Michelle Ockers:
Welcome, listeners, to another episode of Learning Uncut. I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and their connection to the land, sea and community, particularly those of the Brinja Yuin Nation on whose beautiful coastal lands I sit today. And I would like to welcome my guest, Keith Heggart. Welcome, Keith.

Keith Heggart:
Michelle, thanks for having me. I'm really looking forward to being part of the Learning Uncut podcast.

Michelle Ockers:
I'm looking forward to it too. And I just want to make a shout out to Amanda Ashby, who some longtime listeners might recognize as the original editor for the first 18 months of Learning Uncut. And Amanda is one of those incredibly generous people who feeds me suggestions for podcast guests when she comes across someone who's work she thinks would be useful for others to hear about or she, as she says selfishly, but I think it's quite generous, Keith, as she says, I want to hear more about this. And Amanda recommended we have this conversation. So thank you, Amanda. So, Keith, you're at the University of Technology, Sydney. Can you tell us a little bit about UTS and also about your role there?
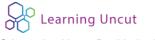
Keith Heggart:
I'd love to. So I'm a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, and also the director for the Centre for Research on Education and the Digital Society, which is a cross-university research centre, and we're particularly interested in education and technology, but also what that means for us as citizens, as teachers, as people who live in this kind of online, offline world. So the University of Technology is in Ultimo. It's a large Australian public university. It's got lots of faculties. It's well known for its teacher education programs and its journalism programs. And I've been there about five years. I think my first day was about a week before COVID sent us all home, but I'm enjoying being on campus. And while I was there, I set up the Graduate Certificate in Learning Design, which I believe we're going to be talking about. And I'm no longer in charge of that officially. I'm now in charge of the Master of Teaching in Secondary Education. But I keep my eyes open and my fingers in the pie of the Graduate Certificate area.

Michelle Ockers:
So are you still lecturing in the Graduate Certificate or not anymore, Keith?

Keith Heggart:
Not anymore, no. I ran it for the first three years. It's only been around for five years and I ran it for the first three years, and the first year it was all by myself, which was a pretty massive undertaking because I think on Wednesdays and Thursdays, I was teaching or lecturing in the evenings from four o'clock till seven o'clock each

Wednesday, each Thursday. And the way we structured it, which is what we'll talk about a little bit later on meant that it was nonstop. It was full on.

Michelle Ockers:
Yeah, there's so many interesting things. I want to have another conversation with you at the end of this chat already about a follow-on episode about something different, something you've just said there has sparked my curiosity. And one of the things I notice about you, Keith, if people go and have a look at your LinkedIn profile, which the link will be in the show notes for that, you've got your finger in lots of pies and you talked about your lecturing role, the Centre for Research on Education in the Digital Society. You're a member of an education advisory group to New South Wales Parliament. I noticed you've got up there on your profile, you're a fellow of the Australian Institute of Training and Development. There's, you know, given the variety of roles and connections that are really apparent in your professional life, what drives you professionally? Is there like a common thread or sense of purpose that connects all of this work?

Keith Heggart:
I just like learning. You know, so I'm one of these people that I don't like to let opportunities go by because I think if people knock on your door once and you don't answer, they're not likely to come back. So I feel you've got to sometimes say yes, even if you're not sure how you're going to actually do it. I am not a role model for academics. A colleague of mine called me a messy academic, simply because there is no nice trajectory, there's no clear pathway. But I think what I'm particularly interested in is how we encourage young people, because most of my work has been about young people, but I think I think we're all young at heart in many ways, but how we encourage young people to live full and active lives in their community, and I think education is so important in that. So I take a very broad view of education, but I've had the benefit of having so many different kinds of roles. So I was a high school teacher and a high school leader for a long time in all the different sectors in Australia and overseas. So I saw a lot of that and I moved around a lot. And then I went into union organising and professional development for adults. And I wandered into this brand new field at the time called learning design. And I thought, oh, this is just education, right? Anyone can do this. And I set myself up as a little bit of an independent learning designer working with some corporate partners and things like that. And then I stumbled into doing a PhD at UTS and they really liked the learning design side of my work. And they said, hey, maybe you should think about setting up a course and we can see if we can get people interested in doing a certificate of learning design. So that's where I ended up. But, you know, since being an adult, I've been always that person who enjoys the technology side of things and is always one of those early adopters. And, you know, I think I was the first person at the school that I was working at to have an iPad or to try out the interactive whiteboard. You know, the online environment has made it so easy to apply and get these kinds of different digital badges. So if there's a digital badge out there, you can guarantee I've tried to go and get it. So the Adobe certifications and the Apple ones and the Google ones and the Microsoft ones, the Tableau ones, I love them all.

