

# Ronda Zelezny-Green

## Learning and Technology in an Era of Alternative Facts

For at least the past 30 years, researchers, academics, and governments have had to consider: What does learning mean in an increasingly connected society? In the 1980s and 1990s, this meant a society that was more connected through air travel, as the costs of doing so continued to fall. This entailed being able to explore new locales and encounter other ways of living, including through language and intercultural exchanges. In the noughties, learning meant that a society was more connected through internet technologies. The process of acquiring skills experienced a digital turn, where the integration of tools like Microsoft Office, use of web browsers like Internet Explorer, and platforms like blogs came into more common use. People could explore new locales and encounter other ways of living at a distance and at a cost even more affordable than air travel.

Today, the idea of connectedness has shifted to become more ephemeral and transient with the proliferation of mobile and Web 2.0 technologies, social media platforms, and video which has resulted in the production of user-generated content in addition to other traditional sources of knowledge. The emergence of this digital media has transformed connectedness – and learning – so substantially that the challenge is becoming not “how can we learn *more*?” but “how can we *cope* with the opportunity to learn more given all that is at our fingertips?”

In terms of the challenges that new technologies are presenting for learning in educational systems worldwide, one of the most critical to understand is how to manage and curate the volumes of information that have been created and made available in the digital age. According to the Foundation for Scientific and Industrial Research (SINTEF), by 2013 at least 90% of all the world's data had been created in the last two years. Since then, the amount of information being generated everyday has grown exponentially, and governments and schools are struggling to keep up with the latest developments. Still another challenge is the creation and distribution of fake news and alternative facts, which has already resulted in mass distortions in what learners understand about current events, history, and the values they hold in relation to others.

The meaning and nature of learning in the digital era of uncertainty in this respect is increasingly amorphous. But I would argue that one thing that should serve as a starting point for learning with technologies old and new, are the bonds that can be developed and maintained among people of different backgrounds, ages, and places. I think it is time that learning is not seen as an object of fixity from the perspective of what we need to know and acquire to graduate and earn qualifications, but rather as a process which truly is multi-dimensional and increasingly in need of agile approaches which help learners separate fact from fiction. Learning in the digital age means activating new ways of thinking and responding to uncertainty; thereby continuing to challenge what it means to be human.