

Finding a place for fundamental learning research in higher education

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Research on learning in higher education has for decades been dominated by a limited number of theories of learning and approaches for investigating learning such as those developed by Martin and Säljö (1976) and Entwistle and Ramsden (1982). Meanwhile, in other disciplines dealing with learning such as primary and secondary education (e.g. Hattie, 2008) educational psychology (e.g. Paas et al., 2012), and the learning sciences (e.g. Sawyer, 2005), models of learning and methods for examining these models have evolved to become far more sophisticated (Haggis, 2009). An over-reliance on simple, categorical models and phenomenography has chronically disconnected fundamental learning research and practice in higher education settings. As MOOCs, flipped classrooms, online learning and instructional design become critical elements in ensuring quality teaching in universities, this disconnect is having serious and detrimental implications (e.g. Lodge & Lewis, 2012). This showcase has three aims; firstly, a systematic review of the literature over several years will be presented. This review involved an investigation of the theoretical underpinnings of research specifically addressing learning in higher education through a quantitative and qualitative examination of papers published in high-ranking journals such as *Higher Education Research & Development* and *Studies in Higher Education*. The second aim of this showcase is to present a comparison of conceptions of learning across disciplines to highlight areas of both agreement and inconsistency. The third aim of this showcase is to draw some inferences about possible places where fundamental learning research could be used to greatly enhance current practice in higher education.