

Stars in My Online Education World

A chronological directory of
open and online educators
I first encountered in the 2010s

Morten Flate Paulsen



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Foreword



The History is one of the three main works in Edvard Munch's aula decoration at the University of Oslo. When I visit the Kragerø viewpoint where Munch found inspiration to his painting History in 1910, I have dual sentiments. First as a young boy who learned some history from all the stars in this directory. Then as an old man who want to pass on my history to the younger generation. The photo is copied from www.uio.no/english/about/culture/art/aula/history.html

This is the final of the four books that present the Stars in My Online Education World from 1980 to 2020.

The three first books are available at:

www.nooa.no/Stars-in-My-Online-Education-World-1980-1990/

www.nooa.no/Stars-in-My-Online-Education-World-1990-2000/

www.nooa.no/Stars-in-My-Online-Education-World-2000-2010/

The books present my encounters with prominent people in the anecdotes included in [My Online Education World 1980-2020](#). The books unfold as chronological narratives, illustrating how these individuals influenced my professional growth and shaped the various stages of my work in online education.

You may look up individuals of special interest to you, read it as a developing narrative of prominent people I met, or use it as an alternative perspective on *My Online Education World*.

I crafted the directories from my personal anecdotes, archives, and imperfect recollections. It is based on my personal encounters with these Stars. So, it represents just a fraction of their impressive achievements.

The Stars I encountered in the 2010s are among hundreds of open and online educators included in the four decades I have chronicled. I know that there are countless others who deserve recognition: many I never met, some I don't remember, and a few I try to forget.

The idea to assemble this directory stemmed from the initial list of Fifty Pioneers in Open and Online Education I shared on Facebook in January 2024. It was based on [the first volume of my chronicle](#) and met with more interest than I expected. So, I decided to elaborate on, and expand on, the initial list.

I started searching, cutting, and pasting paragraphs with recurring names from the four volumes of my chronicle. I edited the entries to weave a cohesive narrative, presented them in a chronological order to tell a developing story, dug up additional information, and added some people to fill in gaps and make the story more interesting.

I deliberately adopted an informal style in crafting this directory, eschewing professional titles, nationalities, and affiliations that change over time. This approach aimed to maintain a personal and relatable tone throughout the narrative.

After a while, I realized that the directory would benefit from contemporary photos of the people. So, I approached colleagues from the 2010s and continued to search the internet and my personal archives, which led me to interesting exchanges, cheerful picture moments, and unforeseen obituaries.

Then, I realized that Mark Nichols had interviewed at least a dozen of my Stars in his podcast, *[Leaders & Legends of Online Learning](#)*. So, I also included links to these interviews.

If I have time and energy, I might be persuaded to compile my four Starbooks to one updated and more comprehensive volume.

Version 1, December 2024

Morten Flate Paulsen

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Introduction to the 2010s



The collage presents my final presentation as acting Secretary General of ICDE, the first EDEN Fellow meeting when I was President of EDEN, and my vision of NooA as an online school in the cloud.

In the 2010s, I was heavily involved with online education associations as President of the European Distance and E-learning Network (EDEN) and acting Secretary General of the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE). I also served as board member of NKI, Studiesenteret.no, and FuN in Norway.

The 2010s was a turbulent decade with many personal and professional challenges. The kids left home and blessed us with grandchildren. I also bought an old fisherman's house in Kragerø.

I thrived as President of EDEN, but found it increasingly difficult to support the new NKI strategies and the way the new management treated my colleagues. So, I quit my beloved NKI after 30 years of service and started an insecure new life as a senior entrepreneur. I hoped that my modest savings could fund the Nordic open online Academy (NooA) as a private online school, based on affordable ICT services in the cloud.

However, I realized that I needed some financial security and an academic environment. So, I landed two consecutive positions as a part time professor at two Norwegian university colleges. These two institutions were merged with the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). They represent just one of many examples of controversial mergers in Norway during the decade.

I was happy to become a board member of FuN after I completed my term as EDEN President at the EDEN 2013 conference in Oslo. I was optimistic about new opportunities when AOF bought the majority of my NooA shares in 2019, and yet stressed by a life changing challenge during the EDEN 2018 conference in Genova.

The technological development continued to change online education with the introduction of iPads, smart phones, Google Maps, MOOCs, electronic badges, nanolearning, learning analytics, cloud computing, and video conferencing systems like Zoom and Teams. I also had many exciting work-related travels to EU-countries, Mexico, U.S.A, and Canada, coupled

with frequent visits to the Baltic countries and exotic trips to Thailand, Tibet, Iceland, Greenland, and the Faroe Islands.

Ebba Marie Køber (FuN 2010)



Photo by Audun Engh of Ebba at the red carpet during the 70th Cannes Film Festival in 2017

Ebba Køber started working for FuN in 2009. I became aware of her when I read her 2010 [interview with George Siemens in Synkron](#).

Ebba deserves much credit for editing [27 quality issues of Synkron](#) so far, and I was fortunate to be on her editorial board from 2012 to 2016.

I met Ebba at many FuN events and some international conferences. She edited a [special English issue of Synkron for the EDEN 2013 conference in Oslo](#), which included an interview with Sugata Mitra.

In 2015, Ebba gave a micro guest lecture about flexible education in Norway for my master's students at NTNU – the Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

In 2016, I was elected to the board of FuN, which allowed me to learn more about the organisation and meet regularly with Ebba

and the other hard-working secretariat members: Torhild Slåtto, Kari Olstad, and Petter Kjendlie.

At the Lillehammer Life Long Learning conference in 2019, I was impressed by Ebba's efforts to present current matters on flexible education in Norway [in the English conference issue of Synkron](#), focusing on artificial intelligence, virtual mobility, and quality in online education.

In 2019, ICDE and FuN moved into shared offices in Oslo, whereupon I learned that Ebba had attended the Cannes Film Festival several times and that she outperformed me big time during the music quizzes at our social work gatherings.

George Siemens (EDEN 2010)



Private photo of George in Oslo

I attended George Siemens's keynote presentation "Knowledge Coherence in Fragmented Information Ecologies" at the EDEN 2010 conference in Valencia. I knew him as the Canadian who introduced connectivism in a 2004 blog post and refined it in his 2005 article *Connectivism: A Learning Theory for the Digital Age*. It was published in the *International Journal of Instructional Technology and Distance Learning* and the theory emphasized that internet and social networks provide new opportunities for learning.

In 2008, George delivered the online course *Connectivism and Connective Knowledge* with Stephen Downes. The course content explained connectivism and used some of the theory. The course was free to anyone and over 2,000 people around the world enrolled. The phrase *Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)* may have come from this course.

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Steve Wheeler summed up George's EDEN 2010 keynote in a [blog post](#):

Then George Siemens took the stage and gave us a breakneck speed tour of his connectivist ideas and how we might transform education into something that would influence the lives of students positively. He made some bold but much needed statements about conventional course provision, and its failure to tap into the needs of a new generation of learners who are firmly located within a world of digital media. It's not about knowledge acquisition anymore, he said, it's now about making useful connections - and that is the future of education.

I had read [Ebba Køber's interview with George in Synkron](#). So, it was a pleasure to be his personal guide when George visited Oslo in November 2010. On a tour to Holmenkollen, we talked about transparency, connectivism, and my theory of cooperative freedom and transparency in online education. A theory arguing that cooperative online learning happens in networks. A theory I introduced in the early 1990s and gradually evolved around my online education experiences.

My impression was that connectivism in many ways resembled my theory, but that I could learn from George's success with timing, focus, and productivity. Anyway, talking with George made me realize that my theory was based on the four words: Cooperation, flexibility, transparency, and celebration. Four words that have guided all my online education activities.

At the ICDE 2019 conference in Dublin, George gave the final keynote address reflecting on the conference theme, Transforming Lives and Societies, and related big questions, in the future of open and distance education.

 [Hear interview with George.](#)

Antonella Poce (EDEN 2010)



Photo of Antonella from profile on EDEN Nap members area

I first remember Antonella Poce from the EDEN 2010 conference in Valencia where she gave the presentation "*The impact of online learning use of the language. Analyses carried out at Roma Tre University*". Later, we met and shared experiences at several EDEN events.

EDEN celebrated its 25th anniversary during the annual conference at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics in June 2016. The Budapest University Chorus performed at the opening ceremony in the University Hall. EDEN President António Teixeira presented EDEN Fellow Awards to Antonella, Paul Bacsich, Torhild Slåtto, Elsebeth

Korsgaard Sorensen, and Belinda Tynan.

In 2018, I took the short trip with a coastal ferry from Amalfi to Salerno. Antonella had invited me to give the keynote presentation: "[Flexibility, cooperation, assessment, and quality in online education](#)". And present ICDE at the International SIRD Conference in Salerno. Organized by the Italian Society of Educational Research. There were more than 200 people in the audience and about 90% were women. At the end of the conference, about 10 delegates were awarded for outstanding contributions to the field. All award winners were

women. Since it was hard to follow the presentations in Italian, my thoughts drifted. Wondered if the female advancements in the education sector had come too far? If female dominance in many western schools deprived boys enough male role models? Maybe a reason why so many boys struggled in primary schools? And dropped out of secondary schools? And female students gradually outperformed males in many universities?

In 2017, Antonella followed Steve Wheeler as President of the EDEN's Network of Academics and Professionals (NAP) until Vlad Mihaescu took over in 2020. She has also been on the Management Board for EDEN Digital Learning Europe since 2017.

In 2020, Antonella was honoured as EDEN Senior Fellow along with Airina Volungeviciene and Josep M. Duart.

Alastair Creelman (EDEN 2010)



Photo of Alastair from his LinkedIn Profile

The first time I recall meeting Alastair Creelman was at the NADE 2010 conference in Horten, the small coastal town where I served one year in the navy. [The program was published in Synkron](#), and a recurring theme was open and social learning. Alastair gave a noteworthy presentation about open educational resources (OER) in higher education. My presentation, "Læring for åpen scene," discussed my transparent teaching experiences from Universidade Aberta. It was filmed by Jørgen Grubbe and is still [available on Vimeo](#). Arne Krokan discussed personal learning networks. Jane Hart and Grainne Conole gave keynote presentations in English titled, *The Social Learning Revolution* and *Towards new forms of open, social, and participatory learning*.

I started to follow [The corridor of uncertainty](#), the blog Alastair started in 2008 and applauded when it was nominated for the Baldic Award in 2011. His reflective 2023 post, [Looking back - inspirations and highlights](#), is one interesting example.

During the EDEN 2011 conference in Dublin, Alastair impressed me with his interesting Twitter messages and blog reflections. One of my favourite conference memories was from my address to her Excellency Mary McAleese, President of Ireland, after she received standing ovations from the 425 delegates. The ovation was featured in [Alastair's blog post](#):

*The standard of the keynote speakers at the conference was very high and all made excellent contributions but the strongest impression in my opinion was the address given by the **Irish President, Mary McAleese**.... Her address was as much a keynote speech as the other experts.*

From 2013, Alastair supported me and provided advice when I wanted to establish NooA as a Nordic open online academy.

