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Special Edition:
e-Learning in a Range of
Educational Contexts

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Editorial

Noeline Wright

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This special topic issue of the *Waikato Journal of Education* centres on aspects of e-learning across tertiary and schooling sectors, using various tools and approaches. These articles cover case studies of particular courses or e-learning affordances, to examining how tools facilitate learning in particular contexts, such as primary schools, practicum experiences, or online learning opportunities.

Garry Falloon's article, for example, examines how technological tools facilitated an industry/school link. This link between a crown research institute and a primary was centred on a primary school class having access to scientists in order to develop students' scientific knowledge related to their local natural environment. The e-learning tools facilitated this industry connection and helped develop the teacher's capabilities to both teach science and support her students' authentic learning.

Along with Falloon's focus on ICT tools in a primary school context, Nigel Calder examined how understanding evolves when children in primary school settings engage with mathematical tasks through using spreadsheets. The social interaction of students in developing mathematical knowledge was of particular interest. Kathrin Otrell-Cass, Bronwen Cowie and Elaine Khoo also considered e-learning in a primary school context, this time in relation to developing year 7 students' Nature of Science knowledge through using Internet sources about, for example, how landforms change. This article focuses particularly on the affordances of ICT in such contexts. The authors argue that the online sources made it easier for students to make meaning in science, interacting in groups to answer specific science questions.

Other articles in this issue focus on e-learning in tertiary educational settings, particularly teacher education or teaching practicum periods. In relation to the former, Yan Cong and Kerry Earl explored Chinese students' perceptions of studying online in New Zealand. They wanted to find out what it was like for them to both live in a foreign country and learn online. They were able to compare these experiences with face-to-face courses. Some relate to either teacher education or teaching practicum periods. For example, Dianne Forbes explains what it was like to get her students to use podcasting technologies as part of her online teacher education paper. She explored the value of this to her students' learning and in building relationships. Another paper, co-authored by Zuwati Hasim, Beverley Bell and Rosemary De Luca, examined the value of blogs as a research mechanism to account for the geographical divide between New



Zealand and Malaysia. The article explores both advantages and challenges in using such a mechanism. Significant factors included both technological ones and sociocultural ones, particularly around asking questions and prompting responses in a timely manner.

Jennifer O’Dea and Louisa Peralta examine teaching practicum experiences in an Australian context and the extent to which e-learning supported this. My paper is also centred on practicum experiences. I explore the value and viability of Twitter as a means of supporting secondary graduates to develop self-reflective pedagogical thinking while on their second teaching practicum. Through using Twitter, these teacher education students were able to connect with each other’s practicum experiences across different schools, using social networking processes to make sense of learning to teach.

Thom Cochrane and Roger Bateman, on the other hand, describe some effects of integrating ‘disruptive technologies’—i.e., mobile Web 2.0 tools (both hardware and software)—across a Bachelor of Product Design programme at Unitec. They combined these technologies with a social constructivist pedagogical orientation. Elaine Khoo and Mike Forret also focused on the tertiary sector. They explored what it means to develop and sustain online learning communities of practice which properly support learners. They used a case study approach to examine this idea in relation to one graduate online course. Khoo and Forret adopted a sociocultural framework to analyse the formation and efficacy of online learning communities.

This collection of e-learning articles feature not only a variety of e-learning tools and contexts, but also include terms such as collaborative, interactive, student-oriented practices. Perhaps these opportunities for active, collaborative, and shared thinking mirror the principles Siemens (2005) argues constitute connectivism, a term we can apply to features of technologically connected students’ learning practices. The practices outlined above also echo themes identified in Wright’s (2010) e-learning literature review. It argues that teachers’ pedagogical design, which facilitates such interactive opportunities, is as important as it has ever been and appears to feature most often in learning environments where students are most often engaged.

This *Waikato Journal of Education* issue, while principally containing New Zealand examples of educational practice, also has an international flavour. An Australian article, for example, sits within the e-learning theme. The article centred on Chinese students’ experiences of learning online in New Zealand and the use of blogs in conducting research with co-respondents in Malaysia are the other examples with international connections. In the general section of the issue, Maria del Mar Badia Martín’s article describes aspects of discipline in Spanish schools. Discipline is a concern that transcends school contexts and countries, and so adds to our wider understanding.

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