

Editorial - Volume 13, Issue Number 4

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Terry Anderson
Editor, IRRODL



IRRODL continues to grow and succeed, and we wish to thank those whose time, energy, and expertise have contributed to this success through reviewing one or more articles in the past year.

As usual, this issue of IRRODL features articles from around the world, bringing you current results of research in theory and practice related to a growing number of models, designs, and research methods that are evolving as formal education embraces openness. It is exciting times for educational researchers, but more importantly this issue contains ideas that can be used to enrich open learning and teaching everywhere.

In the following section, I provide a very brief overview of the articles you will find in this issue.

Online constructivist pedagogies are often focused on learning achieved through group projects done collaboratively. The results can be encouraging, but the challenges and levels of adoption and participation vary greatly. A Canadian study, “An Investigation of Collaboration Processes in an Online Course: How do Small Groups Develop over Time?,” applies group development models to formal education groups online and suggests a theoretical model to help explain, understand, and guide teacher and student behavior when engaged in collaborative activities.

We are all trying to figure out business models for open content development and delivery, especially given the recent flurry of interest in MOOC models of free programming. In an international article the authors assess the “Impact of OpenCourseWare Publication on Higher Education Participation and Student Recruitment,” as demonstrated by early adopting institutions, including MIT, John Hopkins, and Open Universiteit Nederland.

The Net has allowed us to develop hundreds of different ways to communicate, share, and learn. Currently the institutional LMS remains the “workhorse” of formal education delivery and support, but increasingly teachers and students are exploring public networks like Facebook and LinkedIn and private network systems such as Elgg. However all these systems feature redundant affordances and powerful lock-in motivations that propel educators to use tools that they and their students are familiar with. In “Facebook Groups as LMS: A Case Study,” Israeli authors look at the advantages and challenges of using the world’s most popular social networking system for formal education.

In “Footprints of Emergence” a team of UK authors tackles the thorny issue of emergence when interaction, content, and even learning outcomes may emerge within (or outside) a formal learning program. The authors comment that “It is ironic that the management of education has become more closed while learning has become more open” and then demonstrate ways to visualize, understand, and embrace various types of emergent learning.

We all know that the ‘build it and they shall come’ model of online learning has severe limitations. In the study “Understanding E-Learning Adoption in Brazil: Major Determinants and Gender Effects,” the authors examine the adoption of e-learning programming using the popular technology acceptance model (TAM).

Low retention has always plagued almost all models of open and distance education. In “Who am I and What Keeps Me Going? Profiling the Distance Learning Student in Higher Education,” a qualitative study from the UK, the author investigates motivators, inhibitors, and institutional interventions that students experience in online courses.

Context is everything and helps explain the varied reactions to and adoption of online learning models in business training and professional development. “Organizational Factors’ Effects on the Success of E-Learning Systems and Organizational Benefits: An Empirical Study in Taiwan” looks at the critical contextual role of organizational factors associated with successful adoption of e-learning.

I’ve always been fascinated by the ways in which formal learning designs can vary the mix among student–content, student–teacher, and student–student interaction. I even went so far as to postulate Anderson’s interaction equivalency theory. In an article by an American author, evidence is uncovered that indicates a significant relationship between time spent in learner–content interaction and high grades. “Exploring Learner to Content Interaction as a Success Factor in Online Courses” reinforces the idea that quality interaction is important for motivation and achievement of learning outcomes, but that the type of interaction can vary.

Open scholarship is once again featured in a critical review from the USA entitled “Assumptions and Challenges of Open Scholarship.” I note the values symmetry between open scholarship and the founding ideals of the open university movement. The study notes the special role and requirements of technologically induced innovation, notably the requirement for faculty and students to develop their net presence.

Much has been written (often by technology evangelists and promoters) about the supposedly profound difference between the so-called 'net generation' and those of us born before its widespread use. In "Beyond the Net Generation Debate: A Comparison between Digital Learners in Face-to-Face and Virtual Universities," Spanish authors present the results from a study showing how the educational model (face-to-face or online) has a stronger influence on students' perception of usefulness regarding ICT support for learning than the generational differences of online and classroom students.

American authors in "Sense of Community in Graduate Online Education: Contribution of Learner to Learner Interaction" determine which activities are most effective in creating learning community and which are the most commonly used. Like the last study, this study examines the impact of various learning designs and activities on students' perception of community in online courses.

Despite the limitations of 140 characters, microblogging using Twitter has become a very popular tool for alerting, communicating, whining, and recommending in social, political, and business contexts. But does it have a meaningful role in online learning? In an American study, "Mobile Microblogging: Using Twitter and Mobile Devices in an Online Course to Promote Learning in Authentic Contexts," the authors show a number of positive learning and social effects resulting from use of this tool.

In "Student Access to and Skills in Using Technology in an Open and Distance Learning Context" the authors from South Africa describe their investigation of students' access to and capabilities using technology within the broader discourse of the "digital divide." Their findings challenge a simplistic understanding of the digital divide and reveal that the nature of access is varied.

Our final research article, "Emotional Presence, Learning, and the Online Learning Environment" investigates the impact of emotion on how online learning is experienced. This Canadian study provides evidence of emotions in online learning communities, suggesting that emotional presence may exist as a key element in an online community of inquiry.

Open educational resources are constantly debated in education technology circles because they offer the potential to both reduce cost and improve open learning content. But does that mean they are widely used in distance education production? In a field note, "A Needs Assessment of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Educators to Determine their Effective Use of Open Educational Resources (OERs)," the author looks at the challenges of adoption and integration of this innovation in Nigerian dual-mode institutions. There is also a leadership note in issue 13(4) that explores the differences between leadership and management and concludes that "leadership without ongoing personal transformation is little more than management."

The issue concludes with a thoughtful review by Diane Carver of Canadian Linda Harasim's 2012 book, *Learning Theory and Online Technologies*. The review provides a nice overview of this book, which looks both to the learning theory past and the collaborative future of online learning.

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