Thank you for having me.

Tonight I join you in celebration of the creativity and innovation in teaching and learning at Curtin. I want to showcase an example of what is possible from the work that is being done here at Curtin for Learning for Tomorrow.

In 2003 I began a speech pathology degree here. What I expected was 4 years trapped in a lecture theatre with the occasional online quiz – what I got couldn’t have been further from that.

You see, in my final year of study I had the opportunity to travel to India with Curtin’s Go Global program, which is an international, interprofessional clinical fieldwork program. The program offers students from various courses within the Faculty of Health Science authentic WIL opportunities to travel in teams to India, China, Cambodia and Ukraine where they work together with each other and with the locals to provide health care and education to the local communities.

Before I visited India for the first time, I don’t like to think that I was “naïve”, but I guess I had led a very sheltered existence and was shaded from the health status and general health situation in other parts of the world. Sure, I’d seen World Vision ads on TV, read about the “boat people” in the newspaper and I’d learned about the Somalian famine at high school and - and I knew that obviously there was a crisis going on out there - but I didn’t feel the reality of it – I didn’t really understand how our global society is all interconnected, and I certainly didn’t feel an urge get involved. I guess you could say that I felt very “separate” from these issues.

My trip to India, however, put me right in the “epicentre” of an international health crisis. There in rural West Bengal, people with disabilities were – and still are – often treated as inferior citizens and marginalised to the outskirts of society. Their access to basic health services is limited and their very existence is often overlooked. Children were sick and dying from malaria and were malnourished as a result of being excluded from their community and shunned from receiving adequate healthcare.

Here I was facing, first hand, a significant global issue – which made me to feel like a citizen of the global community. Sure I’d heard about it all before, but to live amongst these people and live and breathe their issues for 5 weeks… made it REAL and totally changed my perspective. These people became my friends, my neighbours, and I was able to – to some degree – step into their shoes for a while.

I had been ‘awakened’ in many ways. I started to think and act like a “global citizen”. I learned to respect any and all fellow human beings, regardless of race, religion or creed and developed a universal sympathy beyond the barriers of nationality. I now have global interests and concern for fellow human beings, human rights and human dignity. And from that point on, I knew I had to work in this field. My passion for
supporting people in developing communities to achieve equal health outcomes had well and truly been ignited.

I went on to work for a disability service provider in Perth and became the Vice Chairperson of a charity called Equal Health, which sends teams of health professionals to work in India and East Timor. I have returned to that same orphanage in India that is visited as a student 8 more times since graduating.

My time in India taught me how to think with my eyes, my ears and my heart – rather than just my brain. And through this approach, have accomplished some pretty special things and learned some incredible life lessons. There was one child my student team worked with in India. A girl named Saeeda. She had a terrible speech impediment and limited range of movement in her legs due to cerebral palsy. She was isolated and lonely and spent all her days in her room. Myself and the physio students thought “great, we can actually help this woman” – but as experience has now taught me, it’s difficult to make gains in these areas in just 4 short weeks. So instead, we began to think more creatively, and linked this girl in with the local dance group.

We accompanied her to the first 4 dance classes and provided education to her dance teacher and classmates on how to best communicate with Saeeda and how to adapt the dance steps to suit her ability level. And you know, this was perhaps the best “intervention” I have ever provided. Saeeda blossomed into a confident, capable young lady who was included in in her community for the first time. She made friends and has now gone on to teach other children from her community, who have disabilities, how to dance. To me, this is innovative learning. We didn’t use our clinical knowledge to improve her speech impediment or improve her range of movement in her legs – instead Go Global taught us to think “outside the box” and we changed her life.

It is these lessons that I now wish to pass on to the students I supervise, in that hope that I can offer them the same awakening experience I had back in 2007.

In 2011 I received a call from Curtin asking me if I would come and work for them on a new project out in Armadale. When I got the call from Curtin, I thought, you know what, that is an organisation I want to work for – a university that invests so heavily in student develop while simultaneously building the capacity of the wider community. I went on to set up an interprofessional health program at Challis Early Childhood Education Centre in Armadale, which sees teams of Health Science students work together to provide health services and education to children and their families in the Challis community. Our partnership with Challis has grown from strength to strength and provides an average of 30 therapy sessions per day and lots and lots of parent education.

Our students at Challis are role models to the children they work with, they are raising their aspirations, they are enhancing the health literacy of parents, and they are promoting community health and wellness. At the end of the day, it is these things that are important as they are building the community’s capacity to advocate
for their own health needs. And, to me, that is the first steps towards sustainable change.

One of the children at Challis our students were seeing last year was a little boy called Jeremy. Jeremy has autism and his family hadn’t engaged in any therapy services before meeting us. Our OT, physio and speech pathology students worked together with Jeremy to help him reach his family’s goals – which were to participate in the School Sports Day. I can’t tell you how special it was when the students and I witnessed Jeremy running in his running race on Sports Day. He knew to stay in his own lane, he know to only ‘go’ when the teacher said ‘go’, he was able to run with the correct technique that allowed him to keep up with his peers, and he was able to tolerate the loud sounds that were going on around him – enough to keep focussed. My students had given Jeremy all of these skills and it was a defining moment for all of them watching him run that race. But perhaps what was even more powerful was watching his parents’ faces as he crossed the finished line – as I don’t believe it was something they ever expected to see.

Our students at Challis also worked with a young 15 year-old mother who had an intellectual disability and was struggling to care for her newborn baby to the point where DCP were considering removing the baby from her care. The students worked together with the common goal of enhancing this mother’s capacity to care for her own baby - empowering her through education, advocacy and support. She blossomed into a confident, capable mother who was able to follow through with our recommendations and, for once, be her own advocate. And the baby was able to stay in her care and has grown into a happy, healthy little lady.

You see, all of these stories, all of these situations are REAL. It doesn’t get much more real than this. It’s authentic learning in its most authentic form. And it’s this kind of learning that prepares students for the real world. For both Challis and our international Go Global placements, all learning, materials and activities are framed around "real life" contexts in which they would be used. The underlying assumption of this approach is that learning is meaningful to students and therefore, more motivating and deeply processed. I for one, can vouch for that and am constantly inspired by the growth I witness in the students across the placements. It’s so much more than just showing up to lectures these days. To borrow Jill’s words - It’s personal, it’s collaborative, it’s innovative, it’s richly interactive, and above all it’s global.

As I said in my opening remarks, I am here tonight to join you in celebration of the creativity and innovation in teaching and learning at Curtin. And I hope that I have been able to showcase one example of that tonight.

When I was driving away from Curtin the other day I noticed the new yellow writing on the road. Has anyone seen that? On the main road out of here, it says in big letters “What now?” and “Where to?” – and as I drove over those questions, I contemplated them for myself - for my future – “where to now, Kristy?” , “what’s next?” – Maybe we should all pause to contemplate that for a moment. For me, I’m actually not sure what I will do next – All I know is that I am dedicated to community
development and must continue along this pathway that Curtin set me on, and I’m looking forward to the new projects and new challenges that lie before me.

In my sphere of influence I am seeing improvements, I am witnessing change, and I’m seeing new leaders and torchbearers develop right before my eyes - and I couldn’t be more inspired by that.

So whatever we choose to do next, I recommend we be guided by my favourite quote - “Be the change you wish to see in the world.”

I’m going to leave you with Gandhi’s words because I think they underpin, generally, what we are creating in Curtin graduates. “Global Citizens” that are creating change, advocating for others and standing up for how this world should be.

And I’m so proud to be part of that.

Thank you.