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Leadership

In this issue we present the first article in a new IRRODL section, Leadership in Open and Distance Learning Notes. There is little doubt about the importance of leadership in all organizations in the complex and ever-changing context of the twenty-first century. The cult of leadership is especially visible to us now as the Americans, the French, and the Russians crank up their respective presidential leadership campaigns. But closer to home and the workplace, it is easy to think about leadership as being something for which someone else, higher up, is responsible. Surely our problems exist because the president, the provost, my department head, or my colleagues just aren't being effective leaders!

However, crowd sourcing, the viral influence of individual blogs and YouTube posts, and the power of tweets and Facebook posts force all of us to confront and take responsibility for our own leadership capacities. We can exercise a great deal of leadership in our homes, schools, and workplaces, but that leadership demands commitment, energy, and risk. All of us, as distance education researchers and practitioners, are challenged to maximize and optimize our respective leadership contributions. Our collective mission, to expand opportunity and to increase the development and effective use of knowledge, demands that we be leaders and develop our individual leadership capacities. We hope this new series will help all of us to become more effective leaders. We welcome new articles from both students and practitioners for this series.

The Leadership in Open and Distance Learning Notes section is edited by Professor Marti Cleveland-Innes from the Centre for Distance Education at Athabasca University. Dr. Cleveland-Innes will be familiar to many IRRODL readers as an active sociologist and distance education researcher and author. She has published on a variety of topics related to blended learning, the community of inquiry model, social change, and more. The premier

article in the series, by Athabasca University EdD student Willy Fahlman, focuses on leadership in e-learning in health care contexts.

Introduction to the Research Papers in Issue 13(2)

Insung Jung, from South Korea and now Japan, is one of the world's leading authorities on assessing quality in online learning. In "Asian Learners' Perception of Quality in Distance Education and Gender Differences," she reports on the results from a large survey study of distance students from 11 Asian countries. She develops a conceptual model overviewing and connecting the 10 dimensions of quality that emerged, and she then highlights significant gender differences in student perception of quality.

Many distance educators have experienced the deep bifurcation between students who relish, learn from, and even demand opportunities for collaboration with their peers and the equally opinionated students who remind teachers that they enrolled in distance education so they would NOT have to interact with peers. In an insightful article from Spain, "Are Online Learners Frustrated with Collaborative Learning Experiences?," the authors present empirical evidence documenting the factors that frustrate students when they are compelled to participate in collaborative learning activities. The article concludes with recommendations for reducing these frustrations, thus making these useful pedagogical activities more acceptable and accessible to distance learners.

IRRODL joins many distance education journals and recent conferences that have focused on open educational resources (OERs) and the critical issue of adoption and reuse with two articles on this topic. In the first of these, our colleagues from the USA (and past IRRODL special issue editors) present a study of the reuse of OERs. Partially in response to the need to make educational content culturally, linguistically, and pedagogically relevant, most OERs are licensed in ways that allow teachers to modify them to suit their own context. But do teachers actually modify OERs, or do they just reuse, as is? This study reveals current practices and provides recommendations for more effective OER use.

The second OER article examines the technical challenges of finding the OER resource (from among the tens of thousands available) that best matches the unique needs of individual teachers or schools. In "Conceptual Framework for Parametrically Measuring the Desirability of Open Educational Resources Using D-Index," scholars from Malaysia address this problem from a computer science perspective, and an algorithm for searching is described and tested.

"Contradictions in a Distance Course for a Marginalized Population at a Middle Eastern University" uses the lens of activity theory to explore the contradictions in lifestyle, technology, attitude, and work that confront a sample of distance education students in the often turbulent context of modern Iran. As you read this study you will realize why we are pleased to offer an outlet for distance education teachers and researchers who are providing educational opportunities—even in contexts of considerable religious discrimination.

We next present an article by Swiss researchers examining "The Relationship Between Flexible and Self-Regulated Learning in Open and Distance Universities." Obviously students are attracted to distance and open education because it meets their increased need and desire for flexibility. But such flexibility can require critical amounts of self-directed skill, motivation, and regulation—qualities not often acquired in campus-based education. The survey results presented in this article reveal the connections between self-regulation and flexibility in design, course requirements, and other components of distance education systems.

A common theme in the popular press is the loneliness and isolation of the distance learner. But increasingly, distance education *teachers*, whether working in blended or fully distance contexts, experience a similar disconnection from colleagues and the institution due in no small part to geographic, temporal, and institutional distance. "'Everybody is their own Island': Teacher Disconnection in a Virtual School," from the USA, helps us understand the extent of this phenomenon and challenges us to develop tools and techniques to alleviate it.

Although it is true that academics and researchers love to argue about definitions and distinctions between tiny differences in their theories, tools, and contexts, most of us are more than a bit fatigued with bickering over the diverse names associated with e-learning, online learning, distance learning, flexible learning, net learning, and other close or far synonyms. Thus, "Building an Inclusive Definition of E-Learning: An Approach to the Conceptual Framework," from Catalonia, Spain, is a welcome addition to the literature. You are welcome to join the debate to see if these researchers have finally 'nailed' the definition of e-learning, for all time!

I know that Athabasca University is not the only school in which e-portfolios are proving their pedagogical value. We see increased interest in this authentic and reflective tool in both distance and campus-based education systems. But when students are geographically distributed in practicum activities, the value of staying connected and documenting and reflecting on their experience is heightened. In a paper from Turkey, "Determining the Feasibility of an E-Portfolio Application in a Distant Teaching Practice Course," recommendations are made for increasing the effective use of this tool.

We also publish in this issue two insightful research notes from Africa. The first, "Developing and Deploying OERs in sub-Saharan Africa: Building on the Present" overviews the major African initiatives, documents challenges and accomplishments, and reviews the "factors necessary for creating and sustaining a vision for OER development and deployment." The second, "Assessment of Challenges in Developing Self-Instructional Course Materials at the National Open University of Nigeria," is a case study of the challenges and accomplishments of one of the newest of the world's mega universities as it provides opportunity for the hundreds of thousands of qualified Nigerian adults who have no traditional opportunity for higher education.

Conclusion

With articles from Japan, USA, Nigeria, Switzerland, Spain, Catalonia (Spain), Turkey, Iran, Canada, and Malaysia, this issue continues IRRODL's proud tradition of being the most international of the peer-reviewed distance education journals. We also hope you appreciate the wide range of topics and the underlying theme that unites them—continuing efforts to improve distance and open education practice. Enjoy!

Athabasca University