During the EDEN 2013 conference in Oslo, Alastair wrote in the conference blog:

Norway's education minister Kristin Halvorsen opened up the conference by stressing the promise and potential of technology in education. She ticked nearly all the boxes the EDEN delegates are concerned with; the advantages of openness in education (OER and open access), the potential of MOOCs, the flipped classroom and the need for professional development for teachers.

During the EDEN 2016 Budapest, I stayed at the Ensana Thermal Hotel at the Margaret Island. I slipped out to visit the remarkable Budapest Cave Church when Alastair and Torhild Slåtto presented their Nordplus project on lurkers, which is documented in [Silent learners - a guide](#). At the cursor moment, I admitted that I often was a lurker in secondary school as my thoughts wandered off during boring classes. Even now, I now sometimes turn off my camera during winding webinars.

In 2017, Alastair was awarded the title of EDEN Fellow, and he was a member of the EDEN NAP Steering Committee from 2017 to 2020. At the EDEN 2022 conference in Tallinn, he received the Senior Fellow Award.

When I arrived at the ICDE 2019 Lifelong learning conference in Lillehammer 2019, I met Alastair in front of the fireplace as Neil Fassina, Asha Kanwar, Diana Laurillard, Caroline Seville, Tian Belawati, and George Ubachs walked by. We also mused about what our schools and colleges would look like if we could choose. Alastair later discussed these thoughts in his blog post, [How would you change education if you could choose?](#)

In 2023, Alastair provided this welcome recommendation of the anecdotes in [My Online Education World 1980-2020](#):

My first steps in the world of online education came around 2004 when I discovered that the field was not restricted to grassroots enthusiasts and low-budget projects. There were even professors of online education like Morten who I first heard at a conference in 2004 or 2005. The concept of an online educational institution was exciting and my perspective widened further as I discovered many leading researchers as well as professional networks like EDEN and ICDE. A fascinating study trip to Canada in 2006, including universities like Athabasca, opened up a whole new world of opportunities. Morten Flate Paulsen's anecdotes give an excellent overview of the development of online education and the trends, successes and challenges over the years.

Ebba Ossiannilsson (ICDE 2010)



Photo of Ebba from her profile on EDEN Nap members area

My first digital trace of Ebba Ossiannilsson is her Facebook greeting at my birthday in 2010. At that time, I knew her as an active participant at events organized by the three Scandinavian associations of distance education, Sverd, Fluid, and FuN.

In May 2014, we gathered around the bonfire in the bright Norwegian summer night; fourteen Nordic educators attending a NooA workshop at the Hasselholmen islet close to Kragerø. Ebba led the morning yoga sessions and was a passenger on Rune Riismøller's rowing expedition to town. She also initiated our work with the Kragerø Open Online Education Declaration. Among the other social highlights were Astrid de Mora's boat trips and seafood lunch, Bjørn Ekelund's diversity icebreaker, Kristin Vigander's flora presentation, Katrine Gjærum's video

Sessions, Edgar Valdmanis's LinkedIn advice, and Jørn Bue Olsen's bass song performance.

At the EDEN 2014 conference in Zagreb, I congratulated Ebba as an EDEN Fellow during a warm welcome reception in the botanical garden. Later, she was on the EDEN Executive

committee from 2015 to 2021 and received the Senior Fellow Award at the EDEN 2022 conference in Tallinn.

I learned to know Ebba as a very engaged and prolific scholar, with a broad range of interest and frequent posts in social media. She was a proud ambassador and volunteer guide of her hometown, Lund, in Sweden, offering daily Good Morning posts on Facebook with photos of various locations in Lund.

Based on my recommendation, Ebba was co-opted to the ICDE Board when Hazel Rymer withdrew from the position in 2019. At ICDE, she has been very active in the OER Advocacy Committee, the Quality Network, and the Global Advocacy Campaign.

In July 2023, I went to Jakarta with Ebba and KC Lee to conduct a quality review of Universitas Terbuka (UT) for ICDE. A mega university with 39 regional offices, UT had 22,076 tutors and 439,222 students. Our hosts treated us as royals, welcoming us with huge banners displaying our names and photos. We had an extremely interesting week with a tight agenda, exquisite hospitality, exotic cultural experiences, and delicious food, which pleased Ebba as a devoted vegetarian. We enjoyed the open and frank discussions about distance and online education services with top management, deans, senior executives, staff, students, and alumni students. We had interesting conversations with Ojat Darajat, Tian Belawati, Atwi Suparman, Daryono Daryono, Fauzy Rahman Kosasih, Lidwina Triyatmojo, Dewi Padmo, and our excellent student hosts, Trixie and Bijak.

Before the ICDE 2023 World Conference in Costa Rica, I had some memorable excursions together with Ebba. We visited the rain forest, the Irazu Vulcano, and Parque Nacional Manuel Antonio, and swam in the Pacific Ocean, which made me realize that Ebba is not comfortable with heights, but fully capable of swimming in the Pacific Ocean with her summer dress on.



[Hear interview with Ebba.](#)

Gráinne Conole (EDEN 2010)



Photo of Gráinne from her LinkedIn profile

The first memories I have of Gráinne Conole are from Mexico in October 2010 where I gave the opening keynote and a workshop at the *Aprenred V* conference on Web Citizenship at the University of Guadalajara. The title of my presentation and workshop was [Cooperative freedom, transparency, and student profiles in online education](#).

I remember Efrén de la Mora's supportive workshop facilitation and the private dinner with the local organizers. The two other international speakers were Gráinne and Yolanda Gayol. I found it interesting to hear about Yolanda's experiences with training the trainers to use Moodle. Thinking back at the approaching challenges at NKI, though, I should have paid much more attention to Gráinne's research on e-learning and organizational change. At least Gráinne helped me pronounce her Irish name.

At the EDEN 2010 Research Workshop in Budapest, I chaired the first plenary session with Andras Benedek's opening address and Gráinne's keynote, *Connecting Research with Policy and Practice*. The other keynote speakers in the session were Gilly Salmon and Olaf Zawacki-Richter. I also took part in a plenary panel discussing with Gráinne, Rory McGreal,

Demetrios Sampson, and Don Olcott Jr. about *Quality Issues for Open Educational Resources*.

Soon after, Gráinne gave the keynote presentation, *Towards new forms of open, social and participatory learning*, at the Norwegian Association for Distance Education's November conference. Jane Hart talked about The Social Learning Revolution, and I gave the Norwegian presentation, [Læring for åpen scene](#). Gráinne was kind enough to spend an extra day in Oslo to give a presentation about learning design at our NKI office. It made a lasting impression on me, since she argued that it was possible to develop an online course in just one day.

In 2011, at EDEN's 20th anniversary conference in Dublin, I handed over diplomas to representatives of the eight institutions that had been loyal members since the start. Gráinne received the diploma on behalf of the UK Open University.

At the EDEN 2012 conference in Porto, I chaired the Annual General Meeting and presented the president's report. During the meeting, I welcomed Gráinne, Lisa-Marie Blashcke, and Fabio Nascimbieni as newly elected EC members and thanked the three retiring EC members, Andrea Karpati, Tapio Koskinen, and Gilly Salmon.

At the EDEN 2012 Workshop in Leuven, I led the opening plenary. Ludo Melis welcomed the participants to the university. Wim Van Petegem introduced the conference theme. Gráinne talked about *Teaching as a Design Science: Innovations with Pedagogies and Technologies*.

At the EDEN 2013 conference in Oslo, I greeted the delegates with the familiar dear colleagues and friends of EDEN before I presented the EDEN Fellow Awards to Gráinne along with Ilse Op de Beeck, Bill McNeill, Ari-Matti Auvinen, Thomas Kretschmer, and Sonia Hetzner. Finally, I handed out the Senior Fellow Award to Sofoklis Sotiriou.

Maxim Jean-Louis (ICDE 2011)



Photo of Maxim from his LinkedIn profile

In 2011, Maxim Jean-Louis visited NKI with Tony Bates during a trip to Oslo. I still have fond memories from our dinner conversation at a local pizza restaurant where I learned that Maxim was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, before he immigrated to Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. I also realized that he also had worked for Athabasca University before he started at Contact North in 1996. A network that made it possible for residents in rural and remote Ontario to access education and training without leaving their communities.

I met Maxim again in 2013 at the ICDE SCOP conference in Lisbon where I understood that he was an energetic, social, and

positive man, who obviously was excellent at networking.

In January 2014, Maxim started his three-year term as member of the ICDE Executive Committee with Tian Belawati, Mandla Makhanya, Marta Mena, Alan Tait, and Yang Zhijian. When I later asked him about his time on the committee, he told me that they focused on strategy work, increased membership and added value for the members.

Later in 2014, we sat next to each other at an ICDE dinner I was invited to at the Oslo Holmenkollen Park hotel, concluding an ICDE executive meeting attached to an international workshop on policy for Open Educational Resources (OER) and less used languages – such as Norwegian. Nine partners from eight countries summed up results from the [LangOER project](#) – in English. I enjoyed the interesting dinner conversation with Maxim and learned that Contact North at the time was Ontario’s distance education and training network. It served more than 600 small, rural, remote, Aboriginal, and Francophone communities through 112 local online learning centres. I laughed when the sommelier retorted “MAGNUM” when Maxim asked which wine he would recommend. I also wondered if Maxim was interested in hosting an ICDE conference in Ontario.

Maxim was conference chair when Contact North organized and hosted the ICDE 2017 World Conference on Online Learning at the Sheraton Centre in Toronto. Unfortunately, I did not attend the conference, but when I started working as Secretary General of ICDE in 2019, I had several exchanges with Maxim about experiences from the Toronto conference and received valuable advice for the ICDE 2019 conference in Dublin.

When I recently asked why Contact North had sponsored several EDEN and ICDE conferences, Maxim replied that they wanted to build bridges across the Atlantic. He also explained that the pandemics transformed Contact North from a network of physical centres in Ontario to a fully virtual organisation. He added that they used the sponsorships to signal the vitality of the post pandemic organisation.

After the pandemic, Contact North developed a [Resource Hub for AI in Higher Education](#) and the four AI based digital assistants, [AI Tutor Pro](#), [AI Teaching Assistant Pro](#), [AI Pathfinder Pro](#), and [AI Trades Explorer Pro](#).

Maxim travelled with a prominent delegation of Contact North affiliates to the ICDE conferences in Dublin (2019) and Costa Rica (2023), which allowed me to meet him along with John Daniel, Tony Bates, Robert Martellacci, and Stephen Murgatroyd.

Now, Contact North provides information about trends, best practices, training opportunities, and teaching resources in online and distance learning through its bilingual newsletter, *Online Learning News*, and [teachonline.ca](#). These services reach much further than Ontario. I follow the newsletter with interest and appreciate that Contact North includes several of my publications in their list of [Must-Read Books on Online Learning](#).

I recently met Maxim at the EDEN 2024 conference in Graz where he showed genuine interest for my kids, and after the closing ceremony he said, “See you at EDEN 2025 in Bologna.”

