

# A Guide To Interconnected Learning

Teaching from the perspective of  
inter-action



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## 1 Introduction

This guide is a collection of my teaching approaches based on my ethos and values which reflect our being in the interconnected world. I have been inspired by Boix Mansilla and Jackson (2013) whose early research addresses the importance of developing students' global competencies and the need to redefine learning for an interconnected world.

“In a deeply interconnected world, there is no ‘other’”

-Anand Gandhi-

Rapid emerging technologies, socio-economic-political and environmental changes and crises, as well as globalisation, digital revolution and mass migration occur within an interconnected and interdependent world (Fried, 2016; Richardson, 2015). In contrast to the individual existence of people who act independently of the whole, I believe that we co-exist as phenomena and co-depend on each other. There is a constant interaction between our existence in the world and things are ongoingly changing. Since we do not exist independently from each other and everything in the universe is interconnected, the process of learning occurs through the engagement and interaction between students, teachers, subjects, disciplines, knowledge, and action in the world. In this sense, learning happens during and while we are interacting with each other in the social field. I believe the interaction component of our active learning practices requires the development of awareness and understanding about how we are interconnected with the student, knowledge and action in the classroom and vice versa. We also need to understand the context within which learning takes place and provide flexible, dynamic spaces within which interaction can take place. In addition, I believe that spaces of interconnectedness may only lead to holistic learning results through emphasising equality, diversity, and inclusion through the development of compassionate understanding toward the collective growth and successful competency development of students and teachers alike.

This short guide on interconnected learning draws on Heidegger's philosophy and contributes a set of principles, action points and resources, which support the development of developing positive academic teaching cultures. Taking Heidegger's philosophy into consideration is important when exploring inter-connected learning because his philosophical framework (Time and Being) emphasises the interconnectedness of human existence within the world. Heidegger's concept of “Dasein”, which refers to human being-in-the-world, highlights the idea that we are always placed within a context and influenced by our surrounding environments. This notion aligns with the understanding that learning does not occur in isolation but is deeply intertwined with our environment, experiences, and our relationships between them. Therefore, using Heidegger's perspective we are acknowledging that learning is a holistic experience for both teachers and students, involving multiple facets of life, such as culture, society, technology and individual experiences. This enables a deep understanding of how interconnected learning can extend formal education settings to encompass and embrace the ‘totality’ of our existences in connection with others.

The guide starts with the definition and benefits of interconnected learning followed by the 6 Principles of Interconnected Learning. Then I explain how we can implement interconnected learning. This is followed by the provision of some additional resources and finally, the conclusion.

## 2 What is Interconnected Learning?

In this section, I am defining what interconnected learning is and present its key benefits.

### 2.1 Definition

In line with Heidegger's philosophy (Cunliffe, 2009; Goodall, 2014), I define interconnected learning as an educational approach that emphasises the interconnectedness of knowledge, human existence, and the world. In this sense, following Heidegger's notion "„being-in-the-world" is always concerning other people" (Goodall, 2014, p.29), learning is an integral part of our existence and the ways we are engaging in and with the world.

Interconnected learning enables the provision of new holistic learning experiences. While active learning focuses on the provision and integration of practical, active teaching and learning activities in the classroom, interconnected learning occurs within the dynamic of our engagement with others. I define interconnected learning as an integral 'inter-action' component of active learning, which leads to collective, socially constructed and holistic knowledge creation within communities of practices (Gherardi and Nicolini, 2002). Interconnected learning aims to collectively contribute, through reciprocal understanding and interaction toward the sustainable development of the world and individuals through caring, equal, diverse and inclusive teaching and learning approaches.

### 2.2 7 – Benefits of Interconnected Learning

In this section, I am drawing on Heidegger's philosophy, which has been outlined by various scholars (e.g., Cunliffe, 2009; Horrigan-Kelly, Millar and Dowling, 2016; Kukkola, 2017; McConnell-Henry, Chapman and Francis, 2007).