Michelle Ockers:
I've just kind of jotted down a few things that are coming to mind as you talk about that. And there's the curiosity, that sense of lifelong learning at the squiggly career, the leaning into opportunity and seeing where it's going to take you. So it's really interesting. And there's so many rabbit warrens we could run down here, but let's center now on the Graduate Certificate in Learning Design, and in particular, you know, the design process that you use to pull this together. How many people have gone through that program now? You said it's been going for five years, Keith.
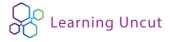
Keith Heggart:
Oh, hundreds, hundreds, yeah. We deliberately don't make it a huge course. So usually in each cohort, we have probably between 40 and 60 people and two cohorts a year. But in addition, as we'll talk about it, we run some of the individual subjects as micro-credentials. So when you throw in those, we've got hundreds and hundreds of people across Australia and indeed the world who've done some part or all of the Graduate Certificate in Learning Design. One of the games I like to play is I look at all the universities around Australia and I try to work out if any of my graduates are currently working at those universities. And the answer is, yeah, they mostly are.

Michelle Ockers:
Yeah. So why? Why was this needed? What opportunity, challenge, gap was this developed in response to, Keith?

Keith Heggart:
Well, this is fascinating because Australia, for quite a long time, since at least the early 90s, has had some of the foremost academics in learning or instructional design in the world. People who are known internationally and respected internationally. And yet at the same time, at the university, at the tertiary level, there have been no programs of study or opportunities for people who are interested in the field to get some kind of certification in this area. And that was just weird, right? And of course, as universities in the first instance move towards more online learning, and I think that was already taking place before it was rushed or accelerated thanks to COVID, and as the corporate sector tries to move and focus more on well, less on being the knowledge organisation and more on being the learning organisation, there's attention being paid there about learning and development, but also about the people who work in learning and development, which are increasingly becoming learning or instructional designers. And so it seemed that there was this opportunity to establish a named program of study. Now, of course, there were programs out there that talked about e-learning and online learning and adult learning. But in terms of learning design, there was nothing out there. And I felt that, and the university fortunately agreed with me, that there was a real gap in the market that we could fill. And I was placed in a very enviable position. This never happened. So I didn't at the time realize how lucky I was. but I had a whole year before we launched the program to do all the planning and the preparation. Now, that year kind of got cut short because COVID happened and then suddenly we had to make some offerings as part of the federal government initiatives at around that time. But even so, that seven or eight months that I had preparation before we actually launched the program was just fantastic.

Michelle Ockers:
So fundamental question 101, what is learning design? maybe we'll go there to make sure we've all got a common perspective about what it is we're actually talking about here.

Keith Heggart:
Yeah, so that's the barbecue question, right? When people always ask you at a barbecue, what are you? And you say, I'm a learning designer, and you try to explain it, and they say, isn't that just teaching? And part of it is, but I think learning design is a step back from teaching. It's a more holistic approach to planning, preparing, and developing the resources and the activities that encourage learning. Increasingly, it's something that spends a lot of time in online or hybrid, asynchronous or synchronous spaces, but it's been around since at least the 1950s and 60s. In Europe, they spend a lot of time talking about the kind of technical nature of learning design and interactive learning objects. In the US, they talk a lot about instructional design, and they got its start there after World War II in the military, when it was necessary to train lots of people to do one thing very well with few mistakes. But now, more broadly speaking, it's in the higher education sector, the learning designers are the people who work with academics to create the online environments and all the other activities that go towards making the student experience actually meaningful and engaging. And in the corporate sector, it's the people who design the training that's required in order to develop leaders, for example, or to ensure people meet their mandatory requirements. All of those kinds of things are really best undertaken by learning designers. So it can be everything from designing and developing and even facilitating face-to-face training to developing quite extensive online courses.

Michelle Ockers:
So again, I found another idea for a separate conversation around how learning design has evolved over time. But anyway, you could become our regular guest with the breadth of knowledge that you have and experience. Let's talk about the graduate certificate and the student experience. Can you just briefly walk us through the student experience from enrolment to completion, putting aside the kind of, I know there's micro-creds, but the whole certificate. How long is it? You know, what do people go through as part of their student experience?

Keith Heggart:
Yes. So I was encouraged, and I wanted to do this anyway, to really push the boat out in my design thinking for how I wanted to structure and plan the graduate certificate. And fortunately, I spent a lot of time consulting with people before I even put pen to paper or finger to keyboard about the actual design of it. But to give you an overview, the design that we ended up with is that we throughout the traditional university notion that a graduate certificate are four subjects and that you do these subjects either all together or you do two in one semester and two in another semester and instead we turn the graduate certificate into eight subjects so each half the size of a normal subject and you do them in six weeks and you do them in series. So you do subject one, finish it. Subject two, finish it. Subject three, all the way through to subject eight. And that means that you can do the whole graduate certificate part-time in about eight months. Each subject takes about six weeks. So again, that's about half the length of time a normal university subject takes.
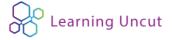
Michelle Ockers:
I was going to say, that's pretty pacey to get a university qualification, eight months.

