

008 – fusion – Professional Education in the e-Learning World: Scholarship, practice and digital technologies

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Editorial

We live in a time in which education in every form is exploring the possibilities of e-learning. In the higher education context, discussions about the nature of online technologies, and how to utilise their affordances for teaching and learning, proliferate. Such discussions are tied to the central question of 'what is the project of a contemporary university?' This leads to a myriad of questions such as: In an era of MOOCs, digital platforms and pre-prepared online interactions, what does the institution add that is of value? What is the currency of higher education? Is this current movement a crisis or can it be seen as a liberating force, creating spaces for innovation and creative practice in university settings? Does change allow us to let go of previous ways of thinking and address issues of new forms of local, national and global communities? Does this change allow us to blur the boundaries of disciplines and ideas and see our work through the lens of hybridisation? How do we work in a fragmented and modularised, yet also connected, world? How do we conceptualise our practice and work with students in these environments? How do students experience these environments and translate their experiences? And how do these questions and their implications alter our approaches to practice and scholarship?

To explore these questions we invited transdisciplinary and multimodal submissions for this special issue of *fusion* to examine the possibilities of educating in an e-learning world. The collection we present here is generated from submissions across a range of perspectives within higher education and it takes this exploration in a range of directions. Contributors have drawn on a rich set of theoretical resources and research-generated data to provide engaged and interesting examinations that document, probe and question the idea of e-learning in the contemporary university.

In their paper, *Online learning and the infinite replicability of digitised knowledge*, for instance, Benjamin Habib, Rebecca Miles and Nicholas Pawsey challenge us to consider the effects on student learning of the ongoing shifts within the university sector towards mass delivery in the online format. They outline the corporate efficiency drive to digitise learning resources and automate teaching processes, highlighting the financial benefits this also brings to higher education institutions in terms of more flexible staffing arrangements. Although the infinite replicability of digital information has given us greater access to more knowledge than at any other time in human history, they argue that this has not solved the fundamental teaching question of how learners use information to produce understanding. And from a position looking across the disciplines of international relations, education and business, they also argue that it has not provided an answer to the fundamental question of what value-added component of online learning makes it worth paying for.

From this overview perspective on the challenges of digital and online learning in and for higher education, the following papers each demonstrate ways in which educational researchers in a range of university contexts and disciplines have studied the effects of their pedagogical attempts to add value to their students' (e-) learning, predominantly within the context of professional education.

John Rae addresses this question from the perspective of the health profession. In his contribution he also crosses disciplinary boundaries, in considering the affordances of arts-based learning in higher education professional learning contexts. Rae highlights what he sees as the opportunity that online professional education provides to work with pedagogies that use art and arts-based learning to engage and extend learners in new ways. In his paper *Art and other matter(s) of online professional education*, Rae's research into his own and his students' art practice allows him to argue that the forms of material engagement that are produced in such learning create deeper, wider and more powerful learning than conventional print-based online exchanges. He further demonstrates how arts practice promotes learner engagement with ideas and information across intellectual, visual and kinesthetic domains. The paper asserts that creativity involving the learner in reflective practice can emulate some of the conditions of professional practice, including the requirement to operate within complex environments.

Donna Mathewson Mitchell and Jo-Anne Reid's paper *Re-Viewing Practice: The Use of Video Recordings in Learning to Teach* demonstrates what they see as a particularly valuable affordance of the proliferation of e-learning in the higher education environment. They report on the use of digital technology, specifically video, to assist students to repeatedly observe, and reflect on, their learning. The paper presents a case study of embodied practice in an undergraduate teacher education program. It investigates the use of digital recordings of pre-service teachers learning and practising 'core practices' of teaching over time. They argue that this use of e-learning can be seen to address critiques that university-based components are too 'theoretical' and that the best preparation for teaching is school-

based. When video recordings offer pre-service teachers complex representations of practice, the non-linguistic, relational and affective dimensions of teaching can be observed and highlighted for reflection. This optimises the impact on preservice teachers' professional learning and highlights how preservice teachers can begin to acquire both *propositional knowledge* about learners, learning, educational theory, pedagogical approaches and curriculum, and personal *practical knowledge* (Clandinin, 1989) of teaching as a professional practice.

