

## Chapter 2

# Kay's Voice: Never in My Wildest Dreams

Kay A. Persichitte

I am stunned to have been asked to contribute to these voices. Many of the writers of these chapters have had significant influence on me professionally and personally! Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine the career I have had...

My story begins in 1954. I am the eldest of four children (girl, boy, boy, girl), raised in a (very) blue collar, nuclear family. My grandparents came of age in the Great Depression. My parents came of age in the early 1950s as America was experiencing the post-WWII economic boom. These facts are important because somewhere in my DNA is a work ethic that can only be described as tenacious. In my world, if you really want something: you work for it.

When I was a young girl, my family moved from a small town in Kansas to a small town in northern Colorado and that is where I grew up. In my early adolescence I decided that I wanted to be a high school teacher. My high school guidance counselor suggested that I consider secretarial or cosmetology school; not because my grades were poor but because I would be a first generation college student and he thought my chances of success would be greater in a "vocational" area. I chose to major in mathematics. Three years later I completed my student teaching in that high school and in the fall I got my dream job teaching high school math at Loveland High School (LHS).

High school math departments tend to be a bit heavy on the male gender side and LHS was no exception. Honestly, it never really occurred to me until decades later that I seem to gravitate to male-dominated arenas. I was driven to meet the expectations of my teaching colleagues...and they set a high bar. Over the next almost two decades, I was fortunate to work with a couple of master teachers who helped me recognize the power of combining effective pedagogy with solid content knowledge. I owe much of my professional development as a teacher to Walt Speece and Don McGinnis. I also got married and we started our family during this time. I never questioned that I "could have it all."

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As the decade of the 80s was ending, I became increasingly disillusioned with the public and parental support for K-12 education. I loved teaching but the politics of the district and the lack of opportunity to challenge age-old organizational structures came to weigh heavily on me. I began to think about changing jobs. This was HUGE for me because I had always thought (and had said many times) that “they would carry me out of LHS in a box.” Serendipitously, a new doctoral program was under development at a state university about 25 miles away from home. I learned that they were bringing in a well-known scholar from the east coast to start a program in Educational Technology. Having no idea what this really was, I made an appointment to visit with Edward Caffarella...and this would change my life.

The fates were with me and I was admitted to the doc program. [There is a whole sidebar story here about the GRE...catch me sometime and I will share it!] Ed insisted that doc students join the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT). He said AECT was *the* professional organization for folks in our field and I took his advice not yet knowing that developing these professional connections would be the saving grace for me in the decades to come. In 1992 I attended the first professional conference of my life and was honored to be selected as a Cochran Intern for AECT in Washington, DC...and this would further change my life.

Ed Caffarella was my academic advisor and my dissertation chair. His mentoring and serving as a professional exemplar have deeply impacted me in my career. In time, Ed would serve as President of AECT. He was the individual who had suggested that I complete the Intern Application; that I volunteer to work on the AECT Standards and Accreditation Committee; and that I consider a career in higher ed instead of returning to LHS. He showed me that knowing your core values, staying true to them, and having the confidence to take a risk were critical to surviving the challenges that were to come in my professional and personal lives. I am forever grateful for his guidance.

As I moved through the transition to a career as a faculty member in higher ed and maintained my AECT membership, I was surprised to see for the first time that there were women in leadership roles; that women existed in my field who wrote textbooks and had professional reputations that equaled and exceeded those of male counterparts. I admired Marcy Driscoll, Sharon Smaldino, and Addie Kinsinger from afar.

While attending an AECT conference in Dallas, due to my limited Assistant Prof income, I was staying at an off-site hotel. On my way to a meeting in the conference hotel, I saw Sharon Smaldino sitting in the lobby, surrounded by others whom I recognized as relatively new to our field so I decided to take a seat. Sharon was talking about finding your niche in the field; identifying the type of work and the setting for your work that would bring challenge and excitement to your career; recognizing your personal and professional strengths and weaknesses; and about the importance of cultivating connections with others in our relatively small field. Certainly, her career is evidence that leadership, scholarship, service, and mentoring are not necessarily independent variables. The fact that I remember this like it was yesterday is a testament to the networking opportunities that continue today in AECT. I still admire Sharon (an AECT Past President) but I now consider her a mentor, a colleague, and a dear friend.