Keith Heggart:
Yeah. And we wanted to make it intense because we didn't want that kind of drift that sometimes happens with those long university semesters of 13 weeks. In the middle of the session, people kind of start to lose interest in the subject. And when we were designing it, we realised there's so much that learning designers need to know. You know, they're very much the Jack or Jill of all trades. And so we wanted to turn each subject into a very precise, work-applicable learning opportunity, and then finish that and then move on. And that meant that there was some concern about the learning, the graduate certificate being a bit fragmented. And when we talk about micro-credentials, that's one of the things that we have to wrestle with. But I think in the end, the final subject really pulls it all together. So I'll just tell you a little bit about the kinds of subjects that we cover. So you can do it in lots of different ways. The final subject is best done as the final subject. So most students start off with a subject called think, which is all about learning theories. You know, how does the brain learn? So we lean into the good old cognitive science side of things. We talk about constructivism. We talk about behaviourism. We talk about connectivism. It's the ABCs of learning design, as I like to call it. And that's probably as theoretical as we get, because the next subject is design. And then we dive straight into what is this process of learning design and how does it look like? And we engage with all those wonderful frameworks of, you know, ADDIE and universal design for learning and understanding by design and constructive alignment. And so we really throw the students in, not quite at the deep end, but we expose them to the different kinds of terminologies and languages and ways of thinking about learning design. So they are ready when and if they go out into the corporate world or the tertiary world for different models. We also have subjects like critique, which is all about the challenges and the problems and the ethical issues that arise in learning design. So we cover things like bias, we cover things like inclusivity and accessibility and open education resources and all of those kinds of things. We have a subject called Create, which is all about creating interactive multimedia objects. And that's the one that we have to change them, simply because these different tools that we use are no longer popular or they're no longer running. But the whole idea is that they learn the basics of multimedia design and they can use that to create interactive learning objects. We've got subjects on things like learning analytics. That one's called Crunch. The university hated the names. They insisted that I change them to much longer ones. And we finally agreed upon a kind of, you know, a compromise where the real name is Crunch Learning Analytics for Performance Improvement. But everyone just calls it Crunch. We've got another subject called Predict where we kind of experiment with what learning design might look like in the future. And that's where we get to play with virtual reality, and as you can imagine, recently, lots and lots of talk about generative AI and what that means for learning design. And like I said, the final subject is called work learning design project. And this is where we send the students out on a five week internship like experience where they work at a university or a higher education institution, and they show off what they've learned, and then they come back and they report on it. It's a project-based internship, so they're not rocking up at eight o'clock with a cup of coffee for the boss kind of thing.

They are given a task within that organisation, and they've got five weeks to work through it, and they check in every week. And then they present it back to the employer and to us as the expert learning designers and talk about what they've learned. And it's just wonderful. I always enjoy the work presentations because it's just brilliant to see what they've done.

Michelle Ockers:
Yeah. So the context for the work project, can people do that in corporate settings? You mentioned higher ed settings for the projects, but if someone's working in a corporate environment or wants to do it in a corporate environment, their workplace project, can they do that?

Keith Heggart:
Absolutely, yeah. And we have lots of placements that we can find, and most of ours are across the university in different kind of learning and teaching units. We're happy to find other universities as well, you know. So sometimes my people from Queensland say, can I do it at a Queensland university? Because I actually want to go in. And they're like, sure, we'll work something out. But then we've also had people working for small not-for-profits We've had people working for corporate learning design companies. And also, especially within the finance sector, we've had lots of people working in finance doing L&D and learning design work there. And, you know, sometimes this is what we discovered when we were originally thinking about how we wanted to develop the course. One of the personas we developed was this idea of the uncertified learning designer. So that's somebody who is in a learning design role, whether at higher education or a corporate or somewhere else, but doesn't have the qualification to say they're a learning designer. And I think the field itself is gradually moving in the direction where those qualifications are going to become important. So these uncertified learning designers like to do this course to, one, because it affirms some of what they know. It fills in some gaps that they don't know. But at the end of it, they get the certificate that says, yes, they could call themselves a learning designer now. They're often in a role, so they often do their work placement in that particular role. And usually they have a really cool little project that they work on.

Michelle Ockers:
So let's stick with personas because you brought them up. So the first one that you talked about was the uncertified learning designer. And I think for those listeners who are working in corporates, that will be all too familiar because of the way that people just tend to fall into these roles or move into them from sideways from other places. The tired teacher was another persona. Was that based on personal experience, Keith? So who's the tired teacher? Tell me a bit more about that persona.

