

## Pacific Leaders in Open, Online and Distance Learning

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### Introduction

The Pacific is a vast region, with a diverse range of cultures and stretched geographical lands, which covers large territories and long distances. Open, online and distance learning (ODL) has always played a key role in providing access to education to remote and rural students and disadvantaged groups. In fact, it could be argued that without ODL, the levels of educational attainment in these regions would be much lower. However, there is work to be done, as some countries in the region still have infrastructure problems, such as Internet connectivity and availability, which directly impact access to online and distance learning. In this piece about Pacific leaders in ODL, I noticed that despite the fact that many leaders have or have had a formal professional base at their institutions, many have worked across different nations and in collaboration with several national and international organisations. Also, initially, ODL leaders were predominantly male, but it did not take long for their female counterparts to join in and be recognised. Encouraged by this journal's editorial board, I made sure that the ODL female leaders are well represented in this piece.

This manuscript is divided in three sections; Australia, New Zealand and some small islands of the Pacific region. This is by no means an exhaustive list of ODL leaders in the region, but one that recognises the contributions of earlier theorists and some more current researchers and practitioners. Finally, it is also important to highlight that the large majority of the leaders recognised here are renowned academics, researchers, practitioners and leaders due to their success, leadership and contributions to ODL. Therefore, most of them have published extensively, been invited to present at conferences and other national and international events, and have worked as consultants for key ODL organisations and their partners, some during the course of their employment and/or after retiring. Their career and academic successes are very important, but here I would like to focus on some of their key contributions to ODL in the Pacific region.

### Australia

Distance education is part of the history of Australian education, including at university and school levels. In 1911, the University of Queensland established its "Department of Correspondence Studies" (White, 1982), while the first primary and early secondary school lessons broadcast by the School of the Air to remote and rural Australian children started on 8 June 1951. The School of the Air still operates today in most Australian states, with a total of 16 centres. With the assistance of modern learning technologies, it currently offers adult education and full secondary school education (<http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/school-of-the-air>). Over the years, ODL has become an important element of Australian higher education generally, as most of its universities have an online presence. With such a long and rich history, there is no doubt that Australia has many prominent ODL leaders.

Terry Evans is an Emeritus Professor at Deakin University, where he was previously a professor and associate dean (research and doctoral studies) in the Faculty of Education. He currently works as a consultant and researcher in Australia and overseas. He commenced his work in distance education in 1979 at the (then) Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education (now Federation University) where



he taught undergraduate sociology on and off campus. His first article on distance education, "Communicating with Students by Audiotape" (Evans, 1984) came from that period. In 1984 he joined Deakin University as a lecturer in distance education and co-ordinated (with Bruce King, University of South Australia) the development of the first Master of Distance Education program in Australia. Terry's passion for research in distance education led to him leading six Research in Distance Education (RIDE) conferences at Deakin University between 1989 and 2004. RIDE conferences were attended by participants from many nations, with each conference leading to a published collection of selected revised papers. By the late 1990s, Terry Evans's research interests moved into doctoral education, although often with online and distance education themes. His recent work is as a consultant and researcher in Australia and overseas, including in the United Kingdom and the Pacific region (New Zealand and in Papua New Guinea). In addition to this work, Terry remains a member of editorial boards for ten international journals related to online, distance and open education. He also continues to supervise and examine PhD candidates.

Bruce King's career has spanned management, policy advice and curriculum development in distance education, open learning, and flexible delivery as theorist, practitioner and manager. He has held senior management positions in both universities, and vocational education and training systems. At the University of South Australia he was responsible for the movement from conventional distance education to the flexible delivery of over 1200 courses online. Highlights of policy advice include work for the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), the Australian Government, The Australian Agency for International Development (AusAid) and individual institutions in Australia and the UK. He has provided expert advice in Tonga, South Africa, Indonesia and Sweden; was a member of the UNESCO panel of experts on distance education in Russia; and represented the Australian Government in Japan and Thailand. He led the small team that developed the world's first professional qualification for distance educators and was part of the group that formed the fundamental approaches to curriculum and delivery of Open Universities Australia. Since 2011 he has been a member of the OHS Education Accreditation Board and is the education advisor to the Board.