Gard Titlestad (ICDE 2011)



Photo of Gard from
<https://psummit2017.wordpress.com/>

My archives show that I first encountered Gard Titlestad in 2003 when the Norwegian Computer Society (DND) celebrated its 50th anniversary. Gard represented the Ministry of Trade and Industry. The conference programme also included Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik, Crown Prince Haakon, and DND President Truls Berg. The conference highlight was still the Rosing Awards, which are perceived as the national Oscar Awards for the ICT community in Norway, and named after the Norwegian ICT pioneer, Fredrik Rosing Bull, who is known for his work on improved punch card machines.

It was an honour to receive the Rosing Competency Award for 2003 on behalf of NKI. It was also a memorable pleasure to receive the Rosing Statuette along with a hug from the popular TV host, Hilde Hummelvoll, who was the conferencier, in front of the eminent piano entertainer, Ingrid Bjørnov.

I later met Gard several times when he became secretary general of ICDE from 2011, until I took over the position in 2018. In many of these encounters, he accentuated his valuable experiences as a bureaucrat working for the Norwegian ministry, the Nordic Council of Ministers, and the Norwegian EU-delegation to Brussels; experiences that ICDE could benefit from.

At the EDEN 2012 conference in Porto, we introduced the EDEN YouTube channel. So, Antonio Teixeira, Maria Joao, Eva Suba, and Livia Turzo worked with a camera-team from Universidade Aberta to make a [conference video](#) and a series of video interviews at the conference. Among the interviewed people were [Gard](#), [Antonio Teixeira](#), [Sally Reynolds](#), and [myself](#).

At the EDEN 2015 conference in Barcelona, the conference dinner and Mediterranean jazz performance was organised in the former Royal Palace of Pedralbes, with its museums and beautiful gardens. I spent much of the evening listening to Gard's detailed monologues about his work achievements before and after he took over as secretary general of ICDE after Carl Holmberg in 2011. In hindsight, I probably should have paid more attention to these experiences.

In 2017, Gard invited me to the office that ICDE shared with FUN at Lilleaker in Oslo. ICDE President Mandla Makhanya joined us via Zoom from UNISA in South Africa when Helmut Heyer and I formally took over as Chair and Vice Chair of ICDE's Board of Trustees, after David Sewart, former Director of Student Services at the Open University in UK and Svein O Haaland, former Rector of Lillehammer University College in Norway. Our task was to monitor the conduct of the Secretary General and the members of the Executive Committee, together with board members from three continents. Tian Belawati, Stavros Xanthopoulos, and Meg Benke. As a Norwegian, I had a special obligation to follow ICDE's operation, as a company supported by the Norwegian government and registered in Norway.

In January 2018, I attended my first ICDE Executive Committee meeting at the Lysebu Conference Centre in Oslo. It was close to Nordmarka, my childhood's precious winter sport refuge, where we had to ski more than 300 km in one season to get the children's gold badge in cross country skiing. Gard and Torunn Gjelsvik represented the ICDE Secretariat; Helmut Hoyer and I represented the Board of Trustees. We met the new ICDE Board as Belinda Tynan was constituted President, and met Neil Fassina and Hyzel Rymer for the first time.

We said hello to Tolly Mbvette as he joined in via video from Tanzania, and realized that Gard had arranged a horse sleigh surprise when we heard the jingle bells. The sleigh ride was a memorable and cold experience, with beautiful views over Oslo in a frozen winter wonderland. Maybe it wasn't quite as much appreciated by people living closer to the equator. At least, I came home with a better understanding of the geographical and cultural challenges ICDE faced as a truly global organization, and new insight for the Board of Trustees' appraisal report.

During the EDEN 2018 conference in Genova, Helmut Hoyer called me several times as Chair of the ICDE Board of Trustees. He asked if I could take over as Acting Secretary General until ICDE could find a new permanent Secretary General, since Gard was about to retire.

The table below shows ICDE World Conferences organised during Gard's period as Secretary General.

Year	Hosted by	Location
2017	Contact North	Toronto, Canada
2015	The University of South Africa (UNISA)	Sun City, South Africa
2013	Tianjin Open University	Tianjin, China
2011	Indonesia Open University (Universitas Terbuka)	Bali, Indonesia

Lars Utstøl (Studiesenteret.no 2011)



Photo from Lars' LinkedIn profile

In March 2011, I flew to Malaga and spent one night in Ronda. Ronda is renowned for its cliff-side location and the deep Guadalquivir River chasm that divides the town. Lars Utstøl, CEO of Studieseteret.no, had invited me to give a presentation about the future of local study centres. Studiesenteret.no. was the hub in a network of study centres, linking 103 municipalities and seven university colleges in Norway, financed by the member municipalities, university colleges, and Norwegian authorities. One month later, Lars invited me, Michael G. Moore, and Will Diehl to lobby for Studiesenteret in the Norwegian Parliament.

Soon after, we signed an agreement, which stated that Studiesenteret should promote and sell NKI's online courses, and that the local study centres should supported NKI's local online students. I accepted to sit on the board of Studiesenteret from 2011 to 2015. I still have fond memories of my visit to Studiesenteret's headquarter in June 2014. Lars picked me up at the Evenes Airport and drove me through the magnificent northern landscape to have a board meeting with Mayor Ivar Prestbakmo in the Sjøvegan Municipality.

Lars and Astrid Høgmo were rural entrepreneurs and zealots, who started Studiesenteret together. They taught me a lot about challenges and opportunities for rural study centres: how they built a national structure for tertiary education and lifelong learning; and struggled with the finances, finally succeeded in attracting significant revenue from innovation and development projects.

In 2017, I learned that Studierenteret.no was acquired by the Oslo Met University, after an approval by the Ministry of Education and Research, and that Astrid Høgmo was planning to follow in my steps as a doctoral student at Penn State University.

Fredric (Fred) Michael Litto (ICDE 2011)



Photo of Fred from his LinkedIn profile

I first met Fred Litto in 2011 at a social ICDE gathering in Oslo, and soon realized that we had several common interests. I spoke enthusiastically about my love for Brazil, and I understood he had fond memories from visiting colleagues and family in Norway. I learned that he was born in New York City, but moved to Brazil as an adult, where he founded *Escola do Futuro* as a research laboratory at the University of São Paulo in 1989. He headed the institution until 2006, and contributed to the advancement of digital education in Brazil and worldwide.

In 1995, Fred was elected Founding President of the Brazilian Association for Distance Education (ABED) and continued as president until 2023.

Fred first served on the ICDE Executive Committee from 2008 to 2012, and later at the ICDE Board of Trustees (BoT) from 2013 to 2016. He continued to be a central contact in the ICDE community when I later served on the BoT and as secretary general.

We continued to have occasional online exchanges until the early 2020s. At the end of a memorable three-week family visit to Brazil, it was with sorrow that I received several social media messages stating that Fred passed away on October 24, 2024.

Mark Brown (ICDE 2011)



Photo of Mark from ICDE 2019 annual report

I first met Mark at the EDEN 2011 conference in Dublin when he was still living in New Zealand. I soon realized that he was thinking and speaking quicker than most people I know. I gradually became more impressed by his contributions to EDEN and ICDE activities, especially when I realized that these were only two of the associations that he was engaged in.

At the EDEN 2016 Conference in Budapest, Torunn Gjelsvik introduced ICDE's new Global Doctoral Consortium. I agreed to join Mark and Martin Weller in its reference group. Earlier in the year, Mark was co-opted to serve on the EDEN Executive Committee and later the Management Board for EDEN Digital Learning Europe.

In 2019, at Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU), ICDE organized a session at the international conference entitled, "Research and Innovation for a Digital Society." Before the conference started, Caroline Seville and I met with the ICDE presenters for a snack. Mark presented "*Mega Trends on the Horizon – From AI/ blockchain/ alternative credentials to what the future will hold.*" Paul Stacey, from the Open Education Consortium, talked about "*Open Education: Where are we now? What next?*" My keynote presentation was titled, "*Innovations in online education: Some pioneering developments and current opportunities.*" This presentation motivated me to write the first anecdotes in My Online Education World.

Wesley Teter moderated our panel discussion on “*Being Open about Open Education: Building OER repositories the challenges faced and the solutions to overcome.*” The distinguished panellists were Chularat Tanprasert, Zhang Xiangyang, Jean-Marc Meunier, and Tian Belawati.

I have attended ICDE world conferences on four continents, but the highlight was, without comparison, the Dublin conference in 2019. It was my first and only as Secretary General, and a unique experience to be in the centre of all the activity together with my ICDE colleagues, Mark, and Mairéad Mhichíl, who represented the National Institute for Digital Learning (NIDL) at the Dublin City University (DCU). I’m still impressed by Mark’s energy, capacity, curiosity, and friendliness as conference chair.

Mark also hosted the EDEN 2023 conference at DCU St Patricks Campus in Dublin, together with an Orna Farrell. He was also listed as one of the authors in nine of the papers presented at the conference. The one I remember best is, “Quality Assurance of Micro-Credentials: An International Review of Current Practices,” which he gave together with EDEN President Josep M. Duart.

At the ICDE 2023 conference in Costa Rica, I attended several sessions where Mark talked about micro-credentials, a topic he had gained expertise on through the European Commission’s expert group and the EU-funded MicroCredX project.

As I wrote this in September 2024, I received the news that [the Dutch Open Universiteit awarded Mark with a honorary doctorate as a pioneer in digital education.](#)

 [Hear interview with Mark.](#)

Arne Krokan (NooA 2012)



Photo of Arne from www.krokan.com/arne/om/

I first met Arne Krokan at a 2010 conference arranged by the Norwegian Association for Distance Education in Horten. Arne’s keynote presentation, “From classroom to personal learning networks,” was followed by Jane Hart’s, “The social learning revolution,” and Grainee Canole’s, “Towards new forms of open, social and participatory learning.”

I started to follow Arne in social media and realised that he was a prolific writer with many interesting reflections and initiatives on education.

In 2012, the University Journal at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) featured Arne as a Norwegian MOOC pioneer (www.universitetsavisa.no/campus/ntnu-professor-blir-norsk-mooc-pioner/127535). In 2013, he offered Norway’s first MOOC through NTNU. Nearly thousand people took part in the course, which focused on technological change and social development.

In 2013, I considered engaging Arne on the NooA board. We discussed business ideas and if he could have a role in the development of NooA. However, we both realised that he was too busy with his MOOC engagements.

In June 2013, Norway appointed a government commission to examine the potential of MOOCs. As far as I know, Norway was the first country to do so. Arne was among the 11 commission members, along with my other acquaintances, Mathis Bongo, June Breivik, Ola

Erstad, Eva Gjerdrum, and Ingrid Melve. Berit Kjeldstad was chair of the commission and Berit Johnsen was chair of the secretariat. The official report, [NOU 2014: 5. MOOC for Norway. New digital learning methods in higher education](#), was released in June 2014 and the commission stated that it was “hairy.” Others probably looked at it as hair in the soup. The report suggested governmental measures that required NOK 130-380 (Euro 16-48) million in yearly investments.