In their paper *Learning in Liminal Spaces: Encountering Indigenous Knowledge and Artworks in Professional Education*, Kim Snepvangers and Jessica Bulger continue the theme of reflective practice in digital online settings in pre service teacher education. They report on a project called "Evolving Curriculum: Indigenous teaching perspectives in tertiary art and design", and in doing so highlight one of the key issues that emerged: that delivery and engagement of Indigenous Perspectives requires a coherent and open-ended review of courses, with particular focus on the development of staff world-views. Snepvangers and Bulger unpack the complexities of engagement with Indigenous Perspectives in art and design contexts and highlight the need for specific and localised approaches to curriculum and pedagogy, especially when dealing with the affordances of ePortfolios. Case study accounts of Bulger's artistic and professional practice are shared in this chapter. The beautiful and thought-provoking images are situated within a broader discussion about how the acknowledgedly contested domain of Indigenous Perspectives may be engaged within e-learning and university curriculum contexts. As with Rae's paper, this recognises the contribution of visual practice and understanding artworks as powerful liminal and ethical 'encountering resources'.

Lena Danaia and James Deehan continue this theme in their paper: *A model for the creation of cooperative e-learning spaces: Teaching early childhood and primary preservice teachers how to teach science*. Here, they provide an account of their experience in taking a successful science curriculum subject taught face-to-face in initial teacher education, and transforming it into an equally successful, student-centered e-learning experience for students. In their article, we see an illustration of the practices of e-learning through online and blended modes, which complements the theoretical discussions of best practice teaching in the knowledge work of university academics discussed in the earlier papers by Habib, Miles and Pawsey, and Reid and Mathewson Mitchell. Evidence of student learning and engagement is provided, demonstrating the strengths of constructivist and responsive teaching in an online setting, as well as practice-based description of supports and scaffolds provided as students experience the sometimes challenging 'disconnect' of learning in new ways and new media.

With these illustrative examples of e-learning pedagogy in higher education, the final two papers, by Narelle Lemon and Katy Vigurs attend to the issue of social media in higher education, and in particular the use of Twitter. These papers are complementary in their

focus on themes of connection, community, belonging, knowledge and voice. In the article *Tweeting as a pre-service teacher: Learning to use Twitter for professional use*, Lemon examines the affordances of social media in the higher education context, particularly for Teacher Education. Lemon provides a strong argument for the integration of Twitter as a means of: forming digital identities, generating content, generating support networks, and ultimately supporting future professional development. She explores the benefits of social media to explore the co-construction of knowledge in a collaborative space where the 140 character tweets and processes of tweeting, re-tweeting and using hashtags, support thinking. The use of Twitter in the academic space is considered in relation to both the pedagogical decision making of academic teachers and concepts of community connectedness. A case study of integration in a pre-service subject documents such decisions and the uptake of Twitter by higher education students in the process of becoming teachers, and provides a fascinating insight into the affordances and experiences of this technology. Analysis and discussion illuminates the opportunities of using Twitter as a means of assisting novice teachers to develop a professional identity, while at the same time crossing disciplinary boundaries and engaging with community.

Finally, taking up the theme of social media for a slightly different learning purpose, Vigurs' paper focuses on its role in higher degree research. She suggests social media can function as a means of ameliorating some of the problems encountered by part-time doctoral students who sometimes experience disconnection and isolation from research communities, within their universities and beyond. Her article *Using Twitter to tackle peripherality? Facilitating networked scholarship for part-time doctoral students within and beyond the university*, examines the affordances and limitations of social media, specifically Twitter, in academic communities. In focusing on the engagement of part-time doctoral students, Vigurs' research looks at how the use of Twitter affects the experiences and positioning of doctoral students, both within universities and in wider global research communities. Framed by the work of Lave and Wenger and their theory of legitimate peripheral participation and drawing on Teewsen (among others) Vigurs presents extensive data from her study of part-time doctoral students located in the UK and Australia. Her analysis illustrates the value of Twitter from the perspective of doctoral students, in terms of: enhanced belonging; networking beyond the university; gaining moral support and keeping motivated. She also highlights some challenges for students and for academic staff, including the development of identity, knowledge of effective use, development of confidence and the appropriate level of involvement of academic staff. This important study raises significant questions about the use of social media in higher research degree education and the roles and responsibilities of staff and students in the e-learning environment, taking us back to the sorts of challenges raised for academics and institutions engaged online teaching, noted in the first paper.