Jim Taylor's contribution to higher education, distance education and open educational resources (OER) is widely recognised. His academic career started in 1974 and since then he has been the recipient of many awards. These include: "Honorary Fellow of the Commonwealth of Learning" in recognition of his many contributions to higher education, distance education and open education resources; "Member in the General Division of the Order of Australia" for distinguished service to tertiary education, particularly open learning, on-line and distance education; "Australian Higher Education Quality Award", for meritorious service to quality advancement in Australian higher education; and the "International Council of Distance and Online Education (ICDE) Individual Prize of Excellence" for his significant contribution to research and development in the field of open and distance learning. He is a renowned scholar whose discourse on "Fifth Generation Distance Education" (Taylor, 2001) has provided the much-needed framework for understanding the historical evolution and growing complexity of open and distance learning. Emeritus Professor at the University of Southern Queensland since 2012, he is currently deeply involved in the establishment of the OER Universitas (OERu), which will provide free access to higher education to students in all parts of the world using OER learning materials.

Colin Latchem has over thirty years' experience of leading and managing distance education, educational technology and educational change. In the 1970s, he was a pioneer in the UK in educational television and learning resources and he established the Learning Resources Unit at Stanmillis College of Education (now part of Queen's University) Belfast, and was a consultant to the UK National Council of Educational Technology. In Australia, where he now lives and works, he held a professorial position as the Head of the Teaching Learning Group at Curtin University of Technology, Perth Western Australia until 1998. In this role, he was responsible for academic staff development, open and distance education and educational technology. He also served on the Academic Programs Board of the Open Learning Australia consortium, was national president of the Open and Distance Learning Association of Australia (ODLAA) and undertook major consultancies into, e.g., the University of the South Pacific; satellite USPNet, the Tanami Network, a

videoconferencing network for aboriginal communities in the Australian outback, and the Western Australian Telecentre Network. One of his books on leadership received the 2002 Charles Wedemyer Award for the best book of the year on distance education in the US. Colin is now a consultant and writer. He works mainly in Australia and the Asia-Pacific although he has also spent a year working in the Caribbean on a Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation consultancy.

Anne Forster has over forty years' experience in academic and executive roles in open, online and campus based learning in Australia and internationally. Anne is experienced in enterprise wide management with a background spanning all sectors, multiple disciplines and communities. She is a specialist in the development and management of education and training that leverages technology, innovative pedagogy and the design of alternative pathways for people seeking flexibility in meeting their learning goals. Anne has held a number of positions in universities and private companies in Australia, Canada and the UK, leading change initiatives and supporting academic professional development over periods of rapid growth and technology disruption. Concurrent with these positions she has retained consultancy services in Canada, where she lived for ten years, while she is now based in Sydney, Australia. Anne has also consulted in the Asia Pacific region, UAE, South Africa, India, Europe, Canada and the USA. She values her professional association with organizations committed to scalable, affordable and effective solutions to meet the challenges in developing countries, such as the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), ICDE, The European Distance and E-learning Network (EDEN) and the USDLA. She is a former president of ODLAA and participates locally with EInet, ANZ mLearn and the Sydney Education Technology Start Up Group.

Yoni Ryan began her distance education career in 1975 at the then Tasmanian College of Advanced Education, ironically one of Australia's smallest states, and perhaps not the first place one would consider as a distance education practitioner. However, the College had begun to realise that many of the state's citizens had no 'local' access to further education, and that Tasmania had one of the lowest rates of participation in education in Australia. Yoni's determination to be involved was motivated by a strong commitment to equity and access and her early passion for ODL led to a long-term commitment to furthering these goals. This has led to a more than 40-year contribution to ODL policy and practice, spanning teaching and research in the South Pacific, the Solomon Islands, Africa, and Australia. She has led or consulted on projects for AusAid, COL, the UK's Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), and individual Australian universities on their ODL operations, which have resulted in more streamlined operational procedures. Yoni has also contributed to the development of state and national policies on ODL. Her analysis of quality assurance processes for ODL in the past few years has led to some universities modifying often complex and vague QA 'checklists'. Her most recent contributions to MOOC development over the past three years are a response to the changing nature of ODL.

