# International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning

# Introducing IRRODL's Regional Editors: Building a relevant pathway to a global village of distance education literature

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# Introducing IRRODL's Regional Editors: Building a relevant pathway to a global village of distance education literature

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**Paula Smith**, Managing Editor, IRRODL

Not only is distance education multi-layered and complex, life itself is multi-layered and complex – contextualized by politics, economics, and culture. This complicates IRRODL's vision as a global e-journal dedicated to the open access dissemination of open and distance education (ODL) research, theory, and practice worldwide. How can IRRODL be everything ODL to everybody interested in ODL? How can we judge what is truly relevant in, say, China, Brazil, Mozambique, the USA, Russia, and Pakistan?

The challenge of running an international journal was made apparent during a recent IRRODL editorial meeting, IRRODL's founding editor, Peter Cookson, offered sage advice when one editorial team member suggested that the content we are publishing is designed to help those developing countries, help themselves. Although we cannot recollect Peter Cookson's reply verbatim, it went something like this: "That maybe true. But don't ever assume that you are 'helping' people in developing countries – or even that they want your help to begin with. That often is not case!"

Peter's comment rang true in this discussion and is critically relevant to IRRODL's future. It also made us think about basic communication theory as applied to the dissemination of ODL literature via open access publishing vehicles, such as IRRODL. Specifically, it made us think about the theoretical underpinnings as articulated by Harold Adams Innis and Marshall McLuhan, and what impact communications theory implies for IRRODL.

Innis, a respected Canadian political economist, was dying of cancer when he wrote a thousand page manuscript examining the social history of communication media. His final work was later was published as a triology, the most notable being *The Bias of Communication* published in 1951. Innis' final work, however, was so involved and difficult to read that *Bias* was 'archived' in the University of Toronto library with little initial attention paid (Hissey, 1988). A decade later, Marshall McLuhan came upon Innis' work and the rest is history – Innis' theory was noticed and advanced through McLuhan.

For those of you who have read *Bias*, you will see the seeds of McLuhan's groundbreaking communications theory that, to this day, hold implications for all disciplines, including Distance Education. But where McLuhan (1968) saw the dawning of a "global village," emerging via an interconnected neural network of mass communication media; Innis recognized that the introduction of new media could be used as a vehicle of oppression and cultural hegemony. Put simply, where McLuhan ultimately saw a pathway to light (global community), Innis tended to see dark (hegemony, oppression, and leading to war). They explored opposite manifestations of the same phenomena, and whereas Innis' early death cut short his work, McLuhan diligently pushed it forward to explore theoretical pathways towards utopia – McLuhan's global village. In sum, both these scholars saw new media as either beneficial to, or inimical towards, society and social structures.

While it is clearly beyond the scope of this short editorial to do more than scratch the surface of Innis' and McLuhan's theoretical frameworks, suffice it to say these Canadian communication theorists did form the germ of an idea that will drive IRRODL from this point forward. We need to draw upon expertise from many global perspectives to create a forum that reflects the cultural diversity and practice of DE on an international scale.

We are pleased to announce the introduction of IRRODL's Regional Editorial Team. These scholars, listed below in alphabetical order, were invited to serve as Regional Editors based on their rigorous dedication to the advancement of ODL research and their strong contribution to the Journal over the previous five years. And while some Regional Editorial Team members might be well known to you, it is likely many are not. For as small as the world is today, it is still a pretty big place. IRRODL's Regional Editors are not window dressing – they are dedicated scholars and practitioners committed to adding value by articulating a regional perspective. We are honoured they have accepted our invitation to serve as Regional Editors, and we are proud to present IRRODL's Regional Editors:

