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Guest Editorial - Education Technology Solutions - Special ASCILITE Edition

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By Professor Shelley Kinash
Guest Editorial

FROM THE EDITOR

It is my privilege, as Guest Editor of this *Education Technology Solutions* special issue to identify the resounding themes and highlight some of the exciting digital innovations described by the university-based authors. This special ASCILITE Issue was launched at the 2017 ASCILITE Conference hosted by University of Southern Queensland. As described in this issue by the ASCILITE President, Dominique Parrish, The Australasian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education, also known as ASCILITE is a not-for-profit professional association leading and advocating for excellence in the use of digital technologies in tertiary learning and teaching. ASCILITE seeks to promote and recognise exemplary innovation, evidence-based practice and research into the sustainable use of educational technologies to progress pedagogical practice. The occasion of the 2017 ASCILITE Conference is therefore a prime opportunity to invite academics across Australian universities to reflect on our vision and practices for enhancing student learning, the overall student experience and graduate outcomes through education technology solutions.

This Special Issue features 16 papers written by 21 authors from 10 different Australian universities about vision and current practices in higher education technology solutions. It is hoped that readers from higher education will find inspiration and practical ideas for their own students and institutions in these papers. School-based readers, such as principals and teachers, might read these papers as 'next steps' or in other words for the digital contexts that their school leavers will experience when they transition to university. Making this transition and deciding whether and then which university can be a fraught time for many Year 12 graduates and their parents. In her paper, titled 'Online information supporting future students to decide which university & program', Asma Qureshi summarises the findings of her ground-breaking thesis research, studying this terrain. She concludes with recommendations to universities regarding their online advertising campaigns.

A number of the papers in this special issue are intentionally broad-based. These papers are not about particular education technologies or specific student matters. Instead, these papers present the overall vision for higher education and how we



can take action through technology-enhanced learning and teaching. With his characteristic insightful leadership, James Arvanitakis inspires readers with his paper, 'Using education technology to support students as citizen scholars.' James wrote, 'The Citizen Scholar encapsulates the idea that universities exist to both promote scholarship as well as active and engaged citizens. That is, universities need to inculcate a set of skills and cultural practices that educate students beyond their disciplinary knowledge.'

This is driven by the idea that universities must maintain a social mission that mobilises knowledge for the benefit of society. That is, a central purpose of higher education is to improve the societies in which we live and foster citizens who are creative, innovate and have the ability to critique the structures around them with the purpose of community

betterment.' In his paper titled, 'Leading academic innovation through technology', Jonathan Powles clearly states that the pedagogy (and thus the students' learning) always comes first in our priorities, and the technology therefore comes second, in support of that learning. In other words, Jonathan is suggesting that we 'flip our thinking' and Chie Adachi and Marcus O'Donnell suggest that we 'flip the whole university.' In their paper titled, 'Innovative curriculum and approaches to online learning – designing for social learning' they remind the readers that 'innovation is all around us' but that universities are not always so good at responding in innovative ways. In their paper, titled 'An agile approach to testing and demonstrating education technology' Ken Udas, Susan Brosnan and Bill Wade describe how they used creative, flexible strategies to encourage, welcome and pilot higher education technology solutions.

In my paper, titled 'Commendations and recommendations for technology-enabled higher education', I presented three lists of seven – first, what I think makes for great university learning, then the exciting practices I have observed in higher education technology solutions and, finally, what I see as problems that have not yet been solved. In our paper, titled 'Surprising research findings about the brain and learning', Jason Lodge and I turned a conversation into this piece about Jason's team research into what studies of the brain can tell us about how to advance learning. Adrian Stagg, in his paper, 'What Open Educational Resources (OER) look like', clearly depicts, using a number of contextualised practical examples, the characteristics and advantages of OER. Openness, sharing and innovation are our emerging future, but how do we support our universities and our students to get there?

Education technologies and digital capabilities overall have changed the way in which we interact with teachers, presenters and fellow learners whether that be on-campus,

online or in blended modalities. At the ASCILITE conference, in addition to listening to the presenters and asking questions directly to them, attendees will also be having 'backchannel' conversations via Twitter. Ideas will be discussed, key points highlighted and sometimes counter-arguments raised. In their article, titled 'Engaging timid students: Backchannel as a tool to provide opportunities for interactivity and engagement within the university classroom', Christian Moro and Donna Henson shared their experiences regarding how bringing backchannels into the university classroom increases student engagement. Many of these backchannel conversations take place between students, without the academic's intervention. Jill Lawrence, in her paper 'Using education technology to facilitate online peer learning', urges readers not to discount the educational value of peer-to-peer interaction and shares strategies and experiences for fostering and supporting this communication, particularly online.

Elizabeth Cook is an educational designer, supporting academics to optimise learning experiences for online students. In her insightful article, titled 'Design strategies that work to maximise e-Learning', Elizabeth presents six practical approaches to improving online learning design. In his paper, titled 'ePortfolios in today's universities', Michael Sankey shared insights into how to use online portfolios as authentic assessment that both enables and demonstrates learning. His paper presents an informative state-of-the-field scan across 48 Australasian institutions. Increasingly, universities are recognising the need for students to have continued access to their ePortfolios after graduation so that they can use them for lifelong learning, job search and career navigation.

A number of the authors of this special issue focussed on how technology and digital communications can support university students to develop professional competencies,

thus increasing their employability and potentially leading to successful graduate careers. In her paper, titled 'Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) in support of digital futures', Denise Jackson takes a different stance to many of the other papers in this special issue. While many of the papers address technology in the context of how universities enhance supports to students, Denise wrote about how the workforce is increasingly digital and how it is incumbent upon universities to prepare students accordingly. One of her insightful quotes is, 'Whatever drives an individual and whatever their career aspirations may be, they need to embrace automation and the rapid changes in technology which permeate our work, social and family lives. If the goal of WIL is to prepare students and make them career ready, the WIL experiences must therefore expose students to at least a snapshot of the digital future.' In their paper, titled 'Seven tips to engage students in graduate attributes through social media', Madelaine-Marie Judd and Heidi Blair wrote about the need to deliver and promote concepts such as 'graduate attributes' using terms and media that make sense to students. On a similar theme, in her paper, titled 'Digital solutions for supporting students' career identities', Trina Jorre de St Jorre described the innovative supports that Deakin University has put into place to nurture graduates' career success. I am a big fan of Deakin's 'Me In A Minute' campaign, which Trina describes in her paper. Coming full circle, from the first described paper to the last, all of the authors in this special issue are committed to students and graduates and to higher education and its life-lifting potential.

Whether you are looking for new ideas regarding how to heighten university student learning, the overall student experience, transitions or graduate career outcomes, I am certain that you will find inspiration in the papers describing education technology solutions in this special issue. ■