



Editorial: Engaging in open, flexible, and distance learning with a new editorial team

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Abstract

This editorial provides insights into the processes of scholarly publishing, at a time of handover to a new editorial team, to publicise evidence of quality processes and leadership. Publishing trends are also briefly identified. The issue also publishes the first set of papers that have been further developed from the research stream of the 2014 biennial conference of The New Zealand Association for Open, Flexible and Distance Learning (DEANZ). We are happy to be able to include papers that represent the wide area of open, flexible, and distance learning supported by our Aotearoa New Zealand association. We start with a paper on using learning management systems to support personalised learning in primary schools, and this is followed by papers situated in the tertiary sector on software literacy in a university's programmes, embedded librarians in the tertiary sector, and research into social work. The final paper provides a literature review on the highly topical subject of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). The editorial puts the papers into current contexts globally and within the region to inform the field worldwide.

Keywords: scholarly publishing; open, flexible, and distance learning; distance education; MOOC; editorial

Introduction

Welcome to the *Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning (JOFDL)*, under new direction and management with a new editorial team. Although the purpose of the journal remains unchanged, the new team is now working its way through recommendations made in the 2013 review of the *Journal* by Peter Albion, with the aim of increasing participation, contribution, visibility, and scholarly recognition. As the flagship of The New Zealand Association for Open, Flexible and Distance Learning (DEANZ), *JOFDL* seeks to bring together the best research and thought from around the world, and incorporating an Aotearoa New Zealand accent, for all those interested and involved in distance education and open learning. We acknowledge our indigenous bicultural heritage by starting with a whakatauki or proverb (Glossary of Māori proverbs, sayings and phrases, n. d.) that comes from those who went before us:

Mā te rongo, ka mōhio; Mā te mōhio, ka mārama; Mā te mārama, ka mātau; Mā te mātau, ka ora.

Through resonance comes cognisance; through cognisance comes understanding; through understanding comes knowledge; through knowledge comes life and well-being.

This issue begins with a review of the papers in this issue, followed by insights into the scholarly processes of this and related refereed journals in the field of flexible learning and educational technology.

Papers in this issue

This issue publishes a number of papers that have been developed from the research stream of the 2014 biennial conference of DEANZ. We are happy to be able to include papers that represent the wide area of open, flexible, and distance learning supported by the New Zealand association. We start with a paper on using learning management systems to support personalised learning in primary schools, and this is followed by papers situated in the tertiary sector on software literacy in a university's programmes, embedded librarians in the tertiary sector, and research into social work. The final paper provides a literature review on the highly topical subject of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which was the major topic of the New Zealand Minister of Tertiary Education's invited summit in June 2014.

Research on school education continues to indicate that digital technologies can enhance educational processes provided they are embedded purposefully and assessment processes change to enable schooling systems to take advantage of them (Webb, Gibson, & Forkosh-Baruch, 2013). Current developments in the school sector of New Zealand, with increased access for schools through the Ultrafast Broadband in Schools (UFBiS) and the opening of the associated Network for Learning during 2014, are particularly exciting. Personalised learning is being promoted as an essential component of future-oriented teaching and learning. Edmunds and Hartnett's research into personalised learning with a learning management system in a primary school, with its brief review and application of the literature on personalised learning as well as relevant literature on learning management systems is, therefore, particularly topical and valuable. The practice in the school case study indicates the relevance of feedback and feed-forward in assessment for learning.

Around the world there is increasing recognition that adults need more critical skills and knowledge of the ways in which computers are shaping our world and futures. While some researchers focus on Computer Science education and early preparation for the software industry supported by multinational giants such as Google and Microsoft (see, for example, Johnston, Conneely, Murchan, & Tangney, 2014), the paper by Elaine Khoo, Bronwen Cowie, and University of Waikato colleagues in the Wilf Malcolm Institute of Education provides valuable research in software studies, which they identify as a relatively new field. They provide empirical research into embedding software literacy in both Engineering and Media Studies to provide us with evidence that students need this support to develop the ability to critique and make informed decisions in today's culture, which is increasingly shaped by digital technologies. Embedding 21st-century literacies and resources is also the focus of Alison Fields' research into embedded librarianship. Students studying at a distance or flexibly through a learning management system are less likely to visit the library, although libraries have changed to take advantage of such flexibility with extensive global digital collections. Fields' mixed method study is well informed by a literature review of both learner support and the relatively new strategy of embedded librarians, where she notes the current "philosophy of the library as an active partner in the information experience" (Smith & Sutton, 2010, p. 92). Analyses of librarians' discussions and interviews with faculty and embedded librarians in the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand

provide authentic illustrations of the challenges of implementing embedded librarians that will be valuable worldwide.

