

## Navigating the “In-Between”: Making a Place for Early Career Scholars to Share and Connect Across Borders

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**Abstract:** This workshop recognizes the need for a peer-supported and sustained space for international early career researchers in the learning sciences across various geographies and institutional contexts. As a supplement to ongoing educational initiatives in the learning sciences, we seek to connect early career researchers through shared dialogue about the ways they navigate professional trajectories. Participants will exchange experiences, explore shared interests, discuss ways of working, and share approaches on navigating the pre-tenure space.

### Workshop organizers' background

As an international group of workshop organizers, we have developed a sense of shared community and professional friendship with one another over the past two years. Across time zones and borders, all organizers share a common sense of place within their institutions, as they are currently navigating what we call the “in-between” – the early career time of an academic trajectory. All organizers define themselves as early career scholars working within institutions and infrastructures that support their research and teaching. Given our shared starting point as early career learning scientists, the primary questions our workshop aims to address are: *How do early career scholars navigate the complexities of structures that both support and constrain the furthering of the work that brought us to this in-between stage of early career scholars? How does the development of our work as early career learning scientists bridge interdisciplinary research toward designing and studying learning environments? How can we share and continue to share effective strategies for meeting early career trajectories?*

About the organizers: *Anna Keune*, is an Assistant Professor of Learning Sciences and Design and Rudolf Mößbauer fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies of the Technical University of Munich since October 2021. Anna investigates and creates educational design technologies to generate knowledge about broadening participation in STEAM. Previously, she co-facilitated workshops related to materials and STEM learning, including ISLS pre-conference workshops. *Naomi Thompson* is an Assistant Professor of Learning Sciences at the University at Buffalo. She seeks to design educational experiences in ways that highlight and honor voices and practices that are traditionally minoritized and undervalued in educational settings. Naomi facilitated numerous workshops for youth around activities for STEAM learning, and professional development workshops for teachers around creative STEM activities for their classrooms. *Ryan Cain* is an Assistant Professor of Teacher Education at Weber State University and researches teacher and child learning in science utilizing model-based inquiry and reasoning with quantitative data. As a former elementary science teacher, his workshop facilitation experience focuses on in-service teachers. *Tolga Kargin* is an Assistant Professor of Elementary Education at Usak University, Turkey since July 2019. He earned his Ph.D. in Literacy, Culture, and Language Education with a minor in Learning Sciences at Indiana University. He is interested in young children's play with new technologies, and professional development of teachers. He recently co-led a workshop for in-service teachers about teaching digitally savvy children. *Areej Mawasi* is a Tenure Track Neubauer Faculty in learning sciences and educational equity at the Faculty of Education in Science and Technology at Technion - Israel Institute of Technology. She earned her Ph.D. at Arizona State University and was a postdoctoral researcher at the NSF National AI Institute for Student-AI Teaming at University of Colorado Boulder, where she studied and facilitated the co-design process of a curriculum that supports learners' engagement with sociocultural aspects of AI technologies. *Maggie Dahn* is an Associate Project Scientist at the Connected Learning Lab at the University of California, Irvine. She earned her Ph.D. in 2019 from University of California, Los Angeles with support from a National Academy of Education/Spencer Dissertation Fellowship and engages in design research to study how people learn in different contexts, across settings, and over time.

### Relationship to similar events and motivation for workshop

All workshop facilitators have contributed to the organization and facilitation of similar events related to the topics of the proposed workshop. For example, Keune facilitated a pre-conference workshop at the international conference on Computer Supported Collaborative Learning 2019 as well as the ISLS annual meeting in 2021 and 2022 that all provided intentional space for early career scholars to present their work. Keune and Thompson were also part of the organizing team of the first two Learning Sciences Graduate Students Conference that acts as an extended apprenticeship into the learning sciences for graduate students in the field.

As a group, we published an ISLS conference poster on the need for an international perspective on maker education (Keune et al., 2022). The collaborative writing process that resulted in the poster artifact involved many conversations among the international team that led to the present proposal—a workshop to support the development of an extended support network for early career scholars. Through our conversations, we collectively noticed that across institutions, there is not widespread or systematic support for early career scholars to share career experiences and advice. Furthermore, when there are efforts to bring early career folks together, it can require competitive selection processes or is targeted to the general audience of institution-specific incoming tenure-track faculty. The proposed workshop is intended as a space to collectively investigate whether and how the society could productively work toward providing support to a broader community of ISLS-affiliated early career scholars in the long term. With this, the ISLS preconference workshop “Navigating the in-between” is expanding existing and ongoing educational efforts of the International Society of the Learning Sciences that several of the authors have greatly benefitted from, including the ISLS Early Career Workshop (ECW). The workshop is unique because it invites those who participated in the ECW before to continue the conversations as well as those who were not invited to participate in the ECW due to space constraints. With the pre-conference workshop, we seek to extend participation in such professional development opportunities and generate insights into how we can sustain community at a pivotal time in our careers.