Belinda Tynan started her journey in the field of ODL in 2003, but she has worked nationally and internationally in universities since 1998. Belinda has made outstanding contributions to ODL in Australia and globally. She is a woman who is driven by the potential for distance and online education to be transformational for all. She has been at the forefront of promoting what Australia and, at times, the Pacific region has to offer. Belinda has had several senior roles, including as Pro Vice Chancellor Learning, Teaching and Quality at the University of Southern Queensland, and Pro Vice Chancellor Learning and Teaching at the Open University UK. Currently, she is the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Education) and Vice President at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Australia. Last year she was elected to the ICDE. Perhaps Belinda's most important contribution to ODL in this region was the conceptualisation and leadership of the DEHub project; which was a 3.6 million dollar project to further research and develop ODL in Australia. The University of New England hosted DEHub (<http://wikieducator.org/DEHub>) and it ran in partnership with two universities in Australia and one in New Zealand. At the close of the project, more than 400 outcomes were recorded. Belinda has played an important role in bringing Australia back into the COL after a number of years of being outside the group. She has worked with several international organisations such as ICDE, UNESCO and COL and the Tertiary Education and Quality Standards Agency (Australia) on matters including online and distance learning. She is a Fellow of EDEN.

Robyn Smyth retired as the Director of Learning and Teaching Support at the University of Southern Queensland in mid-2014. While in that position she supervised teams providing professional development and student support for online, face-to-face and blended curricula. She also specialised in curriculum design in the distance and online modes and the ways in which they can promote transformative and student centred pedagogies in higher education. Her particular focus at the University of New England (1998 to 2012) was the development of innovative synchronous video conferencing to support distance and dual campus students in effective learning and student support as they entered and continued distance study. With the support of the excellent technical advice available Robyn promoted such synchronous communication for the benefit of student learning, innovating ways to effectively engage students and support their learning and personal needs as they entered and maintained distance study. Robyn has been an active researcher and continues to supervise doctoral students investigating practice, theory and pedagogy in higher and distance education. Her interests lie in rich media, including the practice and pedagogy of m-learning, higher degree supervision, and professional development. Using technology to support curriculum design in complex contexts and the potential for open and synchronous communication tools to support student learning are core research interests, for which she won Australian Government Office of Learning and Teaching grants. Principally, her research was focussed on innovating pedagogy and managing educational change to support innovation in open and distance education. The concept of openness was also an interest that stemmed from her work in Bhutan, where she experienced the inequity of access to knowledge first hand.

Mike Keppell is currently the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning Transformations) at Swinburne University of Technology. In this position, he oversees the Learning Transformations Unit, which provides professional development and support for teaching staff across all modes of learning (digital, blended and mobile). Professor Keppell has made significant contributions to research and knowledge in the field of learning spaces, blended, online and distance learning, learning-oriented assessment, and transformative learning using design-based research, throughout his career, as he worked in seven different universities in Australia, Canada and Hong Kong. He has been the recipient of numerous grants, awards and prizes, and has led a wide range of projects and worked with diverse groups of stakeholders and organisations nationally and internationally. Mike is a passionate and dedicated educator, facilitator, researcher, supervisor, mentor and leader, who creates opportunities for rich, interactive and sustained forms of professional development, including for ODL, to empower staff and for assessment-as-learning strategies to create the problem-solvers of the future. An example of such leadership was the Flexible Learning Institute's (FLI) Teaching Fellowship Program developed in 2012 to enhance teaching and learning at Charles Sturt University, using blended and flexible learning and utilising distributive leadership as a catalyst for curriculum change. The Teaching Fellowship Program engaged 26 Fellows across four faculties, 23 schools and nine different campuses. He is a Life Member of the Australasian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education (ASCILITE), after serving 12 years on the executive including three years as Treasurer and three years as President.

Roderick Sims' 40-year career in education and computing began 1976, as a primary teacher, and ended with the graduation of his last PhD student in December 2016. At the same time as Rod was teaching, computers made their social impact and with Rod's skill for programming, he was appointed as a consultant to the first large-scale computer-based education system into Australia (PLATO), introduced by Control Data in 1979, when he was appointed as a consultant to the project. The combination of educational theory and computer programming formed the praxis that guided the remainder of his career. In 1986, Rod took an academic appointment as a lecturer in Computing and Education, which led to his involvement in the creation of specific degrees for teachers and trainers in learning technologies for flexible and distance learning. Rod has also served on boards in leadership roles (IBSTPI, ADCIS, ASCILITE, ODLAA) and has hosted and coordinated national conferences. He was awarded in 1995 a Fellow of ASCILITE, and in 1998 a Fellow of the Australian Computer Society. His latest theoretical contribution was a design framework in the manuscript *Design Alchemy: Transforming The Way We Think About Learning And Teaching* published in 2014 (Sims,

