

Editorial for EJEL Volume 11 Issue 2

The articles in this issue demonstrate the widening range of possibilities for e-learning. The technologies continue to develop and change, and issues of adoption and innovation persist. Like any other technologies, e-learning hardware and software is best used when it is introduced to solve a real problem which has been carefully thought through. The articles show that there is tremendous promise and opportunity, but there are no quick fixes, and no one-size-fits all solutions.

Kyalo and Hopkins investigated attitudes towards online learning for continuous professional development in medical colleges in Kenya, which are facing financial and multi-site challenges. Online learning was found to be acceptable in principle, but the survey confirmed doubts about using online learning for practical and, particularly, for clinical subjects. Fears about the credibility of online qualifications did not seem to be warranted, but this could depend on the clinical or theoretical focus of a course. Motivation was seen a potential problem too, and although many of the staff who had previous experience of online learning were positive, the majority were decidedly neutral. The recommendation of the authors is to adopt a hybrid approach, which is likely to deal with many of these problems.

Hramiak asks whether experience of using blogs in teacher training can simply be cascaded into schools, or whether it is much more complex than that. Teachers' confidence in using blogs came up against 'inhibitors' in the actual classroom. Time, access and support were issues. Not surprisingly, the use of blogs needed to be integrated with pedagogy, specifically with ways to support, share and reflect on experience and interaction, and with the curriculum. Strategically, there is a need for 'whole' school' approaches too.

They do flag up the issue of academics being "reluctant to adopt technology in their sessions with trainees", which seems to point to a reluctance to 'let go', and embrace students opportunities to interact, and learn in different spaces, outside of the narrow circle of teacher-student interaction in the classroom. Perhaps this has some bearing on the reluctance of head-teachers to adopt whole school approaches too. This can be mission-critical, where issues such as firewalls are not solved, enclosing the school in its own walled garden, in which one of the major affordances of blogs – to reach out of the classroom, is prohibited.

Xanthou has developed a dynamic e-assessment tool which responds not just to whether the answer to a particular question is right or wrong, but also to the level of accuracy of the answer. It then raises or lowers the level of the following questions. This provides the student with the motivation to repeat the tests until they become familiar with the course content.

This includes both adaptive presentation and adaptive navigation – the latter in particular provides more than just a 'programmed learning' response, as the learner has freedom of choice which enables them to determine their own learning paths. She concludes that while physical contact with a tutor is clearly ideal, these adaptive

tools can “significantly contribute towards a more interactive, ... more efficient, meritocratic educational framework that cannot be reproduced using conventional ... means”.

Worrall and Harris conducted action research with a group of professionals hard pressed for time, and dissatisfied with the lack of responsiveness of their currently available networking platforms. They conclude that feedback needs to be improved, and they need to have more ownership of the site, as well as more facilities for private interaction in private chat rooms.

Florence Martin and Michele A Parker explore the adoption of synchronous online classrooms at university, using Roger’s model of diffusion of innovation. They found that availability and ease of use, and efficiency and reliability of the system were key extrinsic motivators, although the faculty were wary of using particular tools if they lacked confidence.

Personal factors that rated highest for adoption were an interest in improving teaching and learning, supporting studies elsewhere. Archiving and play-back, and the audio and text chat feedback facilities were used extensively. Conferencing was used for online courses as well as to extend interaction in blended courses, and to offer virtual office hours.

Moten et al tackle the ever growing problem of online cheating, as availability and sophistication of such ‘services’ continues to grow. Procrastination and time-management, peer pressure and behavior, and a less personalized and distant relationship to students all played a role. The authors discuss a range of problems and possible solutions, but it remains an ongoing issue.

Kotsilieris and Dimopoulou explore the possibilities offered by 3D virtual worlds for students to interact via avatars, in ways which are not possible in the real world. They discuss the way Sloodle can be used to bring together Moodle and OpenSim, and their experience in setting up an experimental virtual class.

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