The title of Goldingay's paper links with the theme of the 2014 DEANZ conference, which asked "Where is the 'e' in engagement in flexible, online and distance education?" (see <http://deanz.org.nz/conference-2014/>). The study was set in social work, where it had been observed that students were anxious about the practicum experience that was part of their programme. The pedagogy was therefore re-designed with a constructivist approach to become more engaging. Goldingay found that a combination of existing video-based content delivery and ongoing formative assessment by both the student and peers reduced isolation and alienation and thus had a "multipronged positive effect on the process of learning". These findings on online formative evaluation in tertiary education fit well with the comprehensive literature review by Gikandi, Morrow, and Davis (2011), who reviewed a range of evidence and also identified the value of peer support and reflection in tertiary education.

Given the topical issue of MOOCs in New Zealand and worldwide, the editors are pleased to be able to publish a literature review on this topic and note that it complements the current special issue on the same topic of our sister journal, *Distance Education* (Jona & Naidu, 2014). The editors would also like to note the importance of the MOOC as a phenomenon and resource for secondary education, as well as tertiary education and training, particularly given the unusually wide coverage of this journal. The increasingly fuzzy nature of the term 'MOOC' became very clear at the June 2014 Innovations in Tertiary Education Delivery Summit (ITES2014) convened by the Ministry of Tertiary Education, Stephen Joyce, with support from the National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence (Ako Aotearoa) and the Tertiary Education Commission. Indeed, one keynote speaker, Jim Barber, unhelpfully attempted to rename the whole of our field as MOOC! Avinash Shrivastava and Peter Guiney's (2014) background document to inform the June summit was more helpful in its introduction, and this brief statement also clarifies the reason for unease amongst those who fund and lead tertiary institutions:

This paper examines one development, the Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), rather than doing a general overview of emerging technologies. The paper focuses on MOOCs because of their potential to disrupt tertiary education and the significant opportunities, challenges and risks that they present. MOOCs are also the sole focus of this paper because of their scale and the involvement of the elite United States (US) universities. (p. 5)

We should also note that Shrivastava and Guiney (2014) do not cover MOOC-like phenomena such as the micro-MOOC in open educational resources (OER), which Davis and Mackintosh created as part of one of the first course offerings of the global OERu in 2013 (Davis & Mackintosh, 2013). This course, 'Scenario planning for education', includes some OER study materials on MOOCs as an innovation (see http://wikieducator.org/Drivers_of_change_in_education/Video_signposts). In this issue Jacoby reviews disruptive forces by drawing on published literature, and concludes that MOOCs have been effective in prompting "teachers, administrators, and policy makers to evaluate a range of issues, from definitions of completion and success to pedagogical approaches, delivery methods, and certification".

The 2013 review of JOFDL

Following the resignation of the very successful editorial partnership of Mark Nichols and Ben Kehrwald, the DEANZ Executive commissioned a thorough review of this journal as part of the handover process between editorial teams. The *Journal of Open, Flexible, and Distance Learning* was reviewed by Peter Albion, who is an experienced editor in the field of educational technology, and editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*. Albion is a leading scholar in information and communication technologies (ICT) in education, and

especially in online education, in areas such as communication in online learning communities, using mobile digital devices, and teaching teachers for the future (see peter.albion.id.au/ and <http://scholar.google.co.nz/citations?user=DB50AnMAAAAJ&hl=en>). Albion's (2012) benchmarking citation measures among the Australian education professoriate provide evidence of his leadership in the field of publishing in this region.

Albion's report provided some interesting metrics on the performance of *JOFDL* that we are happy to share with readers in the long quote below, given that the original report will not be published. Albion's analysis provides many points that are valuable to the whole field and, particularly, to inform our strategic work in the near future. The editors are pleased to note that, although *JOFDL* is the lowest of the journals listed in Table 1, the *h* index value is the same as the prestigious *Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology* and the *American Journal of Distance Education*.

