

Lessons Learned, Innovative Practices, and Emerging Trends

Technology for Teacher Education and Professional Development

by Chip Donohue and Selena Fox

Our Story

In May 2011, at the World Forum on Early Care and Education in Honolulu, Hawaii, we celebrated 10 years of co-hosting eTeaching events for early childhood faculty and professional development providers. This gave us a wonderful opportunity to reflect on all we have learned with and from each other and from participants. We've had time to consider how the lessons learned and innovative practices shared have informed our work together and individually, in the United States and New Zealand, as we have designed, developed, and delivered online teacher education and professional development programs at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Erikson Institute in Chicago, and New Zealand Tertiary College.



Chip Donohue, PhD, is the Director of Distance Learning at Erikson Institute in Chicago and a Senior Fellow of the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children's Media. He is a leader in the innovative use of technology and distance learning methods to increase access, create pathways, enhance learning, and improve teaching practices in early childhood education. He spends lots of time playing with new technology tools to enable relationships and build learning communities online.



Selena Fox is the Chief Executive of New Zealand Tertiary College (NZTC). She leads one of New Zealand's largest specialized early childhood teacher education institutions and is guiding NZTC's development of ecelearn, a specialist online learning environment for the early childhood profession.

Beginning in 2002 in Auckland, New Zealand, we have co-hosted eTeaching activities in conjunction with the World Forums in Acapulco, México, (2003); Montreal, Quebec, Canada (2005); Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (2007); Belfast, Northern Ireland (2009); Honolulu, Hawaii (2011); and the Working Forum for Teacher Educators in Auckland, New Zealand (2008). Along the way we've learned with and from over 100 leaders and innovators in online teaching and learning from 29 countries who came together to share innovative practices and emerging trends in the use of technology for early childhood teacher education and professional development in their countries and communities.

Since 1999, we've written numerous articles and books, given hundreds of presentations, served on national eLearning groups, and created new international online programs, all while paying careful attention to the trends, issues, and best practices in the effective use of technology tools and distance learning methods. In this article we share what we've learned about effective practices for online teaching and learning and organizational management of eLearning programs. We believe that whatever the setting, format, or delivery system, effective online teaching and learning needs to be

effective, relevant, engaging, enabling, inspiring, empowering, and transformational. These keywords serve as both goals and outcomes in our approaches. We need to bake them into the recipe for online teacher education and professional development so that learners enjoy the fruits of their success.

We've also come to understand that effective online learning:

- Focuses on learning and the learner
- Provides tools of engagement that encourage reflective thinking
- Encourages interactions, supports relationships, and builds community
- Offers an everywhere-all-the-time learning environment and culture
- Makes it possible to learn with anyone, anytime, any place, at your own pace, on any device
- Promotes lifelong and lifewide learning

No matter how wonderful the online learning environment, it takes effective online teachers to create, manage, and sustain a community of learners. We've found that great online teachers share some key characteristics: being authentic; intentional; encouraging; reflective; conspicuously present; balanced; and they understand the rhythm of online

teaching and learning. These are characteristics of great teachers and great teaching no matter where it takes place, but we've learned that they are essential to effective and engaging online learning.

Chip's Story

I designed and delivered my first online course in 1999 at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and since 2009 I've been designing and developing EriksonOnline and delivering online Master's degree, certificate, and professional development programs at Erikson Institute. Between 2004-2008 I worked closely with Selena and her team at New Zealand Tertiary College to design *ecelearn*, an online learning management system for early childhood professionals. Over the years I've defined and refined a set of design values, principles, and practices that I've written about extensively in *Exchange*. In the past two years of working with online faculty and instructors at Erikson, I've sorted all of those ideas down to these six tips for success:

