# ASCILITE 2026

***The Future is Connection:***

*Collaboration, Creativity and Compassion in a Digital Society*

## Trust, relationships and impact: Evidencing the human work of learning designers

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Learning designers (LDs) play a critical role in supporting higher education teaching and learning, especially through periods of significant digital change, from the rapid transition to online learning during COVID-19 to the redesign of learning and assessment in response to generative AI. In this increasingly digital and AI-enabled higher education sector, learning design is inherently relational, requiring practitioners to meet academics where they are and support educational change through trust, collaboration and compassion. Yet much of this work remains hidden, and difficult to articulate and demonstrate using traditional institutional measures. While output metrics such as consultations, workshops and resources developed provide evidence of activity, they often fail to capture the relational, collaborative and transformative nature of LD practice. Drawing on King and Patterson's (2026) conception of course design as an act of care, we argue that many of the most significant contributions of LDs are relational rather than transactional.

To address this challenge Boreland et al. (2025) developed the Learning Design Evidence Framework (LDEF) which provides a structured approach to evidencing the relational work underpinning educational innovation. The framework makes visible how LDs build trust, foster collaboration, influence practice, and create the conditions for meaningful educational change using seven segments; Student-Centered Design, Curriculum Design and Innovation, Professional Development, Promotion and Sharing of Quality Design, Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, Leadership and Influence, and Recognition and Reward. Across each segment, meaningful impact is demonstrated through collaboration, partnership and sustained engagement with academics, students and institutional stakeholders. Together, the segments provide a structured approach to evidencing the breadth, depth and relational impact of LD practice.

This interactive poster invites the ASCILITE community to inform what constitutes meaningful evidence of LD impact, drawing on diverse institutional contexts and practices across the sector. The poster itself is designed to be conversational, inviting delegates to contribute their perspectives by responding to three reflective prompts:

- What evidence do you think demonstrates the value of relationships and human connection in LD?
- What contributions of LDs have you noticed are often overlooked or invisible?
- What evidence do you see as most important in the future?

Using pens and markers, or sticky notes, delegates will collectively build a visual representation of the evidence they value, the invisible work they recognise and the future directions they envision for the profession.

This participatory approach reflects the framework's emphasis on co-creation, reflective practice and shared understanding while creating opportunities for meaningful discussion among delegates from diverse institutional contexts.

By the conclusion of the conference, the poster will have evolved into a collective representation of how the LD community values evidence, relationships, and impact. In doing so, it will demonstrate that the future of LD is not defined solely by digital technologies, but by the human connections that enable educational transformation.

*Keywords*: Connection, human-centered, learning design, relational, partnership, collaboration


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