2014). Rod believes strongly that, while the power of computer technology has been effectively leveraged to manage and report on student activity and performance not only in face-to-face, but also in online, flexible and distance education, the opportunity and responsibility of academia to continue to harness digital technology for true human-computer learning, conceived decades ago, has yet to be fully realised.

Som Naidu has spent most of his professional life in the higher education sector in a variety of roles to do with enhancing learning and teaching practices in distance education, online learning and e-learning, as well as education more generally, in various jurisdictions and geographical locations. Som is currently a consultant in technology, education and design at Monash University in Australia. He has served as president of ODLAA, and is executive editor of its journal *Distance Education*, assistant editor of the *Journal of Interactive Learning Environments*, a co-editor of the Routledge book series on *Open, Flexible and Distance Learning*, and a member of the inaugural Routledge Education Arena Panel of Editors. In May 2014 the Open University of Sri Lanka awarded Dr. Naidu a D.Litt. (*Honoris Causa*), in recognition of his extensive contribution to the field of open, flexible, distance and e-learning both regionally and internationally. Som's experiences, together with his theoretical and practical work have been key to the ODL community, especially in designing and implementing capacity building workshops in the areas of open educational practices, online learning and e-learning. His professional consultancies in the field include numerous capacity building projects in course and curriculum design and development, online learning and e-learning in India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, Belize, Namibia, Western Samoa, Maldives and the Solomon Islands.

Sue Gregory is a long-term adult educator and passionate about teaching traditional and distance pre-service and postgraduate education students how to incorporate technology into their teaching. An example of Sue's expertise is in adopting and adapting a virtual world (Second Life) to enhance learning and teaching in higher education in the Pacific region. Through her avatar Jass Easterman, Sue has been using Second Life by applying her virtual world knowledge to expose her students, both on and off campus, to the learning opportunities in virtual worlds since 2007, and has also been involved with many national and university projects creating and using learning spaces in virtual worlds. She has been instrumental in bringing almost 1,000 students online synchronously to explore the use of a virtual world as a teaching and learning tool. Sue was also the lead for an Australian Government Office of Learning and Teaching (OLT) Category 1 project "VirtualPREX: Innovative assessment using a 3D virtual world with pre-service teachers", a team member on four other OLT projects and received an OLT citation in 2012. Since 2009, she has been Chair of the Australian and New Zealand Virtual Worlds Working Group and is also a Chair of Research, an Education Scholar and member of the ICT team in the School of Education, University of New England, Armidale, Australia, where she is based. She also holds a Senior Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy. Sue is an Adjunct Research Fellow with Curtin University. Sue has been a member of the ASCILITE Executive since 2012, and is currently the Vice President.

Julie Willems is currently a Lecturer in Blended Learning at Deakin University. Julie's passion and experiences with distance education started when she was a rural-based student from the 1980s to 2000s when she completed the majority of her undergraduate and graduate studies. This experience informed not only Julie's own teaching practices, but also guided her choice of graduate research projects, which included an examination of equity issues for learners in computer-mediated environments. One of Julie's priorities is the promotion of ways in which access to education can be increased for those who have been often marginalised. As a result of the publications arising from her research into equity issues in distance learning, Julie was invited to participate in the government's national policy forum for education in 2013. She was a recipient of the auDA Foundation's national research grant in 2011 for her *i-Survive Project*, which investigated the use of 'back channel' communications via mobile technologies and social media during Australian emergencies and disasters. Dr Willems is also an enthusiastic and experienced teacher, facilitator and practitioner with particular interest in examining alternative pedagogical practices for blended, online and distance learning. In addition, Julie has been involved in key national and international professional bodies in the region, including ODLAA where she was the Vice President from 2013 to 2014, and as an

executive member of the ASCILITE since 2015. Julie's work within these organisations also reflects her research interests of inclusion and technology.

