

Editorial for Volume 14 issue 1 ECEL 2015

Guest editors

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Introduction

Welcome to this special edition of EJEL, which shares a selection of extended papers initially presented at the 14th European Conference on E-Learning (ECEL), which was held in October 2015 at the University of Hertfordshire, UK. In this edition six papers are presented which discuss and reflect on research into multiple aspects of introducing digital technologies to enhance learning from Chile, New Zealand, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Denmark and the UK. This range of author nationalities is indicative of the value and reach of this European conference which now draws a global audience.

The focus of much e-learning research in recent years has concentrated on understanding how student users of digital technologies can enhance their learning whether at school, university level or in professional learning. Charbonneau-Gowdy and colleagues consider the important role of teacher identity in the embracing of technology-mediated learning in Teacher Education. They explore the development of teacher skills in using digital technologies for both research and learning, with initial teacher training and also experienced teachers. Their findings from a 16-month study of guided e-reading and technology-supported mentoring to prepare pre-service teachers are discussed in the context of the reflections of teachers who have been in service for a while. Their primary consideration is the importance of supportive mentoring especially where trainee teachers' 'lack confidence in using technology' and in a context where they face complex barriers – infrastructural, pedagogical and human - in their engagement with and use of technology. Paradoxically, the authors conclude that for pre-service teachers it was the affordances of the technology that were crucial in providing the context of enriching opportunities for good mentoring.

In-service training of teachers is also the theme in the study from the Center for Teaching and Learning, University College Zealand (UCS), Denmark, in a paper entitled 'Design framework for an adaptive MOOC enhanced by blended learning'. In the light of the Danish government's requirement for all primary school teachers to be educated to Bachelor's degree level in their specialist subject by 2020 a radical approach of offering in-service training to teachers via a MOOC has been adopted by UCS. This is in order to support the demands of the additional in-service training required. Gynther and colleagues explore the design and development of a MOOC by means of a design framework to guide the development of instructional designs. This has been adapted for the different training needs of experienced teachers. In the light of the literature they reflect on their rationale for the MOOC design framework which allows the users to have a unique personal curriculum based on their prior experience, skills and competencies. Early evaluation of participants of this ambitious project indicate that it is the external factors such as the lack of time off for in-service training which can be a barrier to progression and completion for mature students in full-time employment.

Schoolteachers' use of technology is discussed in the three year longitudinal study reported by Parsons and Adhikari in 'Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) to Secondary School: The Perceptions of Teachers, Students and Parents'. The authors explore how a school in Auckland, New Zealand has adopted a policy of using personally owned computers and the impact this has had on the primary stakeholders – the teachers, the students and their parents. The length of the study enabled them to take a longer view of how the BYOD classroom has developed and matured as they considered the importance of including the parental view in addition to the student and teaching staff users in the context of BYOD. The teachers commented positively on the changing classroom environment because it offered a more student-centred learning focus as the classrooms became 'more devolved, collaborative, group based and student centric'. Overall the authors considered that the analysis of the qualitative data from teachers was substantially

positive, whereas responses from parents and students were more mixed. They suggest that the impact of agency has an important role to play, in this context, teachers had the greatest agency, but parents the least.

University students' digital and information literacy skills are the focus of Tang and Chaw's paper 'Digital Literacy: A Prerequisite for Effective Learning in a Blended Learning Environment?' They postulate that while it is generally accepted nowadays that students 'face no difficulties in using technology for everyday social and entertainment activities' they query how far 'students can make effective use of technology for learning as well', since in order to make most effective use of technology for learning, they need to display a certain level of digital literacy. Digital literacies have been the source of a number of recent research studies and it is widely acknowledged from UK and US-based studies across tertiary and further education that the possession of effective information management and critical thinking skills and online behaviours leads to a positive contribution to student achievement. This study asks 'Do students require digital literacy to be effective in learning in a blended learning environment? The authors conclude their detailed literature review and the analysis of their own data by asserting that a 'good fit of digital literacy level to course expectations is indeed necessary for successful blended learning.'

Nakayma and colleagues share their work into researching course participants' participation and self-efficacy as a way to understand barriers to student achievement, in a detailed study considering aspects of student participation in a blended course. Their hypothesis was that increased note-taking activity may positively affect student's emotional aspects, such as self-reflection. They gathered students' reflections on their participation in their studies through the students' own note-taking activities during a semester. The full statistical analysis led to the authors confirming that the level of information literacy and student's learning experience contributed positively to factors of student's reflection

In 'Introducing Open Educational Practices (OEP) to a large research-intensive university (RIU)' Masterman first explores the current situation where sharing of knowledge is now globally possible through digital technologies, noting that "*Open sharing of knowledge is at the heart of the academic process. For many faculty, it is an intrinsic value, convincingly demonstrated in their teaching and research*" (Lerman, Miyagawa and Margulies, 2008, 214). She considers the literature on both OEP and RIU in the light of a study which included detailed interviews with 14 academics at the University of Oxford. Her own findings indicate that open educational approaches can be accommodated within a university's prevailing pedagogic model without compromising its integrity and that the practice of openness can enhance the specifics of that pedagogy. She discusses how this can occur through aligning research-informed teaching with emergent open practices in research and equipping students with the skills necessary for living and working in an open world. She considers the motivating factors for the academic sharing their materials whether '*altruism, enhancement of reputation or knowledge self-efficacy*', the academic or researcher re-using materials and the role of the institution in supporting the practice. She acknowledges that ultimately the spread of open practices in both pedagogy and outreach hinges on issues of governance, which in RIUs is historically characterised by academic autonomy. Important questions raised include whether examples of practice from the University of Oxford with its almost unique tutoring approach might be applied in other research-intensive universities and how those HE institutions which focus primarily on teaching can benefit from OEP.

The selection of papers for this Special Issue demonstrates the breadth and depth of e-learning research and the interdisciplinary nature of the e-learning field, which can be positioned within the intersection of Education, Information Systems, and Business subject areas. We commend the diversity of research strategies, methods and techniques and the diversity of the stakeholders' perspectives and hope you enjoy reading this issue.