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July – 2018

Editorial: Celebrating our Geographical Diversity – and Grit and Agriculture

Dianne Conrad
Co-Editor, IRRODL

IRRODL is truly an international review. This 17-item issue, 2018's third, features a wide geographical spread of contributors, including four from the USA and only ONE from Canada (thanks, British Columbia). Without doing a detailed location-search, which I can only conduct manually, I believe that all continents, except the obvious (Antarctica) and South America, are well represented. Topically MOOCs are especially well represented, and we begin there, with four articles.

How do you teach a MOOC? Why do you teach a MOOC? **Lowenthal, Snelson, and Perkins** investigated these questions with 186 MOOC instructors. Although most were novice online teachers, they were also satisfied with their experience. As a long-time online instructor, I found these results intriguing, especially the fact that the study's instructors did not believe their course was as good as face-to-face: I believe the opposite of good online instruction!

And why do people sign up for MOOCs? **Wang and Baker** studied the relationship between learner intention to complete a MOOC and their actual completion status, comparing that relationship to the degree to which MOOC completion is predicted by other domain-general motivational factors such as *grit*, *goal orientation*, *academic efficacy*, and the *need for cognition*. They found that grit and goal orientation are associated with course completion, with grit predicting course completion independently from intention to complete, and with comparable strength. (Does this lend new import to the movie True Grit??)

Poquet, Kovanović, de Vries, Hennis, Joksimović, Gašević, and Dawson investigated how learners perceive social presence, and the different nuances of social presence in diverse MOOC populations, comparing perceptions of social presence across groups of learners with different patterns of forum participation in three edX MOOCs. The study provides insights into the current body of knowledge around social presence in MOOCs and raises questions about the effectiveness of transferring existing socio-constructivist constructs into the MOOC contexts.

Hew, Qiao, and Tang's study used a machine-learning classifier to analyze 24,612 reflective sentences posted by 5,884 students who participated in one or more of 18 highly rated MOOCs that exemplified good practices or teaching strategies and received an overall five-star course quality rating and received at least 50 reviews from different learners within a specific subject area. They describe six themes from the data: (a) structure and pace, (b) video, (c) instructor, (d) content and resources, (e) interaction and support, and (f) assignment and assessment.

From MOOCs TO OER...not a large leap. Four OER-related articles follow.

To shed light on the impact of open education resources (OER) on the employability of marginalized groups, **Chib and Wardoyo** studied open and distance learning in the context of low-income female migrant domestic workers as a marginalized community. This timely and socially relevant study concluded that while institutional learning, combined with employability awareness, had a significant influence on livelihood outcomes, this did not lead to actual improvements in learning or functional literacy. Rather, learning improvement was influenced by digital skills enabled by mobile phones and computers. The study concludes with a discussion on the policy implications.

Ganapathi's study, rooted in the fact that education is a fundamental human right, yet one-fifth of the world's population is illiterate, retrieved lessons from three children's content-providing organizations to understand the opportunities and challenges of OER in primary-level education in developing nations with similar cultural, infrastructural, and socio-economic issues. While the findings of this study suggest that the use of OER allows for greater distribution and scale across different cultural and linguistic settings, particularly in rural and remote regions, they also warn against the adaptation and pedagogical barriers of OER into societies where traditional modes of education are established and trusted.

The purpose of **Mason and Kimmons'** qualitative study was to understand whether certain theoretical benefits that open educational resources (OER) might have on teacher practice were being realized by a group of secondary teachers using open science textbooks. Most participants reported changes to practice, and the most commonly cited changes could be attributed to a combination of openness and online format. In comparisons of current to previous practice, however, teachers did not report increases in the open practices of collaboration, revising, or adapting. There is work to be done!

Likewise, in the Netherlands, to find out how to speed up the adoption of open sharing and reuse of learning materials in publicly funded higher education institutions, **Schuer and Janssen** conducted a qualitative research study that examined issues of willingness of educators and management, barriers and enablers of adoption, and the role of institutional and national policy in the adoption of open sharing and reuse of learning materials and online courses. Findings showed that motivation to use OER was related to the desire to create better learning experiences for students. Barriers to OER use included lack of awareness of opportunities for open sharing and reuse and a lack of time.

