# ASCILITE 2026

***The Future is Connection:***

*Collaboration, Creativity and Compassion in a Digital Society*

# Reflections on women in academic leadership as a community for education-focused academics

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Education-focused academics are important to learning and teaching in Australian higher education yet often face fragmented academic identities and uncertain promotion pathways within research-intensive cultures that reward research over educational expertise (Fleischner & Lutze-Mann, 2025). These challenges are often amplified for women across a range of academic and higher education career pathways, including roles spanning academic and professional domains. Education-focused expertise is frequently respected externally yet under-recognised within academics' own institutions, compounding isolation and invisibility (Brown et al., 2024).

This poster shares the collective reflections of education-focused women from Curtin University, The University of Queensland, The University of Sydney and The University of Western Australia, connected through the ASCILITE Women in Academic Leadership (WiAL) program. Established in 2021 to address women's underrepresentation in senior academic roles, WiAL operates as a cross-institutional community of practice built on structured mentoring, peer coaching, webinars and regular connection (Bone et al., 2024).

Drawing on reflective narratives and examples, we explore how the WiAL community operated as collaborative professional learning, drawing strength from our diverse perspectives and perseverance through the inevitable tensions of education-focused work. With a shared interest in technology-enhanced learning, we make sense of our academic identities across markedly different institutional conditions for education-focused work. We outline how the community supported tangible career outcomes: preparing for and achieving promotion, pursuing learning and teaching grants, building publication momentum, and naming and disarming imposter syndrome. Connections forged through the network have already generated scholarly collaboration, including contributions to a cross-institutional edited collection on generative AI in learning and teaching (Fitzgerald, 2025; Vallis, 2025).

Institutional evidence confirms that education-focused academics progress to the most senior levels when career development, connection and recognition are deliberately cultivated (Fleischner & Lutze-Mann, 2025). Mentoring structured across institutions and free of institutional hierarchies builds capability while countering the isolation experienced by women at the nexus of education and technology (Gribble et al., 2024). Our experiences affirm that such communities foster visibility, gravitas and relationships (Brown et al., 2024), enabling collective strength over individual competition.

Sustained digitally across four states, our community models the conference theme: connection, collaboration and compassion enacted through technology. We share practical insights into reflective career communities that can build resilient and sustainable education-focused careers through meaningful, technology-mediated connection.

*Keywords*: academic women; education-focused academics; communities of practice; mentoring

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