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Editorial

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A Burst of Spring Reading for You

Here it is Spring, at least in my part of the Western Hemisphere, and perhaps where you are too; and you would like to finally get outside to hike or fish or work in the garden, but instead you now have to sit down with your computer and read through all 20 new articles in this super-large issue of IRRODL, 17(3) – plus one book review. But wait! Thanks to m-technologies, you can actually take the journal with you on your device! Thank goodness for that because there is a lot of reading here.

This issue's articles reach far and wide across the globe and across themes. While that diversity complicates the editors' job, it speaks of a healthy, vibrant community of learners and myriad research interests. We are fortunate at IRRODL to be able to foster and distribute this kind of academic energy, and we thank all our contributors and our many reviewers for their ongoing work in this regard.

Because it has played such a major role in theorizing our field, I've chosen to start with research that pertains to the Community of Inquiry framework. Four pieces connect obviously to the CoI. In their article "Increasing Social Presence in Online Learning through Small Group Discussions," Akcaoglu and Lee investigated the effect of group size on students' perceptions of social presence in two graduate-level online courses, comparing small group versus whole class discussions with the intention of promoting social presence in asynchronous discussions.

Rockinson-Szapkiw, Wendt, Whighting, and Nisbet's CoI-related research is aptly described by their title, "The Predictive Relationship Among the Community of Inquiry Framework, Perceived Learning and Online, and Graduate Students' Course Grades in Online Synchronous and Asynchronous Courses." The results of this study supports the foundational constructs of CoI theory and the role of perceived learning to predict final course points. Implications, limitations, and recommendations are discussed.

From Sweden, Stenbom, Jansson, and Hulkko examined a special case of community of inquiry that consisted of only one learner and one instructor. Together they engaged in an online coaching discourse to form a relationship of inquiry. Read about the findings of this exploratory study that suggest that a relationship of inquiry framework has the potential to support development of one-to-one online learning in "Revising the Community of Inquiry Framework for the Analysis of One-To-One Online Learning Relationships."

Watson, Watson, Richardson, and Loizzo bridge both geography – from Indiana to Nebraska – and the thematic waters of social presence, from the CoI framework to MOOCs, in "Instructor's Use of Social Presence, Teaching Presence, and Attitudinal Dissonance: A Case Study of an Attitudinal Change MOOC." Their study examined a MOOC instructor's use of social presence, teaching presence, and dissonance in a MOOC designed to promote attitudinal change. Findings that present a detailed examination of instructor strategies in a MOOC designed to focus on the establishment of a collaborative learning community can inform future instructional design and instruction of MOOCs in general and MOOCs for attitudinal change specifically.

Staying with the MOOC theme, Kursun, in "Does Formal Credit Work for MOOC-Like Learning Environments?" investigates whether or not MOOCs should perhaps be considered as an integrative model for higher education systems, a move that would require the recognition of credentials – a topic much discussed in the MOOC literature. His research showed that the notion of credit had significant impact for learners and suggests various models can be adopted by higher education institutions to integrate MOOCs as a credit.

Loeckx also tackled MOOCS in "Blurring Boundaries in Education: Context and Impact of MOOCs," where he focused on the broader social, cultural, and technological context underlying MOOC development, concluding that the educational industry has received a wake-up call leading to a global discussion on learning and teaching, and thus disturbing established boundaries between formal and informal learning, public and for-profit education, teachers and learners, and between software and teaching practices. In this, he sees opportunities for more development of TEL, digitization, and gamification.

Open and distributed learning is itself a "blurring of boundaries," having laid siege to traditional understandings of education for years. This journals pages are evidence of that – attracting research that crosses many boundaries and, fortunately, critically explores them. And so a small jump from MOOCs to OER continues to challenge tradition, when Amiel (UNESCO Chair in Open Education) and Soares, analysing 50 repositories in Latin America for education content, identified a high level of incongruity that could lead to a limited impact in OER use and reuse, and discussed the lack of guidance in implementation of such repositories, concluding with a discussion on the emphasis given to licensing in the OER movement and how it may be an evidence of a clash between the social and legal commons. Their article is entitled "Identifying tensions in the use of open licenses in OER repositories."

More of a leap than a blur, we now turn to a number of pieces that attend to design and pedagogical (andragogical?) applications of theory. Starting with the theme of interaction, Czerkawski reports in "Blending Formal and Informal Learning Networks for Online Learning" on a research study where

graduate students were surveyed in their use of informal and formal learning networks in online courses to understand the interaction between the two and how they impact each other. The findings showed that although students and professors use both environments often, online course design does not usually consider students' informal learning experiences, and suggests that a new course design framework may contribute to the discussion of blending informal and formal learning online.

Several articles concern interaction among learners, a topic always of interest to online educators and designers. Madland and Richards, in "Enhancing Student-Student Online Interaction: Exploring the Study Buddy Peer Review Activity," studied a graduate course and used a mixed-methods study to examine both quantitative and qualitative aspects of student perceptions using a "study buddy" activity, finding that 88% of study buddies said they found the activity well worth their time, and would recommend it for other graduate courses. The authors suggest that more use could be made of this pedagogy.

I have included Zhang and Chu's "New Ideas on the Design of the Web-Based Learning System Oriented to Problem Solving from the Perspective of Question Chain and Learning Community" here given that they concluded that more attention should be paid to the learning mechanism involved in the problem-solving process than to the technology. Hence, they put forward some new ideas on the design of problem-solving systems. Drawing on the work on Jonassen, Vygotsky, and other constructivist thinkers, they find new significance in the power of community among learners.

