Appendix: Reflections on Hybrid History & Designs at ISLS Annual Meetings

D Teo Keifert, University of North Texas, danielle.keifert@unt.edu

Abstract: This appendix is a supplement to a paper presenting a brief history of the hybrid design efforts across recent Annual Meetings of the International Society of the Learning Sciences in the 2026 Irvine International Conference of the Learning Sciences (Keifert, 2026). This appendix covers a recent history of Virtual & Hybrid Design Innovations to help inform the ISLS community about what has happened and what they might do in their own future innovations. I hope this appendix can support your innovations!

Virtual and hybrid design innovations have proliferated across Buffalo 2024 and Helsinki 2025 and continue to shape Irvine 2026. Designs have ranged from before AMs to during AMs, virtual-focused to hybrid, and replications of in-person events to innovative new designs for the intellectual work of ISLS AMs. Here I describe these efforts based on 2024-2025 design implementations. This is meant to serve as a resource for the field as authors and symposia chairs organize new innovations using existing and emergent hybrid infrastructure. It is also meant to encourage your participation in hybrid organizing through volunteering in any number of ways. For more information on shaping future ISLS hybrid and virtual designs, reach out to the author.

Hybrid Ambassadors

Hybrid Ambassadors (HA) are a recent innovation that ensure smooth engagement across modalities of conference attendance (online, in-person). Rather than relegate virtual attendees to a "watch and listen" position, these designs have created opportunities for facilitated interactions via community chat features, in-room turn-taking support for online attendees, and opportunities for virtual-focused and hybrid community building events. This includes the incredible efforts of HA volunteers who sign up prior to the conference help presenters and attendees to join the Zoom presentation space. Furthermore, these HAs serve a critical bridge to ensure that virtual attendees are able to engage via chat with in-person attendees, and that virtual attendees are able to gain the floor during Q&As. In Irvine, and hopefully moving forward, each paper and symposium will nominate their own HAs much as happens for session chairs, ensuring that the effort of accomplishing community participation is distributed across that very community.

Virtual Innovations

Virtual Events include several, now routine AM designs. The Virtual Social was first instituted by then president-elect Ravit Duncan in collaboration with Keifert . Duncan suggested a virtual social to support new members who were attending their first in-person conference at Montreal 2023 as well as those scholars unable to join the return to in-person features. It has now become an annual feature the week before AMs to meet these needs of these communities. Although the platform for these gatherings has included both Gather.Town and Zoom, in all Virtual Socials volunteer members of the ISLS community have hosted "rooms" for attendees to gather. These rooms have varied from crafting, music-sharing, beverage and chat (e.g., coffee for those attending early morning, mocktails for those attending during their evening hours), meet-and-greet with ISLS Fellows, new members' / first-time attendees Q&A, and so forth. Virtual Socials support emergent scholars' connections with ISLS "old timers" and the opportunity for all members to gather informally to reconnect and plan their AM adventures.

Second, the Virtual Poster Session was first envisioned by Buffalo 2024 and has since grown under the guidance of Debbie Fields and Jody Clarke Midura. In 2024, the event was exclusively online and featured multiple small breakout rooms that allowed for each presenter to share their work with a small audience. In 2025, host Christine Lee was in-person, leading to innovations in format that included a virtual-focus with in-person attendees being able to join by physically joining Christine in a classroom space. Fields and Clarke Midura's design focused on pre-creating small groups of four-five presenters to share their work, each having four minutes to present and discuss with their audience. This design allows for a brief introduction of ideas, best served by single-slide presentations (rather than a typical detailed poster), followed by group discussion across the poster set. Key to this design was the introduction of facilitators in each breakout room, ensuring that someone was focused on asking each presenter at least one question. As a virtual poster presenter myself, I learned that these Virtual Poster Sessions had an abundance of first-time presenters, often from regions underrepresented in ISLS AMs. There is great potential in these events for welcoming new members, positioning junior members to discuss their work with a friendly audience, and providing an alternative

format to the loud hustle and bustle of a typical conference poster session. In fact, some members of the presenting teams indicated during a whole-group debrief in 2025 that upon their return to in-person conference attendance, they would prefer to continue to present their poster in the Virtual Poster Session. Thus, much like the emergence of structured poster sessions/symposia over a decade ago inspiring the imaginations of many members of our community as an alternate to traditional four-talks-one-discussant formats, Virtual Poster Sessions have become a preferred venue for discussion as well.

Finally, Virtual Keynote Watch Parties were introduced in Buffalo 2024. Local constraints are a feature of ISLS AMs as the society continues to choose to base our AMs in local host universities rather than shift to hotel/conference-center based events. We do this for any number of reasons, including cost, design flexibility, and the affordances of well-equipped technology in academic institutions. However, this often leads to constraints in the physical and technological resources; in Buffalo this was caused by needing to use an off-campus venue to provide adequate seating for keynote talks. However, the hosting venue did not have the technology to support live-streaming of keynotes. As a result, Virtual Keynote Watch Parties were envisioned as a way for virtual attendees to gather, watch the keynotes, and have the opportunity to chat with keynote speakers. Moreover, Keynote Watch Parties attend to time zone challenges. That is, attendees in the East Asia might be able to listen in on a Helsinki morning keynote, but those in the US would struggle given the middle-of-the-night time zone. While Virtual Keynote Parties do not fully resolve time zone challenges, they do offer the opportunity for volunteer hosts around the globe to make access and foster dialogue around these important talks.