#### 1. Holistic Understanding of Being

Heidegger's philosophy emphasises the interconnected nature of being (Cunliffe, 2009), and interconnected learning is in line with this perspective. Interconnected learning encourages learners to explore the interrelatedness of different fields of knowledge and employability, which fosters a comprehensive understanding of the world and the students' experiences. This enables students to uncover and highlight connections between different fields of knowledge and how these shape their understanding of what knowledge exists in the world.

#### 2. Existential Awareness

"Heidegger revealed being in the world as represented by the relational process of *being alongside others, being together with others and being the self*" (Horrigan-Kelly, Millar and Dowling, 2016, p.3). Through processes of critical thinking and reflexivity students engage in interconnected learning by reflecting on their situation (being) in the world and the role that they play within their personal and professional fields. This leads to increased existential awareness, supporting students to understand how their learning and actions impact their and others' existence in the world.

### 3. Authentic Engagement

Heidegger's philosophy underscores the importance of actively participating in one's existence (Cuncliffe, 2009). Interconnected learning promotes authentic engagement with knowledge and the world. Students actively engage in thinking critically and reflexively about themselves and their existence in the world. This encourages students to authentically engage with various subjects, experiences, knowledge, and perspectives.

### 4. Critical Thinking

Heidegger encourages individuals to engage within the interconnected world with their own and others' existence in a reflexive, authentic way, which can enrich critical thinking (Horrigan-Kelly, Millar and Dowling, 2016 ). "Being 'critical' and changing practices, structures, or systems, occurs from within, and not necessarily because of an external critique that I can easily rationalize as being irrelevant or mistaken" (Cuncliffe, 2009, p. 93). Students are challenged to explore the underlying connections between knowledge and actions through reflective and reflexive, active learning practices. This, therefore, supports their curiosity to question and seek understanding, by taking different approaches and perspectives, and in-depth meaning of the world, themselves and others.

### 5. Adaptability

Heidegger embraces change and the evolvment of beings within the interconnected world (Colony, 2015; Wrathall, 2021). By learning to navigate the interconnected web of knowledge, being and existence in the world, students become more adaptable and open to change. This supports students' growth and holistic and sustainable personal and professional development, which aims to contribute to the greater good.

### 6. Ethical Reflection

Following Cuncliffe (2009), seeking an understanding of their being through critical-reflexive activities enables students to question themselves and the world and take different approaches to thinking about themselves and their experiences. They learn to understand their personal, educational, and professional lives as socially constructed, comprising ideologies, values and politics, which students learn to challenge and support the development of alternative ways of seeing the world. Students may question the way of their being and acting in their worlds and how they make sense of their experiences. This supports students' critical examination of the meaning of ethical and responsible actions.

### 7. Meaningful Learning

Overall, interconnected learning values students' critical, authentic, and meaningful engagement within the world. The critical-reflexive approach to teaching and learning fosters opportunities for deep, meaningful learning experiences that resonate with student's own existence. Interconnected learning can enrich students' learning process, and encourage them to explore the connections between knowledge, being and the world. It fosters an authentic understanding of the interconnected nature of the existence of students.

### 3 The 6 Principles of Interconnected Learning

In this section, I am drawing on Heidegger's philosophy (e.g., Cunliffe, 2009; Horrigan-Kelly, Millar and Dowling, 2016; Kukkola, 2017; McConnell-Henry, Chapman and Francis, 2007) to outline the 6 Principles of Interconnected Learning.

#### 1. Authenticity

Heidegger emphasised the importance of one's authenticity in one's existence within the interconnected world (Colony, 2015; Wrathall, 2021). Interconnected learning, therefore, should encourage learners to authentically engage with their interests and passions, rather than conform to universal and external expectations.

#### 2. Contextual Understanding

Heidegger emphasises the criticality of understanding the context in which one exists (Wrathall, 2021). Interconnected learning, therefore, should emphasise the context in which knowledge and learning occur, and consider the student's unique context of their existence and experiences within the world.

#### 3. "Thrownness"

Heidegger's concept of "thrownness" refers to the idea that all individuals find themselves in a world that has already been, and everyone is 'thrown' into life without choosing (Withy, 2021). Interconnected learning, therefore, should acknowledge equality, diversity and inclusion when emphasising and embracing diverse backgrounds, and circumstances of students, as well as valuing their uniqueness, various educational starting points and socio-economic-political backgrounds and propositions.

