

ASCILITE 2025

Future-Focused:

Educating in an Era of Continuous Change

The throughline: From performing arts to pedagogy

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In an era of continuous change in digital education, we need educators who can not only respond to complexity but design for it. This poster reflects on my personal and professional shift from performing arts (stage acting and directing), and how that creative foundation has shaped my work as a curriculum and learning designer in higher education. It highlights the value of cross-disciplinary experience, particularly from the creative arts, as a driver of innovation, adaptability, and human-centred learning design.

It is increasingly common for educators to transition from other professional fields into education, bringing with them diverse experiences and perspectives. Even when those fields appear unrelated, they can offer rich conceptual and practical tools for designing better learning experiences. These transitions are not detours. They can strengthen our contributions to education and broaden our capacity for innovation (Anyichie, Butler, Perry, & Nashon, 2023). Importantly, leaving the performing arts was never a failure or fallback, as I once thought. The creative skills and understanding of story and narrative that I developed are not lost but continuously repurposed in service of teaching and learning, particularly in digital contexts. For example, I use narrative mapping and visual storyboarding to co-design online learning experiences with academic staff, and apply storytelling principles to structure emotionally engaging, technology-enhanced learning environments.

As an actor, I learned early the importance of failure as feedback; opportunities to reflect, adjust, and grow. This embodied experience of iterative, collaborative learning aligns closely with constructivist and social constructivist theories of education, where knowledge is actively co-created through experience, dialogue, and reflection (Powell & Kalina, 2009). However, it was directing that most significantly shaped how I now approach learning design. A director must maintain a holistic vision of the production. This involves ensuring coherence across narrative, staging, character, and tone, while also creating space for actors to explore, improvise, and contribute their own interpretations. Similarly, in curriculum design, I work to maintain a consistent narrative and conceptual structure across a course, while also leaving space for learners to personalise, question, and construct their own meaning.

This practice aligns with constructive alignment, which ensures that learning activities and assessments are purposefully linked to intended learning outcomes (Biggs & Tang, 2011). However, my approach extends beyond alignment as a checklist. It involves crafting a throughline: a conceptual and emotional arc that connects outcomes, assessments, and activities into a meaningful and engaging learner journey (Cutting, 2016). This approach is particularly powerful in digital learning environments, where coherence and engagement can be harder to sustain. Tools such as narrative mapping, branching scenarios, and visual storyboarding support this process and foster collaborative dialogue with academic colleagues (Yusoff & Salim, 2014). This future-focused perspective requires adaptability. Just as a live performance adjusts to audience energy and technical constraints, learning environments must remain responsive to learner needs, shifting technologies, and broader social change. Drawing on rehearsal-based practices such as iteration, experimentation, and feedback, I design learning that is structurally coherent, emotionally engaging, and open to ongoing evolution.

This poster invites fellow educators to reflect on how their diverse pathways can enrich digital education, promote creativity, and cultivate resilience in a rapidly evolving landscape. The poster will visually map the throughline metaphor, connecting performing arts practices with key

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learning design principles, supported by examples of narrative mapping and curriculum architecture. It will also include an interactive activity inviting participants to map their own professional journeys and identify how these experiences can inform technology-enhanced learning design. This journey traces a personal and professional trajectory across disciplines, highlighting how diverse experiences can shape innovative and human-centred digital education. At its core, learning design is an act of storytelling, crafting meaningful, coherent, and engaging journeys that help learners make sense of complex ideas and find their place within them.

Keywords: Learning design, curriculum, performing arts, constructivism, narrative, technology enhanced learning

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