Helen Farley has pioneered the delivery of online and distance learning to incarcerated students. She is particularly passionate about using educational technologies to address inequity in higher education. Helen is currently an Associate Professor working at the Digital Life Lab at the University of Southern Queensland. She has led a number of projects that have taken digital technologies into correctional centres to provide prisoners with access to higher education among which her latest project, called 'Making the Connection', is a \$4.4 million Australian-government HEPPP-funded project that started in late 2013. This project has developed two Internet independent technologies and technologies: 1) a server and 2) 11-inch notebook computers onto which a modified version of the University of Southern Queensland's learning management system (an instance of Moodle called StudyDesk) has been installed. The project has won a number of prestigious awards; to date, it has attracted some 1400 course enrolments across Queensland, ACT, Tasmania, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Helen's additional contribution to ODL has been her work on mobile learning. She was the project leader of the Collaborative Research Network project, developing a *Mobile Learning Evaluation Framework*, with colleagues from USQ, the Australian National University and the University of South Australia. The framework identifies critical success factors at four levels: 1) Pedagogical – learning; 2) Pedagogical – teaching; 3) Technical; and 4) Organisational. The project also originated a novel definition of mobile learning with the capacity to change over time as new technologies emerge onto the market. Helen is an advocate for the use of virtual worlds for education and is an active member of the Australia New Zealand Virtual Worlds Working Group. Helen sits on the ASCILITE Executive, is an associate editor off that society's journal, *AJET*, and leads their Community Mentoring Programme.

## **New Zealand**

Similarly to Australia, open and distance learning plays an important role in providing access to education to a diverse range of New Zealanders (children and adults). In New Zealand, distance education also started as correspondence studies, but it has now transitioned to incorporate learning technologies and the Internet. The New Zealand tertiary education sector is relatively small compared to the Australian one, but, its eight universities and more than double that number of Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics, have strong representation throughout the country via smaller campuses and study centres. Despite the fact that New Zealand is a "predominantly urban country, with 86.4 percent of the population living in urban areas", there are still a significant number of rural and remote isolated regions that are sparsely populated. Therefore, ODL is key to extend equality of educational opportunity and to contribute to the development of a skilled labour force. As a result, it is not surprising that New Zealand is also home to several ODL leaders.

Claire Matthewson's career in ODL in the Pacific Region runs from 1984 to her retirement in 2011. During this time she worked in several countries in the region, and was involved in programme and systems development, organisational management, research, and project leadership. From the mid-'80s, she was the University of Otago's first Director, Distance Teaching. From 1990 to 1995 at the University of the South Pacific (USP), she was Director, University Extension, overseeing the provision of distance programmes in USP's 12 member countries, and responsible for the staff and Centres in these locations. During this time, she chaired the Steering Committee for establishing PIRADE (the Pacific Islands Regional Association for Distance Education) and, elected in Port Moresby, was its inaugural President from 1993–1995. After that, Claire was Director, International Programs (Distance) at Simon Fraser University in Canada (a long-time USP partner in developing Pacific community nutrition materials). This position's main focus was on developing distance education capability in West Africa and South East Asia. She returned to New Zealand as the Executive Director (Faculty) at The Open Polytechnic. Claire worked with several international organisations, which resulted in important contributions, including an analysis of all pre-tertiary, preparatory distance programmes in Oceania (USP's 12 states plus Australia, New Zealand, and Papua New Guinea); a feasibility study for distance education in the Republic of the Marshall Islands;

and a five-year development plan for NZODA assistance for distance education in the South Pacific. Her contributions are well documented and one of her most well-known articles was published in 1984 titled "Whose Development, Whose Needs – on the politics and practice of education aid to the South Pacific" (Matthewson, 1984). The publication won the NUCEA (National University Continuing Education Association, USA)'s Elizabeth Powell Award.