#### 4. Hermeneutics

Heidegger's hermeneutic approach (McConnell-Henry, Chapman and Francis, 2007) to understanding texts and meanings can be applied to interconnected learning by encouraging students to interpret and derive meaning from phenomena, and sources, and developing connections between different themes and perspectives critically and reflectively.

#### 5. "Worldliness"

Heidegger's notion of "worldliness" explains that humans exist in a world that is already comprising meaning (Dahlstrom, 2021). The world is the unfolding complex of actual and possible relationships that matter to human beings. In this complex of relationships, human beings essentially find and define themselves, others, and the things around them, while also being defined by the latter" (Dahlstrom, 2021). In this sense, interconnected learning should support students to explore the meanings and connections present in the world around them and in connection with others.

#### 6. "Sorge" (Care)

Caring is a core component of 'being' and without caring the reality of our existence is unimaginable. Caring is not just symbolic of being in the world (McConnell-Henry, Chapman and Francis, 2007). Instead, it is related to how individuals connect between each other, and this connectedness has consequences. To take care of each other's well-being it is required to be connected as this enables active engagement and involvement in somebody's lifeworld (McConnell-Henry, Chapman and Francis, 2007). Interconnected learning requires the integration of care as this enables an equal,

diverse, and inclusive approach to teaching and learning and the interaction between students and lecturers.

Overall, incorporating the 6 Principles of Interconnected Learning in teaching practices can help to create a more existential and holistic approach to teaching and learning that values individual experience, context, and authentic engagement of students within the world.

## 4 How to Implement Interconnected Learning

Interconnected learning emphasises that students and lecturers are connected in the classroom. "We all acquire skills and knowledge together or separately. We all have our roles to play and no matter what our age, we have the courage to be open to learning from everyone; we have the courage to be vulnerable (Freud, 2021)". Thus, students and teachers alike iteratively learn through caring interaction and the seeking of compassionate, holistic, equal, diverse and inclusive understanding. In order to incorporate the aforementioned 6 Principles of Interconnected Learning, drawing on Cuncliffe (2009), Khilji (2022), Lacy (2002) and Sathish (2022) I recommend the following practical strategies focusing on the students as well as the lecturer.

### 4.1 Interest-Driven Teaching and Learning

#### Students

- Encourage students to choose topics based on their interests and/or professional endeavours for projects, assignments and activities.
- Encourage autonomous exploration for students to discover their interests within their personal, educational, and professional worlds.

#### Lecturer

- Tailor your teaching content to include your interests and passions. These can be used as narratives to foster subject cohesion and stimulate students' interests.

### 4.2 Pedagogies of Mattering

"Pedagogies of mattering, we suggest, enable us to notice and consider the impact of a broader range of actors upon learning and teaching, and to tune into the objects, bodies and spaces that constitute the material mattering of learning and teaching as an in situ practice of relationality" (Gravett, Taylor and Fairchild, 2021).

#### Students

- Promote collaborative activities and group projects that stimulate thought-provoking discussions and development of ideas.
- Create opportunities for peer-to-peer teaching and peer-to-peer feedback.
- Foster opportunities for peer discussions about relationships, spaces, places, objects and care by providing activities using different spaces, locations and materials.
- Create spaces of belonging during sessions through a compassionate, equal, diverse and inclusive approach.



### Lecturer

- Collaborate and communicate with colleagues and learn from their experiences.
- Integrate previous work and practices from other colleagues.
- Learn from students and take their opinions, ideas, and inputs on board.
- Learn from students and seek an understanding of their circumstances in order to support their personal and professional development.

### 4.3 Real-World Oriented

#### Students

- Align curriculum with real-world scenarios, applications, projects, and stakeholder engagement.
- Show how the material and sources exist and are connected to knowledge and practices in the context of academic and professional development.