In 2014, Arne introduced his second MOOC, smart learning (“smart læring”). It attracted several thousand participants, and was based on his Norwegian book on smart learning and how ICT and social media change learning. I realised that his MOOCs were strongly influenced by George Siemens and connectivism, where resources in networks were linked into learning paths and various forms of practice.

I was, however, ambivalent about MOOCs. I welcomed a debate about all good online education initiatives and how we could improve future online education. But I feared a wave of unsustainable offers with inferior student support: more focus on individual courses than complete programs and degrees, and less emphasis on the flexibility, systems, and efficiency provided by open universities and online schools.

I was also worried that more governmental funding would be steered towards traditional universities, making it harder for private online schools to compete.

At the present moment, many Norwegians have experiences with MOOCs, often from international MOOC platforms. such as Coursera, Khan Academy, edX, Udacity, FutureLearn, and Udemy. So, MOOCs have increased globalisation of online courses. Yet there are few MOOCs available from Norwegian providers and they are invisible in university strategies. Some have been successful; just a few have been sustainable.

Anyway, much credit should go to the Norwegian MOOC pioneers and enthusiasts, Arne Krokan, Magnus Nohr, and Svend Andreas Horgen.

Martin Dougiamas (Moodle 2012)



Private photo of Martin and the author at the 2015 MoodleMoot in Malmö

I headed the development of two Norwegian learning management systems, EKKO and SESAM, before I went “down under.” So, in hindsight, I regret that we did not visit Curtin University in Perth during our 2002 traveling seminar in Australia, because I had heard that Martin Dougiamas was about to release Moodle 1.0 as an open-source learning management system.

Later, I learned that the UK Open University started a three-year project implementing Moodle in 2005. Then, in 2007, I realized that Moodle already had become a much used LMS when we wrote the report, [The Provision of E-learning in the European Union](#), the first out of four reports in the European Megatrends project. In 2009 and 2010, I had first-hand Moodle experiences as a teacher of online courses at Universidade Aberta in Portugal.

Since NKI decided to drop SESAM, I attended my first MoodleMoot in Dublin in 2012. There, I met Moodle guru, Gavin Henrick, and saw Martin for the first time as he gave a pep talk presentation through a video conference. I was fascinated by the open source approach and the Moodle community. So, I decided to become a certified Moodle Course Creator, and

found a suitable online course provided by HRDNZ (Human Resource Development International Limited) in New Zealand, which was taught by Maryel Mendiola in Mexico.

When I established the Nordic open online Academy (NooA) in 2012, I installed a Moodle server on my PC, and designed the first online courses and services in Moodle. With the help of Alf Martin Johnsen and his company, eFaktor, NooA soon had a Moodle platform in the sky. But it took more time to configure the system, and set up the tools and services, because I wanted it to be based on my theory of cooperative freedom and transparency. I also wanted it to support continuous enrolment, individual pacing, and online payment.

In 2015, the first MoodleMoot in Scandinavia was organized by Netsapiens and eFaktor at the High Court conference centre in Malmö. There, it was interesting and useful to spend two days with Martin and Gavin Henrick, and to get their feedback on my presentation, titled *Moodle experiences from Campus NooA – the Nordic open online Academy*.

It was a welcome opportunity to explain how we strove to use Moodle to support individual start-up and progress. But also, it was a chance to point out some of the Moodle shortcomings, as compared to SESAM. My main concern was how we could best set up Moodle to effectively handle individual start-up and progression. So, high on my Moodle wish list at the time were:

- student profiles that showed their course expiration dates,
- teacher response barometer to improve response time,
- individual planning and follow-up functionality to improve course completion rates,
- more and better school administration tools and reports, and
- list of submitted assignments not handled by teachers.

I returned home from Malmö with better knowledge about how we could use CSS styling, learning analytics, open badges, and Big Blue Button webinars in NooA's Moodle platform.

In 2014, I attended MoodleMoot in Barcelona at the *Escola Superior de Música de Catalunya (ESMUC)* and earned one of my very first electronic badges for attending a conference. I remember meeting Gavin Henric again at Hotel Condado for dinner. I also remember a presentation about the status and roadmap for the Moodle Mobile app by Juan Leyva Delgado.

I later heard several inspiring online presentations Martin gave at international conferences and met him in person at the ICDE 2018 Open Education Leadership Summit in Paris.

At the ICDE 2023 conference in Costa Rica, I attended Martin's remote keynote presentation, "How we can use AI to make education amazing." His futuristic and optimistic speech argued that generative AI will impact our world even more than the Internet, and Martin also presented the new Open EdTech association that he founded to promote and support open-source companies in education.

Nancy Pyrini (ICICTE 2013)



Photo of Nancy from her LinkedIn profile

Nancy Pyrini invited me to give a keynote at the International Conference on Information Communication Technologies ([ICICTE](#)) at the fashionable Rhodes Palace Hotel in July 2012. The Norwegian Airline had just installed Wi-Fi aboard its newest aircrafts. So, approaching Rhodes, I addressed my very first airborne e-mail to Nancy Pyrini, informing her that I soon arrived with my family.

During the stay, I learned that Nancy founded the ICICTE conference in 2000. She continued to coordinate it as a yearly international event in Greece and has recently invited me to the 25th ICICTE conference at the Minoa Palace Resort in Crete.

One hundred participants from more than thirty countries could choose between eighty presentations. The [conference papers](#) are still available from the conference website. Russel Stannard gave an instructive keynote titled, “[Feedback using Screen Capture.](#)” in which he focused on his experiences with Jing and www.teachertrainingvideos.com. My keynote was titled, “[Cooperative Freedom and Transparency in Online Education.](#)”

It was nice to meet EDEN colleagues, Airina Volungevičienė and Costas Tsolakidis, at the conference. Airina’s paper was titled *Measuring Conscious Use of Open Content in Competence-Based Education*. Costas was on the steering committee and arranged a memorable garden party at his house. Other new and interesting acquaintances were the Swedish artist, Marie Louise Kold, and Maltese media and communication scholar, Ġorġ Mallia, who loves to draw cartoons and portraits.

The first evening conference dinner was memorable. The security was strict, as we expected a special guest. I had the pleasure of sitting next to him. I learned that he had lived in Sweden and understood quite a bit Norwegian. We talked about our kids and discussed several technology and education issues. I was really impressed by his broad overview and in-depth knowledge of our field.

The next day, the special guest used his iPad actively for note taking during the conference, before he as the recent Greek Prime Minister and current President of Socialist International was honoured with an ICICTE award for his contributions to the field of education. [A video and the full text of George Papandreou’s conference speech is available at the conference website.](#)

Finally, Nancy Pyrini, George Sarrigeorgiou, and their team topped the conference off with an excellent social programme. This included a boat trip to the beautiful village of Lindos, and a guided tour in the old town of Rhodes. The programme finished with a Greek dinner and night of dancing.

My daughter is still embarrassed of my Greek dancing.

Belinda Tynan (ICDE 2013)



Photo of Belinda received via e-mail

I first met Belinda Tynan at the ICDE SCOP 2013 conference in Lisbon when she was Pro Vice-Chancellor for Learning, Teaching, and Innovation at the Open University UK. We were welcomed by UAb Rector, Paulo Dias, ICDE President, Tian Belawati, and EDEN President, António Teixeira. Belinda was among the prominent speakers and session chairs, along with Mandla S. Makhanya and Tian Belawati. ICDE celebrities I met for the first time, and people I had no idea would soon become so important for me.

At the EDEN 2015 conference in Barcelona, the conference hashtag #EDEN15 generated over 1400 tweets the first day. I talked with Belinda, who gave a keynote with Marci Powell and Darcy Hardy, titled “From the classroom to the boardroom.” The other keynote presenters were Martin Weller (The Battle for Open), Alan Tait (From Distance Learning to Open Education: A Changing Landscape), and Albert Sangrà (Expanding Learning Opportunities for the Last 25 Years).

Belinda had just moved to Melbourne, Australia, when the Budapest University Chorus performed at the opening ceremony in the University Hall at EDEN 2016 in Budapest. There, EDEN President António Teixeira presented EDEN Fellow Awards to Belinda, along with Paul Bacsich, Antonella Poce, Torhild Slåtto, and Elsebeth Korsgaard Sorensen.

I was present when Belinda was constituted President of ICDE after Mandla Makhanya, at the 2018 board meeting in Oslo. Gard Titlestad and Torunn Gjelsvik represented the ICDE Secretariat. Helmut Hoyer and I the Board of Trustees. I met the new ICDE Board members, Neil Fassina and Hyzel Rymer, for the first time, and said hello to Tolly Mbvette as he joined in via video from Tanzania. In the evening, Gard had arranged a memorable horse sleigh ride with beautiful views over Oslo in a frozen winter wonderland; a very cold experience for Belinda, who obviously preferred Australian temperatures.

During the opening session at the 2018 Open Education Leadership Summit in Paris, I had started working as acting Secretary General for ICDE, welcoming about two hundred leaders and senior managers from 50 countries, and introducing distinguished colleagues from the conference organizers: Belinda, as ICDE President, along with OEC President, Sophie Touzé, strategic counsel for digitalisation at MESRI, Mehdi Gharsallah, and chief digital officer at Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers (CNAM), Thierry Koscielniak. The cocktail dinner was located at Musée des Arts et Métiers. CNAM’s Museum of Arts and Crafts, which displayed an original version of the Foucault pendulum, the original model of the Statue of Liberty, and Blaise Pascal's first mechanical calculator. It was an interesting venue, well suited for social networking, where I was reminded that the French football team won the 2018 world championship in Russia, and that Belinda had keen interest in taking her mobile phone on photo safaris in search of graffiti and street art.

The ICDE 2019 conference in Dublin started with the ICDE Global Presidents’ Summit (GPS) at the DCU St Patrick’s Campus. It was a unique forum for ICDE Presidents, Vice-Chancellors, Principles, and Rectors to discuss learning in globally relevant topics. As usual, I was impressed by Belinda and Neil Fassina, who planned, facilitated, and summarized the summit. Before the GPS dinner, we had a short ICDE Executive Committee meeting, which was memorable and special because it was the last for me as acting Secretary General, for Belinda as President, and for Asha Kanwar and Tolly Mbvette as members of the EC. The three incoming EC members were Som Naidu, Mark Nichols, and Carlos Alberto P de

Oliveira. Neil Fassina was chosen to take over as President after Belinda. Belinda gave me a warm pair of socks as a symbolic thank you, since my period as Secretary General of ICDE was now completed.

Tian Belawati (ICDE 2013)



Photo of Belinda from ICDE 2018 annual report

I first remember Tian Belawati from the ICDE SCOP 2013 conference in Lisbon, one year after she started her four-year term as President of ICDE. She welcomed us along with UAb Rector, Paulo Dias, and EDEN President, António Teixeira. Tian was also among the prominent speakers and session chairs, along with Alan Tait, Tony Bates, and António Teixeira, as well as ICDE celebrities I met for the first time: Mandla S. Makhanya and Belinda Tynan, people I had no idea would soon become so important to me.

In 2017, I joined the ICDE Board of Trustees as Helmut Hoyer's Vice Chair. The other members were Tian, Stavros Xanthopoulos, and Meg Benke. Our task was to monitor the conduct of the Secretary General and the members of the Executive Committee. My special obligation was to monitor ICDE's operation as a company supported by the Norwegian government and registered in Norway. In that position, I appreciated Tian's advice as a former ICDE President and board member.

At the ICDE 2019 Lillehammer Life Long Learning conference, I appreciated informal conversations with Tian about ICDE and our magic moments from Hunderfossen Winter Park, where we visited the Snow Hotel, Ice Bar, Ice Cathedral, and the Fairy-tale Restaurant, all of which were close to the Olympic Hafjell Ski Arena. I also remember greeting the Norwegian Prime Minister, Erna Solberg, and Caroline Seville's video interviews with prominent delegates. I further recall ICDE President and conference chair, Neil Fassina's, eloquent introductions to panels and keynote presentations, as well as Asha Kanwar's and Diana Laurillard's keynotes.

In 2019, I had some memorable days together with Tian in Bangkok when ICDE organised one of the sessions at a conference about research and innovation at the Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU). Wesley Teter moderated the ICDE panel discussion on "Being open about open education: Building OER repositories the challenges faced and the solutions to overcome." Tian was among the distinguished panellists, along with Chularat Tanprasert, Zhang Xiangyang, and Jean-Marc Meunier. My keynote presentation was titled "Innovations in online education: Some pioneering developments and current opportunities." This presentation motivated me to write the first anecdotes in *My Online Education World*.

At the ICDE 2019 conference in Dublin, I greeted Tian and Ojat Darajat after I handed over the Prize for Lifelong Contribution to Atwi Suparman, who was President of Universitas Terbuka from 2001 to 2009. Tian succeeded him and handed over the Presidency to Ojat Darajat in 2017.

In July 2023, I went to Jakarta with Ebba Ossiannilsson and KC Lee to conduct a quality review of Universitas Terbuka for ICDE. There, I had good conversations with the three presidents again and wondered how many western universities could foster three consecutive Rectors who could collaborate so well. We learned that Universitas Terbuka was a mega

university with 39 regional offices, 22,076 tutors, and 439,222 students. Our hosts treated us as royals, and welcomed us with huge banners displaying our names and photos. We had an extremely interesting week with a tight agenda, exquisite hospitality, exotic cultural experiences, and delicious food. I also recall interesting encounters with Daryono Daryono, Fauzy Rahman Kosasih, Lidwina Triyatmojo, Dewi Padmo, and our excellent student hosts, Trixie and Bijak.

During the stay, Tian invited me, Ebba Ossiannilsson, and KC Lee for lunch in Jakarta, where Tian touched upon several of her favourite subjects: UT, ICDE, good food, exotic travels, and grandchildren.



[Hear interview with Tian.](#)

Sandra Kučina Softić (EDEN 2013)



Photo of Sandra from her LinkedIn profile

I first met Sandra Kučina Softić at the EDEN 2013 conference in Oslo when she was elected member of the Executive Committee and Antonio Teixeira followed me as President of EDEN.

Sandra was instrumental to the success of the EDEN 2014 conference in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia. The conference was located at the HYPO Congress Centre and the SRCE–University of Zagreb University Computing Centre. The theme was “E-learning at work and the workplace: from education to employment and meaningful work with ICTs,” and the conference was opened by the Croatian president, Ivo Josipović.

I focused on the many interesting presentations, including ones on MOOCs and OERs, Jim Devine’s keynote about “*Agile responses to Ireland’s job crisis*,” Terry Anderson and Olaf Zawacki-Richter’s discussion about a research agenda for online distance education, and the closing session that Sandra chaired.

I knew that Croatia was a young nation that declared its independence in 1991, and then won its war of independence against the Serb-controlled Yugoslav People's Army in 1995. I prolonged the stay in Croatia with a few days of vacation in Split. I enjoyed the charming town with the Diocletian’s Palace, nice beaches, and boat trips to nearby islands in the Adriatic Sea. However, I regretted booking a cheap apartment and learned one lesson: don’t leave clothes, towels, plates, glasses, or bottles on the balcony if you live close to a hospital heliport.

At the EDEN 2016 conference in Budapest, Sandra was promoted to EDEN Vice President for open professional collaboration. She worked on the EDEN initiatives, Open Education Week and European Digital Learning Week which, over the years, became important pillars in building EDEN’s community. She also worked on community building and collaboration with similar associations.

At the EDEN 2017 conference dinner at the beautiful Elite Stora Hotellet in Jönköping, I shared a table with Sandra and Lindköping Mayor, Helena Balthammar. One theme I remember talking about was roam, like at home, as the expensive roaming charges in EU ended just before the conference. This meant that we could use our mobile devices in EU and pay the same as at home. It brought European countries closer, and made our European work

and travels easier, since mobile phone calls and internet access suddenly became much more affordable.

The EDEN 2018 conference at the University of Genoa was organised with the Italian Education and Media Conference (EMEM). The theme was “*Exploring the Micro, Meso, and Macro–Navigating between dimensions in the digital learning landscape,*” making me reflect on the huge differences between the two institutions I was involved with: NooA and ICDE. The conference dinner took place at the huge aquarium, with spectacular views of the old Genova Port. I remember communicating in person and via e-mail with Sandra, Lisa Marie Blasche, Don Olcot Jr., Airina Volungevičienė, András Szűcs, António Teixeira, and Alan Tait about a new EDEN Fellow Council.

In 2019, Sandra took over as President of EDEN after Airina Volungevičienė. It was a challenging period, as she had to handle Brexit and the pandemic. In 2022, she handed over the presidency to Josep M. Duarte.

At the EDEN 2023 conference in Dublin, I joined Sandra, Airina Volungevičienė, Alan Tait, and António Teixeira in a panel discussion where the five former Presidents shared their experiences from major EDEN developments. There, Sandra relayed that the survival of EDEN UK was called into question by the Brexit. So, the Executive Committee decided to establish a new association in Estonia. It took more than a year to implement all the necessary processes and activities so that the new association, called EDEN Digital Learning Europe, could function. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown occurred at the beginning of 2020. The initial shock was stressful. Overnight, life, work, and classes had to be organised in an online environment, for which most educators were not ready or knew how to teach online.

According to Sandra, EDEN reacted quickly and showed the strength of its community. Already in March 2020, it started a series of practical webinars called #onlinetogether, with advice on how to organise classes in an online environment. The goal was to support the educational community in Europe and around the world, provide advice and examples of good practice, and facilitate discussion and exchange of ideas and thoughts. EDEN invited the members to share their expertise, and they responded promptly. Over the course of two years, 24 webinars were provided by 98 lecturers and moderators and attended by over 5,300 participants. The recordings are still available on [EDEN's YouTube channel](#).

Christina Violeta Thrane Storsve (NooA 2013)



Photo of Christina Violeta from her teacher profile at NooA

In 2013, NooA got a NOK 400,000 grant from Vox, the Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning, which made it possible to develop more online courses and services. So, we launched NooA's first secondary school courses with the help of enthusiastic teachers around Norway. We also developed tourism courses with a Norwegian partner in Thailand, and in Spanish for adopting parents in collaboration with Christina Violeta Thrane Storsve.

I soon learned that Christina Violeta was adopted from Guatemala and often accepted invitations to share her thoughts and experiences related to adoption issues.

As an adopting father myself, I knew that four countries in South America required that adopting parents could speak Spanish with their kids. Those becoming parents lived all

around Norway and often waited in long adoption queues for several countries, such as India, China, and Colombia. If they received an offer to adopt a child from one of the Spanish speaking countries, they wanted to attend a suitable Spanish course as soon as possible, learn as fast as possible, and continue to study in South America and upon their return home.

However, traditional Spanish courses taught people how to book a hotel, rent a car, and order at a restaurant. They did not teach how to comfort a kid, explain how to use a toothbrush, sing a lullaby, or tell bedtime stories. Hence, the Norwegian adoption agency, Adopsjonsforum, engaged Christina Violeta to develop and teach a Spanish course focusing on how to speak Spanish with kids. The course was offered two times a year as evening classes and only in Oslo.

This course obviously needed a more flexible approach. So, we engaged Christina Violeta as a dedicated course designer and encouraging teacher for the online version of the course, which we offered successfully for several years, until very few children were adopted from these countries. The course not only covered basic grammar, but also included children's songs and rhymes, and an introduction to the most famous characters from TV-series and movies, such as Sponge Bob and Dora the Explorer. The glossaries were designed in a way that the parents could easily use while they were together with their children. The vocabulary from each country (Peru, Chile, and Colombia) was carefully compiled in cooperation with representatives from these countries. Upon meeting some of the parents who took this course years after adopting children, they told us heart-warming stories about how their children lit up and felt more secure as they sang the songs learned in the course. Several parents used the course as well as a means of communication during the first months once they were back in Norway.

I later followed Christina Violeta as an active member of various organizations, focusing on how to implement post adoption services (e.g., how the adoptees and their families are supported after they become a family) into law, and how to create a network where peers can meet and make use of all their unique resources.

Christina Violeta and Diana Patricia Fynbo have co-founded Evolution in Adoption – a resource centre for adoptees and their families (Adopsjon i endring – Ressursenter for adopterte og deres familiar), and they keep on advocating for adoptees' rights, and making their needs and experiences more visible to politicians and society. Christina Violeta is also a vocal participant in the public discourse related to transnational adoption and has recently written vividly about her personal experiences in several articles and essays.

Johan Brand (Kahoot! 2014)



Private photo provided by Johan

After I started the Nordic open Online Academy (NooA) in 2012, I considered renting an office space at the Startuplab in the University of Oslo. I was fascinated by the young and energetic ICT entrepreneurs at the location, and attended several presentations of start-up companies there in 2013 and 2014.

Johan Brand, co-founder of Kahoot!, made one of the presentations I remember best from Startuplab in 2014. He explained that the Norwegian company, Kahoot!, was founded in 2012 by Morten Versvik and a team of co-founders in a joint project with the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. They launched their game-based learning platform in 2013, which provided

user-generated multiple-choice quizzes (kahoots), became a popular online platform for educators, and succeeded in attracting a lot of investments.

Kari Olstad (FuN 2014)



Photo of Kari from FuN 2016 web page

I first met Kari Olstad when she started working for FuN in 2014, and later met her many times at conferences and seminars. We both enjoyed social conference gatherings when she was project manager for FuN's annual conferences from 2015 to 2021, and on the EADL R&D committee from 2015 to 2023. I also learned to appreciate her friendly support when I was a member of the FuN board from 2016 to 2019.

In 2018, I entered the Victoria and Albert Marriot hotel with crutches, seven weeks after a squash inflicted meniscus injury, to attend the EADL conference in Manchester. The conference slogan was, "Making learning visual and viable."

The conference dinner was at the Manchester Museum of Science and Industry. John Traxler paid tribute to executive director, Kees Veen, who stepped down after 14 years of service to EADL. Afterwards, happy colleagues went on a pub-to-pub crawl. I soon realised that I couldn't keep up with them on crutches. Fortunately, Kari showed concern for me. She bought a bottle of wine and joined me on a bench in a neighbourhood park.

I told her that I looked forward to next week's FuN board meeting in Bodø; the last one before Torunn Gjelsvik took over after Torhild Slåtto. I listened to her passionate fascination for karate, packrafting, and paragliding. I congratulated her for launching the English version of FuN's [Guide to Quality in Online Teaching and Learning](#), a publication which was sponsored by EADL and translated into English by Kari and Tony Hopwood.

We discussed Mie Buhl's and David Patterson's keynotes about pedagogical and technical aspects of flexible learning, Niels Henrik Helms' presentation on digital story telling, and the workshops about smartphones, animated videos, and virtual realities in education.

Kari and I wondered what we would learn from next day's exciting program, which included: Leah Matthew's update on distance education in the US, Ger Driesen's presentation about big data, and Garry Griffin's promotion of microlearning. Unfortunately, cyclist Donald Clark's presentation about artificial intelligence for education was cancelled.

Returning to the hotel, Kari and I exchanged ideas about what I should focus on during the panel session, which was about quality control. Other panellists included Tony Hopwood, Ger Driessen, and Martin Kurz. We agreed that I should share experiences with online courses provided by partners in NooA's Moodle platform.

My final conference memory was the informal meeting with EADL President, John Traxler, and R&D committee members about next year's conference, and that they listened to my advice about taking it to Tallin in 2019.

Edgar Valdmanis (NooA 2014)



Photo of Edgar from his LinkedIn profile

I was aware that Edgar Valdmanis was Communication and Marketing Director for the Norwegian Computer Society from 2004 to 2013. But I first learned to appreciate him in 2014, after he started focusing on entrepreneurship, sales training, and digital communications. Together with Trond Heggelund, he arranged many informal Friday afternoon sessions (Fredagspilsen) for entrepreneurs with interesting presentations and networking opportunities.

In 2014, they invited me to give a presentation about my start-up experiences with NooA at the MESH coworking space in Oslo. This initiated a period where I and NooA benefited from Edgar's work and experience within marketing, networking, and video production. We also developed online courses about video production and marketing together with Katrine Gjærum.

At the memorable NooA 2014 workshop at the Hasselholmen islet in Kragerø, Edgar gave an inspiring workshop on networking and smarter use of LinkedIn. These were two topics that he later wrote several publications on in Norwegian and English.

In 2018, Edgar gave an online micro guest lecture about networking at a seminar I organized when we started the Kragerø Cowork. Soon after, he was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and decided to use his competencies to spread information about the disease.

In 2021, he started the podcast, *Uttafor men Innafor*, which still produces weekly episodes of interest to the Parkinson community.

Leif Frode Onarheim (NooA 2015)



Screenshot of Leif Frode in a NooA interview from 2015

Leif Frode Onarheim was my trusted adviser and frequent lunch time companion at the coworking space in Asker from 2014 to 2017. He was in his eighties, but still Deputy Mayor in the Asker municipality. He had so much wisdom, sensible advice, and exciting anecdotes.

In his 80th birthday party, I met many celebrities and colleagues from his impressive career as business leader, board member, and chair of numerous enterprises in diverse sectors, most recently from Marine Harvest, Akershus University Hospital, and Innovation Norway. In earlier years, he was president of Norway's largest Federation of Employers (NHO), top manager in the Nora and Orkla food companies, Rector of the BI Norwegian Business School, and elected member of the Norwegian Parliament for the Conservative Party.

Leif Frode became the only man I know who has attended a bell ceremony at the New York Stock Exchange when he was part of the team behind the Marine Harvest introduction in 2014. Yet he was a modest man, who jokingly stated that his major impact on the Norwegian society was that he introduced the plain, but incredibly successful, Pizza Grandiosa in 1980, as CEO of the Nora food company.

Leif Frode was my advisor when we launched an online course about Business Ethics, six months before the Panama Papers were published in April 2016. These Panama Papers contained millions of leaked documents from the Mossack Fonseca law firm in Panama, and detailed financial information about wealthy individuals and public officials. As a part of our course, Jørn Bue Olsen made video interviews with Leif Frode, and Henrik Syse, the philosopher who was a member of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee.

When I moved the NooA office from Asker and started Kragerø Cowork, I saw Leif Frode a few times at his summerhouse in Kragerø before he passed away in September, 2021.

Paul Bø (NooA 2015)



Photo of Paul from his LinkedIn profile

In 2015, Paul Bø was among my closest colleagues at the Askershus coworking space, along with Leif Frode Onarheim, Lars O. Nordal, Bjørn Langvik, Mohamed Ghouse, and Ambrein Sha.

Together, we developed online start-up courses in English for immigrant entrepreneurs in the Asker municipality. Paul did the online mentoring in the courses, and was very excited when the Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg asked about our experiences on a PR tour with Major Lene Conradi to our coworking space.

In 2018, I encouraged Paul to become an expertise partner in the [eNEET Rural project](#) through his company, Inclusion, and use NooA's learning platform for course development. So, in November, I flew with Paul to Varna, Bulgaria's third-largest city and a nice seaside resort on the Black Sea Coast. The first day, we walked on the beach and ended in a local microbrewery to taste seven distinct kinds of beer. Paul was, as usual, in an enthusiastic mood. So, I learned much about his passions for beer, church, and soccer. His favourite teams, Vålrenga and Manchester United, which was led by the Norwegian manager, Ole Gunnar Solskjær.

We discussed NEETs: people who are Not in Education, Employment, or Training, and how we could help young NEETs in rural areas with online entrepreneur courses through the eNEET Rural project. The project was funded by the EEA and Norway grants. The full project title was *eNEET Rural: Facilitating entrepreneurship and improving skills of NEETs living in rural areas*. The main objective was to create job opportunities for young people falling outside the labour market.

NooA's Moodle platform was used to develop five online courses offered in seven languages. It was developed in English and translated to Bulgarian, Romanian, Spanish, Italian, Slovenian, and Hungarian, in close cooperation with our Slovenian project partners at Styrian Technology Park (STP): Matjaž Fras, Tanja Senekovič, and Stefano Guardati. These competent partners also became friends.

The eNEET kick-off meeting was hosted by our Bulgarian partners at UBBSLA, The Union of Bulgarian Black Sea Local Authorities. It was organized by the Bulgarian team: Mariana Kancheva, Todor Tonev, and project coordinator, Polina Antonova, with the help of Hungarian communication manager, Patricia Merei.

In the evening, we enjoyed videos with Bulgarian nature and culture, and a traditional Bulgarian dinner at Mariana's beautiful house. It was a pleasant evening that boded well for my next project meetings in Ljubljana and Oslo.

In 2018, Paul and I flew to Ljubljana in Slovenia for a successful project meeting organized by STP. We enjoyed a social evening, starting with a visit to the Ljubljana Castle and ending with traditional food at a nice local restaurant. Returning home, we had to take a bus to the Venice Marco Polo Airport in Italy, because Adria Airways cancelled our flights due to financial troubles.

In 2019, Paul and his wife, Åshild, stayed with us in Kragerø during a workshop about development on the online eNEET courses.

In March 2020, we arranged a partner meeting at a local community centre in Oslo. This was just before international traveling was shut down due to the Covid pandemic and we started to realize how serious this was. We did, however, manage a guided tour of Oslo from the town hall to the medieval Akershus Castle. Some of the partners also ventured to see Holmenkollen Ski Festival.

Marc Prensky (FuN 2016)



Photo of Marc from <https://marcprensky.com/press-kit/>

I met Marc Prensky at the 2016 FuN annual conference in Oslo where Barbara Wasson presented the first keynote about Big Data and Learning Analytics. Marc gave the final keynote, “Unleash the Power of the 21st Century Youth,” which was based on his new book, *Education to Better Their World: Unleashing the Power of 21st-Century Kids*.

Marc was known as the inventor and populariser of the terms, “digital native”, and “digital immigrant.” I had become grandfather of two, and Apple had recently introduced their wireless AirPods. So, I found it especially interesting to talk with Marc during the conference dinner and continue our discussions through lunch the next day together with the FuN board members at the iconic Oslo Opera House—where whale meat was on the

menu.

I admitted that I neither felt like a digital native nor a digital immigrant. In my best moments, I felt like a digital pioneer or digital entrepreneur. After a long working week, I could feel like a digital senior and even dreamt of becoming a digital dropout.

I only met Marc once. But his terms are handy, and he has influenced my thinking about how digital technology influence the life of educators, kids, and elderly people in an era where immigration is controversial and digitalization both integrate and segregate citizens around the world. Kids spend too much time in front of screens, countless elderly are left behind, and many teachers had been forced to become online education immigrants during the pandemic.

Since I met Marc, he has written five more books. His latest, *Third Millennium Kids: A Hell Yes! Low Stress Guide for Everyone*, argues that our young people are moving into a technology-filled world that is exponentially expanding, and that their smartphones are their best portal into their new world. Rather than blaming them for spending too much time on their screens, Marc argues that we should be praising them for their quick adaptation skills. Yet we must work hard to make what is on their phones less exploitative and more useful to

them. With the exponential growth of compute power, the global connectivity of the Internet, and Artificial Intelligence (up-until-now "Missing" intelligence), humans are going through an important stage of non-biological evolution. Our young will be different people from us and live in a different world than ours. Marc also argues that we should be focusing on their future needs, not on our past ones.

Giedrė Kvieskienė (Lithuania 2016)



Photo of Giedrė from her LinkedIn profile

I first met Giedrė Kvieskienė in 2016, when a group from the Lithuanian College of Democracy made a study trip to Oslo. The visit was arranged as a part of the Norway Grants project “Promotion of Sustainable Development by Strengthening the Social Clustering in Public Sector.” FuN was the Norwegian project partner; I was included in the project because the project partners were to develop several online courses for schools and civil servants throughout Lithuania.

Soon after, we travelled to Vilnius to participate in a workshop in the Parliament Building. The project aim was shown on the big screen during the press conference. I sat next to Petter Kjendlie as we figured out how to “transfer the Kingdom of Norway’s knowledge and best practices to authorities of the Republic of Lithuania and Lithuania’s municipal authorities.”

Later in the project, we travelled across the country to present the project results to stakeholders in local municipalities. We also visited a secondary school to meet the principal, who had posted the following notice outside his office: “No guns, no drugs, no paper!” We were told he refused to accept anything on paper, but allowed teachers and students to use the scanner in his office.

I am grateful to Giedrė, Egle, and Vytautas for their extraordinary hospitality; friends who introduced us to many good people and exciting experiences in Lithuania. We enjoyed local restaurants, jazz music, and opera performances, the central Christmas market, a memorable visit to the historic town of Trakai, with its beautiful lakes and island castle, and a visit to Šakiai, which was close to the Russian exclave, Kaliningrad.