Hybrid Symposia

Hybrid Symposia, those designed from the beginning to innovate designs across in-person and online modalities, were first launched in Buffalo 2024. These symposia were initially limited in number during Buffalo 2024 and Helsinki 2025 as ISLS and the Hybrid Engagement subCommittee worked to determine what technological and human arrangements were necessary to support successful hybrid designs. Local constraints often mean that not all rooms are well-equipped to support fully hybrid engagement across virtual and in-person modalities, thus there may be a return in the future to a constrained number of hybrid sessions. However, Helsinki demonstrated that there are relatively easy shifts in cultural norms, specifically introducing a Hybrid Ambassador in each session, that allow for all concurrent sessions to have a minimum of hybrid design (i.e. ensuring that virtual and in-person attendees can engage via the chat feature, facilitated turn-taking to ensure that virtual attendees are able to gain the floor in sometimes rapid-fire Q&As). The pervasive basic-hybrid structure now leaves the label of "hybrid symposium" as one of increased design innovation, above and beyond mere access for virtual attendees.

Over Buffalo 2024 and Helsinki 2026, there were 14 hybrid symposia. I conducted a small survey in the summer of 2025 to gather details about these sessions from their chairs resulting in 13 chair responses (in some cases, multiple co-chairs response) describing 10 symposia. This survey indicated that most planned hybrid designs were implemented with high fidelity to initial plans, with the exception of a group that reported unforeseen technical issues related to logging into the presentation platform (one of the reasons ISLS shifted to Zoom-presentation in all rooms in Helsinki 2025), and several groups reported some of their plan was not completed because they ran out of time for activities (an ever-present challenge for all symposia). Another group noted time zone challenges reduced virtual attendees. All others indicated successful engagement in their plans. These plans included the use of a variety of technological tools like Zoom, Padlet, breakout rooms (physical mirroring virtual), polls, digital whiteboards, shared slides, owl cameras, and parallel low-sensory physical spaces for in-person attendees. In the future, starting with Irving 2026, Hybrid Facilitation Plans will be included in the proceedings to aid with future proposers work to imagine and innovate. Without that available for Buffalo 2024 and Helsinki 2025, I instead summarize additional key hybrid features for survey respondents. Please note, although 13 people responded, in multiple cases two co-chairs responded with information about the same symposium.

Table 1
Key Hybrid Features from the First Two Years of Hybrid Symposia

Chair/Co-Chairs Symposium Title	Key Hybrid Features
Morgan Vickery Learning for Every Body: Intersectional Dimensions of Embodied Learning	• Live-transcription via Zoom • Synchronous engagement across virtual and in-person attendees • Asynchronous availability of session for those unable to attend synchronously

Peter Woods & Lauren Vogelstein Doing Learning Sciences Research In and Through Performing Arts	• Circulating materials (annotated artifacts) prior to the conference • Co-chairs facilitating virtual and in-person attendee engagement • Breakout rooms mirrored in-person and virtually via Zoom • Participants circulate breakout rooms (self-selection enabled in Zoom) • Digital whiteboard for discussion, left open after conference
Xinran Zhu Bridging Social Annotation Practice with Perspectives from the Learning Sciences and CSCL	• Web annotation tool, multiple forms of participation, facilitating cognitive engagement with the works, fostering social interaction beyond the traditional boundaries • Synthesize symposium proposal to create a document for collaborative reflection • Webpage with Hypothesis (annotation tool) embedded to relieve tech burden • Invitations to stakeholders (instructors, students, instructional designers, tool builders) prior to the conference, and to attend the conference session
Candice Love & Tessaly Jen Caring Relations in Interaction Analysis Labs	• Modeling and facilitating multilayered engagement • Multiple threads of conversations via Zoom chat • Designated Zoom-chat monitor • Zoom chat for sharing articles, links • Meeting Owl camera for 360° views • Group norms of pausing to read chat contributions • Group norms of voicing chat text and offering the floor to virtual attendees
Deborah Dutta & Miwa Takeuchi Centering Community-rooted Actions of Hope: Beyond Knowledge Monoculture	• Connecting intergenerational academics, educators, and community partners located in diverse geographical regions • Website hosting presenters' bios, public works, reference list, book/art recommendations • Online discussion board • Commentaries/questions from online participants moderated/presented to on-site participants • Diverse presentation formats: in-person presentation and discussion, pre-recorded presentations, and online discussion board for asynchronous discussion • Use of online conference platform (Whova) for discussion • Pre-prepared video recordings in case of technological challenges, backup plan for Q&A
Ashley Quiterio Critically-Oriented Approaches to Mixed Methods	• Time for logging-in planned into the session (5 minutes) • Chair introduction of intellectual work of the session and hybrid tools / design • Padlet with set times during the session for quiet reflection • Padlet as a resource for whole-group discussion • Chat interactions • Moments for silent reflection • Poll questions • Breakout room
Yong Ju Jung Learning Environments Designed For and With Learners with Disabilities	• Multiple communication channels • Regional hub & Low-sensory parallel rooms (join via Zoom) • Website for synchronous communication • Accessibility-checked resources available for download • Chairs attending via both virtual and in-person modalities
Teo Keifert Co-Research in Video Analysis: Shifts Towards Ethical Validity	• Statement of principles for the rights and obligations of attendees and hosts • Opportunities for multimodal contributions • Facilitators managing virtual and in-person turn-taking, ensuring in-person speakers use microphones for both in-room and online accessibility • Zoom manager assigned to support presenters (e.g., confirm visible slides, adequate audio)