Caroline Seelig has over 25 years' experience as a senior manager in New Zealand's tertiary education sector. Throughout her career, she has taken on several leadership roles, which provided her the opportunities to lead institutional strategies and investment planning, to oversee flexible learning, teaching and delivery units, academic portfolio development, quality management and student support. She has also been involved in a wide range of successful collaborative initiatives and projects to drive change and innovation in online and distance learning. Since taking up her role as Chief Executive in 2009, Open Polytechnic has gone from strength to strength. Under Dr Seelig's leadership, Open Polytechnic's course and qualification results now match those of face-to-face polytechnic providers in New Zealand. Passionate about the benefits that distance learning can deliver to lifelong learners, Caroline has been instrumental in Open Polytechnic's digital transformation. Caroline is an Honorary Fellow and Learning Advisor of the COL. She is a previous Chair of New Zealand Institutes of Technology and Polytechnic's (NZITP) and was recently a member of the ICDE's Task Group on Student Success. The success of distance learners is also one of Caroline's passions, as she spent the last three years, leading the development of an innovative platform (iQualify) that was designed to meet the digital learning needs of current students. iQualify provides a social learning experience, which is intuitive, responsive, informed by analytics, and can be "white-labelled" for partners. Currently, iQualify is licensed by a wide range of domestic and international partners, including universities, polytechnics, private providers, corporate and community organisations. Caroline has particular interest in the areas of ODL leadership, organisational digital transformation and e-learning educational performance.

Niki Davis is the University of Canterbury Distinguished Professor of e-Learning and Director of the College of Education, Health and Human Development e-Learning Lab. She is recognised internationally as a leading expert in information and communication technologies in teacher education. She is sought by UNESCO, national agencies, companies, scholarly societies and institutions for her expertise. Niki is a past president of the Flexible Learning Association of New Zealand (FLANZ) and is currently an editor of the *Journal of Flexible and Distance Learning*. Awards for teaching and service include recognition as an Outstanding Global Educator by the International Society of Information Technology and Teacher Education and for outstanding service by the International Federation of Information Processing. Past experience includes the teaching of science and computer science in secondary schools and tertiary education.

Sarah Stein is the Director, Distance Learning at the University of Otago, New Zealand, a strategic role to facilitate change and development in distance education in collaboration with her colleagues. Sarah's past work experience includes primary school teaching, curriculum advising in primary and secondary schools, and academic staff development for online and distance learning in Australian universities, including the University of New England and the University of Queensland. As a researcher, Sarah has made significant contributions to the theory and practice of open and distance learning in the region through her research, leadership and mentoring on distance education, student evaluations, teacher professional development, and technology and science education. Sarah supervises postgraduate research students and runs academic staff development activities. She is currently the president of FLANZ, which is the New Zealand professional association for those interested/working in the areas of open, flexible and distance learning. She is also a member of the Ako Aotearoa (New Zealand's National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence) Southern Hub Advisory Group, which assists in identifying issues across the sector, setting priorities for the hub, contributing to research project approval processes.

Wayne Mackintosh has made significant contributions to the advancement of open and distance learning not only in the Pacific region, but also globally. He is the founding director of the Open

Educational Resources (OER) Foundation headquartered at Otago Polytechnic, New Zealand. He is coordinating the establishment of the OERu, an international innovation partnership, which aims to widen access to more affordable education for all. Wayne holds the UNESCO / ICDE Chair in OER at Otago Polytechnic and serves as a member of the Board of Directors of the OER Foundation. He is a strategic innovator with a passion for open sourcing education. For example, he was the founding project leader of New Zealand's eLearning XHTML editor (eXe) project ([www.exelearning.org](http://www.exelearning.org)) and founder of WikiEducator ([www.WikiEducator.org](http://www.WikiEducator.org)) — an international community of educators collaborating on the development of free/libre teaching materials in support of all national curricula. Wayne has extensive international experience in educational technology, learning design and the theory and practice of ODL. He has previously been Education Specialist, eLearning and ICT policy at COL, and Associate Professor and founding director of the Centre for Flexible and Distance Learning (CFDL) at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. At the University of Auckland, he was tasked with eLearning strategy and leading CFDL's professional staff team. Prior to moving to New Zealand he spent eleven years working at the University of South Africa (UNISA), a distance learning institution and one of the world's mega-universities. Wayne has participated in a range of international consultancies and projects including work for COL, the International Monetary Fund, UNESCO and the World Bank.