Keith Heggart:
Yeah. So when I was talking to colleagues and basically everyone that I could find, when I was thinking about how to design this graduate certificate and what I wanted to include and what I couldn't include, I recognised early on that some teachers were quite interested in this as an alternative career, you know, so these teachers who've worked hard but they're looking for something that maybe they can do in a part-time role or something that they can do perhaps mostly online and something that's not

going to take, you know, 70, 80 hours a week because we know teachers often are overworked. And so originally I didn't call it the tired teacher, I called it like the career change teacher. But the more teachers I talk to, they're like, we're just tired, we want something different. And so this is somebody who's got all these experiences and skills, you know, so many teachers already feel very comfortable with the idea of developing learning processes and resources and materials. There are some gaps there, but they're a natural fit for learning design. And if they can wrap their head around adult learning design or adult education, they often go on to become very good learning designers. Yeah, and I'm pleased to see we get a lot of teachers and a lot of TESOL teachers, so teachers of English as a second or other language, who are interested in doing this as well, you know, as adding it to their skill set. What we actually found, and you know, I try to keep track on as many of our graduates as possible, but what we have actually found is that for some of these educators, they feel so reinvigorated by what they've learned. They're quite happy to go back into the classroom and try these new ideas. But for others, it's a stepping stone to a whole new career.

Michelle Ockers:
Yeah, absolutely. So interesting couple of examples of the personas. How did you create these personas and how did they help you then in your design process?

Keith Heggart:
I spent, I think, of those seven or eight months that I had to prepare this course, I think I would have spent about three or four of those months just existing in the problem space, right? You know, which is one of those things that we know that is important for designers, spending time in the problem space. And I always think of that and I leveraged every single education contact that I had to talk to people. So I tapped on shoulders and at the end of the conversations I might have had with my old teaching colleagues or my old Apple distinguished educator colleagues, I'd say, and who else should I talk to? And there were some very generous people who run programs like this in the U.S. who were quite open and said, this is what we do, and this is how we do it, and this is why we do it, and this is why it doesn't work, and if you can fix that, that'd be really good. And that's something that I've tried to mirror as well, you know, the generosity I experienced when I first came into the field, I'd like to share with other people. And as a result of that, you know, drawing on my own learning design experience, I realized that we were going to have quite a diverse cohort, which I think is a strength, because I enjoy having these kind of provocative discussions during the learning sessions that we have. I think that encourages engagement. But I needed to make sure that the course was suitable for that diverse cohort. And when I say diverse, I knew it was going to be online. So I needed to make sure that it was going to be accessible and inclusive. And I think online goes a long way towards doing that. But I also knew that we're going to have people who are coming from higher education. We're going to have people who are coming from big teaching backgrounds, big education backgrounds, and people also with no education background. So that was a tricky design question to answer. How do you meet those? And also people who were going to be quite time poor. So I had to find a way to design the course to ensure that they could still access it.

Michelle Ockers:
In terms of, like, could you go back through the archives and, like, here's a set of documents that are our learning personas. Did you document the personas? If so, how did you do that? And how did you test for your understanding?
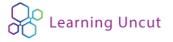
Keith Heggart:
Oh, yeah, absolutely. So I think we had about eight personas at the end of the process, and those were to the tired teacher, the uncertified learning designer, the alternative academic was another one. Off the top of my head, the learning coach or learning leader, I think, was another one. The sideways transitioner, so that's somebody who's been in a corporate role and has been moved into L&D, was another one. Yeah, so we had eight, and we did the traditional kind of learning design persona, you know, the user experience persona, what do they think? What do they feel? What do they do? What do they say? I never got beyond stick figures because I'm not particularly talented when it comes to that. And I never gave them a name like, you know, Terry the tired teacher. They were just the tired teacher. And then what we did was use them as constant touch points as we were thinking about the course. And so it became this balancing act of the university requirements and also the needs of these personas. So when I made the decision to have eight courses rather than, you know, four larger subjects, I'd go back and I'd say, all right, well, if I'm a middle career person who's now taking on a learning design role, does this make sense to me? Or would it be better? And what we found is that, especially the breaking it down and stretching it out, really made a lot of sense for most of our personas who were, what we discovered, very time poor. So it just became this constant, almost conversation with these fake personas. And of course, there are risks with personas because people are people, they're not personas. But certainly it helped us to take ourselves out of our role as academics and learning designers and put us in the position of, I'm coming back to university, I'm coming back to online learning. This is all new to me. How can I make sure that this is a good experience?

Michelle Ockers:
Thank you. That all makes sense. And it's great to see that the personas kind of actively being used to bounce the design as it evolved back off the personas and ask the question, you know, are we making decisions which meet the needs of these different groups? What else did you explore when you were in that problem space?

