



"Flow" in Course Design

Organic, Alternative Approaches from SF

Inspired by Maureen McHugh's "China Mountain Zhang," organic course design treats learning experiences as integrated ecosystems rather than modular components. Instead of sequential assembly, this approach envisions complete learning journeys first, then refines details—like the novel's "organic engineering" discipline where buildings function as responsive, living systems.

Core Principles of Organic Design

Attune to the System: Develop deep understanding of subject matter, learners, and environments that allows intuitive knowledge to complement analytical planning and expand capacity for holding complexity.

Design for Integration: Create elements that "dovetail" seamlessly with sensitive dependence on initial conditions, where small details create ripple effects and natural progression throughout the learning experience.

Embrace Holistic Vision: Envision complete learning journeys before breaking into components, allowing structure to emerge organically rather than imposing predetermined templates.

Modular vs Organic Design

| Aspect | Modular Design | Organic Design |
|-----------------|--|---|
| Structure | Discrete, interchangeable units | Integrated, interconnected ecosystem |
| Development | Sequential assembly of components | Holistic vision refined into details |
| Strengths | Scalability, reusability, clear assessment points | Coherence, narrative flow, intuitive progression |
| Challenges | Potential fragmentation, artificial transitions | Complexity, resistance to measurement, institutional fit |
| Designer's Role | Architect planning and connecting components | Facilitator attuned to emergent possibilities |
| Ideal Contexts | Standardized content, technical skills, mastery learning | Interdisciplinary learning, complex problem-solving, creative domains |

"Don't plan the building, let the system do that. You just let go, let your mind drift and do what it wants." - China Mountain Zhang by Maureen McHugh