	• Facilitators + Zoom manager trained through prior hybrid facilitation / participation
Suraj Uttamchandani Queer and Trans Learning: Placemaking, Non/Dominant Imaginaries, and Educational Dignity Towards Resistance	• Synchronous session and asynchronous engagement • Pre- and post-session viewing (once the AM begins, two weeks after the end of the AM) of pre-recorded presentations via shared Google Drive folder • Posters as abbreviated presentations (instead of full printed posters, a few slides) • Google drive folder linked on conference app (session page) • Slides allow for "stick-note" annotations from all attendees • Encourage in-person attendees to join Zoom (without audio) to participate in chat • Discussion facilitated by attendees submitting questions via a Poll • Zoom chat monitor • Sharing resources via Google Drive folder available to all attendees to contribute
Rishi Krishnamoorthy Decolonial and postcolonial possibilities for the learning sciences	• Pre-presentation virtual sessions and reading group across a network of scholars in the 6 months prior to ISLS AM • Invitations to scholars with relevant work across the globe • Presentations then fishbowl conversation, rotating attendees / presenters as central participants at different times • Meeting Owl camera • Introductions of all attendees, relationship building • In-person attendees encouraged to join Zoom, Zoom chat • Invitations to connect to the group after the session

It is important to note that the full complexity and innovation of these designs cannot be adequately captured in a short table. However, I by sharing a summary of features, future chairs/co-chairs are able to take inspiration in designing non-traditional interactional formats that center their design on hybrid arrangements.

There are a few themes that are worth of exploring. First, there were multiple sessions that modeled engagement related directly to the intellectual effort at hand. For instance, the Caring Relations symposium modeled hybrid facilitation in ways that mirrored the session's framing around caring in research. Similarly, Learning Environments Designed For and With Learners with Disabilities created designs that attended to the needs of scholars with disabilities through a regional hub, low-sensory physical breakout space, and multimodal communication modes. Finally, Bridging Social Annotation Practice with Perspectives from the Learning Sciences and CSCL centered shared annotation before, during, and after the session. Thus, sessions demonstrate ways hybrid design can be tailored to the intellectual efforts of symposia.

Another theme across these designs are both technology- and human-based facilitation designs. In each session, chairs/co-chairs named both traditional understanding of technology (e.g., Owl camera, Hypothesis, Zoom) as well as human technologies (e.g., Zoom managers, turn-taking norms, invitations to participate). It is critical that symposia include a consideration of both types of technology, as micro-chips cannot determine alone how interactions unfold (as our community well knows).

Another key feature across multiple designs is the inclusion of a broad range of experts and perspectives. This included parents, children, youth, teachers, disability advocates, students, self-advocates, community partners, community gardens, Indigenous farmers, schools and NGOs. Hybrid designs are particularly well-suited to these sorts of value-added designs as non-traditional attendees have easy access to join for one session. This strengthens our society as scholars are able to learn from practitioner and everyday partners, not just those able to afford the time and cost of attending an in-person conference. But it also enriches the quality of the research itself, as these conversations can shape ongoing efforts by the research teams, leading to new possibilities and innovations in that collaborative work. Thus, sharing the benefits of connecting in intellectual candy-shops like the ISLS AM offers new opportunities for innovation both in session design and ongoing research.

Finally, many hybrid facilitation plans also included expanding the "temporal wings" of the conference (Keifert et al., 2023, p. 1594). Dutta and Takeuchi wrote "A visual description of their work and perspectives would be included on the website for the audience to engage with various ideas beyond the brief descriptions presented in the symposium owing to time constraints." Vogelstein and Woods, Uttamchandani, and Zhu similarly circulated materials prior to the conference via invitations, websites, and collaborative tool development. This feature could be

taken up in any symposium design, but may be particularly well suited to hybrid symposia as they tend to already include technological tools of more diverse kinds than traditional symposia.

References

Keifert, D. T. (2026 June). Reflections on Hybrid History & Designs at ISLS Annual Meetings [short paper] Proceedings of the 20th International Conference of the Learning Sciences - ICLS 2026. Irvine, California: International Society of the Learning Sciences. pp. TBD [peer reviewed] DOI available after proceedings are published.

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