Keith Heggart:
One of the things that was really important to me was that the Graduate Certificate in Learning Design needed to be immediately practical. This arose out of the personas because For some of the personas, we recognised they were there, not necessarily because they had a deep and abiding passion for learning design at the start. I'm sure they did by the end of the course, but maybe at the start they'd been sent there as a professional development opportunity by their employer. So what we wanted to do was provide them with the kind of evidence that they could take back to their employer to say, look, I am learning something. And we knew that the best way to do this was through the development of portfolios. That is something that increasingly learning designers are being asked to show at job interviews, you know, can show some portfolio. It's always a little bit tricky because of things like intellectual property, but we felt that if we could tailor all of the assessment tasks across the whole

graduate certificate to be an item that they could then put in their portfolio, this would be something that would be of value to them in the future. And then we tweaked it a little bit because we thought, yes, it's all very well to have a multimedia object or a report about the learning analytics and some recommendations. But the number one skill after you get past the pedagogy side of things for a learning designer is communication, because they are so often the project manager, that kind of link person who's bringing together subject matter experts and multimedia designers and learning analysts. And then you've got the, you know, all these other kinds of people contributing to the project. And the one who knows what's going on is often the learning designer. So we wanted to foreground how to develop that communication skill to the point where sometimes learning designers need to feel empowered to push back and say that's not the right decision because that's not how people learn. And so for these items that they create for the portfolio, the learning designers then have to justify their design decisions. They have to explain concisely, in ways that would be understood by non-learning design or non-education experts, why they have done it in that particular way. And that was born out from our experiences working, or my experiences working with academics, who often feel that the best way to ensure that students engage with, for example, readings, is to just throw them a whole bunch of URLs to links in the library and say, pick any one, away you go. And that's just not great learning. Yeah, so that emerged out of the personas.

Michelle Ockers:
That's so interesting. I'm surprised that the number two skill after pedagogy is communication. It makes a lot of sense, particularly, I mean, I know you work a lot in the higher ed sector, my exposure to the corporate sector. Everybody thinks they're a learning designer because they're learners. And being able to explain, particularly if you're taking an approach that requires a little more time, allowing people time to practice, allowing people time to embed. you know, looking at how do we address workplace conditions so that people actually do properly learn and apply in the workplace and being able to explain the rationale, being able to influence and work with your different stakeholders. They're really important skills. But that was like, that's number two after the pedagogy, rather than, for instance, how to use all these tools to create great looking materials and so on. Really interesting, Keith.

Keith Heggart:
Yeah, we did a survey of all these different jobs that were learning design or learning design adjacent. And this is where we discovered organisations like the AFL, you know, the football league, employs learning designers. And that leads to a fascinating discussion. Every football team, American football team in the US, has a team of learning designers to train their athletes, their sports people, which is just mind blown. Anyway, but we did the survey of all these job descriptions and, you know, tried to identify the kind of commonalities and high level communication skills was consistently there.
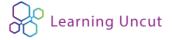
Michelle Ockers:
So interesting. And so interesting, the kind of giving yourself that space to stay in that problem space, you know, eight months to do the design or 12 months or however long you had, you had a good period of time to really dig in and understand the needs and that adjacent skills, that's a really good example of, you know, one of

the opportunities we have with the skills landscape evolving so rapidly because it's not just learning and design skills that this applies to, but just about every skill that we support as learning designers in the workplace and being able to find those adjacencies really important. Collaboration and industry input. You're obviously, you talked right up front about some of the cross-university work you do, and I don't know whether cross-university work was part of the way you progressed the design, but certainly industry practitioners, how did you collaborate with, get the input of industry practitioners as you shape the design and qualification?

Keith Heggart:
Yeah, one of the things that I was really worried about, and you alluded to it, Michelle, when you mentioned how pacey the course is, I was worried that the students were going to complete the grad cert and then we kind of abandoned them. Where was the aftermarket care, if I can get a little bit, you know, consumer driven, you know? And I didn't want to just feel that the students had been, that this relationship where the university had been really transactional. I wanted to stay in touch with them and I wanted them to stay in touch with the university. And, you know, as an aside, one of the success measures of the course is how many of the students come back and redo further courses. And one of the things that we've kind of discovered along the way is that it's become an entryway into things like the Masters of Education and Leadership and Learning. So people who are very nervous about doing a master's degree, some of them see that the grad cert is a really nice stepping stone to get into that. Anyway, industry collaboration, in order to look after, look after is the wrong word, but to stay in touch with the students during the course and after they graduated, I set up a little LinkedIn group called the Australian Association of Learning Designers. Now, we're not an official association. It's just the name of the LinkedIn group. And originally, I was just going to keep it limited to graduates or students in the course. And, you know, it could be just a way they could share what they're doing. But more and more people kept requesting to join and saying, hey, there's nothing like this on LinkedIn. It'd be really good to be part of it. And it's exploded. I think we've now got more than a thousand members across Australia and Australasia, many of whom are currently practicing learning designers from all these different kinds of organisations like OES or Keypath or Guru. And so it's now become a knowledge network where people can share interesting articles or learning design events. or what they're up to, or job promotions, or job opportunities. And it's got to the point where, and I think this is always a sign of a good online community, where I don't have to really be involved. It's become an organic living thing in and of itself. So that was a kind of unexpected, but very pleasing way that that industry has been involved. The second way, and again this goes back to my plan, that it had to be so close to practice, you know, we had to have learning designers walking out and getting a job if they didn't already have a job as a learning designer. What we included were, in the final week of each subject, is something called an expression session. And I stole that name from craft brewers, where they all get together and they try each other's beers. We didn't do that, but for our expression sessions, we invited a practicing learning designer, or someone in a similar kind of role, to come and lead that week's workshop. So each week we had a 90-minute workshop on the topic, but the final week was this expression session. And so we'd get somebody to come in and talk about an ethical issue that they'd faced in learning design recently for critique, or they'd talk about their work with