Mark Brown is currently Ireland's first Chair in Digital Learning and Director of the National Institute for Digital Learning (NIDL). Prior to taking up this position at the start of 2014, Mark had worked for more than 20 year in higher and distance learning in New Zealand. His last role at Massey University was as the Director of the National Centre for Teaching and Learning as well as Director of the Distance Education and Learning Futures Alliance (DELFA). In addition, Mark had responsibility for oversight of the Central Hub of Ako Aotearoa - National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence. His contributions to ODL in the Pacific Region have been of significant importance as he played key leadership roles in the implementation of several major university-wide digital learning and teaching initiatives. Mark was also President of the New Zealand Association for Open, Flexible and Distance Learning (DEANZ) and Treasurer and an Executive Committee member of the ASCILITE. He is a recipient of a National Award for Sustained Excellence in Tertiary Teaching and remains a member of the New Zealand Academy of Tertiary Teaching Excellence. He continues contributing to open and distance education in the Pacific Region as he still has strong professional links with organisations, institutions and scholars in the region.

## **Small Islands of the Pacific Region**

As I mentioned earlier, this article is divided into three parts in an attempt to assist readers to better identify ODL leaders by the region in which they are most influential. The third section is dedicated to the small Pacific Region. According to Professor Emma Kruse Vaái (2017), online and distance education are key to provide opportunities and access to education in the small islands of the Pacific Region.

*“The use of online and distance learning is critical to the development of the small island developing states (SIDS) of the Pacific where remoteness is a key challenge to a region which spans one-third of the earth’s surface and consists of thousands of islands located far and wide across the Pacific. Goal 4 of the SDG’s ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all’, is also addressed by the availability of online and distance learning. Many Pacific women unable to further their education off-island because of various reasons such as family commitments, cost or distance; are enabled by on-line and distance learning to continue to post graduate levels. Traditionally in the Pacific; university and post graduate studies required locals to go to New Zealand, Australia or Fiji for a number of years. Now there are choices of going off island or staying back and still access and progress through online or distance mode.” (Kruse Vaái, 2017)*

Emma Kruse Vaái is a Professor of the National University of Samoa and represents the Pacific Region as a member of the Board of Governors and Executive Committee of COL. As a founding



member and first chair of the management committee of the Virtual University for Small states of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) (2004), she is a strong advocate for open distance and online learning and the use of Open Educational Resources (OER) for education and sustainable development in the small island states of the Pacific region and the Commonwealth. Through collaborative efforts of VUSSC members and strong support from COL, small states actively contribute to global development, international academic collaboration and lead educational reform through the innovative use of information and communications technologies (ICT). At present in Samoa the upgrading of all teachers (primary and secondary) to degree level has propelled the National University and Ministry of Education to collaborate in the provision of open and distance education for the many who are located in outer islands and villages. Emma continues to advocate for national policy developments in open and distance education as well as the development and use of Open Educational Resources (OER). The successful trial of the COL APTUS device at the National University of Samoa is another step towards further confidence and competence for teachers and students to be part of the OER community and enabling access to quality learning materials.

Rajesh Chandra's contributions to open and distance learning started when he was a practitioner and continued at the University of the South Pacific (USP) in 1990 when he became Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic). Since then, he has closely guided USP's learning and teaching and flexible learning as a teacher, policy maker, and implementer. He commissioned two reviews of flexible learning, one in 2000, and another in 2014 by COL to ensure that the University's philosophy and practice of distance and flexible learning were comparable with the best universities in this field. He led a sustained campaign, strengthened by his later appointment as Deputy Vice-Chancellor, to ensure the mainstreaming of flexible learning into the university's overall learning and teaching. As Vice-Chancellor and President since 2008, Rajesh has been responsible for the development of two strategic plans through which major initiatives were taken in new pedagogies, programmatic conversion of programmes for online delivery, and in the expansion of access to remote areas by leveraging ICTs innovatively. Rajesh also collaborated with COL to jointly establish the Pacific Centre for Flexible Learning for Development (PACFOLD) to improve capacity building in this vital area. As Chair of the Human Resources Working Group of the Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific, he has worked closely with Ministries of Education and other tertiary education providers in the Pacific to spread the practice and benefits of flexible learning. Rajesh has played a pioneering role in distance and flexible learning that has made USP a hub of learning, cutting-edge pedagogies, and an example of providing access even to the remotest communities in the Pacific. He was made an Honorary Fellow of the Commonwealth of Learning in 2016.

