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Editorial

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Q: When is higher education not higher education?

A: When it is distance, distributed, or open, apparently. At a recent higher education conference, there was no mention of distance education, and very little of the open movement – a scant reference to OER or a MOOC – in discussions revolving around higher education reform. As a response to this oversight, please direct all your friends and colleagues to the pages of IRRODL, where advances in the world of higher education, via distributed learning, and "open," do indeed signal changes to traditional higher education (HE) models.

And, in this spirit, we bring you another issue of research in our burgeoning and advancing field, and we begin with research that suggest potential areas of change! Ungerer's "Digital Curation as a Core Competency in Current Learning and Literacy: A Higher Education Perspective" is a good example, wherein the author suggests that digital curation could be regarded as a core competency in higher education since it contributes to establishing a sense of meta-literacy (an essential requirement for optimally functioning in a modern media environment) among students. She urges teachers to blend informal and formal learning to help the adoption of digital curation in teaching and learning.

Oh and Kim present another example for enhancing learning in higher education. In "Understanding Cognitive Engagement in Online Discussion: Use of a Scaffolded, Audio-based Argumentation Activity," they explored adult learners' engagement in asynchronous online discussion through the implementation of an audio-based argumentation activity and found that the activity helped students achieve higher levels of thinking skills and produced greater cognitive efforts.

MOOCs, of course, are a prime example of change. Gallagher and Wallace, in "A Far Cry from School History: Massive Online Open Courses as a Generative Source for Historical Research," demonstrated

that MOOCs can serve as a generative repository for personal and family historical narratives, describing how MOOCs can change perceptions of teaching and learning history. Their paper contributes a novel understanding of MOOCs for discipline-specific analysis, provides a framework for MOOC historical resource generation, and describes changing perceptions of learning from the perspective of MOOC learners.

In another MOOC-themed piece, "MOOCs, Graduate Skills Gaps, and Employability: A Qualitative Systematic Review of the Literature," Calonge and Shah analysed the literature highlighting the use of MOOCs as a means to reduce the mismatch in graduate skills, reviewing the following relevant areas: higher education and graduate skills gap, today's graduates and employability, and MOOCs and graduate skills. IRRODL does not usually publish articles that are solely literature reviews, but as MOOCs figure so prominently in the open world, we have made an exception in this case.

Also on the subject of graduate skills, Gauvreau, Hurst, Cleveland-Innis, and Hawranik, in "Online Professional Skills Workshops: Perspectives from Distance Education Graduate Students," evaluated the experiences of online graduate students participating in synchronous online professional skills workshops. Using a phenomenological lens to accomplish its research goals, their study reports that participants experienced a "sense of community" and learned skills that were not included in their academic programs.

Kisanga addressed another type of professional training, looking at "Determinants of Teachers' Attitudes Towards E-Learning in Tanzanian Higher Learning Institutions," where it was found that teachers have positive attitudes towards e-learning where computer exposure played a statistically significant contribution to their attitudes. Kisanga recommended that training in e-learning needs to be provided to teachers to widen their understanding of e-learning in order to enhance the quality of education in Tanzania.

Al-Azawei, Parslow, and Lundqvist's study, "Barriers and Opportunities of E-Learning Implementation in Iraq: A Case of Public Universities," is also concerned with the quality of education. The authors provide an in-depth understanding of the current status of e-learning in public Iraqi universities and highlighted major hindrances to its successful application.

The theme of access and quality provision of education is present also in Cox and Trotter's "Institutional Culture and OER Policy: How Structure, Culture, and Agency Mediate OER Policy Potential in South African Universities," as they consider how these factors interact at an institution regarding OER policy development. Conducting research at three South African universities, each with their distinct institutional cultures, the authors explored which type of interventions might work best for motivating OER activity in each context.

Also from South Africa, Queiros and de Villiers examined the perceptions of students, and their situations, to consider how to accommodate both disadvantaged and techno-savvy students without compromising quality of education and learning. "Online Learning in a South African Higher Education Institution: Determining the Right Connections for the Student" provides practical recommendations that encompass

the main findings to help guide institutions in developing countries as they move towards online teaching and learning.

Five more articles further the discussion on access to quality learning. In an American-based study, Moreira's "From On-Campus to Online: A Trajectory of Innovation, Internationalization and Inclusion" concludes that, despite careful formulation of the online component, online learning still does not enjoy the same status as the face-to-face element of courses, and, as a result, is largely ignored in terms of promotion in the teaching profession. There is work to be done!

Access using social media: Pimmer, Chipps, Brysiewicz, Walters, Linxen, and Gröhbiel's exploratory study, "Supervision on Social Media: Use and Perception of Facebook as a Research Education Tool in Disadvantaged Areas," investigated how a user group of older, female learners from rural, low-tech settings in South Africa used and perceived a Facebook group as a distance learning tool over time.

Access using open textbooks: Prasad, Totaram, and Usagawa set out to develop a prototype open textbook learning analytics system to track individual learners' online and offline interactions with their open textbooks in electronic publication (EPUB) format, and to present its developmental work as building blocks for future development in this area, noting that the potential of technology in this instance is still very much in its infancy. Their research is presented in "Development of Open Textbooks Learning Analytics System."

Brooks and Young discuss access using a communication lens in "Exploring Communication and Course Format: Conversation Frequency and Duration, Student Motives, and Perceived Teacher Approachability for Out-of-Class Contact." Their study offers a sense of how students who seek informal interaction with instructors beyond the classroom are faring amid the increased reliance on Web-based learning environments in higher education.

An interesting form of access, again through the communication lens, is discussed in Liew, Nor Azan Mat Zin, Sahari, and Tan's research, "The Effects of a Pedagogical Agent's Smiling Expression on the Learner's Emotions and Motivation in a Virtual Learning Environment," where they found that if a virtual smile is perceived as "polite or fake," learners would respond negatively, thereby affecting learners' emotions, motivation, and learning outcomes in a virtual learning environment. Theoretical and design implications for pedagogical agents in virtual learning environments are discussed in the concluding section of the paper.

Our final research article of this issue addresses the Community of Inquiry (CoI) model. In "From "Presences to Linked Influences Within Communities of Inquiry," Peacock and Cowan propose an enrichment to the well-known framework, by entitling the overlapping spaces uniting pairs of presences as "influences." These three spaces, linking pairings of social, teaching, and cognitive presences, can be labelled as "trusting," "meaning-making," and "deepening understanding." The contribution of "influences" to the educational experience is to constructively address some of the challenges of online learning, including learner isolation, limited learner experience of collaborative group work, and underdeveloped. higher-level abilities. The authors call on both learners and tutors to conceive of the

presences and influences as working together, in unison, to enhance the educational experience whilst fostering deep learning.

This issue also features a field note in which Rapp, Gülbahar, and Adna discuss a situation arising from political disruption in Ukraine. Because many students and academicians have been compelled to re-locate, they have been forced to substitute face-to-face teaching with distance learning, often on a large scale, but within a short span of time and with limited resources. Consequences of this disruption are presented in "e-Tutor: A Multilingual Open Educational Resource for Faculty Development to Teach Online."

So, for those who don't see the ongoing change in higher education – change that is pedagogical, technical, geographical, and political – or don't know where to find it, it is here, or at least well-documented here, in the pages of IRRODL, not just in this issue, but in every issue. I hope you enjoy issue 17(5).

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