learning analytics for crunch, or how they were using AI in their corporate setting for predict. And so that was really good because the learners could see what they'd learned in the preceding five weeks had a direct application to what was happening in the industry, not in the future, but right now. And they became really, really popular. And then my colleague, John, who taught the grad cert learning design last year, he said, these are fantastic learning opportunities. why don't we just make these even bigger? And so now we offer them as open events, which is great because suddenly we've gone from a closed ecosystem where it's just the students enrolled in that particular subject to now all the students in the course can come along to a particular expression session, but so can everyone else who's interested. So yeah, we're kind of nurturing the learning design industry or community by doing that.

Michelle Ockers:
Fantastic. There's some really great connections with industry and keeping it alive there as well. So you've mentioned a little bit about success metrics for the program. And I think the specific metric you indicated was, you know, repeat learning, engagement, people coming back, doing more courses. How have you evaluated the effectiveness and impact of the certificate?

Keith Heggart:
The most important metric for us is the employment statistics. So how many of our graduates go on to get a job in learning design in the field of their choice? As a little fillip to that, I think one of the measures that we can use for that is how many of them do we actually employ after the course? And the answer is we employ quite a few. So now when I wander over to the central learning and teaching unit, I get to see all, not all, but quite a few of my ex-students who have completed the graduate certificate and it's been such a valuable learning experience that they have now been employed. And that's one measure, but we can break it down because It needs to be not just people being employed at UTS, but across the whole higher education sector, but then also within the corporate education sector as well. And those are, I think, really good metrics. You know, we were very pleased with how many of our students have gone on to find jobs. And it's always a wonderful experience when they write back to you and say, oh, you know, you need to be a referee or I just got this job and it's because of the grad cert learning design. So that's the first metric. I think the second metric is, you know, imitation is the most sincere form of flattery. And since we set up the Graduate Certificate in Learning Design, there are now at least four that I'm aware of, four very similar courses in other universities. In fact, some of them have incredibly similar names to the subjects within the Graduate Certificate in Learning Design, which I think is testament to the recognition that there is value and that this is a course to be involved in. A colleague of mine who's at Monash, Professor Michael Henderson, has just launched a bachelor's degree in learning design and technology, which I think is going to be very interesting. And I think it'll only be a matter of time before a university launches a master's degree. My real interest would be to do a combined learning design slash learning analytics master's degree, but yeah, wait and see for that one.

Michelle Ockers:
Yeah, the analytic space is increasingly important in the work we do in learning, absolutely. So, what about how feedback from the participants is used, has been used, particularly in the earlier years when you were running it for the first couple of rounds? How did you gather feedback and use it? And can you give us any specific examples of improvements that were made to the program based on student feedback?

Keith Heggart:
Yeah. I find the traditional university feedback measures serve a purpose, but they're quite limited, you know. So especially if you're only running a six-week course and then suddenly at the end of the six weeks they have to do a survey and they talk about, you know, their experiences and how much they enjoyed it or didn't enjoy it, and then you don't get those results for two weeks. It's the rule of feedback, right, as well, too late then, I needed to know when I was teaching it and of course you incorporate it in the next time you run the course but because of the pacey nature I've already put it out of my mind and I'm not thinking about it until six months time when I've got to teach that subject again because I'm in the middle of the next subject and I'm even thinking about the subject after that. So what I tried to do with the students during the live sessions, so those were the synchronous online sessions that we had once a week, I tried to encourage them to speak openly and honestly about what they'd found and we would devote 10 minutes at the end of every class just for that kind of question. So the final or the penultimate 10 minutes would always be about the assessment task and of course that's a cheat just to make sure that people hung around for the whole session and then the next 10 minutes would be this kind of hang around and tell me how you're going. And I found that worked, but not as well as I'd like. And what I was trying to recreate was that period in the classroom. So when you're teaching face-to-face in the classroom or the training room, and there's that kind of informal rapport-building discussion that goes on either before or at the end of the training session. And so what I did was I started opening the Zoom room 20 minutes before the class started. So if the class started at 4 o'clock, I'd open it at 3.40. And I'd just have it open and if people wanted to pop in and have a chat, they could come in and have a chat. And the before seemed to work a lot better than the after. So, you know, it was kind of an online version of that informal discussion at the start. Something else that came through really quickly early on was that I was giving them far too much reading. So in the early iterations of the course, we'd have two academic readings per week, which I thought was reasonable, but the feedback from the students was very much, no, no, this is not reasonable. I can't read two 20 page articles and do these asynchronous activities, commit to 90 minutes online and work on an assignment. We need to talk about that. So we address that in two different ways. We cut it back to one reading, but we also change the reading to not always be a reading. So if we could find a podcast, by an academic that was still academic in nature, we'd put the podcast up or we'd have a little video. And that actually was really positively received. The students would say, oh, you know, I was walking the dog and listening to the article by so-and-so. And that works for me, you know, and it works for them. You know, it's all about finding that sweet spot between, yes, we're teaching you what you need to know, but you're also doing it in a way that works for you because you're more likely to remember it that way.