*Rashid Aderinoye, PhD,* University of Ibidan, Nigeria
Dr. Aderinoye is responsible for Central Africa and South Africa
*Cengiz Hakan Aydin, PhD,* Anadolu University, Turkey
Dr. Aydin is responsible for North Africa and Middle East (i.e., Morocco, Iran, Afghanistan)
*Patrick Danaher, PhD,* University of South Australia
Dr. Danaher is responsible for Australia, New Zealand, and Oceanana
*Insung Jung, PhD*, Christian Women's University, Japan
Dr. Jung is responsible for Asia Major (i.e., China, Korea, Japan)
*Sanjaya Mishra, PhD,* Indira Gandhi National Open University, India
Dr. Mishra is responsible for Asia Minor (i.e., India, Pakistan, Nepal)
*Fredric Litto, PhD,* University of São Paulo, Brazil
Dr. Litto is responsible for South and Central America and Mexico
*Fred Rovai, PhD,* Regents University, USA
Dr. Rovai is responsible for North America
*Morten Flate Paulsen, PhD,* Norgesuniversitetet, Norway
Dr. Paulsen is responsible for Scandinavia and Northern Europe (i.e., Sweden, UK, Germany)

**OPEN:** Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union
**OPEN:** Southern Europe

With this new decentralized editorial structure, IRRODL aims to increase its relevance to – and be reflective of – regionally localized context. IRRODL's Regional Editors will: (1) provide editorial guidance on submissions on a region-by-region basis; (2) solicit papers from their respective regions; (3) and edit a special regional-focus issue approximately every five years.

The purpose of IRRODL's Regional Editor Team structure was made clear during the 2005 Canadian Association of Distance Educators (CADE) conference in Vancouver Canada, wherein the Commonwealth of Learning sponsored several delegates from South Africa, Zambia, Namibia, and Ghana. These scholars and practitioners presented papers on topics that many of us living, working, and researching in developed countries have certainly heard about, but rarely – if ever – have personally had to deal with. These African delegates shared their experiences of delivering DE classes in Africa (e.g., remote teacher training, AIDS orphans, basic literacy, etc.) when the channels for course materials dissemination are wholly inadequate, or totally non-existent. Richard Siaciwena (IRRODL board member) said that in many African villages, DE classes are broadcast via radio – a pedagogical tactic used to overcome barriers of space and basic literacy. Moreover, because there are no schools in many African villages, radio-based DE classes are often held under a large, shady tree. And while presenting DE lessons from under the tree, curious villagers of all ages, typically drop-in unannounced. "It is not uncommon for such classes to swell from 20 'registered' students, to several dozen or even a hundred 'unregistered' students," said Richard. "But these people are just as intent on learning as the 'registered' students." What Richard described at the CADE conference is the DE experience throughout many regions in the world. And this is exactly why IRRODL must pay heed to the warnings of Innis (and Peter Cookson) and this is why we must continually strive to be sensitive to academic rigor and literature dissemination on a region-by-region basis – with the vision of building a global village of distance educators. Indeed, if one is teaching basic literacy skills to villagers from under a large, shady tree, it is perhaps not too much of a technological fantasy to imagine these students accessing content and interacting with others via mobile cell phone technology under that tree? But regardless of the media, IRRODL's content must be relevant to the audience for which it is intended on a region-by-region basis – whether it is disseminating literature on qualitative content analysis, a comparative analysis of asynchronous and synchronous distance delivery, exploring the emerging role of m-learning, or teaching basic literacy via radio to students under a tree.

# Introducing Cider Notes

In this issue of IRRODL, we have five Main Section papers, three Book Reviews, and four Technical Note reviews. For those of you with adequate bandwidth, we have cross-linked to an archived series of live audio-graphic presentations called CIDER Sessions, which were sponsored by the *Canadian Institute for Distance Education Research* and *Elluminate*, and held online in Spring 2005. While this research hails from Canada, we feel this work holds value for ODL researchers and students around the world. These CIDER Sessions are: 1) Distance Education Research, Design-based Research and the CIDER Solution; 2) Research on Formal Virtual

Learning Communities in Higher Education; 3) Content Analysis of Online Asynchronous Discussions; 4) Learning Object Repository Network; 5) Investigating How Technology Innovation is Decided and Implemented in an Inter-organizational Collaboration; 6), Affect as a Presence in the Community of Inquiry Model; 7) e-Learning 2.0; 8) Games as Learning Environments: Research strategies and issues. We hope you will be able to download the free JAVA engine and JAVA applets from *Elluminate*, and sample these hour long CIDER Sessions.