Interaction requires support – of course design, of instructors and facilitators, and of course of technology. From Malaysia, Ghadirian, Ayub, Abu Bakar, and Hassanzadeh discuss facilitation supports in "Growth Patterns and E-Moderating Supports in Asynchronous Online Discussions in an Undergraduate Blended Course" in a case study designed to address the gap in our current understanding of how threads are developed in peer-moderated synchronous discussion. As an online teacher, I found it particularly interesting that discussion thread continuity was reinforced by the use of "knowledge construction" support and less with "socialization" supports or motivation supports. I wonder whether this would be true of graduate courses as well.

Noroozi, McAlister, and Mulder's research on "Impacts of a Digital Dialogue Game and Epistemic Beliefs on Argumentative Discourse and Willingness to Argue" is also included here, in the interaction discussion, as they explored how students debate with their peers within a designed context using a digital dialogue game, and whether their epistemic beliefs are significant to the outcomes. While previous research has shown that some epistemic beliefs lead to less critical engagement with peers, the results presented here demonstrate that activity design is also an important factor in successful engagement within argumentative discourse.

For a K-12 discussion, Borup's research on "Teacher Perceptions of Learner-Learner Engagement at a Cyber High School," in which he examines how online high school teachers perceive, value, and facilitate learner–learner interactions. His analysis identified four student behaviours that positively impact student engagement and learning - befriending, motivating, instructing, and collaborating – as well as identifying several drawbacks to learner–learner interactions such as bullying and cheating.

In "Hispanic or Latino Student Success in Online Schools." Corry gives us another K-12 study, from Arizona, where he investigated graduation and dropout rates for Hispanic or Latino students in various school types (charter vs. non-charter) using various delivery methods (fully online vs. blended). Results showed that Hispanic or Latino students involved in K–12 online learning in Arizona are less likely to drop out of school if they are in a fully online learning environment versus a blended learning environment. Using this and related research to form a basis upon to make decisions could lead to increased success for Hispanic or Latino online K–12 students not only in Arizona schools, but elsewhere.

An American study on blended learning, "Participation in the Virtual Environment of Blended College Courses: An Activity Study of Student Performance," by Cavanaugh, Hargis, and Mayberry, looked at blended success factors in undergraduate liberal studies courses in a science program by measuring the number of times students logged into the learning management system (LMS) and their average session length. They observed that students with an intermediate number of logins and average session length tended to exhibit the optimal level of course performance with students who logged in near the low or high amount of times tending to receive lower grades.

Across the globe, Cigdem and Ozturk investigated predictors of students' behavioural intentions toward LMS use at a military school in Turkey. In their report, "Factors Affecting Students' Behavioral Intention to Use LMS at a Turkish Post-Secondary Vocational School," they found that learners responded to ease of use and perceived usefulness, and suggested that an increase in multimedia features and interactivity of the system could lead to even higher perceived usefulness, ease of use among learners, and increased learners' perceived satisfaction and increased engagement.

The next two articles considered trends and directions in two areas, geographical (South Africa) and methodological (the flipped classroom). From UNISA, Mkhize, Mtsweni, and Buthelez studied that insitution's LMS to determine the factors that influenced it acceptance and usage by learners. Their findings are reported in "Diffusion of Innovations Approach to the Evaluation of Learning Management System Usage in an Open Distance Learning Institution." From Indonesia and Malaysia, Zainuddin and Halil sought to analyse trends and contents of flipped classroom research based on 20 articles on flipped learning classroom initiatives from 2013 to 2015. Their analysis of the impacts showed that flipped classroom positively impacted students' achievement, motivation, engagement, and interaction. Some challenges found in implementing the flipped classroom concern poor quality of video lectures and untrained instructors.

As a qualitative researcher, I am always searching for themes and categories, but as I approach the end of this massively long editorial, I introduce two articles whose topic areas fall outside the previous groupings. First, Makokha and Mutisya address the "Status of E-Learning in Public Universities in Kenya" and found that universities in Kenya lacked requisite ICT infrastructure and skills. The majority of online courses simply consisted of uploaded modules and lecture notes and were not interactive. The study recommends that universities partner with the private sector to improve ICT infrastructure, build capacity, and standardize e-learning programs in the country.

And lastly, researchers Aghaee, Jobe, Karunaratne, Smedberg, Hansson, and Tedre bring us their study on "Interaction Gaps in PhD Education and ICT as a Way Forward: Results from a Study in Sweden," where they investigated perceived problems of PhD education from doctoral students' points of view, and looked at how an Information and Communication Technology Support System (ICTSS) could alleviate these problems. A system was prototyped to facilitate different types of online interaction, and the result of the study provided some rudimentary ideas on how an online ICTSS may facilitate PhD education by providing distance and collaborative learning and fostering PhD students' self-managed communication. No doubt we can all relate to the hardships of completing arduous doctoral studies!

Let's not forget this issue's book review. As you may recall, we have recently reintroduced this feature to our pages. If you have an idea for a book review, don't hesitate to contact our Book Review editor, Cengiz Hakan Aydin.

This issue's review is written by Liwen Chen from Taiwan; he reviews Watts and Stenner's 2014 publication, *Doing Q Methodological Research: Theory, Method and Interpretation,* a 238 page volume on the use of mixed methodologies in research.

Thank you for reading this lengthy introduction to our third issue of 2016 (already!). At least two more are planned for this year. Again, we thank our contributors and readers for your ongoing support of the journal. Watch for another large issue in a couple of months!