From OER to OEP, an area in which we are seeing more and more publications. From Australia, **Stagg, Nguyen, Bossu, Partridge, Funk, and Judith** provide a contemporary view of sector-wide OEP engagement in Australia—a macro-view that is not well-represented in open research to date. It identifies core areas of capacity that could be further leveraged by a national OEP initiative or by national policy on OEP. This first-phase research suggests that the experience of OEP across the sector is diverse, but the underlying infrastructure to support the creation, (re)use, and dissemination of resources is present.

ODL practices and processes – and problems – will always be topical. **Cabi** investigated the impact of the flipped classroom (FC) on learners' achievement and sought the opinions of learners about the FC. The results showed that there were no statistically significant differences between the scores of the two groups. These results echo other studies over the years that have revealed no significant difference between delivery

modes. The study identified FC problems, labelled motivation, content, and learning, and presented learners' opinions on advantages and disadvantages of the flipped classroom.

Weidlich and Bastiaens looked at the impact of transactional distance on satisfaction in online learning, extending Moore's seminal work of years past. Using a new scale for measuring transactional distance between students and the learning technology (TDSTECH), they conclude that TDSTECH is the single most important predictor of satisfaction for distance learners and suggest that this finding has important implications for practitioners trying to design and facilitate satisfying online distance learning experiences.

Arshad and Akram's paper investigates the impact of virtual environmental characteristics such as collaboration, communication, and resource-sharing on social media adoption by the academic community at university level. Findings suggest that an individual's propensity toward social media features (i.e., collaboration, communication, and resource sharing) acts as a stimulus to social media adoption. Moreover, perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness mediate the relationship between these stimuli and their outcomes (i.e., social media adoption).

Perhaps Unisa deserves special mention for two contributions in this issue? In her study of distance educator competence at Unisa, **Bezuidenhout's** 407 participants reflected on their experienced competency gaps that impacted them the most. From a strategic human resource development perspective, systems theory was used to explain the idea of maximising outputs with the minimum inputs. The results of this study have implications for capacity-building of academic staff in developing world contexts and other contexts where resources are scarce.

Pilkington's "playful" study explored promoting motivation in a distance third-year computer programming course via a gamified approach. The results of using gamification in education are mixed, and its use is controversial. There was little evidence that the gamification intervention led to behaviour change or improved scores; however, students responded very positively to the intervention, although some negative themes emerged. Was the effort worth it? Pilkington concluded that such playful approaches could have positive motivational effects.

And finally, also from Africa, **Tumbo, Mwalukasa, Fue, Mlozi, Haug, and Sanga** bring us interesting agricultural research from Tanzania, exploring how agricultural extension service can be geared toward teaching farmers how to develop innovative and cost-effective technologies given that advancements in ICTs have brought new opportunities for enhancing access to agricultural advisory and extension service for climate change adaptation. In Tanzania, a dire agricultural situation calls for new tools in order to understand hidden patterns from massive data. This study features a semi-automated text classification that was developed to determine keywords from a web and mobile-based farmers' advisory system that has been used for more than two years by more than 700 farmers.

IRRODL invites various kinds of "notes" in addition to fully developed research pieces. These notes are described on our website, in our recently revamped "Submissions" section, in which we attempt to give you as much information as possible to make the submission process clearer and easier for you. Two research notes follow.

Barker, Jeffery, Jhangiani, and Veletsianos, in their Research Note, identified, described, and illustrated eight distinct patterns of open textbook adoption: stealth adoption, adoption by infection, committee adoption, sanctioned exceptional adoption, course developer adoption, infection by inter-institutional carrier, creation and adoption, and lone adoption. The authors hope that identifying these patterns provides a useful framework for campus leaders to (a) understand how adoptions occur in their own contexts, (b) identify ways to support further adoptions, (c) recognize that there are multiple ways, and no single path, to supporting the adoption of educational innovations at their institutions, and (d) foster the embrace of wider open educational practices.

Béché's Research Note provides a literature review on open distance learning (ODL) in Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa, including research on topics such as the supporting reasons for the creation of ODL systems and their potentials; and success, difficulties, and issues linked to their implementation. The literature review shows that studies on ODLs in this area emphasize the representations, motivations, and identities of students and university managers, including the historical and cooperative aspects of these third-generation learnings. Further research must explore teaching and learning practices, evaluation, social and university transformations, and hybrid forms of learning.