In summary, these papers provide us with a range of perspectives for considering the questions posed at the beginning of this introduction. They explore how e-learning is being conceptualised across higher education in different forms and in different contexts, as the spatial boundaries between the local, the national and the global world are increasingly blurred. The affordances of digital technologies are investigated in terms of the opportunities they present for practice innovation and for thinking in creative and new ways. Hybridisation is presented as a particular opportunity with links across disciplines and domains, and with a digitally expanded community providing a platform for engaged and authentic student learning, across time and space.

At the same time, these papers acknowledge and contextualize the challenges and difficulties in relation to ongoing issues for teaching and learning in higher education. In this way the discourse of e-learning as panacea is contested and critiqued with acknowledgement of its limitations. There is a recognition that while e-learning has addressed the institutional needs of higher education, particularly in terms of efficiencies, flexibility and access, its impact on the production of knowledge remains unclear, yet also exciting. What is clear is that educators are engaging with the digital environment in pedagogically informed ways. Also evident is that although technology and its affordances have changed the approach of educators to professional practice, the need for effective student learning, connection with the profession and a positive student experience is still at the heart of the educational endeavour. The student experience is prioritized in these papers, with the student voice being highlighted through the discussion and analysis of data generated and gathered in an array of interesting and relevant research.

The question of how those experiences are then translated beyond the higher education context into the professional realm is not yet fully explored and remains an area that is fertile for future research as online learning grows and evolves as a particular area of scholarship and practice.

The Editors

Dr Donna Mathewson Mitchell is a Senior Lecturer in Visual Arts Curriculum at the Australian Catholic University (ACU) . She is also an Adjunct Senior Lecturer in the Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education (RIPPLE) at Charles Sturt University (CSU). Donna's research is concerned with teaching practice, visual arts teaching and teaching and learning in public spaces. Her teaching is situated in teacher education and focuses on secondary visual arts curriculum and arts curriculum in K-12 settings.

Dr Narelle Lemon is Senior Lecturer in Curriculum Studies, Academic Program Director Postgraduate Teacher Education at La Trobe University, Australia. Her research interests are museum education, teacher practitioner reflection, reflection and metacognition in curriculum, communities of practice/learners, image based research, visual methodology,

visual narrative, narrative inquiry, early years, middle years of schooling, innovative learning and teaching, digital technologies embedded in learning and teaching, thinking skills, new initiatives in learning, inquiry models of teaching, coping skills, music education, visual arts education, Arts education, Arts and technology, social media, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, blogging, and 21st century learners and the future of teaching.

Dr Rebecca Miles is a researcher and teacher in pre-service teacher education. Her research interests are centred on (and converge in) 1) knowledge, curriculum theory and inquiry, 2) teacher professional practice, 3) pedagogy in online teaching and learning, and 4) place-based education. Rebecca's teaching focuses on social and cultural contexts in education and teacher research. Rebecca's PhD research was on place-based environmental education, drawing on practice theories to consider ways that place, knowledge and practice intersect in educating primary school students about being in the world. Her PhD dissertation was a recipient of the 2014 NSW Institute of Educational Research Beth Southwell Outstanding Thesis Award.

Jo-Anne Reid is Professor of Education in the Faculty of Education at Charles Sturt University, Australia. Jo-Anne's doctoral work focused on teacher programming as a means for constituting both school and teaching subjects. Her interest in the potential of post-structuralist theories of practice for rethinking education and diversity in post-modern society has informed her research and teaching. Jo-Anne has published a range of books and articles on curriculum, classroom practice and research, both alone and in collaboration with others. Among her book publications are *Small Group Learning in the Classroom* (1982), *Shaping Up Nicely: The Formation of Schoolgirls and Schoolboys in the First Month of School* (1994), *100 Children Go to School* (1998) and *100 children turn 10* (2002), *Managing (Small Group) Learning* (2002) and *Literacies in Place* (2007).