#### Lecturer

- Stay informed and up to date with the latest developments across subject areas.
- Stay informed about socio-economic-political and environmental issues that may affect students and yourself.
- Provide students with real-life opportunities and develop an awareness of what your students' futures are.
- Stay up to date with technological developments and related accessibility issues.

### 4.4 Caring for Shared Purpose and Well-Being

#### Students

- Design assignments that require group cooperation and the development of shared goals.
- Foster a sense of community through active participation in, for example, field trips or game-based activities.
- Integrate well-being activities in your teaching and learning (download your guide @ [Sathish, 2022](#))

#### Lecturer

- Care for your own mental and physical well-being.
- Care for your colleagues and aim to develop positive academic teaching and research cultures.
- Inform yourself what you can do to create positive academic teaching and learning cultures (see also [Positive Academia](#))

#### 4.5 Production-Focused

##### **Students**

- Emphasise hands-on activities, projects and presentations.
- Encourages students to research and connect with experts or resources outside of the classroom.

##### **Lecturer**

- Collaborate and engage with internal and external stakeholders to develop hands-on action projects.
- Work interdisciplinary and develop relationships with colleagues in different schools. This will enable diverse projects leading to multidisciplinary competency development for yourself and the students.

#### 4.6 Learner-Managed

##### **Students**

- Allow students to set their own learning goals and create their learning pathways.
- Provide guidance and support as they take ownership of their learning.

##### **Lecturer**

- Try to integrate student leadership into your learning planner.
- Humanize your leadership (see Khilji, 2022) and develop your competencies through reflective and reflexive practices (see Cuncliffe, 2009).

#### 4.7 Peer-Supported Assessments

##### **Students**

- Encourage reflexive self-assessment and reflection on how students can enhance their learning.
- Incorporate peer-to-peer reviews and feedback in assessment processes.

##### **Lecturer**

- Develop awareness of students' interaction and engagement within groups.
- Support introverted students and try to form safe, inclusive groups within which all students feel happy, confident, and comfortable to work.
- Aim towards positive academic teaching cultures through the provision of safe spaces where all students are confident to have a voice and share their opinions.

These teaching practices should aim to create an environment that values student interest, fosters collaboration, connects learning to real-world contexts and encourages students to take an active role in their education. Additionally, integrating contemporary technology and other sources can support students' accessibility to information and wider networks within their personal and professional worlds, which should further foster and develop interconnected learning.

## 5 Challenges

Based on my personal experience I noticed the following challenges:

- Creating spaces of belonging within which students can foster authenticity takes time and requires an in-depth understanding of who the students are. This becomes more difficult with cohorts that comprise multiple students who do not attend regularly.
- Finding the balance between authentic freedom and structure can be difficult as too much freedom results in some students taking advantage of the situation. Too much structure, on the other hand, constrains students to be authentic. Finding a dialogue with the students and getting to know their motivations and educational ethos may help to differentiate the levels between freedom and structure.
- Compassionate praxis that supports belonging requires the understanding of how students have experienced traumas due to, for example, the pandemic, wars or other socio-economic-political issues. Students do not often want to talk about their problems but can be affected by complex traumas. The challenge is to build the competency as a teacher to understand and support these students even if they do not speak up. It requires the use of narrative from an outsider's perspective that indirectly supports such students.

## 6 Overcoming Challenges and Fostering Inter-Connectedness

In this section, I will provide valuable resources that can support you to overcome the above teaching and learning challenges. These resources are designed to provide you with the tools and knowledge required to improve your approach to inter-connected teaching and learning approaches and strategies.

### 6.1 Belonging Through Compassion

The concept of belonging is intricately tied to its specific context, and this discussion delves into the intersection of belonging with various knowledge domains. The [UAL page](#) explores three significant theoretical approaches that play a crucial role in shaping our understanding of compassion and belonging: posthumanism, trauma-informed education, and pedagogies of care. These approaches differ in their fundamental philosophical and epistemological foundations, including the study of knowing within existence, a concept referred to as "onto-epistemology" by Prof. Karen Barad. The page aims to bring these different approaches together, acknowledging their interconnectedness in a complex and multifaceted manner, and emphasising the importance of considering their overlapping influences on our understanding of compassion and belonging.

