



Gathering Wisdom

Reimagining Learning Design with Ancient Tools

Ursula K. Le Guin proposed that humanity's fundamental tool isn't the spear (weapon) but the carrier bag (container). She suggests that before we were hunters with spears, we were gatherers with bags—collecting, preserving, and sharing what we found. This perspective challenges us to see stories not as weapons that pierce with conflict, but as vessels that gather and share human experience.

Learning as Carrier Bag

Traditional learning design often mirrors the hero's journey: a learner faces challenges, overcomes obstacles, and emerges transformed. Yet real learning, like Le Guin's fiction, is more about gathering, connecting, and sharing than conquering and achieving. Students learn most effectively when allowed to collect ideas at their own pace, make unexpected connections, and contribute to collective understanding. Their paths loop back, branch out, pause for reflection, and sometimes move sideways rather than forward.

Stories as Technology

When we discuss educational technology, we often fixate on digital tools while overlooking humanity's most enduring learning technology: stories. Stories naturally capture elements that traditional e-learning struggles to convey: professional intuition, cultural understanding, ethical considerations, and community wisdom. They serve as ideal vessels for complex knowledge transfer, being naturally accessible, device-independent, and built for human memory and recall.

Essential Questions for Reflection

1. How might we value collection over conquest in our learning designs?
2. What happens when we prioritize connection over completion?
3. How can we create spaces that honor the messy, non-linear nature of real learning?

"If it is a human thing to do to put something you want, because it's useful, edible, or beautiful, into a bag... and then take it home with you, home being another, larger kind of pouch or bag, a container for people... then I am a human being after all. Fully, freely, gladly, for the first time." - Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction"