

Case Study 4.6

Judy O'Connell Leadership for Global Learning- A reflection on Higher Education Experiences in Australia

Judy O'Connell is a senior lecturer and Program Director for the School of Information Studies in the Faculty of Education at Charles Sturt University (CSU), Australia. She has responsibility for a number of undergraduate and postgraduate programs in education and information studies. Her professional leadership experience spans primary school, secondary school and tertiary education. Her work focuses on open education, social media, digital innovation, learning frameworks, and new directions for knowledge networks in digitally enriched environments. Before commencing at CSU, Judy was Head of Library and Information Services at St Joseph's College, Hunters Hill, Sydney, and prior to that she was an Education Consultant in with the Catholic Education Office, focusing on Library and Web 2.0 developments for 80 primary and secondary schools in the Western Region of Sydney.

I have known Judy for many years through online connections and interactions and met for the first time (I recall) not in Australia but at the NECC/ISTE conference in 2008. When I moved back to Australia after 15 years of international teaching I was delighted to be contacted by Judy asking if I was interested in teaching online for CSU. Judy was the catalyst for my new journey into higher education and has broadened my horizons as to the needs of teacher education globally.

When you read Judy’s blog and connect with her online presentations you understand she is an astute and passionate educator striving to change the world, one student at a time. Judy is active on social media and knows how to integrate knowledge sharing and online community learning into all levels of education. Her story is one of moving forward, always looking for the next challenge. This case study, written by Judy herself, shares her journey as a global educator and focuses especially on teacher education in Australia including the new Master of Education (Knowledge Networks and Digital Innovation) at CSU.



Connect with Judy O’Connell

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My Journey

I became an English teacher in my mid thirties—late to the scene, but no less ready to meet the joy and challenges of education. Because I was older, people around me assumed I had lots of experience, so I slipped into the role and began to take up opportunities to lead and/or innovate almost straight away. Of course, the internet had not arrived at that point—but computers were making an impact. I found computers, even in the early days, to provide different and exciting ways of working with students—even with only one computer at my disposal. So technology continued to feature in my work, as did a deep curiosity in understanding exactly how to support student inquiry and need for information to make sense of their learning. Then along came the web—wow!

Perhaps because of this combination of interests I moved to the discipline of information science, and eventually took up the exciting new leadership opportunities provided in schools through school libraries. Here I was to do more than just teach my own classes. I was now able to influence all the classes in the school, the information services to support the curriculum, reading and knowledge needs of all the students, teachers and extended family in the school community. The journey became an exciting roller-coaster ride, and soon enough I moved beyond school to become a Library 2.0 and Web 2.0 leader of innovation at district level, working with

teachers as well as with their students through exciting programs to shape what the world began to dub “21st century learning”.

Somewhat to my own surprise, the tail-end of my teaching career finds me in tertiary environments, first as a casual lecturer, and then later with a tenured position as lecturer. Now I find myself as a senior lecturer and Course/Program director, leading graduate and postgraduate programs, and developing learning opportunities designed to meet the needs of global education right where we need it—for our educators in classrooms, libraries, professional organizations, school leadership staff, educational designers, and post-secondary educators.

What’s not to love about being a globally connected educator if this is the way our career can blossom? I know that what I achieve is possible because of wonderful and generous globally connected educators.

What Does Being a Global Educator Mean to You?

In simple terms, and in a digital context, being a global educator means keeping connected with ideas, people, and the passion that is education in any education setting. However, this means that it is also important to acknowledge, respect and be responsive to cultural and socio-economic circumstances. It is possible to empathize, support and work with colleagues, in a wide variety of circumstances. To that end, it is also highly critical that we look beyond one’s own country and region in the professional activities we undertake, or organizations that we join and participate in. Through professional contacts within international organizations, a global educator can be an ambassador for the future education needs of our people. Of course these comments are in the context of education. There are obviously social and religious tensions that underlay differences, but the role of a global educator is to focus on learning, teaching, and building the resilience and capacity of each child, adolescent or teacher with whom we interact.

Of course the adoption of a global educator mindset does not happen overnight, or even evolve automatically in our teaching or education roles. The reality is, however, that today it is easier than ever to be connected with others in our neighborhood, region, state or country from day one. From simple interactions on Twitter, to complex global classroom sharing activities or virtual conference presentation, any educator can develop a global focus—beyond curriculum content that might already

include global culture and society perspectives. This is the key—not just what we teach or the curriculum we engage with, but more importantly, it is the personal and professional interactions which give us the global context and makes us sympathetic and energized by being a global educator.

Global Connected Learning

Information (and the knowledge it contains) is the underpinning of society, learning, and future developments. Information is what leads to the creation of the web, and which leads to developments in all forms of our web engagement. Social networks are enabling information sharing. We need to be able to read, and read well, to access information. We need to know how to find and make available to others the information that matters. Global connected learning provides the framework for learning beyond the classroom, street, town, city, or country, allowing educators to build curiosity, knowledge, understanding and an agile disposition to innovation and change.

Ideas are central to our need to connect and communicate—and technology has become a pivotal process or tool in that social and intellectual process of connectedness. We can celebrate the open communication that the web has come to make possible, and the capacity to share and build knowledge. We are part of a socially connected era of mobile devices, online access, digital data, and communication mashups where interaction is the key to learning. The good side is about savoring the growth of creative knowledge and nurturing the understanding of students and teachers that can sometimes surprise and delight us with new insights and even lead us in new directions. The bad side encompasses that information abyss that exists, but which is misunderstood, largely unmentioned, and yet which is creating a new form of the digital divide—content and conversation ignorance in an era of mass information.

When it comes to connections in the classroom or workspaces, simple classroom projects without global connectedness may not be enough to meet the needs of our students. Innovation and opportunities for engagement are available in many different ways. How about off the planet? Remember when Colonel Chris Hadfield provided an ongoing channel of information and communication via Twitter from the international space station, including responding to questions from students? He topped this off with a recording of David Bowie’s “Space Oddity”, the first music

video recording from space, which was shared with the world via YouTube. What amazing ways to think differently about global connections. In other words, global connected learning has to be a remix of different forms of technology, devices, data repositories, information retrieval, information sharing, networks and communication. New technological tools are expanding—and fundamentally altering—the ways students can interact with the world.

So as an educator, I found joining international organizations to be essential. As a member of ISTE I jumped at the chance to undertake the first group study tour to ISTE from Australia, which provided me with an amazing opportunity to not only visit schools in New Zealand as part of the trip, but also to visit Silicon Valley, and organizations such as Google, Apple and Oracle. Finally, ISTE in San Antonio allowed me to engage in person with educators at one of the largest technology events in the USA, returning for many more conferences after that. But even before that, I found that by joining and becoming involved in the International Association of School Librarianship I've visited organizations, schools, libraries and education facilities in many countries, and made many friends at conferences held in places as diverse as Dublin, Tel Aviv, Moscow, Vancouver, and Adelaide! This has given me the most humbling of experiences, and the biggest challenges in refocusing my connections with people and their local experiences and contextualizing my own work for a bigger purpose.

My Daily Workflow

My circumstances are limited to connecting in participatory environments (daily), engaging in global discussions or projects via a range of organizations (regularly each year), and building learning programs that include global components within them. I believe passionately that we need to share and collaborate with colleagues.

We need to lead by example—every day. Back in 2009 I wrote about A Week in the Life of a 'new media' Teacher Librarian. It is wonderful to see what I was doing each day, and how the interactions were indeed those of a global digitally active educator. Each day included connecting beyond my school in some way, and each week included connections and collaborations with others. In 2015 my day takes a different shape, but my reliance on time-shifted global communications and information connections has not changed. Now my work is in online (distance) education

with graduate and post-graduate students, so of course I am using digital tools more than ever.

In my degree programs, I find that my approach proves to be a challenge for many who do not connect globally or online as a natural part of their workflow, but also demonstrates that connecting and collaborating with a ‘global’ mindset is important, enjoyable, invigorating professionally— and actually easy. My day-to-day information and knowledge exchange has to include a range of devices, from desktop PC, MacBook Air, Microsoft Surface, iPad, and iPhone. I am device agnostic (with a secret love of Mac), and will happily use what my workplace provides! My workflow cannot operate without multiple platforms, as I move from office to office, room to room, place to place. So my organizational tools of choice are online and connected with the most important including: Google suite, Google translate, Office365, Evernote, Feedly, Pocket, Zotero, Good Reader, Scholar Alerts, Clear, Diigo, Dropbox, Twitter, Facebook, Slideshare, and of course, 1Password. There are more bits and apps that I deploy, of course, but the point is really that, for a global educator today, if your organization tools are not online and connected, then you cannot really, really be effectively organized and responsive!

But it is a challenge because so many of our educators, in schools, post-school, or tertiary education are still struggling with setting up a blog, let alone using a suite of tools to manage information, share resources and collaborate. Using Skype or email is no longer a sign of a connected educator. Perhaps the benchmark now is being a good user of cloud services, mobile devices, curation tools, and communication channels. This is certainly the hallmark of my daily workflow.

Challenges of Global Connected Learning?

I see that a major challenge for education is to enable and facilitate the generation of new knowledge via an appropriate information environment, to facilitate integration of new concepts within each person’s existing knowledge structure. This knowledge structure or framework needs to be global in perspective and action, more so than ever in the digital era. Digital age students and educators must be able to think critically, learn through connections, create knowledge and understand concepts and should be able to connect and collaborate with others beyond a constrained physical environment; understand that knowledge is created through a range of media and created through networks, connections and collaborations; and be able to think

critically and evaluate processes and emerging ideas. It's the new knowledge flow that makes the challenges of quality global education so rich but also so difficult for others. Our work as educators has to center on helping to meet future learning needs by fostering a culture of inquiry within a sustainable learning ecology that is shaped by the ubiquity of information and globally responsive pedagogical practices, that are driven by collaboration and informal learning in multiple access points and through multiple mediums. Ultimately, how can we as educators ensure that scholarly practices are coupled with a 'questing' disposition, rather than media hype.

Teacher Education in Australia Today

Preparing teachers for the classroom is a crucial profession. We are fortunate in Australia to have an extensive range of undergraduate and postgraduate programs for the aspiring teacher professional, or the experienced teacher seeking to further their knowledge and understanding in their chosen field. Programs are provided face-to-face on campuses in capital cities and major regional centers throughout Australia. There are also many programs that are offered online as a distance education option. However, what is certain is that each of these programs is of a high quality, as they are required to meet the Australian Qualification Frameworks which is a national system of qualifications encompassing all post-compulsory education. Knowing this, learners can confidently plan their future education, training and career pathways. However, like all areas of education, these programs are heavily impacted by the rapid changes in digital environments that influence the teaching and authentic learning experiences created in everyday classrooms. So not only are teacher education programs having to update and be responsive to these amazing changes, but the professional learning opportunities for educators must also respond to these needs. Good teachers want to talk, learn, explore, challenge and share new ways of creating authentic learning experiences for their students. As a result there has been a burgeoning of grassroots initiatives, such as TeachMeets, in all major centers in Australia, which supplement the long-standing professional offerings from various associations, such as the English Teachers Association, or the Science Teachers Association. Of course there are also Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) that attract a lot of attention, and many global virtual online conferences, such as Library 2.0: The Future of Libraries in a Digital Age (www.library20.com/), that regularly tempt Australian educators to participate and present, and many other organizations present online seminars, such as the popular Eduwebinar series (<http://eduwebinar.com.au/>), that bring innovators into the homes of educators for presentations and discussion, making learning accessible to all. In all of these,

a common theme is the impact of technology and the tools, skills and capacities for engagement in digital environments. Teachers want to transform learning and teaching! They do not want to be labelled as belonging to the 'industrial' era of schooling. They also know the limitations of their own setting, so bring personal inspiration to the task of change.

But when it comes to university programs, there is a special challenge facing the higher education sector. After all, not only do they have a responsibility to graduate the best possible teachers, but also to continue high-quality credentialed professional programs that by their very nature go beyond what ongoing professional programs can offer. An excellent example of this was my work in launching a new multidisciplinary master's degree in education and information studies, developed to uniquely facilitate educators' capacity to be responsive to the demands of a digitally connected world. Charles Sturt University's new Master of Education (Knowledge Networks and Digital Innovation) aims to develop agile leaders in new cultures of digital formal and informal learning. By examining key features and influences of global connectedness, information organization, communication and participatory cultures of learning, educators are provided with the opportunity to reflect on their professional practice in a networked learning community, and to improve learning and teaching in digital environments. Understanding why this was an important initiative is critical to understanding globally connected learning.



Charles Sturt University Master of Education (Knowledge Networks and Digital Innovation): www.csu.edu.au/digital

The digital information environment of learning and teaching demands a new knowledge flow between content and digital connections. While the bibliographic paradigm created textbook learning, the digital information environment of today indicates the need for educators to understand information seeking and engagement within connected multimedia contexts. Computer and mobile device technology environments, social media, and ready forms of online communication drive our newly emerging knowledge ecosystems. Thomas and Brown (2011), who explored what they described as a new 'culture of learning', explained just how much the internet has changed the way we think about both technology and information. In this new culture of learning, information technology has become a participa-

tory medium, giving rise to an environment that is constantly being changed and reshaped by the participation within information spaces. They argue that traditional approaches to learning are no longer capable of coping with this constantly changing world. The information environment is a technology environment, which demands adaptation. Information is also a networked resource, as “information absorption is a cultural and social process of engaging with the constantly changing world around us” (Thomas & Brown, 2011, p.47).

In other words, we have a digital information ecology that is a remix of different forms of technology, devices, data repositories, information retrieval, information sharing, networks and communication. New technological tools are expanding and continually altering the ways school students, or educators can interact with the world. The implications for education that stem from new means for accessing information, communicating with others, and participating in a community needs a new brand of professional competences to thrive within the changing environment.

Our work as educators has to center on helping to meet future learning needs in courses and programs by fostering a culture of inquiry within a sustainable learning ecology that is shaped by the ubiquity of information, globally responsive pedagogical practices, and driven by collaboration and informal learning in multiple access points and through multiple mediums.

In 2014 I launched our newest degree program, which is delivered online (of course!) and grounded in cross-disciplinary studies in information science and education, allowing students to gain an advanced and integrated understanding of an important body of knowledge in the information science discipline, and the online knowledge networks, processes, and interactions for innovative education practice. It aims to encapsulate a participatory information ecology that is a co-construction of knowledge through interpersonal discourse and the tension within pedagogy between a focus on knowledge-based instruction and outcomes, and on praxis-based instruction, which is both creative and dialogic. The learning processes depends more on the coordination among all the interactions and activities that take place in different spaces of the learners’ lives, like school, home, and workplace, than only on interactions and activities developed in the spaces of formal learning.

The academic program has also been designed to enhance personal professional networks and personal learning conversations, understanding that learning is social within Communities of Practice where learning happens through experience and

practice as part of a community (Leiberman & Mace, 2009). Each subject is treated as an intensive professional development program, facilitated by social interaction through forums, Twitter, Adobe Connect, and Google Hangouts, helping to facilitate greater insight into generic issues (Rienties & Kinchin, 2014) through the various participatory learning experiences.

This program provided a unique opportunity to bring together leaders in the field of professional practice, and blend it with academic study of the underlying foundations of the learning ecology of students today. Experts with a ‘connected’ voice ensure that the program is ground-breaking in application and intention. Leaders in the field have developed subjects which they also teach, in areas as diverse as learning spaces (Ewan McIntosh, <http://notosh.com/>), digital environments (Julie Lindsay, <http://flatconnections.com>), game-based learning (Dean Groom, <http://deangroom.wordpress.com>), and concepts and practices underpinning digital environments (Judy O’Connell, <http://judyconnell.com>). This has been a unique and exciting adventure made possible by a strong commitment to innovation at Charles Sturt University.

In a study of the first cohort in the keystone subject “Concepts and Practices in a Digital Age”, we found that the quality of learning experiences outshone other programs in the university, helping us understand what teacher education in Australia needs to become. Other subjects have cemented the success of our new approach.

These are what our students highlighted about the content and their participatory experiences:

- I found the access to high quality articles and artifacts online enabled me to learn about topics I may not have identified as being useful.
- Direct connections between past models, present trends and future directions.
- The different media that was used to present the information: YouTube, Slideshare, images, websites, articles.
- Up-to-date and future-focused subject content made it relevant and meaningful for me.

- As a new leader, in a new position, I have found this to be incredibly beneficial and so pertinent to teachers and students in today's changing educational landscape.
- The amount of relevant content put together was astounding. There are so many new things to explore.
- I have experienced the participatory culture that is at the foundation of 21st century learning. My views and understandings of an educational professional in digital environments have been matured by these studies and the social interactions that have taken place around this learning journey.
- Having a voice and influence on each other's learning.
- The ability to collaborate with peers. Getting responses to questions through Twitter. This was very cool.
- I have been involved in distance education for many years and this subject/course is one that has been the most relevant, most engaging and most current I have experienced. The quality and 'connectedness' of the subject coordinators are amazing—well done to CSU for offering this program.

We focused on participatory empowerment. How often do our teachers as students have the opportunity to share their learning achievements with the world? Sharing, not marks, is surely the foundation of global postgraduate education.

My Goals

Educators always like to set themselves goals, or at least some challenges. My personal journey has always involved change and innovation in some way. It has also always involved connecting with and learning from others. I am who you are, and we are the future, if only we are willing to rise to the excitement and challenge of our education future. My goals are to remain flexible, open to ideas, ready to “give it a go” and in that process to nurture as many educators as I can to become global educators themselves!

Use of Technologies

I'm not sure what technologies I haven't used. I think that pretty much all the important ones make it into my tool kit for "getting on with the job." Of course, this does mean that I have to be willing to "let go" at times, remembering that as a global educator with colleagues and friends around the globe, I cannot be available 24/7. I like being connected, but I also know that we have to use our technologies wisely, so that we can connect, communicate and collaborate synchronously and asynchronously, to get the job done!

Advice for Others

In this era of cable TV, movies, Facebook and so on, we are actually all global educators—but most have not recognized or accepted the responsibility of understanding this. Face the future front on, and make global connections through your professional learning networks—and let the game begin!