1. **Find your voice** — Introduce yourself. Be authentic, accessible, and available. Communicate in writing, audio, and video in a conversational tone that strikes a balance between academic and informal. Welcome, notice, affirm, and encourage your students. Think about teaching one adult learner at a time, not lecturing to a classroom full of students.
2. **Establish your presence** — This includes the ideas of 'being there' and 'being together' (Lehman & Conceição, 2010). How do your students know you are there in the online environment? How do they establish their presence among their fellow students and with you? Attend to cognitive and social presence by encouraging interactions and building relationships.
3. **Understand the rhythm** — We've recognized that there are ups and downs of online learning — times when students are most active online, times when they're offline but busy with readings and assignments, and the times they use to catch up and keep up — not to mention your rhythm and schedule as the online instructor. Understanding and attending to your students' rhythm requires presence, being consistent, and allowing students enough time to participate and contribute to the learning community. You also need to understand the natural ebb and flow of their time online, including the timing and pace of when and how they participate and complete readings and assignments and the challenges of balancing work, family, and school. Rhythm also has to do with providing clear expectations and deadlines for online activities and assignments so that students can plan ahead, allocate time, turn in assignments on time, and participate and contribute to the learning community.
4. **Build a community** — We know that early childhood teachers like to learn in a community, and that when they learn online they still want that sense of connection and relationships with other students and to be part of a community of learners. Building an online learning community requires intentional efforts on the part of instructional designers and the instructor to prepare, welcome, invite, and engage students, and to encourage interactions that support relationships. We're very explicit about our goal of building a community. We talk about it and make it visible from the first day online, and we use online icebreakers, class photo albums, synchronous calls, and webinars to encourage interactions that can lead to relationships that build community.
5. **Create a sense of belonging** — Online learners who earn a degree or certificate without ever stepping foot on campus still want to feel part of the institution, and you want them to be proud alumni and representatives of your program in the community and among other professionals. Help students feel connected to your institution by sharing news and updates, posting short video introductions of key 'behind the scenes' staff who students will contact by email or phone but may never meet, work closely with library and student services staff to be sure online learners have full access to information, services, and support that are available to on-campus students, and help them feel part of the larger community as well as the online community from day one.
6. **Use the tools at your fingertips** — There are so many amazing tools, apps, devices, and social media sites available to students and faculty today. Embrace these new tools for communication, collaboration, and productivity, but be thoughtful about which and how many external tools you require students to use. Provide tutorials, quick start guides, and tech support for any required plug-ins or add-ons. Focus on free tools that don't require complicated downloads and installation. Choose and use tools that support learning and extend the online learning community. Know what tools your students are already using and are comfortable with. My best advice comes from my New Zealand friends who always say, "Have a play." Play with the tools to figure out if and how you want to use the tools and encourage a spirit of digital play and sharing among online instructors and students.

It's Erikson, and It's Online

We've all shared the concerns about whether online learning is as good as face-to-face, and how to deliver the

same rigorous, high-quality teacher education and professional development online as we do on campus. None of us knew how to teach or learn online before we got started, so we've had to learn along the way through trial and error, by exchanging ideas and resources with others, and by starting from what we already knew so well — our early childhood students, our instructors, and our content. It takes time to convert face-to-face course content to an online format, and it takes even longer to nudge great classroom instructors into a new teaching/learning environment. But we've both seen the magic that happens when all the pieces come together: the new access to teacher education that online learning brings, the empowerment of learning in a community, and the positive impact on classroom practice and child outcomes. What will it take for you to be able to fill in the blank with your program's name. "It's _____, and it's online"?

If you model these types of interactions and participation strategies, your students will soon be using the same practices to deepen their connection with each other and their engagement with the content.

Selena's Story

Our online teaching and learning story in New Zealand has been a journey of much listening, learning, and then leading. Alongside an amazing team of colleagues from IT, education, and administration disciplines, we have addressed and risen above every challenge to provide our early childhood teachers, instructors, and organisational teams access to an empowering, yet simple, high-quality online learning environment that our profession deserves.