Recommended Resource: [UAL Webpage on Belonging Through Compassion](#)

## 6.2 Practicing Care and Compassion

The practice of care and compassion should be an integral part of curriculum development and design in education. To achieve this, it is important to introduce curriculum orientations that enable and promote the practice of care and compassion. Individuals interested in integrating care and compassion into education should start by studying the theories and approaches of prominent curriculum scholars, including Ralph Tyler, Joseph Schwab, Paulo Freire, John Miller, Daisaku Ikeda, Nel Noddings, and Martha Nussbaum. Each of these scholars offers unique insights into how care and compassion can be incorporated into teaching and learning:

- Ralph Tyler emphasizes an empirical-analytic perspective.
- Joseph Schwab provides a practical and eclectic approach.
- Paulo Freire offers a critical and reconstructive orientation, often associated with radical love.
- John Miller explores holistic possibilities in education.
- Daisaku Ikeda advocates and exemplifies dialogic communication and value creation.
- Nel Noddings emphasizes the importance of a feminine basis for caring.
- Martha Nussbaum highlights the intelligence of emotions in education.

In addition, it is crucial for those who want to teach care and compassion in education to consider the challenges and issues raised by scholars who focus on oppressed individuals and groups, particularly those who have experienced imperialism, colonialism, or have had their culture and history marginalized. Deep and essential questions need to be addressed regarding how care and compassion can be effectively taught and learned, especially for the most marginalized and oppressed individuals who make up the majority of the world's population.

Recommended Resource: [Practicing Care and Compassion](#)

## 6.3 Compassionate Play: why playful teaching is a prescription for good mental health (for you and your students)

Compassionate, contemplative, and playful pedagogies in teaching and learning may support positive mental health. Practical approaches how these pedagogies can be implemented are:

- **Collage for Self-Compassion:** This technique encourages a gentle and kind approach to self-reflection, using collage as a playful and visual method. Participants are asked to cut out or tear images from magazines, create a collage, and then reflect on the themes and personal attributes that emerge. It offers a space for both individuals and groups to engage in self-reflection and encourages open sharing and discussion.
- **A Mindful LEGO® Meditation:** This approach combines mindfulness meditation with the use of white and clear LEGO® bricks for quiet, unstructured model-making. It can be used to alleviate exam anxiety, take a mental break from academic tasks, or promote social connection without the need for conversation. The activity encourages participants to focus on the present moment, be creative, and imagine while building with LEGO® bricks.

In sum it is importance to providing spaces for learners and educators to explore identity, reflect, develop empathy, and support mental health by emphasizing the essential role of compassion and playfulness in human life.

Recommended Resource: [Compassionate Play: why playful teaching is a prescription for good mental health \(for you and your students\)](#)

#### 6.4 Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education

[The text discusses UNESCO's recent report](#), "Reimagining Our Futures Together: a New Social Contract for Education," delves into UNESCO's recent report, "Reimagining Our Futures Together: a New Social Contract for Education," which has been instrumental in my understanding of the global challenges we face. It highlights a web of interconnected crises, including social and economic inequality, climate change, biodiversity loss, unsustainable resource use, democratic backsliding, and rapid technological changes. The report stresses the pivotal role of education in addressing these complex issues and advocates for a fresh social contract grounded in principles like inclusion, equity, cooperation, and shared purposes.

Nonetheless, the report doesn't shy away from pointing out certain limitations within the report. It rightly highlights that it doesn't adequately address the detrimental influence of profit-oriented economic models, or the significant role played by elite groups in shaping the educational landscape. Moreover, it prompts critical questions about the definition of "quality" in education and the practicality of universities shifting their focus to serve the common good. The text also raises concerns about the report's Northern-centric perspective, which seems to sideline alternative viewpoints and ontologies.

What strikes me the most is the profound line of inquiry about the state of humankind, the emergence of the post-human era, and the hurdles of achieving inclusivity in a world marked by divisions and power imbalances. It asks whether rationality and aesthetics have given way to instrumentalism and sentimentality, and whether humanity is navigating a path that moves beyond the cherished ideals of progress, justice, and equality. It underscores the significance of education but leaves no room for complacency by reminding us that the matter of education is intricate and far from being easily defined by a single authority.