## **Description of event**

### **Intended audience and number of participants**

The main intended audience is a group of early career scholars in the “in-between” period—new assistant professors, research scientists, and those who are considering pursuing research careers in industry. We are interested in recruiting participants who have just finished their first postdoctoral positions and are working on navigating a new period of their careers. Given our focus on building an international network of early career scholars, as scheduling allows, we hope to hold our workshop at a time that allows for folks from several time zones to participate. We expect a maximum of 30, a minimum of five participants, and the workshop organizers.

### **Required facilities and equipment**

We plan for conference activities to occur in person, and we will also make a space for those who would like to be part of the group but cannot attend in Montréal, assigning a dedicated person to facilitate the in-person/online relationship and following recommendations coming out of current conversations in learning sciences communities such as the Change Lab and the annual meeting committee. All pre- and post-conference activities will be facilitated online. Required facilities for the conference event include a space with round tables if possible to facilitate discussion, a general technical setup, and writing/journaling materials to help facilitate shared discussions (e.g., post-its, paper, pencils, perhaps creative materials like colored pencils). The workshop organizers will bring their own materials. Additionally, because we intend to bring the group outside for part of the workshop, we would love information/local knowledge about local parks/areas for walking.

### **Theme and goals**

The overall goal of this long-tailed pre-conference workshop is to develop and cultivate a strong network of early career learning scientists. Through a half-day conference workshop, as well as events preceding and following the conference, we aim to connect this group of “in-between” early career scholars to one another to exchange experiences, develop groundwork for potential future collaborations, identify challenges and opportunities of the early career experience, and build a broader support network for early career scholars.

The workshop will aim to create bridges between early career international scholars in multiple ways:

1. Exploring past and future learning trajectories through mapping of participants' experiences across various places and spaces.
2. Exchanging expertise and experiences on navigating power dynamics in academia, management of workload, strategizing workflow, balancing between teaching-mentorship-research responsibilities, and doing interdisciplinary research.

3. Meeting career goals: a) applying for fellowships, grants, and awards b) publications c) exploring possible collaborations through governmental grants d) dealing with failure e) navigating tensions between disciplinary and interdisciplinary research.
4. Creating systems for cultivating and maintaining connection among early career scholars.

### Theoretical background and relevance to field and conference

**Connected learning.** The theoretical motivation for our proposal builds on a connected learning framework, which advocates for expansive learning environments that bring together learners' interests, support meaningful relationships, and highlight opportunities for academic, civil, and career engagement (Ito et al., 2020). Connected learning suggests educational approaches should utilize digital media, local and global resources, and relationship-building to help learners connect with others with similar interests in productive configurations toward sustainable goals that support networks and capacity building. A major goal of this approach is to create equitable learning experiences, especially for minoritized learners within educational structures and systems. Extrapolating this approach to a network of early career scholars and people with experience beyond the Ph.D. whose research aligns with the learning sciences, this proposed workshop will help build those productive relationship configurations and provide structures for knowledge sharing, peer mentoring, resource brokering, and interest development among participants.

**Learning on the move.** Learning on the move creates opportunities for human social interactions, connections with more-than-human-beings, and explorations of places (Martin & Bang, 2018; Springgay & Truman, 2017; Taylor et al., 2018). We build on this work to create a walking activity that aims to support participants of this workshop to explore, navigate, and experience collaboratively the host city that brought them together. Such interactions and connections extend learning beyond a specific location. It allows people to create new forms of knowledge as they build relations with land and are on the move and transitioning across places (Springgay & Truman, 2017; Martin & Bang, 2018). These explorations invite us to develop an understanding of places' cultural and sociopolitical present and histories (e.g., Taylor et al., 2018).