Theresa Koroivulaono is currently the President of the College of the Marshall Islands. Her vision for the College focuses on transforming educational opportunities and scaling resources through collaboration between small islands' developing states with selected international partners. With the inclusion of blended learning initiatives in the College of the Marshall Islands' Strategic Plan 2016-2018, she aims to introduce ODL in the Republic of the Marshall Islands to increase access to cost-effective, educational opportunities. Prior to that she was the head of the Learning Design team at the Center for Flexible Learning, at the University of the South Pacific (USP). Under her leadership, a whole range of innovative and pedagogically sounded educational resources were designed, developed and externally reviewed. These materials were for different modes of delivery primarily to students in the twelve countries of the USP region. Theresa also led a number of collaborative research projects at regional and international levels that focused on areas that include Distance Learning methodologies and best practices, Open Education Resources (OER) and leveraging technology for education. She has presented at conferences worldwide and published in the aforementioned areas. Theresa is passionate about increasing access to tertiary education in the SIDS of the Pacific through leveraging technology for ODL delivery and supported by OER.

Richard Guy has made significant contributions to open and distance learning in the Pacific region, most specifically in Papua New Guinea, during his academic career. He has engaged in several projects in the region and worked with several international organisations, including Australia and in Papua New Guinea. Richard was director of the Advanced Diploma Unit at the Goroka Campus of

the University of Papua New Guinea, and then later moved to the Port Moresby campus of the University. The Advanced Diploma Unit was funded by the government to provide distance-education courses for secondary teachers across Papua New Guinea to improve their knowledge and skills. Richard has also worked in the Northern Territory of Australia on distance programmes with Aboriginal people. His research has been primarily focused on the relationships between distance-education pedagogies and indigenous cultures in Papua New Guinea. His work has been well documented and exposed the problematic nature of practising distance education in developing nations, mostly in Papua New Guinea. Guy is currently a consultant with Coffey International Development, in Papua New Guinea.

## Final Considerations

As can be seen from this piece, there is no shortage of ODL leaders in the Pacific region. Their hard work has assisted in the development, progress and establishment of ODL in this region for decades, from creating and offering formal degrees and programs, to informal and localised capacity building activities, from developing theories to applying them in practice. Some of them have been working with ODL since the correspondence model, as educators and also as learners, while others have entered the field when technology was already recognised as an important resource to enhance learning and teaching in ODL.

As discussed here, the Pacific region is a vast area of land and sea, which still poses many challenges and opportunities to ODL in region. However, ODL in the Pacific region is more equitable, is of higher quality and better designed to meet the needs of learners in the region, uses cutting edge technologies (virtual worlds and mobile learning) and open educational resources, reaches all types of learners, including those incarcerated and those in isolated and rural areas, and continues producing high quality professionals and educators; all because of the legacy, leadership, perseverance and commitment of people like the leaders presented here. Finally, I would like to thank the leaders who kindly assisted me with this manuscript; some of them I have known for many years, while others I had the pleasure to get in touch for the first. Thank you also to the *Journal* editors, who were very professional and patient with me. Thank you all for your time, generosity and kindness.

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**Dr Carina Bossu** is a Lecturer in Learning and Teaching at the University of Tasmania (UTAS). Having graduated from her PhD in 2010, which investigated higher and distance education, in particular policies and staff development practices to support distance educators, Carina's academic career has been largely devoted to advocating and researching open educational practices (OEP) to enhance learning and teaching in higher and distance education. Prior to UTAS, she was a Research Fellow with DEHub at the University of New England (UNE) where her role was to investigate the use and adoption of OER across the Australian higher education sector.

Carina led and collaborated in several large research projects, including projects in partnership with institutions in New Zealand and Fiji. These projects were funded by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) to investigate several aspects of OEP across the Australian higher education sector. Currently,

she is involved in several institutional, national and international collaborations related to OEP, including research projects, consultancies, PhD supervision and mentoring, amongst other activities. Carina's professional leadership in OEP in Australia has been recognised nationally and internationally, through invitations to present and publish in this area; as well as invitations to conduct consultancy work.

In 2013 Routledge Education awarded Carina the New Researcher "One to Watch", and more recently (2016) she has been awarded an Australasian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education (ASCILITE) Fellow. Carina is also a member of several key professional organisations and a reviewer of a number of well-established and recognised journals. Email: [carina.bossu@utas.edu.au](mailto:carina.bossu@utas.edu.au)

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