UNESCO's report, as portrayed in the text, serves as an invitation, a call to engage in dialogue, challenge established truths, and forge connections to tackle the multifaceted challenges of our times. It leaves me with a sense of uncertainty, wondering whether people will heed this invitation and work collectively to surmount the predicaments of our era.

Recommended Resource: [Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education](#)

## 6.5 Self-Compassion – An Overview

Self-compassion is a concept that I've found to be incredibly important and beneficial in my life. To truly grasp self-compassion, it's essential to understand the broader notion of compassion itself. Compassion involves recognizing the suffering of others, feeling deep concern for them, and being motivated to take action to alleviate their suffering. It's essentially about empathy and the desire to make a positive difference in the lives of those who are suffering.

Empathy and compassion are closely related, with empathy often serving as the gateway to compassion. When we empathize with someone, we connect with their feelings and experiences. Compassion, on the other hand, goes a step further, motivating us to take action to help others.

Now, let's shift the focus to self-compassion. It's all about extending the same kindness and understanding that we readily offer to others in times of our suffering, perceived inadequacy, or when we face failure. I've noticed that many of us, including myself, often find it easier to show compassion to others than to ourselves. This tendency can have a significant impact on our well-being and mental health.

Personally, I've experienced that when I practice self-compassion, I feel a greater sense of well-being and resiliency. It's like giving ourselves permission to acknowledge our pain instead of suppressing it, which, in the long run, only makes it worse. By treating ourselves with kindness, we create space to process our pain, learn from it, and ultimately move forward.

Imagine how you would comfort a dear friend who came to you upset about a problem they were facing. You'd probably offer them words of kindness and a supportive presence. But when we struggle, we often treat ourselves quite differently. We tend to let our inner critic take over, bombarding us with self-criticism. Self-compassion means shifting from self-criticism to self-kindness, just as we would do for a friend.

In my own experience, I've recognized the presence of my inner critic, that nagging voice that berates me when I mess up. To overcome this inner critic, I've found it important to understand that it's a mechanism for self-protection. Our brains are wired to focus on negative experiences, perhaps as an evolutionary survival instinct. So, when we criticize ourselves harshly, we trigger the stress response in our bodies, which only perpetuates our suffering. Self-kindness, on the other hand, is a soothing balm for our emotional wounds. When we practice it, we consciously choose to stop self-criticism and offer ourselves words of encouragement and understanding.

In my life, I've also experienced times when I felt utterly alone in my struggles. I'd wonder, "Why is this happening to me?" It's easy to isolate ourselves and believe that everyone else has it all together, except for us. However, the reality is that we are not alone in our struggles. This is where the concept of common humanity comes into play. We need to recognize that every one of us is wonderfully imperfect, and making mistakes is part of being human. Acknowledging this shared experience can be incredibly comforting and can foster a sense of connection.

In addition, mindfulness, in the context of self-compassion, means paying courageous attention to our emotions and allowing ourselves to sit with discomfort. I've discovered that by sitting with strong emotions and taking time to process them, we can avoid the extremes

of suppressing our feelings or reacting impulsively. Just like weather patterns, emotions come and go, and we don't have to judge ourselves based on them.

Overall, I've found that practicing self-compassion has had a profound impact on my well-being. It has helped me to be kinder to myself, acknowledge that I'm not alone in my struggles, and take a more mindful and self-reflective approach to my emotions. It's a valuable tool for personal growth and improved mental health.

Recommended resource: [Self-Compassion – An Overview](#)

## **7 Conclusion**

In this short guide on interconnected learning, following Heidegger's philosophy, I defined this concept based on my teaching values, ethos and experiences. I outlined what interconnected learning is, and explained the 6 Principles of Interconnected Learning. Following the outlining of how interconnected learning can be implemented in teaching practices, I also explained which potential challenges that I have faced as well and I provided supportive resources to implement interconnected learning as a critical component of our active learning practices.

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