Andrew : Hello, and welcome to the DLTV podcast. My name's Andrew [Williamson 00:00:16].

Mel: And I'm Mel [Cashen 00:00:18]. This episode's part of a series that focuses on what's going on in digital learning and teaching across our schools. We've got some exciting podcast planned for the rest of 2017 including the authors of the [00:00:30] articles in the DLTV journal, presenters that we had at the DigiCon conference recently, and finding out what's happening with some of our member schools. So Andrew, this is our first episode back since DigiCon. How did you find the conference?

Andrew : DigiCon was absolutely fantastic, Mel. I really enjoyed it. There's a real, I don't know how you thought about it, but there was a real buzz this year. Certainly it was great to see a lot of old faces come back to the conference and caught up with a lot of [00:01:00] friends. The standard of keynotes and sessions was just amazing. I learned so much. It was wonderful.

Mel: Yeah. No, I thought exactly the same thing. It was great to see some old friendly faces that we know from around the traps, I guess. Also, the amount of new faces that I saw, and people that I hadn't met before that I got to know over those couple of days so it was really fantastic.

Andrew : Yeah. And certainly the trade show, too. I thought this year was [00:01:30] outstanding. The exhibitions that was going on there was brilliant, and kudos to John Pearce as well who sat in the middle of all that with your students from pre-Hill working through the-

Mel: Yes, it was [crosstalk 00:01:43]. Had a great time talking with John, and all of these little toys and tools that he had there, so they've come back to school with a big wishlist.

Andrew : Well, so have I. That's how good it was. There's just plenty of toys there that I want to purchase for [inaudible 00:01:57]. It's great. [00:02:00] Well, Mel, today we've got a great guest for the podcast. It's Anne Mirtschin who was the recent [inaudible 00:02:07] Make It, or Make IT Happen, award recipient. Hello, Anne, and welcome to the DLTV podcast.

Anne: Hello, Andrew. Hello, Mel. And hello to all the listeners tuning in to this podcast.

Andrew : So Anne, you work at a school that not everyone would have heard about. I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit about Hawkesdale P12 [00:02:30] College, and where is it?

Anne: Many years ago I married a farmer and we lived just eight kilometers south of Hawkesdale, and that's between Warrnambool and Hamilton. I usually say I teach near Warrnambool because most people know Warrnambool. So it's a very small rural school. It's prep, or now called foundation, I guess, through to year 12. We have about 220 students from age 5 to 18, so we're a very small rural school, [00:03:00] but a great community network type school. We don't have any mobile phone service at our school, nor where I live, so that makes it very difficult at times with communication. But our students tend to find spots around the school on the windows where they can still get their messages through.

Mel: That's fantastic. I've got a great vision of your students being very resourceful there.

Anne: Yeah.

Mel: Many of our listeners would have actually [00:03:30] heard you speak and/or present over the years. I know that you've been to a lot of conferences and presented at DigiCon in the past. And you share your expertise and work on global connections. Do you just want to tell us a little bit about some of the things that you've done in being able to connect globally, and the impact of that for your students being in that location that you are, how you've been able to use some of those global connections to really open up opportunities for your students.

Anne: So our school [00:04:00] is very much geographically and culturally isolated, so we're very much a white Caucasian type school. Although, in recent years we've had the farmers selling out to the great, big organizations, or bigger farmers, and that means we're starting to get some of the visa immigrants coming into our area, so we actually got a family from Sri Lanka, Philippines, South Africa, et cetera. We are broadening up a little bit within our own school population.

[00:04:30] But I think because we are isolated rurally, it's very difficult, first of all, for us to go on excursions. Students don't really even go to libraries outside our school library. Are they really even go to Warrnambool because ... Well, our school, their parents are shopping. And it's so expensive. A lot of effort to get our students out from our school to experience some of the things the city schools would take for granted. But I think because of that isolation, [00:05:00] that put a little bit more emphasis on us trying to give our students the same experience as others would have.

I think because two of my children lived overseas I saw the amazing things that you could do with technology to stay in touch, to connect, et cetera. So I started blogging, and through that I made a lot of connections, I joined a lot of global projects, et cetera. So the students quite regularly get involved [00:05:30] in global projects, especially my classes. I guess I didn't say. I do teach ... I still call it information and communications technology, but I think it's now the digital technologies. Is that right?

Mel: Yeah. Or the word.

Anne: Anyway. That's my subject area, although I do teach accounting and business management. I have an opportunity [inaudible 00:05:52] to connect the students. I usually use Skype because that suites the bandwidth for our rural area there. But that [00:06:00] means we've been able to connect with people, as you say, across the world. I think for my students that's certainly opened up their eyes. They not only learn about places through their textbooks, but they now see and know the people who live there, they can interact with them, ask them questions on a personal level, and I'm sure it develops empathy in them and a greater understanding of the world, the accents that people have, the way people look. And I'll never [00:06:30] forget the first time we connected with Indonesia. The girls would have only been 12 years old, but they were all wearing ... I don't know if I get the terminology right, but the hijabs. And that was a real eye opener to the kids. They'd never seen that before.

Mel: Sounds like some really, really great opportunities. Have you got one particular connection that you made that really stays with you? And what sort of things do you connect about? What are the conversations [00:07:00] that you're having when you ...

Anne: So the second one first. Just the conversations change all the time. A lot of the time we leave it up to the students. [inaudible 00:07:08] a direct connection, it's usually with Asia. Sometimes we bring objects to the camera to share and show what Australia's about and like. Often the students go off and ask questions just on the spur of the moment and on the fly, so they might just ask what sort of pets do they [00:07:30] have, what does it look like where they live? Et cetera.

But one of my most memorable connections is with a teacher in Germany. Now, unfortunately we're not in the same timezone, so no matter what we do we have to work out how we connect without doing it synchronously. But he asked me if I could share a photo of a lunch box from our students, because his year seven science students were studying healthy [00:08:00] foods. It just happened to be on lunch time, so I quickly asked two girls to get their lunch boxes, emailed him the photo, and he was very grateful, and he just wanted to know more about where the school was. I sent him a link to our school blog, which happened to have a vegetable garden post on it, and he wanted to know more about that and would I teach his students about our vegetable garden, how we use some of the produce in their canteen.

At night time my [00:08:30] time, seven o'clock at night, which would have been about 10:00 a.m. their time, I was sharing, this time with Google Hangouts, about our school, show them photos of the garden, how the canteen uses it, et cetera. The students then went and ... My students create a podcast on water in rural areas for the German students radio station. And it eventually lead to the teacher over there saying their canteen manager [00:09:00] wanted to have an Australia food day. So I said something to my canteen manager. She said she would love to do a German food day.

After school, we decided to connect together over Skype, but we can't speak German and their canteen manager couldn't speak English. We were actually talking to each other while the year seven English class in Germany were in their classroom. [00:09:30] We had an interpreter for both ways so that we all understood what we were doing. They showed us their bread rolls, we showed them ours. We showed them the dishes that were popular with our students. So the two managers decided which dishes they would share on that day. Those year seven English, who were really German students, actually had to interpret the recipe, so we couldn't use abbreviations because interpretation would be lost. We [00:10:00] finally got the emails through on the recipes, we went ahead with that canteen day, and our food sold out within 15 minutes. It was a great success.

Mel: What a wonderful story.

Anne: Yeah, and it just shows what can be done even if you don't speak the same language.

Andrew : Yeah, that's fantastic. A wonderful way of using the technology to really make those connections. I'm sure that ... Was it the year seven English [00:10:30] class, were they interpreting it themselves as well?

Anne: Yeah. So the actual students in the class had to interpret the recipe, so that was a really ... their class, not mine because we don't speak German. So yes, they were responsible for doing that. I think their teacher may have just double checked to make sure that it was correct. But anyway, it all worked out. It looked good, sounded good. They actually decorated their school with all sorts of Australiana flags, and all bits [00:11:00] and pieces. Unfortunately I wasn't at school that day, I was at an excursion. I didn't actually get to see the excitement, et cetera. But we've continued on, so often I'll linkup with his classes at nighttime, they'll present to me. They'll record it so I can share some of the videos with my students, et cetera.

Andrew : Fantastic. Does Hawkesdale have a language?

Anne: Yes. Our language is actually Mandarin Chinese, but because China is so difficult to be able to connect [00:11:30] to a school that's willing to give up some of their time to just share conversations with our students the students will sometimes work with teachers in Taiwan in classes there because a lot of ... They speak Chinese, too. And we connect with classes in Malaysia, Chinese schools over there, and then they can try and share conversations in Mandarin. But our students probably don't speak that well, get very nervous, et cetera. [00:12:00] Our older students have been able to actually practice it in realtime with native speakers in like Taiwan and Malaysia.

Andrew : Yeah, fantastic. So your connections with ... Was it Indonesia or just ... As well, did you say? Or was it just Asian countries in general?

Anne: Oh, no, we've had [inaudible 00:12:21]. Once you make a connection you just seem to find that always there for you, even though you may not communicate for several months or a year. When [00:12:30] you need each other we're there for each other, and we will work together and connect again. When it's like international friendship day, that's a day when we'll often linkup with some other classes. It was India Independence Day on Tuesday, so we had a linkup with India last week to talk about, or learn a little bit about what they do on their Independence Day.

Andrew : How do you find these people to connection with, Anne?

Anne: I often get asked that question. And sometimes [00:13:00] it's just you've got this network established and you forget how you started. I joined an online site called Classroom 2.0. I met a lot of teachers there who I still connect and communicate with, and that's Steve [inaudible 00:13:15] from America. I met on Twitter a lot of my connections. Skype in the Classroom gives me a lot. Just Google groups, Google+ groups that I'm a member [00:13:30] of. Facebook brings up people now, too. And once you start you seem to just expand and people start to find you too. They're actively looking to connect, and even more so now since when I first started.

Andrew : Well, brilliant. No wonder. Without making all those connections, then the great use of technology in supporting the learning of your rural students, and that you're the recipient of the Making It IT Happen [00:14:00] award, which is the international award for the outstanding service to IT education. You were lucky enough to be at the ISTE conference in San Antonio. And I know our listeners who couldn't be there would love to hear about the conference and what the takeaways were for you.

Anne: Okay, so if people aren't quite sure what ISTE is, it's the International Society for Technology in Education. Their annual conferences are always held in America, and [00:14:30] they are just huge. So I think there were more than 20,000 people involved in it this year in San Antonio it goes over three and a half days, so it officially starts Sunday late afternoon with the keynote and it finishes Wednesday afternoon, but it's almost expanding now each year.

So on a Saturday, this is fantastic day called Hack Ed. Educators who can gather together, topics are put up for discussion, [00:15:00] they are voted on which topics people want to continue with through the day. People then choose which topic they are going to go and discuss for one hour of that day, and it's quite organic. It's just everyone's sharing their experiences, their knowledge, their questions, experiences, et cetera. So I went to the topics called Games in Learning, which is still very topical. I went to one on makerspaces, [00:15:30] and I just love technology tools. I'm always willing to go to those to see which tools people are still using, the new ones that they're using, et cetera. So one of my takeaways from that was Flipvideo. So I don't know if you've used it, Andrew and Mel.

Mel: No, I haven't heard of that one.

Anne: It's very, very popular with a lot of those teachers who are out there innovating. It's like a ... Instead of having text connections, [00:16:00] it's completely video. So you'll throw up a topic, or create this grid, and then share that link with either your class or connected classes, and the students just go up and talk their reflections, or talk about the topic, et cetera. And then the next student will come in and share with that. There's almost that link shared, it doesn't matter where you are, you can actually go in and interact. So that way you can ask questions, interact, continue conversations. So it's [00:16:30] just Flipvideo. Another new tool I learned about was [Bunsy 00:16:34], which is a presentation type tool. But back to the major takeaways. The main themes were popular topics. They all seem to be makerspaces, robotics. Drones featured quite a bit this year. AR and VR were still topics there that were fairly well presented on.

Mel: So I guess [00:17:00] the same things that really are topical here.

Anne: Yeah. Absolutely. And connected learning, it was another one. But what I think I like about ISTE is because it's so huge, and sometimes that can be overpowering, but once you've actually been there, because there's so many people there, so many sessions to choose from, so we start ... Some of the sessions start at eight o'clock in the morning, even 7:30. [00:17:30] It just means that if you've got a very special interest, or a passion, you can actually go in there and follow your theme quite easily and readily. Some of the keynote speakers that are brought out to Australia are just simply the people out in the fall there that you can talk to presenting just normal sessions like everyone else.

I found that some of the most popular sessions now there, they ignite. There's just very short, sharp, snappy type presentations, [00:18:00] and they've expanded that unto some that last more like 15 minutes or 20 minutes. But it's great. You can go in there and if one speaker's not to your liking or interest, the next one probably is. They also have what's called playgrounds. So these are set up by these professional learning network groups within ISTE, but that measure can get hands on. The robotics playgrounds there for people to actually go talk to the people and get hands on experience with [00:18:30] that. So the ISTE global collaboration panel that I'm a leader of, we had a playground there.

And the other one that's really popular are the poster sessions. So these are just poster sessions that are based on a theme. Again, teachers are at the table. You can go up and talk to them, see examples of student work and learning, ask the questions, et cetera. And there's always so much social networking opportunity, and I think for me, my biggest takeaway [00:19:00] is that network. Meeting more people, keeping with people and colleagues that I've got, sharing and then continuing the conversations afterwards.

Mel: And you can see through there, really, those connections that you're making through all of those things. I don't know. For the three of us, we've all been connected through our network. Yeah, we certainly know how powerful it is. So tell us about the award and how does that all come about.

Anne: Well, I was invited to a very special dinner, it was a ISTE dinner. I thought, " [00:19:30] Wow, that sounds good." And it was at one of the big hotels near the conference center. Unfortunately, my poster session that I was organizing got changed to lunchtime and it now clashed with this dinner. And I didn't know at the time I had a minder who was Tina [Fetakis 00:19:49] from South Australian Computer Society, or Educator's Society. I'm not sure what they call themselves. She was rather aghast that I may [00:20:00] not turn up to the dinner. She said, "Anne, great food, you get to meet more people, beautiful venue." I thought ... Okay, so I made sure there was some other people that kept that poster session going. And to my great surprise there were six of these awards given. My name actually got called out, so it was a very, very proud moment. I still really can't believe that that award is mine.

Mel: Well, we certainly can. I know over the last number [00:20:30] of years that we've seen the work that you've been doing. I know you're an inspiration to many people out there. If we could just add up the amount of teachers and the students that you've been able to inspire or support, or give ideas to over the years. I think they would certainly add up very quickly, so I can certainly see you getting that award. And congratulations on ... Certainly on behalf of DLTV and Andrew and I on receiving such a prestigious award. [00:21:00] Well done.

Anne: Thank you. And I think it's also an award for the network, isn't it really? Because it's a network that's helped me get where I've been able to do and be able to achieve what I can do. That's the beauty of technology allowing us to do that.

Andrew : Yeah, absolutely. I can certainly second all that, I think. My very first ever conference was an ICTVE conference, and I remember [00:21:30] specifically sitting next to some teacher who is from Hawkesdale P12 College and she was typing her notes from a session directly into global two, or what was called global teacher then. And I turned around, and I said, "What are you doing?" And she goes, "I'm using a blogging tool." I think he was sitting on the other side of me, and you then said, "Hi," and, "Yes, we've using this, and we've got this tool, and all of our students are using [00:22:00] it." And I went, "Oh, my goodness. What is this?" I think the rest is history, and I think pretty much that's how I met Mel as well.

Anne: That was amazing.

Mel: Fantastic. Well, thanks very much, Anne, for coming in and spending some time with us, and being able to share some of the different ways that you're connecting your students and sharing, of course, what it was like at [inaudible 00:22:25]. It was great to catch up.

Anne: Thank you.

Andrew : Yes, thanks, Anne. Thanks for coming [00:22:30] along. It's been fantastic.

Mel: Now, Andrew, we've got a few events coming up at DLTV soon that we should let people know about.

Andrew : Yes, we should.

Mel: 22nd of August we've got everybody dance [inaudible 00:22:40], which is a free animation and coding session. And there is a competition around the [inaudible 00:22:46] humanoid robot at the moment, if you're interested in that. On the 24th of August there'll be an online webinar around the introduction to the digital technology's curriculum from F to 10. And then on the 25th of August [00:23:00] we've got John Pearce in the DLTV office where he'll be looking at coding, makerspaces and the digital technology's curriculum. I do know that he'll have all of these toys with him, so it's a perfect opportunity to go and have a look at what's around. So a few events coming up in the next few weeks.

Andrew : Sounds fantastic. Yeah, and I highly recommend getting along to those sessions. Especially if you're thinking of purchasing some [00:23:30] toys for your school, for some devices that support your digital technology's learning, get along to that session with John Pearce, because it is quite amazing.

Mel: Right. Well, as always, thanks Andrew, and thanks again to Anne for joining us tonight. It's been a wonderful podcast.

Anne: And Mel. Can I interrupt? Sorry. The tool was Flipgrid, and I think I might have said Flipvideo. So Flipgrid is that great tool that everyone was talking about.

Mel: [00:24:00] Fantastic. We'll put the links to that in the show notes so that people can access that, so thanks, Anne.

Andrew : Yeah, we certainly will. Alright, well thanks everybody. We'll see you next time. Bye.

Mel: Thanks for listening.