More recently, Giedrė and Egle have included me in additional projects as a webinar speaker, author, and editorial board member for the Social Education Journal published by the Vytautas Magnus University Education Academy.

Mark Nichols (ICDE 2016)



Photo of Mark from his LinkedIn profile

I knew Mark Nichols’ name as an author, editor, and reviewer, but I can’t remember when I first met him. It was probably at the EDEN 2016 conference in Budapest, when he was elected to serve on the EDEN Executive Committee from 2016 to 2019. This was the same period when he moved from New Zealand to work for the Open University in the UK. At the conference, he received the Award of Institutional Excellence for continuous support of EDEN on behalf of the Open University. Marta Aymerich, Sofoklis Sotiriou, and Torhild Slåtto received the same awards on behalf of Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Ellinogermaniki Agogi, and Flexible Education Norway.

During the ICDE 2019 conference in Dublin, we had a short ICDE Executive Committee meeting. It was memorable and special because it was the last for me as acting Secretary


General and for Belinda Tynan, who handed over the ICDE presidency to Neil Fassina. Mark was among the three incoming EC members, together with Som Naidu and Carlos Alberto P de Oliveira. Asha Kanwar and Tolly Mbwette also ended their terms as members of the EC at this time.

I knew that Mark had started a podcast in 2018 where he made interviews with notabilities in distance and online education. So, I was honoured and nervous when he included me as number 77 in his series of interviews of [Leaders & Legends of Online Learning](#) and followed up with this welcome recommendation of the anecdotes in [My Online Education World 1980-2020](#):

I've posted a highly recommended conversation with Professor Morten Flate Paulsen for the Leaders & Legends of Online Learning podcast. Morten's online work extends into the 1980s, and his core thinking is remarkably contemporary. His anecdotes make excellent reading!

In 2023, Mark was one of six distinguished colleagues who were given three-year honorary positions as Chairs of the Commonwealth of Learning. Others included Shironica P. Karunanayaka, John Traxler, Geesje van den Berg, Denise Whitelock, and Michalinos Zembylas.

At the ICDE 2023 conference in Costa Rica, Mark made a further impression on me as a friendly, knowledgeable, and thoughtful man who took a lot of notes. So, I was happy to congratulate him as the newly appointed President of ICDE. During a breakfast by the pool at the Hilton Doubletree Hotel, I asked if he knew where the upcoming ICDE 2024 conference would be hosted. He promptly changed subject, so I correctly guessed that it would take place in Wellington, his hometown in New Zealand. Then, I asked if he had the capacity and energy to continue the volunteer work with his podcast, and I argued that it probably would be more sustainable if ICDE would host it. I also suggested that he could reach one hundred interviews if he included some more of the stars in My Online Education World.

 [Hear LLOL number 100 where Tony Bates interviews Mark](#)

Dennis Holm (NooA 2016)



Photo of Dennis from https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dennis_Holm

We landed in Tórshavn in February 2016, to attend the Studylab visit arranged by our local partners, Finn Jensen and Heðin Lamhauge. It was sixteen years after my first visit to the North Atlantic capital of the Faroe Islands. The Faroes consisted of 18 rocky islands of volcanic origin with 50,000 inhabitants.

We started with a meeting on board M/F Smyril, heading towards the Suðuroy island where we aimed to visit Dennis Holm, Mayor of Vágur, a village with about 1,400 people and a declining population.

Dennis was concerned that young villagers left due to lack of schools and educational opportunities. He wanted to help them get the education they wanted in the village; encourage them to stay and get a degree in Vágur, instead of moving away. So, he showed us the local study lab, which was an ordinary detached house, with counsellors who offered support and guidance, and online education technology. This technology provided access to a variety of educational

opportunities from several Nordic institutions, including free key cards for all villagers who wanted to study. Dennis informed us that 800 people had visited the study lab during its first three years. We spoke with seven young women there who told us that the study lab made it possible to learn in the village where they wanted to live. Four of them were pregnant and Dennis noted with a smile that study labs could offer hope for the future.

Then Dennis guided us to Pál's Høll, which was named after Pál Joensen, a local athlete with an impressive career in international swimming, who continued to live in Vágur even though there wasn't a 50-metre pool in the country. So, he stubbornly trained in Vágur's 25-metre swimming pool and became a national hero. He was an inspiration, who made the impossible possible. So, the local community and many volunteers built and crowd-funded a 50-meter swimming pool, large enough to simultaneously contain Pál and all the people living in Vágur.

Dennis made a lasting impression on me, and made me realize how much people can achieve with enthusiasm, local collaboration, and entrepreneurship. So, I was not surprised when I heard that Dennis became Minister of Fishery for the Faroe Islands in 2022.

Snorre Karkkonen Svensson (NooA 2017)



Drawing of Snorre from his LinkedIn profile

I first met Snorre Karkkonen Svensson in Tallinn in September 2017. The softspoken man with characteristic scarfs and a special Nordic-Baltic background. The Norwegian linguist with an Icelandic name, Finnish mother, and Swedish relatives, who spent one year in Denmark and two decades in Latvia where he studied Baltic philology at the University of Latvia, worked as a translator, and taught Norwegian at the Latvian Academy of Culture and the University of Latvia for many years.

We stayed at Meriton Conference & Spa Hotel together with Leif Harboe who taught NooA's Norwegian course and met with our project partners at the Multilingua office.

The project backdrop was the introduction of the online courses for immigrants who wanted to learn Norwegian. Courses NooA launched together with Norsk Nettkurs in October 2016. We wanted to improve the courses and hoped to get more student in the Baltic countries. So, I looked for potential partners in the Baltics and got project funding from the Nordplus program for Nordic Languages for a project acronymed PONC - Partnership for Online Norwegian Courses. NooA's project partners were: Snorre and Marta Rože from SIA Vārdu vārti in Latvia, Tove Andersen from Norsk Nettkurs in Norway, Malle Nei from Multilingua in Estonia, and finally Rita Boguzaitė and Zita Ambrutytė from UAB Business Strategy Advice Services in Lithuania.

The purpose of the project was to exchange experiences with online Norwegian courses at level A2, B1, and B2 and to build on the experiences from the Norwegian for beginner courses developed in Moodle by the Nordplus Adult funded project eNordisk. One of many excellent projects that were discontinued when the project funding ended. So, the PONC project could benefit from its quite advanced multimedia courseware with special versions for people speaking Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian.

Our second workshop was organized by Snorre in Riga in December 2017. We stayed at Hotel Neiburgs and met at Spiikiizi, Krišjāņa Valdemāra iela 17A. Snorre was a knowledgeable guide and took us to restaurants with traditional food.

The final project workshop was held in Kragerø in May 2018, and we had time to take the ferry boat to Jomfruland. During the workshop, we had the pleasure of accommodating Snorre in our guest house and appreciated his knowledge and love for the Baltic languages, literature, and culture.

Snorre later told me that our collaboration inspired him and Marta Rože to establish the [House of Languages](#) in Riga and the www.oratastic.eu portal with teaching resources for teachers in Norwegian.

Torbjørn Røe Isaksen (NooA 2018)



Photo of Torbjørn surrounded by the senior entrepreneurs captured from <https://storehaug.no/letterer-hverdag-for-grundere/>

In 2018, I was surprised to receive an envelope with a personal letter from Torbjørn Røe Isaksen, the Norwegian Minister of Trade and Industry, who served as Minister of Research and Education from October 2013 to January 2018.

As Minister of Education for the Conservative Party, he convened a government commission to examine the potential of massive open online courses (MOOCs). I also remember him for introducing a controversial 10% limit for absenteeism in upper secondary schools, requiring teachers to hold a master's degree to teach in upper secondary schools, and promoting quality and digitalisation within the educational sector. During his watch, I also observed that traditional distance education schools struggled because financial support and new quality schemes gradually favoured face-to-face institutions that tried to become more flexible.

As Minister of Trade and Industry, Torbjørn had probably noticed the Forbes article, [Proof That The Most Successful Entrepreneurs Are Older Ones](#), and maybe one of his advisors had read the November 2013 article published by the Norwegian Centre for Senior Politics, which featured me as a senior entrepreneur; an interview that added several years to my mental age.

Anyway, the Minister invited five senior entrepreneurs to share their experiences in October: Jan Sollid Storehaug (Tenk Digitalt), Sverre Olav Helsem (Gaitline AS), Øystein Rekdal (Lytx Biopharma), Jofrid Erland (Erland AS), and me (NooA).

The invitation was a welcome opportunity to reflect on my start-up experiences with online schools, discussions with other entrepreneurs at the Askershus coworking space, and the online courses NooA offered to international entrepreneurs in Norway. Such experiences led me to conclude that entrepreneurs had three primary sources to generate a comfortable income: grants, investors, and revenues.

Many Norwegian start-ups spend a lot of resources writing applications to Innovation Norway, a governmental entity that supports innovation in start-ups and other companies. So, I contacted them. After a few exchanges about my NooA ambitions, I had a feeling that I was too old and academic, because an elevator pitch was not enough to explain my business ideas. Consequently, I realized that it was wiser to spend more time on NooA than Innovation Norway. I still think entrepreneurs should focus more on their core business than grant applications.

After establishing NooA in 2012, I had secured welcome developments grants from educational programs, but marginal investments from investors. Hence, my NooA work had primarily focused on creating revenue from enrolment in online courses.

With this experience, I asked my grey-haired network two questions with the intention of sharing the answers with the Minister. Why do seniors become entrepreneurs? And how can the government help senior entrepreneurs?

We concluded that many seniors are financially independent. Their mortgages are paid down, and their children have moved out. Some face a difficult job market. If they lose a job, it could be difficult to find a new. Others are old enough to retire, but prefer to work and use their competence and experience. They want to improve their self-esteem and contribute to society, or to eventually realize an old dream.

We suggested that the Minister could come up with incentives that stimulate cooperation between junior and senior entrepreneurs to combine young enthusiasm and new skills with wisdom and experience. The Minister could also initiate a support scheme for senior entrepreneurs; a scheme that addresses senior entrepreneurs' need for basic income and experienced colleagues, that gives some financial support to certified companies that provide office space, collegial support, and some wage to a senior entrepreneur for a two-year period, a scheme like the Norwegian apprenticeship programme, which supports young apprentices and their employers.

The most visible outcome from my meeting with the Minister was that my hair became even more grey. Yet I still operate the online school I started in 2012 and read many of Torbjørn's opinion articles with interest after he became editor in the financial newspaper, *E24.no*, in 2022.

Neil Fassina (ICDE 2018)



Photo of Neil from ICDE 2018 annual report

I first met Neil Fassina in January 2018, when I attended my first ICDE Executive Committee meeting at the Lysebu Conference Centre in Oslo. This was close to Nordmarka, my childhood's precious winter sport refuge, where we had to ski more than 300 km in one season to get the children's gold badge in cross country skiing.

Helmut Hoyer and I represented the Board of Trustees and met the ICDE Board as Belinda Tynan was constituted President, and Neil and Hyzel Rymer were newly elected members. We also met Tolly Mbwette when he joined in via video from Tanzania.