Michelle Ockers:
Yeah, nice. Some great examples. And I really like what you did there with opening the Zoom room up early and creating some space for people just to drop in and connect with you and have some conversation. That's a great example of the rapport building, because there is something we miss out on in the online environment. And it's just that our online sessions end up being so full. that it's difficult just to create some space to connect.

Keith Heggart:
I often found I was quite tired after an online session. And my theory is that I put more into it so that people can respond. So you kind of overact a little bit in an online environment, which sounds terrible. But I think because there is that screen between you and there's not that physical presence, so you put a little bit more into it. And I think students respond to that.

Michelle Ockers:
Yeah, you definitely have to bring the energy on in a different way in the online setting. Absolutely. So Keith, I want to bring it back to you at this point. You've gone through this period where you spend a lot of time in the problem space, you've gotten to know who this is for, what might work for them, you've designed the certificate, you facilitated it, I think you said for three years, initially as the only facilitator. What have you personally learned along the way? How has this affected, you know, any of your personal perspectives or practices?
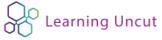
Keith Heggart:
The first thing that really struck me was the division between corporate learning design and higher education learning design. And that really frustrated me because at the end of the day, we're there to teach people, right?

Michelle Ockers:
What do you mean by division? What does that look like in your mind? What were you seeing that led you to that conclusion?

Keith Heggart:
So, for example, the association, the tertiary community, often congregates at events like the Ascilite Conference, which is admittedly a scholarly conference, but there are very few learning designers from a corporate background at a conference. And the same is true of, for example, AITD. Lots of corporate learning designers go to that, but fewer academics or tertiary education learning designers go to that. In my experience, they don't even talk to each other on LinkedIn. They don't follow each other on LinkedIn. They don't go to the same events or even talk, in many ways, the same language. A little bit, but yeah, I just, I think we as a community of people who are interested in designing good learning experiences have got far more in common than we've got in difference. And I'd really like to find ways that we can bring together those kinds of, well, yeah, you know, bridge that gap and narrow that division. And so I've been quite conscious about making sure that I'm a member of Ascilite and part of the Learning Design Special Interest Group there, but also I'm a member of AITD and I want to, you know, be part of those activities and be involved

in that as well. And I think it's my hope that the Grad Cert might serve as a bit of a bridge between those two things and hopefully we can all learn from each other and do things better together. The other thing is the value of asking. What I've found, and this has been throughout the whole process that I've been involved, not just the planning and the preparation, the number of people who are willing to put themselves out to help you along the journey. So, you know, not things that don't cost them or are easy for them, but are actually willing to rearrange schedules or to come at an unfriendly time zone, or to even come all the way to the university to do a face-to-face event. I think that is a wonderful reflection on us in the education profession but also a recognition of there's a desire for more networking opportunities, more communication, more chances for us all to get together and talk about the things that get us all excited and interested. So I'm incredibly grateful to the people that helped me in the early days. And one of the things that I, as I said earlier I made this very clear commitment to myself and to the rest of the community is that even if I'm no longer in charge of the grad cert learning design, I still think I'm a learning designer. Even though I'm a senior lecturer or whatever, at heart I design learning experiences. So I'm a learning designer and I want to be able to promote and to share and to celebrate other people in the community and the good work that they do. Yeah, so I guess it's karma, right? What goes around comes around. And I know I was fortunate and I want to return that favor.

Michelle Ockers:
I think you've just kind of encapsulated a lot about our profession as a community. And when I say our, in the broadest possible sense, those of us who are involved in adult learning in any way, as well as the value of being part of a network and in showing up with a spirit of contribution and generosity and the way that that does come back to you. So thanks for sharing that, Keith. So, what about advice for learning professionals, regardless of what sector they're working in, who are seeking to design effective learning solutions, apart from going and doing some skill development, doing a course? What would your key advice be to those who are sitting right now in learning design roles in corporates, in higher ed, in any sector whatsoever, for doing a better job with learning design?

