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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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November – 2018

Editorial

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Welcome to the fifth and final issue of 2018. It has been a wonderfully productive and busy year for IRRODL. We have published 88 research articles along with our selection of “notes” from various areas of the field and book reviews. Keep those articles coming (while paying close attention to standards, formatting, and word length!).

When I first glance at the listed articles for publication in an issue, wearing my organizational hat, I am looking at their subject matter in order to find some coherence among topics. This choice is usually driven by numbers: for this issue, the numbers surely point to MOOCs.

King, Pegrum, and Forsey – all from Australia – consider the state of MOOCs and OER – together constituting a good portion of “visible” open in the Global South. From a literature review, they conclude that the “ongoing tendency for the research literature to pay little heed to the agency of the social actors with the most to gain from these innovations is noted,” and they use this reality to call for more research into online learners in the Global South.

MOOCs are under study everywhere and in all ways. From Russia, **Sablina, Kapliy, Trusevich, and Kostikova** examined how MOOC learners perceive success. It is interesting to note that they “discovered that taking MOOCs often coincided with the time when an individual was planning to change career, education, or life tracks.” In spite of not receiving formal credit for their studies, learners felt as though they had benefitted from their MOOC experiences.

van den Beemt, Buijs, and van der Aalst from the Netherlands and Germany, have also explored learning behaviours and progress in MOOCs. Using the process mining and clustering approach, they identified techniques for successful MOOC completion.

Another international team of authors – **Khalil, Prinsloo, and Slade** – considered the issue of user consent in MOOCs from micro, meso, and macro perspectives based on the examination of four MOOCs from varying contexts. They propose, in conclusion, that there is a need for greater transparency around the implications of users’ consent during registration for a course.

Cisel’s research on MOOCs considers interactions that take place outside of a course, illustrating a mismatch that can exist between course-prescribed and actual tasks. He found that friends and family often share MOOC activities, conceptualizing in-course activity as the tip of the iceberg.

Taking the broad view of “open,” **de Langen** considered the issue of sustainability by looking at business models to analyze not-for-profit organizations in higher education. Although the four organizations he studied used different key activities and key resources (for example, management competencies, social skills, or design and teaching skills) for their continuity, community building provided to be important in all cases.

Moving away from MOOCs to the more general field of “online,” **Rasmussen** considered boundaries in a different way by examining adults’ experiences in choosing to study online. Using a phenomenological approach, she found that adults practiced an “expansion of the recognition of care” that extended from self-outward to community.

Coker, in her investigation into online learning, examined the lecturers’ purpose, pedagogy, and philosophy and how they emerged in the dialogic patterns of the online space. Practice was shaped by the lecturers’ epistemological positioning and their cultural values and beliefs. Coker’s research illustrates the importance of online teachers understanding their own beliefs and how they bring those beliefs to their practice.

From Brazil, **Luz, Rolando, Salvador, and Sousa** examined a troubling aspect of online study, dropout, focusing their research on science teachers in that country. While socioeconomic data could not account for dropout patterns, a follow-up procedure revealed that a heavy workload and technological issues accounted for most of the reasons teachers left courses.

Examining another troubling area of online study, **Alessio, Malay, Maurer, Bailer, and Rubin** considered issues of quality and academic integrity in online exam-taking. Their results using a statistical model showed that, overall, the use of proctoring software resulted in lower quiz scores, shorter quiz taking times, and less variation in quiz performance across exams, implying greater compliance with academic integrity compared to quizzes that were taken without proctoring software.

Rienties, Herodotou, Olney, Schencks, and Borooa conducted a study among 95 online teachers to explore their readiness for learning analytics and found skepticism and a need for training and support among participants. More professional development opportunities are called for.

Still in the realm of open learning, **Hood and Littlejohn’s** novel study examined gender inequities noted in the process of editing Wikipedia entries - “editathons.” Their research focused on the topic of the Edinburgh Seven and demonstrated the transformation of readers from being online information consumers to being active contributors (editors), prompting new critical understandings, and an evolving sense of agency.

Pimmer and Rambe’s study of the roles of instant messaging applications, such as WhatsApp, they found that the realities of MIM use are socially constructed and the subject of conflictual negotiations requiring navigation among the interdependent dialectical tensions of immediacy versus delays (temporal dimension), intimacy versus detachment (relationship dimension), and task versus ludic orientation (intellectual dimension).

Chang, Shih, and Lu were also interested in the use of social networks by learners. Using the cloud-based platform CoCoing, they noted that the majority of input consisted of responses rather than concept construction, and they concluded that teacher intervention was needed to initiate concept construction. Both this study and Pimmer and Rambe’s work shed useful light on the use of social media as an “outside” class tool.

Zhang’s research on teaching language at a distance complements our many past publications on this topic of

global interest. In his case study based in China, he presents strategies to help language educators better assist their students to learn to navigate English literacy.

For mathematics teachers! In this Technical Note, **Ahn and Edwin** introduces a mathematical e-learning model based on social constructivism, social realism, and connectivity. Findings reveal that the platform offers a developer’s tool for coding and customizing templates to attain higher levels of usage and interactivity in which learners can create and control learning objects.

So concludes our 18th year of global research publications! We are, as always, grateful for your support and readership. On behalf of IRRODL, I take this opportunity to wish you peace, health, and happiness in the New Year and a Happy Holiday, wherever you may be. Look for our first 2019 edition in just a few of months!