In 2002 it became clear to us at New Zealand Tertiary College (NZTC) that our early childhood teachers were beginning to appreciate the flexibility

that online learning offered, yet at the same time the learning management systems available simply did not offer an effective, easy-to-navigate environment where they would choose to learn. Chip and I engaged in extensive research, discussion, consultation, and more listening and learning and identified the need for a learning environment that offered these basics, as well as features that supported curriculum, community-building, and communication — with 'help' offered at every step of the way. And with this the foundations for *ecelearn* (www.ecelearn.com) were set. In 2004, our online dream took its first steps with the first lines of code being written. Today, *ecelearn* and our custom-

ised *NZTC Online* — the specialist early childhood online learning environment designed by and for learners and instructors — has enabled thousands of early childhood teachers throughout New Zealand, India, Australia, and the Philippines to take up their programs of study and achieve their professional goals.

Listening: From the first days, it was all about listening: listening to the voices of our learners, our instructors, and NZTC managers. To achieve the level of success we aspired to, we needed to ensure the needs of each of these key groups were addressed. Listening to other groundbreaking leaders like those who

Chip's Tips for Facilitating Effective and Engaging Online Discussions

Here are eight words to live by (and discuss) when managing discussions online:

1. **Be present:** Visit the discussion frequently during the week and let students know you're reading and enjoying their conversation.
2. **Notice:** Each week be sure you notice something that each student has contributed to the learning community and make a point of posting at least one message to every student.
3. **Personalize:** Always use the student's name to begin a posting and always 'sign' it with your own name.
4. **Quote:** When a student says something that grabs your attention, include a quote in your reply. It's very affirming to have your own words recognized and valued by your instructor.
5. **Nudge:** Acknowledge the message, affirm what the student has said and contributed, and then offer a gentle nudge to extend his or her thinking or to encourage connections between personal thoughts and words and those of classmates.
6. **Invite:** End your message with a question that invites the student and others to respond and continue the conversation.
7. **Connect:** One of the most important things you can model through your own postings is the importance of finding the connections between what someone has posted and comments shared by other students earlier or elsewhere in the discussion.
8. **Summarize:** Sometimes this happens early in the week or more than once, depending on the nature of the students' participation and contributions. This is something you can model and encourage by seeing the big picture and pulling out the big ideas the group talked about during the week. Your summary might end with another nudge that bridges this week's discussion to the next module topics.

attended the eTeaching events, and engaging in online learning endeavours further supported our steps forward.

Learning: With technology changing the way we work, study, and live, learning at each step has been non-negotiable.

Increasingly, digital literacy is no longer an option but a requirement of learning and success. Learning from our students and instructors, IT leaders, and experts nationally and globally in all areas that impact eTeaching and eLearning, ensured that our online learning environments would consider our students first, and in doing so inform the *ecelearn* we know today.

Leading: With the changing nature of technology, online learning teams must maintain a focus on the horizon to ensure teaching and learning opportunities stay relevant and continue to acknowledge technological advancements that support student learning. Recent work with the NZ eLearning Advisory Board led by Larry Johnson, launched the first NZ Horizon Report — *Technology Outlook for New Zealand Tertiary Education 2011-2016* — that explores emerging technologies that offer real potential to impact online teaching and learning.

The Horizon report notes that the Internet has brought about fundamental change in how we approach learning, and even how we define relationships; the obvious consequence is that the role of educators must adapt and evolve to accommodate this change. The fact that people increasingly want to learn, work, and play wherever — and whenever — they want, requires us to constantly look to flexible access to learning for all. When *ecelearn* began in 2002, we were ‘focused on the horizon.’ Today our focus remains ahead but we now look to the emerging technologies, top trends, and challenges that may impact constructively or disruptively on our student learning. We must stay aware of these.