Gard Titlestad and Torunn Gjelsvik represented the ICDE Secretariat, and I realized that Gard had arranged a horse sleigh surprise when we heard the jingle bells. A memorable experience with beautiful views over Oslo in a frozen winter wonderland. I returned home with a better understanding of the geographical and cultural challenges ICDE faced as a truly global organization, and new insight for the Board of Trustees' appraisal report.

Neil was on the ICDE board during my term as acting Secretary General. I came to know him as an inspiring person, with significant experience in educational management and leadership. He was an impatient colleague. with a special interest in strategic work and

transformation of academic institutions, who did not share his interests and experiences in social media.

At the ICDE 2019 Lillehammer Life Long Learning conference, Neil was the conference chair and made eloquent introductions to panels and keynote presentations. He also introduced Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg, who stated in her keynote:

We cannot accept that people become outdated. Continuous education is important in a time of major changes in the way we work. Many people will have changed jobs and even careers because of digitalisation in society. Both to keep the competitive edge and to prevent anyone from being excluded from work life, it is important to succeed in lifelong learning.

The ICDE 2019 conference in Dublin started with pre-conference workshops at the DCU St. Patrick's Campus, and ICDE's Global Presidents' Summit (GPS), which was a unique forum for Presidents, Vice-Chancellors, Principals, and Rectors from ICDE member institutions to engage in discussion, debate, and learning about globally relevant topics. As usual, I was impressed by Neil and Belinda Tynan, who planned, facilitated, and summarized the summit.

Before the GPS dinner, we had a short ICDE Executive Committee meeting. It was memorable and special because it was the last for me as acting Secretary General, for Belinda Tynan as President and for Asha Kanwar and Tolly Mbwette as members of the EC. The three incoming EC members were Som Naidu, Mark Nichols, and Carlos Alberto P de Oliveira. Neil was chosen as the next President just before the pandemic started.

When I recently asked Neil about his major achievements as ICDE President, he told me that he was quite proud of being the chair during the development of the previous strategic plan and then working with the secretariat to make that plan come to life. He further stated that his pride was in the ICDE team—a small and incredible team that cares deeply about the OFDL space and each of the members that make up the ICDE community.

At the ICDE 2023 conference in Costa Rica, Mark Nichols took over as ICDE president after Neil. I had personal conversations with both of them at the restaurant by the pool at the Hilton Doubletree Hotel. As a former Adjunct Professor at Athabasca University, I found it worthwhile to notice that three AU presidents had made considerable impacts on ICDE. Dominique Abrioux was ICDE's Vice-President for North America, and later Frits Pannekoek and Neil both became ICDE presidents; three ICDE notabilities I met several times.



[Hear interview with Neil.](#)

Oddgeir Tveiten (WLS 2019)



Photo of Oddgeir from <https://uia.futurelearninglab.org/>

I had never attended. But was curious about the international network and the ambitious name of the conference. Not modest Norwegian, more brazen American. *The World Learning Summit* (WLS). A name likely influenced by Oddgeir Tveiten's experiences as a visiting scholar at Stanford University in 2008 and 2014. Visits that probably provided connections and courage to start WLS and nurture his network of international experts in the field.

An event arranged in June, every year since 2010. By [Future Learning Lab](#) at the University of Agder. As a mixture of research conference and knowledge festival. Focusing on media technologies, learning innovations and digital transformation of society. Featuring an impressive list of acknowledged experts from around the world.

I knew that WLS had cooperated with Christian Stracke and other organizers of the Learning Innovations and Quality (LINQ) conferences. And that the 2015 summit at Stanford was important. With about two hundred attendees from Gates Foundation, Harvard, Yale, MIT, UC Berkeley, and many people from the Nordic innovation community in Silicon Valley. It resulted in closer collaboration with Google's Engineering Director Peter Norvig and Creative Commons's CEO Cathy Casserly. They both presented at the 2016 summit in Kristiansand which gathered more than three hundred participants.

So, invited by Oddgeir Tveiten, I drove south to Kristiansand on June 5, 2019. To represent ICDE at the 9th World Learning Summit.

The 2019 summit focused on digital divide. Under the slogan E-QUALITY. Hot topics were: Artificial Intelligence, Big Data, Virtual Reality, and New Designs for Lifelong Learning. Arranged in a friendly and informal environment. With much interaction and ad hoc changes in the program.

During the summit dinner at Odderøya military dining hall, I understood that many of the participants had joined the conference for years. Talked with some of the veterans. June Breivik, Vidar Mortensen, and Eilif Trondsen. The transplanted Norwegian who spent his professional life in Silicon Valley and studied the Nordic edtech industry for Silicon Vikings.

Drove home reflecting on how much dedicated individuals as Oddgeir Tveiten can achieve with limited resources. But lots of enthusiasm, hard work, and stamina. And how dependent some initiatives are on a handful of devoted individuals.

Epilogue

In November 2024, I was about to complete the final of the 160 portraits included in this chronology of *Stars in My Online Education World*. And I pondered how to weave my own portrait into the chronology.

At the same time, I had the honour of being inducted into [the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame](#) during a ceremony at the University of Florence. So, I found it convenient to use the laudation text from the Hall of Fame.

Morten Flate Paulsen



Photo of Morten from his LinkedIn profile

A prolific scholar, Morten Flate Paulsen is a pioneer in open and online education. He established NooA, the Nordic open online Academy, in 2012, where he is CEO and professor of online education. Among his many other achievements over the course of his career, he initiated NKI Online College, the first online college in Europe. Paulsen is revered worldwide for these accomplishments in providing education for all, as well as for his technology developments, and numerous publications and presentations on online education and the technology to support it.

As part of NKI Online College, the largest provider of online courses in Scandinavia, Paulsen made some of his most innovative contributions to the field of adult education and lifelong learning. He worked at NKI from 1982 through 2012, with two years off for doctoral studies, ending as Director of Development. At NKI in the 1980s, he designed the EKKO computer conferencing and learning management system software tools that made distance teaching and learning possible. In 1987, he introduced NKI Online College and taught the first online course at a distance. The college is one of the longest running online colleges in the world.

At the time of NKI Online College's founding, the Internet was in its infancy. The idea of a teaching institution that would provide access to upper, secondary, and higher education to anyone equipped with a modem was visionary. Today, the institution serves as a reference for researchers and practitioners interested in online upper secondary school, postgraduate studies, and university college studies.

Paulsen's other positions have included working as acting secretary general for ICDE—the International Council for Open and Distance Education (2018–2019)—and as part-time professor of online education at universities in Canada, Portugal, and Norway. He has served as president of EDEN—the European Distance and E-Learning Network (2010–2013)—and on EADL, the European Association for Distance Learning research and development committee (2005–2007).

As an academic, Paulsen has published widely on online and lifelong learning, with a particular focus on technology-supported innovations and his Theory of Cooperative Freedom and Transparency in Online Education. He has also given more than 150 keynotes and other presentations at conferences in 30 countries. Paulsen's publications include numerous papers and more than twenty edited volumes and reports. His most recent books address the use of digital technologies to supply open-access education for all. He began

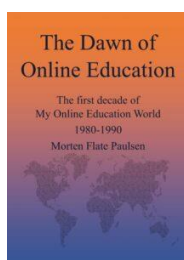
releasing the first installments of his four-volume, open-access work *My Online Education World, 1980–2020* in 2024.

Paulsen established the Distance Education Online Symposium in 1990 when working with the American Center for the Study of Distance Education at Pennsylvania State University. He served as the founding editor of *DEOSNEWS* and the first moderator of DEOS-L. He has been regional editor for *IRRODL* (the *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*) and *EURODL* (the *European Journal of Open, Distance and E-Learning*). Paulsen has also served on the Editorial Board of the *Asian Journal of Distance Education* and seminar.net.

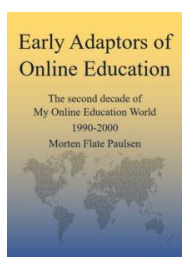
Paulsen holds a doctorate in education from Pennsylvania State University in adult education and instructional systems.

 [Hear interview with Morten](#)

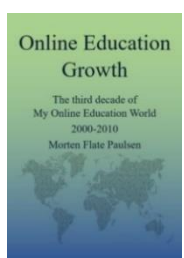
Open access books in My Online Education World



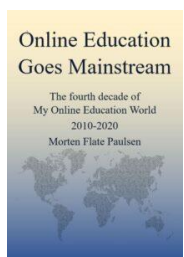
[The Dawn of Online Education](#) was published in January 2024. In 1980, distance education was synonymous with correspondence courses, educational radio, and television. But the eighties totally transformed our perception of distance education. The major driver of the development was new technology: PCs, modems, and learning management systems. In the eighties, I started working as a hardware engineer with keen interest in microcomputers before I joined a group of people who established Norway's first private ICT college. There, I taught ICT courses, bought a modem, and headed the development of a learning management system for online education. In 1987, I taught my first distance education courses online and visited online education pioneers in the US and Canada.



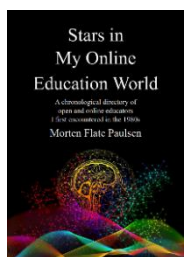
[Early Adaptors of Online Education](#) was published in April 2024. The 1990s was a decade of amazing innovations. The decade that introduced PCs with colour- and graphic interfaces. New Internet services opened the world, and the web brought it all together. Search engines provided immediate access to mindboggling sources of information. Online journals, early web-based learning management systems, digital cameras, and personal digital assistants (PDAs). And mobile phones that changed our lives. In the early 1990s, I was a doctoral student and graduate assistant for the American Center for the Study of Distance Education. There, I established *Deosnews* as one of the first online journals in the field. Back in Norway, I learned html, developed websites, designed my first web courses, and initiated the development of a web based LMS.



[Online Education Growth](#) will be available in the first quarter of 2025. It covers a decade with substantial growth in online education. A decade that introduced Wi-Fi, multimedia PCs, online bank accounts, and PayPal. Skype, Spotify, podcasts, creative commons, and open educational resources. Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, and many other social media services. Learning Management Systems became omnipresent in Norwegian schools and universities. Systems that I had to relate to as a father of three schoolchildren. As director of development for a fast-growing online school, I took part in a dozen European R&D projects and led several innovative projects.



[Online Education Goes Mainstream](#), will likely be available in the second quarter of 2025. The 2010s introduced smart phones, iPads, video communication, MOOCs, electronic badges, nano learning, learning analytics, and cloud computing. A decade with increased focus on online education in public universities. Partly due to media coverage of MOOCs. A decade I worked as professor of online education in Norway and Portugal, established my own online school, became President of the European Distance and E-learning Networked (EDEN) and had many international experiences as Secretary General for the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE).



During the writing process, I realised that I have learned from so many brilliant people around the world. To honour them, I started to develop chronological directories of ***Stars in My Online Education World***. The directories unfold as a narrative which shows how 160 individuals influenced my professional growth and shaped the various stages of my work in online education. Readers may look up individual stars of special interest, read it as a developing narrative of prominent people in the field, or use it as a supplement to *My Online Education World*.