



## **Dawn Bennett, Rachel Sheffield and Susan Blackley**

### **Abstract**

This paper considers the thinking and practice of undergraduate and graduate students in relation to their future selves and careers. It describes two studies in which students and educators visualised professionals in their discipline, responded in writing to a guided reflection about future work and career, brought together artefacts that described them, photographed themselves as professionals, and created a professional digital portfolio. The research focused on the cognitive dimensions of employability: learners' dispositions and capacities for professional engagement, and their understanding of themselves. The research was guided by two research questions: What can multiple "narratives of self" reveal about learners' developing professional identities? How might the assembly of such narratives positively impact learners' salient identities? Recognising that adults learn differently to children and mindful of the profile of 21st century learners, the study adopted an innovative 'digital andragogical approach' to course delivery, utilising the affordances of Web 2.0 technologies to develop learners' future-oriented thinking within the theoretical framework of possible selves. 'Andragogy' focuses on acquiring and thinking critically about content and its application rather than the transmission of subject matter. Andragogy encapsulates the characteristics of adult learners and employability through its inclusion of self-concept, learning from experience, readiness to learn, orientation towards problem-centred learning, and internal motivation to learn. Digital portfolios support the practice of digital andragogy and they underpinned our efforts to student learning by making competencies and learning outcomes explicit; teaching portable skills; blending technological literacy and fluency and domain knowledge; and encouraging learners to take a meta-cognitive approach to critical engagement with their courses of study. The use of visualisation and drawing created a climate which encouraged and supported students' deep and continuous reflection of their personal and developing professional identities. The multifarious skills and strategies helped students explore their notions of self and their uniqueness and individuality through multiple lenses. The project team has since committed to supporting these students to craft a reflective space in which they can continue to trouble and develop their salient identities.

**Bio**

Presenting author Dawn Bennett is John Curtin Distinguished Professor and Director of the Creative Workforce Initiative with Curtin University in Australia. Her research focus is enacting and enabling employability within higher education learning and teaching and she won an OLT citation for this work in 2015. This incorporates research on employability, identity development, graduate transition and graduate work, retaining a special interest on careers in the creative industries. A violist and a Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, Dawn serves numerous editorial boards and she convenes the Australian Learning and Teaching Fellows' network. She is on the board of directors for the International Society for Music Education and peak body Music Australia, serves as a commissioner with the ISME Commission for Education of the Professional Musician, and co-chairs the Curtin Academy.