# The Main Section

In this issue, we start with an insightful paper: *An Assessment of the Academic Achievement of Students in Two Modes of Part-time Programme in Nigeria* by Kola Adeyemi and Austin Osunde at the University of Benin. These authors report on a post-hoc study that analyzed the academic achievement of outreach and on-campus students at three dual-mode Nigerian universities. Adeyemi and Osunde wrap up with several suggestions for improvement.

Next in *Increasing Access to Higher Education: A study of the diffusion of online teaching among 913 college faculty*, The State University of New York's Peter Shea, Alexandra Pickett, and Chun Sau Li, report on research on American professors engaged in dual mode distance education delivery. The purpose of this work is to determine barriers to adoption of online teaching in dual mode college and university contexts.

University of Ottawa's Colla J. MacDonald and Terrie Lynn Thompson report on an analysis of e-Learning experiences using the Demand-Driven Learning Model (DDLM) to evaluate an online Masters in Education course, in their paper: *Structure, Content, Delivery, Service, and Outcomes: Quality e-Learning in higher education*. Using multiple data collection methods, they find that all five dimensions of the DDLM model must work in concert to implement a quality e-Learning course.

In *Navigating Distance and Traditional Higher Education: Online faculty experiences*, Alice G. Yick, Pam Patrick, and Amanda Costin from Capella University in the US, report on a qualitative study designed to explore faculty members' experiences in a DE, online university vis-à-vis the traditional environment of higher education. Explored are issues such as tenure, professional practice, program development, and policy.

In *Selected Topics from a Matched Study between a Face-to-face section and a Real-time Online section of a University Course*, Mia Lobel and Randy Swedburg of Concordia University, and Michael Neubauer, Stanford University, report on a matched study designed to compare interaction of two groups of students studying the same course, one enrolled in an online section using LBD eClassroom©, and the other in a face-to-face section.

Our final Main Section paper: *Identifying Sources of Difference in Reliability in Content Analysis*, by Elizabeth Murphy and Justyna Ciszewska-Carr, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada, complements CIDER Session #3: Content Analysis of Online Asynchronous Discussions. In this paper, the authors discuss important reliability issues involved in quantitative content analysis of transcripts of online asynchronous discussions.

# Book Notes

This issue features three book reviews of recent DE publications. Lending his expertise in leadership issues in distance education, Don Olcott Jr. reviews: *Reflections on Research, Faculty and Leadership in Distance Education*, edited by Michael F. Beaudoin. Next, Erin Keough brings her insights on technology application to her review of *Distance Education and Technology: Issues and Practice*, co-edited by David Murphy, Ronnie Carr, James Taylor, and Wong Tat-meng. Finally, Stacy Ludwig reviews the latest volume from the Oldenburg series *Learner Support in Open, Distance and Online Learning Environments*, co-edited by Jane Brindley, Christine Walti, and Olaf Zawacki-Richter.

# Technical Notes

We wrap up this issue with four installments of the popular Technical Notes section which examine 1) a comparison of Wiki products; 2) rubrics and exemplars in text-conferencing; 3) learning objects and instructional design; and 4) optimizing synchronous conferencing freeware. We hope you will enjoy and benefit from this latest issue of IRRODL, and we trust you will continue to visit and reference previous issues of IRRODL. And we trust that you will subscribe to IRRODL so you can continue to grow and learn and expand your horizons with us.

*Terry Anderson, Editor*
*Paula Smith, Managing Editor*
*Edmonton, Canada, June 30, 2005*

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