

Editorial – Volume 15, Issue Number 1

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Editorial – Volume 15, Issue Number 1



Dianne Conrad
Co-Editor, IRRODL

Did you get enough of racing luges, dare-devil aerial acrobatics, head-spinning ice dancing, or breakneck bobsleigh? Probably; the recent amazing 2014 Winter Games provided us with daily thrills as we marveled at our athletes' incredible courage and expertise in their respective fields. But here, offering a possible diversion, another display of skill and expertise is presented to you in IRRODL's February 2014 issue 15.1.

Using the popular "by the numbers" convention, I note that this issue offers a wonderful geographical variety: Four out of the five inhabited, researching continents are represented, as are 12 countries, and one grouping of countries – the Balkans. The 15 articles in this issue comprise the efforts of 38 researchers, including the largest writing team of six contributors (Balkans) and four singleton authors. Three writers adopted a case-study approach.

Journal editors seek to make sense of an issue's offerings in ways that are interesting and useful to our readers. The numbers above, while whimsically interesting, don't tell the story you really want to hear. Knowing what you DO want to hear is the challenge. As a qualitative researcher, I enjoy "themes and memes": What has intrigued these writers from four continents? What has motivated them to embark on the arduous research road to publication?

Several topics emerged in this issue's selection of articles. The first, in pieces from Canada, the UK, Korea, and Saudi Arabia, considers aspects of open and distributed learning on culture, learning, and knowledge. Simon, Burton, Lockhart, and O'Donnell open up this theme by examining the experiences of students in a rural First Nation in Atlantic Canada. Next, the UK's Baxter and Haycock contemplate MOOCs' sense of community and identity at the Open University. K.P. Joo, using cultural-historical activity theory, presents findings that show that KNOU's efficiency-oriented model has not effectively facilitated students' learning, highlighting a tension within its distance higher education system. And Hamdan from Saudi Arabia approaches her cultural study

through the gender lens, considering the impact of ODL on female learners in that country.

A second topic, the increasingly popular open movement, is further explored by Mtebe and Raisamo as they look at African instructors' use and adoption of OER. And from Katy Jordan comes a wide-ranging study that presents the results of a study that draws together MOOC enrolment and completion data from courses across the major MOOC platforms. Jordan included statistical analyses that explore trends in the data.

Thirdly, and not surprisingly in any ODL journal, South African, Balkan, Chinese, and Taiwanese researchers give us the results of their investigations into the use of specific distance learning tools. From Unisa in South Africa, Archer, Chetty, and Prinsloo share their findings, based on a socio-critical model for understanding student success and retention, from a pilot project that benchmarked successful students' habits and behaviours using a tool (Shadowmatch®) that is used in business settings. Reporting on a project involving 15 universities in nine countries, Budimac, Putnik, Ivanović, Bothe, Zdravkova, and Jakimovski focused on assessment while studying the delivery of a collaborative software engineering course in a range of different physical environments. Kuo, Walker, Belland, Schroder, and Kuo, in a case study approach, investigated learner-instructor interaction, internet self-efficacy, and satisfaction in synchronous online learning with the use of the web-based videoconferencing tool Interwise, while Luo, Liu, Kuo, and Yuan considered the effective use of instructional technology used in an international trade education course in China.

Finally, reflecting our evolving field's continuing interest in the critical issue of what constitutes effective teaching and learning at a distance, several writers offer their answers to that question from a variety of perspectives. One of the most popular approaches to "what works" over the years has been the measure of student satisfaction. The relationship of satisfaction to learning is, of course, its own topic, also often researched. In this issue, however, Lee investigates the impact of human and design factors on graduate student satisfaction, specifically in the affective and cognitive domain, and comes down on the side of human factors. Similarly, Emelyanova and Voronina give us the results of their look at perceptions of online learning at a Russian university, also extolling the importance of the "human factor" – the positive impact of instructor presence. And in two less-mainstream studies, the UK's Harrison, Gemmell, and Reed considered graduate students' satisfaction with online supervision and Grau-Valldosera and Minguilló, citing Tinto's (1975) classic study, researched the idiosyncracies of drop-out over 26 semesters at Spain's Open University of Catalonia, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC), and found that program, semester, and timing within the semester were all critical factors in students' decision-making. Lastly, Cheryl Kier, a Canadian colleague, presents a study on plagiarism, concluding through research conducted in a psychology course that students have a poor ability to understand this serious breach of academic conduct and, correspondingly, a poor ability to prevent themselves from falling victim to plagiarism due to an inability to effectively present ideas in their own words.

The academic performances outlined above constitute another Olympian IRRODL effort, brought to you by our managing editor, Brigette McConkey, and a host of backstage volunteers – IRRODL reviewers – contributing generously from locations all over the world. And now the pitch: We need more reviewers! Reviewing is a never-ending constant, an especially demanding activity for a huge journal such as this one, with its large number of articles per issue and many issues published each year. While we try not to overburden our reviewers' time and energy, effective reviewing based on content expertise requires many bodies. Please step to the podium and volunteer to help our community in this effort! To do this, please register as a reviewer at <http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/user/register> and indicate your specific areas of interest within the field. Your effort will ensure IRRODL's gold medal standard.

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