We argue that creating walking opportunities for learners as a community can be a form of a third space where they engage informally in learning together, socialize, enact joy and humor, and do activities of their interest outside the classroom formal experience. Learners also could experiment and experience differentiations of walking, various pathways, rhythm of walk, noticing new things in places they are familiar with, touching and feeling, and using devices to enact new ways of thinking-making-doing while walking (Springgay & Truman, 2017). These interactions can be a source for connecting with peers and more-than-human-beings throughout the walk. Such interactions are essential for supporting learners to make sense of their surroundings and the world around them (Martin & Bang, 2018). That is, walking methods provide a context for affective social interactions shaping what and how learners see, how they navigate their walk, and how they connect with one another and the world around them (Springgay & Truman, 2017).

### Pre-conference activities

Leading up to the ISLS conference, we will plan a series of pre-conference networking activities. Beginning with an interest development survey, which will ask interested participants which small group discussion groups they would like to join during the workshop. Because we know that an interest survey is not enough for making connections to support the development of a community, we will assign participants a follow-up activity that will lay the foundation for making initial connections before the conference. Using a random match generator, we will create pairs of early career participants and task participants with meeting up before the conference. Additionally, we will ask all participants to contribute to a shared excel sheet with pragmatic tools, processes, and advice they received to help generate a toolkit for the group.

### Conference activities

We imagine the conference will serve as a physical place for early career learning scientists to connect and reconnect in person, building on relationships forged during the online pre-conference activities. We imagine the half-day session will include the following activities:

- Introductions (30 minutes): Participants will have opportunities to introduce themselves.
- Small Group Discussions (60 minutes) – Participants will self-select into smaller discussion groups, each organized by a workshop facilitator. We imagine topics will include:
  - (a) mental health (i.e., staying professionally focused, saying “no,” finding balance);
  - (b) navigating administrative systems within your institutions (e.g., HR, construction, equipment);
  - (c) making connections between your work, local communities and impact beyond research itself;

- (d) dealing with rejections of grant applications and journal articles
- Small Group Share Outs (30 minutes) – Participants will share the highlights of their small groups conversations and facilitators will take notes to share with workshop participants
- Outdoor Time (30-60 minutes) – Participants and facilitators will enter Mount Royal Park for a walking activity and/or to engage in other outdoor activities (e.g., meditation, sitting in nature). We plan on organizing a few different activities, perhaps writing and/or making art together.
- Creating a Shared Artifact (60 minutes) – Participants will work together to create a shared list of commitments and goals to help sustain future career goals. We may consider sharing this artifact with a senior learning scientist (or group) to help us think through the professional journey ahead.

### Post-conference activities

We hope to keep the spirit of open dialogue up after the in-person conference ends. As mentioned, we may share our co-created artifact (e.g., a letter, list of commitments) with a senior learning scientist (or group of learning scientists) who we may invite as a panel to our group for discussion of topics of interest. We will let the group lead us to the best next steps, but we may also consider organizing a short speaker series as a next step.

### **Expected outcomes and contributions**

During the workshop, participants will have the opportunity to discuss early career challenges in group discussions where they will have the opportunity to connect across their cases (possibly from different countries), and develop solutions to common problems. The workshop will contribute to a fuller understanding of the locations, challenges, and opportunities these scholars face as well as ideas for how to continue to support and nurture each other in productive and effective ways. Concretely, the workshop will result in supportive new connections (pre- and during workshop), a shared written commitment toward sustaining future career goals (the workshop), and comments by mid- and late-career scholars on their perception of the feasibility of the commitments based on their own experiences navigating the academy (post-workshop). The workshop will present an opportunity to continue to advance the network of early career scholars within the ISLS community.

### **Participation requirements and solicitation plan**

#### **Participant solicitation**

We will invite participants for the workshop through personal social media channels (e.g., Twitter, Facebook), emails, and the ISLS Facebook page. Additionally, we will reach out to our existing networks of scholars who are in an early career stage and locate their work within the Learning Sciences, including prior pre-conference workshop participants, and those who expressed interest in participating.

#### **Draft call for participation**

We invite early career scholars in their first positions post-Ph.D. in the Learning Sciences, Educational Research, and beyond who are interested in building an international community, sharing their experiences, and supporting each other to navigate academia in relation to academic research, teaching, and service engagements. In this workshop, participants will map the space of early career scholars and work toward capturing the approaches to sustaining and continuing to build the learning sciences within and across international academic settings. We aim to bring together a diverse international group of scholars whose interests and experiences are diverse and who are interested in building a nurturing and healthy international community of early career scholars.

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