Top trends include:

- The abundance of resources and social networking accessible via the Internet is increasingly challenging us to revisit our roles as instructors/teacher educators.
- Bandwidth is increasingly available enabling more access and better student experience.
- Students expect to be able to work and learn whenever and wherever.
- Students want to use their own technologies for learning. They feel safe and ‘at home’ on their own learning platform (Johnson, Adams, & Cummins, 2011).

Alongside current trends there are challenges faced by organisations that need to be taken into consideration when looking to enable eLearning, due to their potential impact on teaching, learning, and research. While trends influence the uptake of technology positively, challenges are grounded in everyday realities that often make it difficult to learn about — much less adopt — new technologies. IT literacy, for example, continues to dominate conversations about the challenges likely to impact the acceptance of technology in teacher education worldwide, and New Zealand currently is no exception.

Top challenges include:

- IT literacy continues to increase in importance as a key skill for teachers. Teacher education institutions need to consider this in their course content to support teacher graduates in their work with young children.
- The requirement to offer flexible models of teacher education due to student demand, often associated with economic pressures, is presenting competition to traditional models of teacher education.
- High-quality programs must be offered while staying abreast of rapidly changing, ever evolving technologies.

- The shift in the instructor’s role from teacher-centered classrooms to learner-centered environments where instructors are facilitators, supporters, and guiders of learning presents its own unique challenges (Johnson, Adams, & Cummins, 2011).

An additional challenge we see emerging is the overload of information and communication avenues that impact students’ lives. With so much content available on the Internet at all times, and the 24/7 availability of social networking, the reduction in many students’ skills of attention, engagement in learning, and deep reflection need careful attention. We must build students’ skills of moderation, concentration, reflection, and engagement with materials through encouragement and intentional support.

As with all trends and challenges, the most important steps in harnessing their potential is being aware of their possibilities. Our journey of online learning is not one with a finishing line in view. It is one that once commenced requires our undivided attention, flexibility, adaptation, much listening, continued learning, and leaders with a focus on the ever-changing horizon, to ensure student outcomes remain central to all decision making. This awareness of trends and challenges and well-chosen quality assurance reflective measures, along with consideration of emerging technologies, will ensure that organisations are on the right path.

Guiding Lights on Our NZTC Journey

To be strategic, organisational leaders need to have the tools to guide and justify their decision making. Key resources that continue to support NZTC in our journey today include:

- **NZ eLearning Guidelines** (<http://elg.massey.ac.nz/>) a reflective quality assurance support tool.

■ eMM — The eMaturity Model

(www.utdc.vuw.ac.nz/research/emm/) an outstanding organisational quality assurance support resource for eTeaching and eLearning.

■ Taking the Lead (<http://akoatearoa.ac.nz/takingthelead>) a support for organisational decision makers and team leaders.

Although many changes have impacted us in our nearly 10-year eLearning journey, what has remained constant from our first days is the importance of *listening, learning, and leading*. For us, it is only with these foundational principles that wise strategy evolves, student support stays central, and student success results. Technology offers great flexibility but it must be combined with informed strategic decision making, considering quality assurance resources and research to truly know its benefits and realise our vision of empowering students to achieve their goals.

Our Reflections and Focus on the Horizon

These core principles of listening, learning, and leading have been at the heart of our work together from the first eTeaching event in New Zealand in 2002 to the four technology spotlights sessions at the recent 2011 World Forum in Hawaii. We've had the good fortune to learn with and from each other and to meet so many amazing leaders and innovators from around the world whose work has informed our own and enhanced the quality and effectiveness of technology for teacher education and professional development. Technology is here to stay, so sharing lessons learned and innovative practices and understanding emerging trends is essential for keeping your eyes on the eLearning horizon. We wish you well on your journey.

