ASCILITE 2026

The Future is Connection:

Collaboration, Creativity and Compassion in a Digital Society

Mind the gap: Bridging disconnection in Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) design

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As higher education continues to rapidly digitise with the rise of Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL), the challenge is not only technology implementation or access, but meaningful integration into student-facing learning, assessment, communication and support practices (Chung et al., 2026). Despite increasing investment in TEL, research and practice continues to focus on technology adoption, functionality and efficiency (Feng et al., 2025; Wu & Chen, 2025). Consequently, learning technologies, pedagogy and student services are often treated as separate domains rather than interconnected components of an educational ecosystem (Barrett & Harte, 2023; Børte & Lillejord, 2024). This creates a design problem where students experience fragmentation across systems, processes and support services, leading to disconnection between learning and assessment. Drawing on practice-based evidence and relevant literature, this poster argues that advancing TEL requires intentionally designing connection across the educational ecosystem.

This poster employs a practice-based, reflective methodology informed by evidence gathered across two intersecting roles at a research-intensive metropolitan university in Australia. First, as an educational developer involved in learning design, digital assessment implementation, and academic capability development. Second, as a strategic student experience officer within a stakeholder relations team, focused on cross-functional collaboration, service design, stakeholder engagement, and student support. Insights were drawn from implementation observations on digital assessment initiatives, stakeholder interactions across faculties and central service divisions, service-design challenges and student support queries. Recent literature on digital transformation, TEL, student wellbeing, and connected learning ecosystems was used to sensitise and critically inform these reflections, providing a conceptual lens through which patterns and gaps could be identified. This contributed to the development of a conceptual framework that positions learning, support, and technology as interconnected components of a connected educational ecosystem.

Insights from the roles highlighted recurring points of disconnection in student facing practices, including assessment processes, support pathways and learning design decisions. These issues emerged at the intersections between academic, professional and technological domains, and were often reinforced by siloed approaches to working. These practice-informed reflections suggest that the future of digital learning depends on the intentional design of connection across students, educators, professional staff, and institutional systems. When learning, assessment, and support are designed in isolation, misalignment and fragmentation can occur, with implications for student success, satisfaction, and motivation (Bull, 2025; Liang et al., 2024). The implications on TEL are to prioritise collaborative connections across student-facing practices.

To address the disconnect gap, the poster proposes a “Connection by Design” framework, developed through an iterative process of reflective analysis, stakeholder consultation, and engagement with literature on TEL, student wellbeing, digital transformation and connected learning. Practice-based observations from digital assessment implementation, service design initiatives, stakeholder interactions, support queries, and communication challenges were compared against themes from relevant literature and refined through ongoing professional dialogue, peer feedback, and cross-functional collaboration. This process contributed to the identification of three interdependent dimensions of effective TEL design. The first is human connection, which focuses designing learning and assessment that promote clarity, belonging and productive cognitive engagement (Zhou & Ye, 2024). The second is collaborative connection, which highlights the importance of co-design between

academics, education designers and technologists and professional staff. The third is systemic connection, which involves the alignment of digital platforms and services through integration, policy coherence and embedded support pathways. Together, these three dimensions provide a practical approach for diagnosing disconnection and informing more connected, collaborative and human-centred TEL design.

Keywords: collaborative design, digital assessment, higher education, learning ecosystems, student experience, technology-enhanced learning (TEL)

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Khan, Z. (2026, Vov 29 – Dec 2). Mind the gap: Bridging disconnection in Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) design [Poster]. In Cochrane, T., Narayan, V., Poole, T., Lai, P., Lake, P., Moore, O., & Li, L. (Eds.), *The Future is Connection: Collaboration, Creativity and Compassion in a Digital Society*. Proceedings ASCILITE 2026. Brisbane (pp. 37–39). https://doi.org/10.65106/apubs.2026.3258

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