Publication in a journal is intended to make research articles available to readers. Hence, the number of readers would provide a simple measure of journal performance but that is difficult to gauge. It is possible to measure hits on a webpage and/or downloads of articles but there is no certainty that those numbers represent actual readers. A more commonly accepted indicator is the rate at which other researchers cite articles and the Thompson ISI Impact Factor (IF) is one well known measure.

Because many education or social science journals, including *JOFDL*, are not included in the indexes from which the IF is calculated alternative metrics based on readily available sources such as Google Scholar have been developed (Harzing & van der Wal, 2009). Two of the better known measures are the *h*-index which represents the number of papers that have at least *h* citations and the *g*-index which better represents the contribution of more heavily cited articles. Although these metrics were intended for use with the citations of individual scholars they have also been applied to journals.

Google Scholar, in its *Metrics* section, has recently begun to publish lists of journals in specific categories and sub-categories ranked according to variations on the *h*-index (see URL in reference list below). *JOFDL* is not listed in the Educational Technology sub-category because it does not meet the criterion for inclusion of having published at least 100 articles between 2007 and 2011. Unless that criterion changes in the future *JOFDL* would need to average 20 countable articles per year to qualify. That is higher than the current rate of publication and might preclude *JOFDL* from inclusion in the list....

...In order to provide a basis for comparison of the performance of *JOFDL* with other journals in the field, the *Publish or Perish* software developed by Harzing (2009) was used to obtain *h* and *g* values for *JOFDL* and some related journals for articles published in 2011 and 2012. The restricted range of years was necessary because of the change from *JDL* [*Journal of Distance Learning*] to *JOFDL* from 2011. The raw results obtained for *JOFDL* were spurious, apparently because the change in title and subsequent upload of older *JDL* papers resulted in those papers appearing to Google Scholar as published in 2011 and 2012. Papers affected in that way were excluded from the indices for *JOFDL*. There was no reason to suspect similar effects for other journals in the list but the entries for *AJET* were checked to ensure validity. Table 1 presents the results for *JOFDL*, *AJET* and 10 other journals in related areas.

Citations for publications typically build over time as papers are read cited, and noted by other researchers. For that reason it is unrealistic to expect strong citation records to have developed for papers published in very recent years. Nevertheless, the contrast between citation indices for *JOFDL* and the journals at the top of the table is evident.

Table 1 The h and g citation indices for JOFDL and related journals (Albion 2013)

Journal	h	g
Computers & Education	22	29
The Internet and Higher Education	11	14
Journal of Computer Assisted Learning	11	12
British Journal of Educational Technology	9	12
Educational Technology Research and Development	9	11
The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning	9	15
Australasian Journal of Educational Technology	7	10
Distance Education	6	7
Journal of Technology and Teacher Education	5	7
Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology	3	6
American Journal of Distance Education	3	4
Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning	3	3

Computers & Education has at least 22 papers published in 2011 and 2012 that have attracted at least 22 citations. In the same period *AJET* has published 7 papers that have attracted at least 7 citations. Both journals have published considerably more papers than *JOFDL* and will have many papers with no or very few citations. Nevertheless, the low values of the indices for *JOFDL* suggest that the journal is having a relatively limited impact, at least to the extent that impact can be inferred from citations.

When the record for *JDL* is examined there are papers dating from 2009 or earlier that have accumulated 20 or more citations. The number of papers with citations at that level is small but their existence demonstrates that it is possible for papers published in *JOFDL* (or *JDL*) to attract significant attention. Papers are more likely to be cited if they are found by researchers so the implication here is similar to that above for visibility of the journal. Although the abstract pages for individual articles include metadata it is mostly limited to author and title details and does not include keywords although the PDF files for papers do have keywords. Consideration should be given to how the visibility of papers might be increased so that they might attract a wider audience.

