

Editorial: Designing for Digital Futures

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The global pandemic catalyzed a transformative shift in education, exposing the fragility and resilience of traditional systems as institutions rapidly pivoted to digital platforms. In *Designing for Digital Futures*, this editorial examines this abrupt transition's lessons, challenges, and opportunities. Drawing on insights from multiple contributors, it explores how integrating technology, including artificial intelligence, can reshape education while addressing persistent issues of equity, inclusion, and academic integrity. The editorial highlights various articles that delve into decision-making frameworks in faith-based and higher education institutions, the ethical dimensions of digital citizenship, and the evolving landscape of assessment and feedback practices. It also emphasizes the importance of centring Indigenous knowledge systems and decolonizing digital education. Through diverse perspectives, the edition invites reflection on how digital tools can enhance learning and foster more adaptive, inclusive, and human-centred educational environments. This collection challenges us to reimagine the future of education, where technology and tradition coexist to create equitable and dynamic learning ecosystems.

Keywords: Digital education, Equity, Inclusion, Post pandemic, Innovation

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The global pandemic reshaped education in ways previously unimaginable. With classrooms closed and institutions pivoting to digital platforms almost overnight, the crisis became an opportunity for transformation. This sudden shift revealed both the fragility and resilience of traditional education systems. As we emerge into a post-pandemic world, pressing questions remain: Will education revert to its old forms, or can it embrace the innovations born from necessity to craft a more adaptive, inclusive, and dynamic future?

Designing for Digital Futures is a special edition born out of these reflections. It examines the lessons learned, the ongoing challenges, and the potential of digital learning and teaching. The pandemic forced educators and learners to reimagine education in real time,

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sparkling critical conversations around the role of technology, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI), and the enduring challenges of equity, inclusion, and academic integrity.

As theorists like Illich (1971) envisioned decades ago, technology has immense potential to decentralize and democratize education. Yet, as digital platforms become ubiquitous, there is a risk of replicating existing inequities rather than dismantling them (Selwyn, 2016). This edition addresses these tensions by exploring how education can evolve as an adaptive system that balances tradition with innovation, equity with accessibility, and human connection with technological advancement.

Contributors in this collection delve into the intersections of technology, equity, and creativity, offering nuanced perspectives on what a reimagined educational landscape might look like. Together, their voices invite us to understand education not as a static system but as an evolving ecosystem that responds to the challenges and opportunities of a digital world.

One article explores decision-making in online Catholic education through the lens of Communities of Faithful Inquiry (CoFI). By investigating the factors that shape LMS selection, this piece highlights how faith-based institutions navigate digital platforms to meet both pedagogical and spiritual goals. Another examines the complex interplay of policy and practice in higher education, providing key considerations for blended and online learning policy development. These contributions demonstrate how decision-making frameworks and institutional priorities shape the digital learning experience.

An article discussing academic integrity and digital citizenship centers on the ethical dimensions of digital learning. Drawing on post-secondary teaching experiences, the authors examine how open digital tools, such as discussion boards, can foster thoughtful learning while addressing the challenges of diverse student cohorts. By emphasizing accessible design, norming practices, and ethical engagement, this piece aligns with frameworks for digital literacy that prioritize citizenship and independent thinking (Ribble, 2011).

The special issue also critically addresses equity in assessment and feedback practices. The pandemic exacerbated inequities in Ontario's K-12 system, challenging traditional grading methods. One article advocates for a compassionate, holistic approach using data

triangulation—observation, conversation, and student products—to prioritize feedback and student agency over rigid grading systems. Similarly, another article investigates assessment literacy among teachers in Confucian cultural contexts, offering insights into how cultural values shape online learning environments.

Another contribution introduces an innovative approach to navigating academic disciplines through hyperlinked, visual-spatial digital maps. Using tools like the Learning Discourses map, the article demonstrates how hypermedia can foster a relational and dynamic understanding of knowledge, moving beyond traditional textbooks to create accessible and interconnected academic landscapes (Azevedo & Witherspoon, 2009; Sawyer, 2022).

The lived experiences of students also feature prominently in this issue. One article focuses on racialized students in postsecondary online classrooms, exploring how digital spaces can act as safe environments where students control their visibility, reducing microaggressions and fostering belonging. These findings emphasize the importance of creating inclusive digital and in-person spaces that advance equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) initiatives (Ahmed, 2012; Nasir et al., 2012). Additionally, a Brazilian case study highlights how digital technologies were leveraged to strengthen school-family partnerships during the pandemic, illustrating the importance of collaborative, culturally responsive practices. Indigenous perspectives add a crucial dimension to this collection. Two articles explore how educational technology intersects with decolonization and land-based learning. They emphasize the importance of centring Indigenous knowledge systems and practices in digital education, presenting models that honour relational and place-based approaches to learning.

Together, these contributions—highlighted here and many others—invite readers to envision a future where digital tools not only enhance learning but also address systemic inequities and drive meaningful innovation. They challenge us to critically examine the intersection of tradition and technology, urging the design of educational systems that are equitable, adaptive, and profoundly human. As Selwyn (2021) aptly reminds us, the future of education extends beyond merely adopting new technologies; it is about reimagining the possibilities for learning, teaching, and inclusion.

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