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Editorial

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This final issue of 2016 kicks off with several articles on openness and OER with topics ranging from "what is an open educator?" to the OER effects on student progress in higher education, including how faculty members act when adopting OER. Open assessment is also covered, segueing into the evaluation of virtual objects. This theme is followed by one of interaction and social networking with papers on the impact of contacts and the effects on student persistence. OER-related articles are followed by papers on how scaffolding strategies can support interactions along with studies of social media and tele-communities. The final themes in this issue are disparate, ranging from reading online to quality issues, ethical considerations, and finally MOOCs, in the Field Notes.

In the lead article, Nacimbeni and Burgos propose a definition of "open educator" within a holistic framework. They conclude that teachers who adhere to openness have attitudes that are conducive to networking and collaboration. They emphasise the importance of the transition phases for openness capacity-building.

Hilton III, Fischer, Wiley, and William focus on how OER affect the course through-put rate of students. In their comparison study, they examine dropout and withdrawal rates along with the letter grades of student in two classes, one using OER and the other commercial texts. Their results suggest that OER can be instrumental in improving student retention and academic success.

The priorities of faculty members in adopting OER are the subject of Jung and Hong's paper. Using in-depth interviews, they discovered that instructors tended to prioritise effectiveness, efficiency, appeal, and extension over other considerations. They also determined that regional differences were apparent.

Assessment is becoming an important issue in openness and disaggregation research. In their paper, Chiappe, Pinto, and Arias conducted a meta-synthesis of more than 100 studies on ICT-based assessment, identifying common topics. While collaboration and sharing were identified as innovative in ICT- based assessment, there was still great resistance to this change among faculty and administrators.

Vieira, Moraes, and Rossato segue out of openness with a related topic in evaluating virtual learning

objects for learning in Brazil. They analyse the VLOs used in distance education courses using quality criteria. This analysis can shed light on both commercial content and OER.

Olivier introduces the next theme of interaction by studying the impact of presential contact sessions and discussion forums on distance education student performance. They found that students who attended a face-to-face written assignment workshop did significantly better than those that did not. Participants in an online discussion forum also did significantly better. On the other hand, there was no significant difference between students who did or did not attend an examination workshop. They discuss possible explanations for this.

Anxiety and persistence are the focus of Oh and Lee's Korean study of online interactions among visually impaired students. They found "significant associations" between learning-related anxiety and persistence. They looked at different roles and relationships and have made suggestions for improvements to persistence.

Cho and Cho report on how scaffolding strategies can promote interactions. They describe a scale for assessing scaffolding strategies using a factor analysis in online settings. Their research showed results with correlations related to interactions as well as social presence.

The role of social media is the subject of Zhang, Chen, de Pablos, Lytras, and Sun's paper. They examine information processing and social connection in teamwork using communication and transactive memory systems (TMS). They found that TMS combined with communication can significantly improve teamwork outcomes. On the other hand, their research suggests that only social connection is related to communication and information processing is not.

Themeli and Bougia focus on Synchronous Video Communication (SVC) and how it can be an alternative form of distance education. Extending the Community of Inquiry model, they highlight how SVC can create a sense of place or stage, thus minimising transactional distance. They believe this could lead to more people-oriented options in distance education.

In his contribution, Cheng studies usage strategies for reading online in a foreign language. Using data analysis, he examined several strategies and found no significant difference among the various strategies in terms of the learners' foreign language proficiency.

Vlachopoulos looks at quality in elearning course design, offering a roadmap with clear and consistent signals for quality. He uses a meta-analysis of the concepts, definitions and approaches to quality in a wide range of fields, but specifically in elearning in higher education.

Ethical considerations are examined in Flynn's article using a socio-critical model of student success. She cautions against "algocracy" in which algorithms takeover from human-controlled democratic decision-making. The ethics, values, and moral argument around the use of big data are discussed using a practical application.

The Field Notes article reveals several challenges around MOOCs. Using a survey, Pasa, Abidi, and Ali explore the concerns and apprehensions that institutions have when considering offering MOOCs. They

discuss both the pedagogical and technological considerations. Their survey is included.

This is the final IRRODL issue for 2016. Dianne, Serena, and I would like to thank IRRODL's many contributors, our hundreds of reviewers, the Editorial Board, Athabasca University, AU Press, and our thousands of readers (over 2,000 readers on some days) from all over the world. To you all, the best for your holiday season and a happy, healthy new year.