It is also interesting to note the analysis and review of the journal *Distance Education* by Oviatt, Burdis, and West (2012), who set out “to determine the primary topics, research methods and most highly cited pieces 2000–2010” (p. 44). They also applied the *Publish or Perish* software (Harzing, 2011) to *Distance Education* but preferred to not give the figures because of the challenges caused by the commonness of the journal’s name, which is also a problem in Albion’s analysis reported above. Most useful is the recognition of the continuing development of new approaches in our field, and the current trends of “emerging mobile technologies and social networks” (p. 47).

In his nine-page report Albion also made three commendations that confirmed that the leadership and strategic work undertaken by the previous editorial team of Mark Nichols and Ben Kehrwald had been successful:

1. The commitment and enthusiasm of members of the editorial team, editorial advisory board, and DEANZ executive provide a solid foundation for the journal that should support it through the next phase in its development.

2. The decision to convert the journal to open access will have resulted in a cost associated with the loss of subscription income but a more than commensurate benefit in the potential to increase readership and future performance through subsequent citations.
3. The adoption of the Open Journal Systems software through the Ako Aotearoa site provides for efficient management of the publication process and exposure of the journal to potential authors and readers through a significant national higher education site.

The report also made nine recommendations that the new editorial team are working on. These are condensed into three main tasks, and work is underway on all three.

1. To review and clarify the focus and scope of the journal to attract appropriate authors and readers while also contributing to the objectives of the organisation.
2. To increase the visibility of the journal.
3. To improve communication through the JOFDL website.

Future issues of *JOFDL* will continue to report progress.

The most important recommendation was successfully completed in January 2014:

Recruitment and selection of future Editor and team should be informed by the decision about the focus and scope of the journal. If the journal is to both publish high level international research and support the development of early career researchers then that might be reflected in the editorial team by creating positions with those distinct functions and seeking to recruit people with the appropriate orientation for each.

Introducing the editorial team

A number of expressions of interest were received following an open call for a new editorial team for *JOFDL* in late 2013. The DEANZ Executive appointed a working group, led by President Mark Brown, to provide a recommendation, resulting in the appointment of the current team led by Niki Davis as Editor-in-Chief. The process is worth noting, because it is part of the quality assurance processes for journals that often remain hidden from the reader's view.

Table 2 provides an overview of *JOFDL*'s new editorial team and those who support them.

Both Associate Editors have papers in this issue, providing a window on their scholarship.

Niki's previous experience as editor of academic refereed journals (including *Information Technology for Teacher Education*), and editor of books (including the *World Yearbook of Education* for 2004 with Professor Andrew Brown) made her an obvious choice for Editor-in-Chief. She has been a member of journal boards and has published over 100 papers. She has been journal editor of *Journal of Information Technology for Teacher Education* (1996–1999), sole editor (October 1996–1999), and senior editor (2000–2001). That journal is now re-titled the *Journal of Pedagogy, Technology and Education*. In 2012 Niki co-edited its special issue, celebrating 20 years of publication, with Avril Loveless. Niki has been part of a group of leading scholars in the United Kingdom and the United States who believe in open access and scholarly collaboration. This group has set up, first, journals in the field of ICT and teacher education and, subsequently, sister journals (*Journal of Technology and Teacher Education* and *Current Issues in Information Technology and Teacher Education*). The *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education* was one of the first open-access journals in the world and *Current Issues in Information Technology and Teacher Education*, which was set up a few years later, remains open as well as being part of the Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education

(AACE) digital library called EdITLib, to which *JOFDL* will be added during 2014. The challenging issues relating to open publishing were discussed in Bull, Bell, and Davis (2002) and were also reviewed within the celebration of the *Journal of Technology, Pedagogy and Education's* first 20 years (Davis & Loveless, 2012).

Table 2 Role and strengths of JOFDL editorial team and those who support them

Niki Davis, Editor-in-Chief

- Experience as a journal editor, editorial board member, author, reviewer, and assessor
- Experience as a member of the *JOFDL* Editorial Board
- Experience as DEANZ President and current member of the Executive
- Extensive links with editors of other journals, including those in Europe and the United States
- Membership and leadership of relevant international networks
- Expertise with a range of research methodologies
- Established international reputation in the field of open, flexible, and distance education

Alison Fields, Associate Editor

- Experience as a journal editor, author, and reviewer
- Knowledge and research expertise within the field of open, flexible, and distance learning
- Knowledge and expertise of library and information skills
- Established relationships with library organisations worldwide

