



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

Academics' experience of personal learning networks to enhance knowledge of digital pedagogies.

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INVITATION

You are invited to participate in a research study to investigate academics' real life experience of professional learning, through their engagement with their online personal learning network (PLN). The findings of this study will provide empirical evidence to enable a better understanding of how academics might use contemporary technologies to enhance and extend their professional learning, particularly when developing their knowledge about digital pedagogy.

The study is being conducted by Dr Kay Oddone from the School of Information and Communication Studies at the Charles Sturt University. Charles Sturt University is an Australian University, TEQSA Provider Identification: PRV12018. Charles Sturt University CRICOS Provider: 00005F

Before you decide whether or not you wish to participate in this study, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish.

What is the purpose of this study?

Around the world, the mass migration of education into the online space hastened by the Covid-19 pandemic, has revealed a need for significant professional learning to raise the knowledge of digital pedagogies of academics. The online personal learning network (PLN) may have the potential to enable academics access to timely, cost effective, active and interest driven professional learning which allows them to develop this competence to ensure the ongoing success of digital pedagogy initiatives. This research will investigate academics' real life experience of professional learning through PLNs by asking the following research questions:

1. How do academics understand the concept of personal learning networks?
2. How has the capacity to connect with others through social technologies influenced academics' professional learning experiences since the worldwide pandemic began?
3. In what ways do academics use personal learning networks to enhance their understandings of digital pedagogies?

Why have I been invited to participate in this study?

We are seeking practicing academics, defined as individuals who are working in a higher education institution in a role which requires teaching students. This includes part-time and full-time academics and researchers who have a teaching load.

To participate, you must have an online personal learning network that you have initiated and developed yourself. This means you use a number of digital tools to connect and learn with others. These tools could

include (but don't have to be limited to) Twitter, Facebook, blogs (your own or others), Diigo, Pinterest, Instagram, TikTok, academic websites etc. You should use this Personal Learning Network regularly (at least once a week) for the purposes of professional learning.

Criteria that will exclude you from participating in this study are:

- If you do not currently teach in the university sector
- If your professional learning network consists only of face to face (offline) participants
- If you are currently employed at CSU in the School of Information and Communication Studies.

What does this study involve?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to construct a visual map of your PLN, and also participate in one online interview, where we will discuss your PLN map, and the principal researcher will ask you some questions.

PLN Map: The map will be a visualisation of your personal learning network. You can choose any way to draw the map, and can include as little or as much detail as you wish. You can request to view an exemplar map if you would like guidance. You can create the map using pen and paper, using a mind mapping tool, or any other way that is easy for you. It is envisaged that the map will take between 15-45 minutes to complete. We will discuss the PLN map during the interview, so that you can explain the diagram in more depth if you wish.

Interview: The interview will be online, using any video conferencing tool you feel comfortable with (e.g. Skype, Facetime, Zoom). It will be at a time and location convenient to you. The interview will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes of your time and will be audio recorded. No video footage will be stored. This will be a semi structured interview, and will include questions such as:

- How would you describe the professional learning you undertake when online?
- What inspired you to begin developing an online PLN?
- Please tell me about a significant or memorable event or learning that you have experienced through your PLN? How did this event or learning make you feel?

The interviewer (Kay Oddone) may ask you prompt questions to allow you to elaborate on your responses. The full list of questions will be shared with you prior to the interview.

Are there risks and benefits to me in taking part in this study?

The researcher does not anticipate any risks to you from participation in this research; however, there is the possibility of discomfort due to low level anxiety during the interview procedure, and inconvenience due to the time required to complete the research tasks. The likelihood of the risk of discomfort is low, and you may choose the level of response to interview questions and prompts to which you feel comfortable. The likelihood of inconvenience is moderate, however mitigating strategies such as meeting online at a time suitable to you will be put in place to minimise the inconvenience participation in this research may cause.

Should you feel uncomfortable or distressed, you may withdraw from the research at any time during this project without comment or penalty. Support is available through

- beyondblue: Free phone support (1300 22 4636) (in Australia)
- United for Global Mental Health <https://unitedgmh.org/mental-health-support> (International assistance)

It is expected that this project will not benefit you directly. However, it may benefit academics and educational researchers through:

- Gains in knowledge, insight and understanding in how academics may use online technologies to enhance and create new opportunities for professional learning through a PLN.



- Increased potential for academics to access cost-effective and timely professional learning through a better understanding of the ways a PLN may be developed and used.
- The development of an empirical evidence base for theory generation and evidenced based conceptual models of innovative professional learning.
- Greater understanding of how social media and other digital tools may be used to create opportunities for professional learning for academics during periods of isolation, such as the current COVID pandemic.

There may be some potential advantages for participants:

- Participants may find it beneficial to reflect on their understandings and practices when interacting with their PLN.
- Participants may experience an enrichment of their own PLN through engagement with the research process.

How is this study being paid for?

This study is not being funded.

Will taking part in this study (or travelling to) cost me anything, and will I be paid?

There will be no financial costs involved with participating in this study. While there is no compensation for your participation, we would very much appreciate your participation in this research.

What if I don't want to take part in this study?

Participation in this research is entirely your choice. Whether or not you decide to participate, is your decision and will not disadvantage you. Only those who give their informed consent will be included in the project.

What if I participate and want to withdraw later?

You can withdraw from this research at any time by cancelling the scheduled interview, or ending the interview at any time throughout its duration. Participants who complete the data collection activities will be provided a transcript of their interview by email. They will have two weeks to review the transcript and request any changes or request that it not be included in the data analysis. In the event that you withdraw from the study, your data will be removed from the study and disposed of by completely deleting the data that has been collected from the Charles Sturt servers where it is being securely stored.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

All data will be confidential, and anonymity of participants will be maintained through the use of pseudonyms. As social media data is potentially re-identifiable, no screenshots or direct transcription of data shared by participants on social media will be included in this research. Any potentially identifiable information such as names of blogs or avatar names will be removed from transcripts. No video footage of interviews will be stored. All audio recordings will be stored securely according to Charles Sturt University servers according to the research data management strategy. Interview recordings and transcripts will be labelled with a code, and published extracts will be de-identified and pseudonyms used.

What will happen to the information that I give you?

You will be given the opportunity to review the transcripts of the interview recordings, and these recordings will be stored securely on CSU servers. These recordings will not be shared. The de-identified information you give to us will be used to inform findings which will be shared in journals and at conferences with other professionals. We will also share these publications with you via the Charles Sturt University Research Output repository so you can see the final results. Your name will not be shared in any of these publications or presentations.



What should I do if I want to discuss this study further before deciding?

If you would like further information, please contact Dr Kay Oddone.

Telephone: (02) 6933 4308

Email: koddone@csu.edu.au

Who should I contact if I have concerns about the conduct of this study?

Charles Sturt University's Human Research Ethics Committee has approved this project (Protocol number: H22070). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you may contact the Committee through the Research Integrity Unit via the following contact details:

The Presiding Officer
Human Research Ethics Committee
Research Integrity Unit
Locked Bag 588
Wagga Wagga NSW 2678
Phone: (02) 6933 4213
Email: ethics@csu.edu.au

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated thoroughly, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Conclusion

Thank you for considering this invitation. This information sheet is for you to keep.