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Selena's Key Tips for Organisations Considering eLearning

- **Know your students.** Understand their abilities, concerns, strengths, and challenges. Only when you know your students' abilities and areas of need will you be able to make sound eLearning decisions that support student outcomes.
- **Know your curriculum and the learning outcomes to be achieved.** Understanding your curriculum goals allows you to choose technologies that support your student outcomes wisely.
- **Develop an eLearning strategy and team** that casts the vision of eLearning in your organisation.
- **Bring expertise around the table.** Leaders bring the needed skills together (IT, academic, management, administration, curriculum) and create a common goal focused on eLearning and student outcomes. The Internet just happens to be the tool!
- **Ask questions.** There is never a 'questionable' question — ask away and learn.
- **Ensure you have reflective quality assurance measures** to guide decision makers, developers, instructors, and other team members. Choose your assessment review materials well.
- **Review, reflect, and continue to ask questions.** This is the only way to stay focused on your eLearning horizon.

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10 Innovative Teacher Education and Professional Development Programs from eTeaching 2002-2011

- **Center for Early Childhood Professional Development & Leadership**, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee www.sce-earlychildhood.uwm.edu
- **Eager-to-Learn**, Minnesota Child Care Resource & Referral Network www.eagertolearn.org
- **Early Childhood Education Online**, Northampton Community College www.northampton.edu/Early-Childhood-Education/Academic-Programs/Online-Learning.htm
- **Early Childhood Development Virtual University (ECDVU)**, University of Victoria www.ecdvu.org/
- **Early Childhood Education**, Colorado Community Colleges Online www.cconline.org/courses/programs/Education/ECE/
- **Early Childhood Learning Community**, University of Cincinnati www.cech.uc.edu/eclc/
- **eCDA**, Teaching Strategies www.teachingstrategies.com
- **ecelearn** www.ecelearn.com
- **EriksonOnline**, Erikson Institute www.erikson.edu/online
- **New Zealand Tertiary College** www.nztertiarycollege.ac.nz
NZTC Online — www.nztertiarycollege.ac.nz/Content/Guest/PageContent.aspx?PageID=59
NZTC India — www.nztertiarycollege.in
- **Science of Early Child Development**, Red River College www.scienceofecd.com/

eTeaching Presenters 2002-2011

Rosemarie Allen	Leslie Gleim	Roger Neugebauer
Olasumbo Apampa	Karen Graham	Susan O'Neill
Marta Arango	Adele Grosse	Barnabas Otalla
Fortidas Bakuza	Magela Guimaraes	Suzanne Pace
Vicki Bartolini	Nada Hammed	Vera Melis Paulillo
Bonnie Blagojevic	Judy Herr	Alan Pence
Pam Boulton	Meryl Hewett-Fourie	Sam Price
Tessa Browne	Lisa Holstrom	Edna Ranck
Rosemary Burton	Eeva Hujala	Sonja Rice
Hannah Clemmons	Janet Jamieson	Erja Rusanen
Ingrid Crowther	Mark Johnston	Aurore Salinas
Diane Trister Dodge	Helen Kimathi	Bob Siegel
Catherine Donahue	Diane Levin	John Siraj-Blatchford
Chip Donohue	Susan Linn	Michelle Spence
Sandra Duncan	Kate McGilly	Agatha Thapa
Regina Egger	Petra Luck	Debra Torrence
Mia Elfenbaum	Judy Magee	Unaisi Tuivaga
Lisa Farnan	Jennifer Masters	Kathy Ward-Cameron
Lydia Foong	Laurie McNelles	Patty Wells
Angela Fowler	Kimberly Moore	Judy Williams
Selena Fox	Val Mullally	Lily Wong
Marito Garcia	Nancy Mundorf	Cory Woosley

29 Countries Represented at eTeaching Institutes 2002-2011

Australia	Great Britain	New Zealand	South Africa
Austria	Haiti	Nigeria	Tanzania
Brazil	India	Northern Ireland	United States
Canada	Ireland	Pakistan	Uruguay
Colombia	Malaysia	Peru	Wales
Fiji	México	Saudi Arabia	
Finland	Namibia	Senegal	
Ghana	Nepal	Singapore	