

Introduction

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Distance learning has moved apace since the last issue of the *Journal of Distance Learning*, and developments in New Zealand reflect that movement. The Teaching and e-Learning Research Fund (TeLRF), the e-Learning Collaborative Development Fund (eCDF), and the Innovation and Development Fund (IDF) have provided opportunities for those involved in e-learning at the tertiary level to engage in research and development at a level not previously seen in this country. Government funding of \$68 million has been committed to development aspects over the four years from July 2003 to July 2007. Six hundred thousand dollars has been committed to e-learning research in the two rounds of the TeLRF. These developments are reflected, to some extent, in this issue of the journal.

One of the three feature articles in this issue comes from Philip Roy, who writes about the use of open source software (OSS). Several open source initiatives have been selected for funding in the eCDF rounds and a community of practitioners is slowly developing around those projects. Udas (2004) provides full discussion of the role of OSS in the development of e-learning capacity within New Zealand, and the most recent issue of the DEANZ flier (April, 2005; <http://deanz.org.nz/flier/2005-04/>) was devoted to this topic. The use of OSS is indeed a topic of the moment. Roy discusses aspects of

OSS use that are not so often mentioned and which serve as a counterweight to the, sometimes unbounded, enthusiasm of OSS advocates. Whatever your reading of Roy's article, it is certain to generate debate.

This issue also contains two research briefs from TeLRF research projects. The projects are from the first TeLRF round and largely complete as we go to press. The final reports may be available from the Ministry of Education, along with those of the three other research projects. The projects undertaken are effectively the first major research activities in the area of New Zealand's e-learning capability at tertiary level. As such they deserve a wide readership. We encourage all readers of the *Journal of Distance Learning* to engage with the reports of these projects. Given the relative scarcity of such research within New Zealand, we are sure that a close reading of these reports will reveal many additional avenues for further research.

There are two further feature articles in this issue. Major discusses the extent to which effective teacher education for diversity can occur at a distance using online technologies. Two converging factors make this an article worthy of attention. The first is the increasing diversity of the school student population. The second is the increasing number of teachers whose teacher education has been conducted primarily

online. The extent to which online learning enables self-knowledge and allows careful examination of attitudes and beliefs—both central aspects of teacher education for diversity—is examined carefully in this thoughtful article. The second article, by Barbour, draws on a small project he undertook based on the development of Web-based courses for secondary students. Barbour distils a number of design principles from a series of interviews with designers and teachers of online courses for secondary students.

Rounding out the articles in this issue are descriptions of two of the projects that were honoured with DEANZ Awards in 2004. Both projects demonstrate a central tenet of good distance education practice—matching the mediating technology with the needs and access potential of the students being served. These projects are not “high tech.” They exhibit exemplary practice and demonstrate the systemic nature of effective distance education on which that practice relies. A final section of book reviews completes the issue.

The concept of “e-learning” is foundational to every item in this issue. As people involved in distance education for a number of years (starting

as distance students in 1972 and 1973), we have engaged in many discussions about the relationship between e-learning and distance education.* They are clearly not the same, yet have a considerable amount in common. Boundaries blur when we consider these areas side by side. As a result of this overlap, there are many lessons learned in the field of distance education that apply to e-learning. Sound knowledge of distance education practice and familiarity with the research base in that field provide an effective preparation for exploration of e-learning. We look forward to publishing many more articles that acknowledge what is known and use it as a stepping stone to the future.

REFERENCES

Udas, K. (2004). Open source at the core of a national eLearning strategy: Analysis of developments in New Zealand. *The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education*, December.

*See M. G. Moore and G. Kearsley, *Distance Education: A Systems View* (2005, 2nd ed., p. 2) for a definition of distance education and New Zealand Ministry of Education, *Interim Tertiary E-learning Framework* (2004, p. 1) for a definition of e-learning.