ASCILITE 2026

The Future is Connection:

Collaboration, Creativity and Compassion in a Digital Society

The Learning Design Manifesto: What we value, resist and might build

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Learning design is increasingly central to higher education, yet practitioners continue to grapple with questions of identity, recognition and collective purpose. Building on previous ASCILITE conversations about professional standards for learning design, this working symposium builds upon previous symposia on this theme to move from questions about what learning designers do to what learning design stands for. Participants will be invited to co-author draft principles for a Learning Design Manifesto, articulating the values, commitments and purposes that should guide the field in a period shaped by generative AI, institutional reform, hybrid education and demands for scalability. Through short provocations based on existing research, guided group work and live synthesis, participants will develop, test and prioritise candidate principles.

Keywords: learning design, profession, reform, provocations, skills, values, knowledges

Description

Learning design is increasingly central to the future of higher education, yet the field continues to face questions of identity, recognition, legitimacy and influence (Altena et al., 2019; Kickbusch et al., 2025; Ritzhaupt et al., 2015). Recent work (Henderson et al, 2026) to articulate professional standards has provided an important foundation for naming the practices, capabilities and forms of expertise that define learning design. However, standards alone cannot answer the deeper question now facing the profession: What does learning design stand for?

This working symposium builds on previous ASCILITE conversations about learning design as an emerging profession. In 2025, the symposium “Professional Standards for Learning Design: Mapping Values, Practices and Professional Identity” explored the need for a community-led standards framework to support recognition, career pathways and professional coherence. This 2026 symposium extends that work by shifting attention from standards as descriptors of practice to principles as expressions of shared values, purposes and

commitments. The provocation for this symposium is that a profession cannot be defined only by what its members can do. It must also be shaped by what its members value, what they are prepared to advocate for, what they are willing to challenge, and what futures they seek to make possible. For learning designers (LDs), this question has become increasingly urgent. The rise of generative AI, the intensification of institutional reform, the growth of online and hybrid education, and continuing pressures around scalability, efficiency and quality assurance have expanded the visibility of learning design. Yet these same forces risk narrowing the work to implementation, compliance, production, platform management or technical support.

Inspired by Bayne et al. (2020), this symposium invites participants to contribute to the groundwork for the development of a manifesto. Participants will work collaboratively to ideate, test and refine possible principles for a Learning Design Manifesto. These principles may address issues such as educational justice, learner agency, care, accessibility, academic partnership, ethical technology use, critical engagement with AI, sustainability, creativity, integrity, and resistance to reductive or purely instrumental models of teaching and learning. The aim is not to produce a final declaration during the session, but to generate a robust starting point for further community-led development. The outcomes of the symposium will be used to develop an open, living resource that can be shared with the wider learning design community after the conference.

Symposium structure

- 5 min – Introductions and framing the task – the panel will be introduced.
- 10 min – Provocations – Three provocations based on recent research (Henderson et al., 2026) will be used to focus the discussion on the relationship between standards, values and professional purpose, and the need for principles that can guide learning design in changing institutional, professional and technological contexts (Fenwick, 2018). Each provocation will be led by one of the panellists.
- 10 min – Individual reflection and generation of draft principles. Using the provocations as a catalyst, participants will consider their own practice and expertise to respond to prompts.
- 15 min – Small group principle drafting – Participants will work in small groups of shared interests to develop the themes into candidate manifesto principles.
- 10 min – Sharing and prioritisation – Groups will share their draft principles.
- 5 min - Synthesis and next steps – The convenors will summarise the emerging principles and invite participants to continue the work after the conference.

The panellists

The panellists have been selected because of their various roles in the development of degrees in the field of learning design, or because of their lived experiences as learning designers and educational technologists across sectors.

- **Associate Professor Keith Heggart** has worked in education and educational leadership roles in Australia and England.
- **Professor Michael Henderson** has been teaching educational design for 15 years and created the Graduate Certificate of Educational Design, and Australia's first Bachelor degree in Learning Design and Technology.
- **Dr Nhung Nguyen** is a passionate educator with 20 years of experience in the education domain, focussing on learning design, digital technologies in education, science education, and academic development.
- **Dr Homa Babai** is a Lecturer in Learning Design and Technology.
- **Dr Colin Simpson** has worked as a Learning Technologist, Education Designer and Academic Developer since 2003.
- **Dr Kashmira Dave** is a Third Space researcher and academic developer at UNE with 22 years of experience in Australian Higher Education with a multidisciplinary academic background.
- **Mr Dominic Rushton** is a learning designer at the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM). He designs medical education for rural doctors.

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