Maggie Hartnett, Associate Editor

- Knowledge and research expertise within the field of open, flexible, and distance learning
- An established research platform with a growing publication record
- Familiarity and experience with manuscript review processes
- Familiarity and expertise with a range of research methodologies

Una Cunningham, Book Reviews Editor

- Knowledge and research expertise within the field of open, flexible, and distance learning
- Established international reputation in the field of computer assisted language learning
- Experience as a journal author and reviewer
- Expertise with a range of research methodologies

Mark Nichols, Advisor and Past Editor-in-Chief

- Knowledge and research expertise in the field of open, flexible, and distance learning
- Familiarity and experience with manuscript review processes
- Established reputation in the field of open, flexible, and distance education

Kate Hunt, Copy Editor

- Editing and learning design experience in the field of open, flexible, and distance learning
- Extensive academic manuscript editing skills and experience
- Experience of service to *JOFDL* in this role

David Zimmerman, Ako Aotearoa Web Manager

- Management of *JOFDL* website and OJS software
- Established reputation in web design and management

Editorial vision and direction for *JOFDL*

The *Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning* is the flagship for our national association of open, flexible, and distance learning (namely DEANZ), and it provides a way to showcase the scholarship of DEANZ members and those they collaborate with, and serve. As editors of, contributors to, and reviewers for *JOFDL*, we consider its ongoing viability to be very important for the publication and dissemination of research and scholarship, particularly within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, and incorporating international readership and multiple perspectives.

The *Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning* is one of a limited number of specialised publications based in Aotearoa New Zealand, and one of the few in this field based in the Asia–Pacific region. The journal and association are unusual in the scope of members and researchers because we cover all sectors of education and training, from early childhood education to adults and senior citizens. Aotearoa New Zealand is known for outstandingly strong research methodologies that incorporate indigenous perspectives, including kaupapa Māori. In addition, the new team brings additional librarianship expertise to benefit *JOFDL*. These distinctive attributes will be used to advantage the field while also encouraging the submission of quality manuscripts for review and selection for publication by accomplished and experienced authors, as well as new and emerging researchers within Aotearoa New Zealand and abroad.

The journal will include editorials, such as this, to lead the field and contextualise articles within rapidly changing global and national contexts. One specific innovation that we will consider is promoting the journal across educational sectors to postgraduate students (in addition to established researchers) as a viable, high-quality alternative in which to publish their work. In this way, the journal can provide opportunities for publication both during study and beyond, and showcase emerging researchers' work.

The editorial team will also encourage a wider range of established academics to publish. While the number of established researchers within the open, flexible, and distance learning field is relatively small within New Zealand, there are a growing number of educational researchers exploring the use of various aspects of digital technologies in broader educational contexts. There is significant potential, we believe, for *JOFDL* to be a target journal—particularly given that the research is typically situated in a New Zealand context.

Finally, increasing the number of special issues of the journal and expanding the links to the biennial DEANZ conference has already encouraged a greater number of manuscript submissions both for the conference and the journal—with the potential to increase influence on the field. From 2014, the editors will spread the number of accepted manuscripts across more than one issue, and ensure sufficient, high quality content for subsequent issues while also enabling authors to use the feedback from the conference to improve their scholarship.

We invite readers to respond to this article with suggestions and feedback on these processes, and to submit papers of all types to the journal.

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Biographical notes

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Alison is a senior lecturer at the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand where she teaches Information and Library Studies. She also sits on the Professional Registration Board of Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA). Her research areas encompass e-learning, library services, and continuing professional development. She is currently enrolled in EdD studies at the University of Otago under supervisors Wing Lai and Keryn Pratt. Alison is an Associate Editor of the *Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning*.

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Maggie is a lecturer in the Institute of Education at Massey University, New Zealand, where she teaches in the areas of e-learning and digital technologies. Her research interests include motivation and engagement in digital environments, teaching and learning with digital technologies, electronic portfolios, support for digital learners, digital places, and spaces of learning. Maggie is an Associate Editor of the *Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning*.

Davis, N., Fields, A., & Hartnett, M. (2014). Editorial: Engaging in open, flexible, and distance learning with a new editorial team. *Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning*, 18(1), [1–10].



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