I have also been fortunate to extend my professional development through PIDT (Professors of Instructional Design and Technology). PIDT is a loosely-woven group of folks whose work in our field is grounded in instructional systems and includes icons like Robert Gagné, Walter Wittich, and others who gathered at Lake Okoboji in the 1940s and 50s. PIDT convenes each summer in a very informal place and, typically, one is assigned a roommate upon registration. Many years ago I was more than a little nervous to find out that I would be rooming with *the* Marcy Driscoll. It is one thing to interact with leaders of the field in the AECT setting but it is a wholly different thing to think about sharing a room and a bathroom with someone who you have only admired from afar! I had no reason to fret...Marcy bounced into our room with a big smile and a, "Hi, Kay!" Over the next 3 days, I gained another lifelong friend, colleague, and role model. Marcy's career has evolved from reputable scholar to professional leadership in the field (including President of AECT) to administrative leadership while supporting collaborations and activities that continue to strengthen our field.

The field of educational/instructional technology has been the perfect fit for me. The breadth of the topic areas and the diversity of the settings for the application of our theories and research offer opportunities for each of us. In my experience, there is a culture of mutual respect for the scholar, the practitioner, and the teacher/trainer/developer. There is always something new on the horizon and fresh opportunities to collaborate with others who support innovative ideas and activities. You will find us in varied leadership roles (government, business/industry, schools, and higher ed) and increasingly connected to colleagues in international settings. I came to this field because I wanted to use my doctoral program to improve my teaching and to challenge me with using computers in support of my teaching, not as an end goal of my teaching (remember this was before the World Wide Web). I have gotten so much more!

My story cannot conclude without introducing two other women who have held me up in times when I might have faltered. As my friendship with Sharon Smaldino developed, it was inevitable that I would connect with Mary Herring. Mary is my role model for the consummate public professional. Also a Past President of AECT, she always has the "big picture" perspective. When she makes a commitment, you can count on the job getting done. Twice in the last 20 years, Sharon, Mary, and J. Ana Donaldson have served as my professional port in a storm. They have offered me invaluable emotional support and professional advice. Which brings me to Ana...

I met J. Ana Donaldson when she was an AECT Intern at the conclusion of her doc studies. Then, she joined the faculty at the University of Northern Iowa with Sharon and Mary...and the "3 Sisters" were born. In essence, I horned my way into the group, somehow knowing that these women individually and collectively represented the woman I strive to be. Ana (also an AECT Past President) is a constant source of encouragement and a role model for emerging leaders in AECT. She has helped me come to grips with my core values as she has explored her own. She demonstrates time and again that the human connection is the most important one. Her natural ability to make a new friend wherever she is reminds me that the world can be a gentle place and that my skepticism is often unwarranted.

I conclude my story with a few words about one other woman who has influenced every aspect of my life: my mom. Now in her 80s, Mom lacked a couple of weeks of earning her RN degree (at the age of 18) when she eloped with my father and they kicked her out of nursing school when they learned she was a married student. Over her lifetime, she worked in a flyswatter factory; was a graveyard dispatcher for a local police department; managed a gas station, kept the books, and pumped gas while my father worked the garage and built his first tow truck. Mom was the first female tow truck operator in Loveland, Colorado while managing the family towing business. She was a cook for the county Sheriff's office and eventually completed law enforcement training (at county expense) and got promoted to Sergeant at the county jail. Retired now, her story is extraordinary and in many ways she was an important role model for me. The others I have written about here somehow reinforced or re-directed the model my mom continues to share.

I am a first generation college kid with a blue-collar academic pedigree and I have been blessed with mentors, friends, and family (including my husband and two children) who have helped me to "have it all." Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine this story or even imagine that I might someday be elected President of an international organization...as Ellie Goulding tells us in her song, "Anything can happen." To those who follow, I offer my hand to lift you if I can and I offer this unsolicited advice:

- Know your core values and keep close the friends and colleagues who share them..."You are who you run with" (my father)
- There is leadership capacity in each of us...let yours shine
- Know your limitations but don't be afraid to take a risk
- Find something in your life outside of your career that makes you happy and don't let it become lost in your regular routine...Work hard, Play hard...enjoy your journey!

## Selected Publications

- Januszewski, A., and K.A. Persichitte. 2008. A history of the AECT's definitions of educational technology. In *Educational technology: A definition with commentary*, ed. A. Januszewski and M. Molenda, 259–282. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Persichitte, K.A. 2008. Implications for academic programs. In *Educational technology: A definition with commentary*, ed. A. Januszewski and M. Molenda, 327–339. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- — —. 2013. Leadership for educational technology contexts in tumultuous higher education seas. *Tech Trends* 57(5): 14–17. doi: 10.1007/s11528-013-0686-5.
- Polly, D., C. Mims, and K.A. Persichitte (eds.). 2012. *Developing technology-rich teacher education programs: Key issues*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
- Shepherd, C.E., D.U. Bolliger, T.A. Dousay, and K. Persichitte. 2016. Preparing teachers for online instruction with a graduate certificate program. *Tech Trends* 60(1): 41–47. doi: 10.1007/s11528-015-0015-2.



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