Keith Heggart:
Oh man, can I rephrase this and call, you know, my pet hates in learning design?

Michelle Ockers:
Well, you can if you want. If you want to start there and then flip it. And if it's like, here's the things I want you to avoid. Here's the common pitfalls and traps.

Keith Heggart:
Something that seems to occur with alarming regularity is gamification is the solution to learning design. Don't get me wrong, there is a time and a place. And good gamification is fantastic, but incredibly resource heavy and intensive and has limited repeatability. Yeah, gamification and giving people badges is not the solution. And I always talk about the fantastic McDonald's example. So there was a training app that McDonald's released and they discovered that it really promoted performance and speed on the consoles. But then it really trailed off after a period of time because

people got bored and they carried over the boredom with the app into the workplace. So it actually made things worse. So yeah, gamification is not the answer.

Michelle Ockers:
I've just got to put in a little plug. I had an episode, episode 135 with Claire Seldon, who works for the Department of Education. Do you know Claire?

Keith Heggart:
I know Claire.

Michelle Ockers:
Right. So I have had an episode with her talking about gamification and scenario-based learning and what is poor gamification and the common issues with people trying to apply gamification and not doing it well versus, you know, sort of effective game mechanics and using those in learning. So, listeners might want to take a look at that because you're not saying that gamification full stop doesn't work, just that we apply it very poorly and perhaps with a very superficial level of understanding of what it's really about and how to use it effectively, Keith.

Keith Heggart:
Yeah and Claire used to teach in the grad cert learning.

Michelle Ockers:
There you go. So maybe we'll get a little bit of a bump in people going back and listening to her episode then. Awesome.

Keith Heggart:
The other thing is educational technology companies are incredibly good at convincing you that their particular product or solution is going to, one, change the world and two, make everyone's jobs obsolete and three, remove the need for people to actually design good learning experiences.

Michelle Ockers:
Particularly in the world of AI, Keith.

Keith Heggart:
Well, yeah, but I think you can go back and you can say it about virtual reality and then you can say it about iPads and interactive whiteboards and even the, you know, the biro pen. But I think It's not enough to just be learning designers or educational professionals. We need to be critical educational professionals. We need to recognise that we're the experts in how people learn. And while that is sometimes dismissed as anyone can do it, the reality is that this is an incredibly nuanced and challenging skill to develop. And I think we should collectively and individually speak up for what we know is right and or wrong. I'm not a technology luddite, I'm not a technology pessimist, okay, I'm far from that, but I think we need to make sure that we start off with the human in the room, whether that's an online room or a virtual room or a face-to-face room or an asynchronous room, whatever, and we design with them in mind. So that old human-centred design chestnut hasn't changed even through the use of AI. And then we need to make those tools work for us rather than

us work for them. So I've never seen AI do a good learning design for a project or anything like that. But it does some pretty good multiple choice questions. So if you ever have to use multiple choice questions, I'm quite happy to farm that kind of work out to AI. And so I think what I'm saying is, use our judgment well in how we use these technologies.

Michelle Ockers:
Yeah. Thank you, Keith. I think that's a wonderful note for us to wrap up the conversation on. We're going to include several links for listeners to explore further, including your LinkedIn profile, a link to the Graduate Certificate in Learning Design, if possible. and we can have a conversation about this. I'll get listeners, appoint them to the show notes for resources. It'll be really cool to get one of those learning personas, if you've still got access to them and share those. And if there's any other resources that you think might be useful to help people kind of see reinforce some of the things you've discussed. So really appreciate this. It's been such an interesting conversation, Keith. Thank you for so generously coming on and talking us through the design of the Graduate Certificate in Learning Design.

Keith Heggart:
Thank you for having me. It's been an absolute pleasure.

 About Learning Uncut

Learning Uncut are learning and development consultants that help Learning and Development leaders and their teams become a strategic enabler so that their businesses can thrive. We work in evidence-informed ways to drive tangible outcomes and business impact and are strong believers in the power of collaboration and community. We specialise in helping to build or refresh organisational learning strategy, update their L&D Operating Model, enable skills development, and conduct learning evaluation. We also offer workshops to shift learning mindset and practices for both L&D teams and the broader workforce – as well as speaking at public and internal events.

Learn more about us at our website.

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 Michelle is the co-founder and Chief Learning Strategy at Learning Uncut. She is an experience, pragmatic organisational learning strategist, L&D capability builder and modern workplace learning practitioner. She also delivers keynotes, workshops and webinars for learning and broader professional or workforce groups at both public and in-house events.

Michelle received the following prestigious industry awards in 2019:

- Australian Institute of Training and Development Dr Alastair Rylatt Award for L&D *Professional of the Year – for outstanding contribution to the practice of learning and development*
- *Internet Time Alliance Jay Cross Memorial Award – for outstanding contribution to the field of informal learning*

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