



Time for Change: The Journal is in Good Shape

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Abstract

Associate Editor Maggie Hartnett says farewell while casting an eye over the achievements of the *Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning* in the past 8 years. This issue presents four articles providing a rounded view of managing and improving emergency remote teaching (ERT) in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The first two articles focus on the experience of teachers in ERT; one provides empirical research; and one is a position piece on the uptake and value of learning management systems (LMSs) for delivering this remote teaching. These practical and timely articles provide research and thought of substance as the pandemic continues.

Keywords: tikanga Māori; bicultural practices; blended synchronous learning; emergency remote teaching; online learning

Time for change

This issue signals a time of change for the editorial team of the *Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning (JOFDL)* as I have made the decision to step down as Associate Editor after 8 years of service. This will be my final editorial. When I was appointed to the role in 2014, I was part of a new look editorial team that included Nikki Davis as Editor-In-Chief and Alison Fields as fellow associate editor. At that time, the journal had recently gone through an independent review, and recommendations from the review included “increasing participation, contribution, visibility, and scholarly recognition” (Davis et al., 2014, p. 1). These recommendations have guided our work over the intervening period. Much has changed, notably the journal’s listing in the directory of open access journals, the consistent publication of two issues per year, increasing volumes of manuscript submissions, and the improved quality of those submissions. As I leave, it is encouraging to see that the journal is in good shape.

It is also appropriate to take time to reflect on the content of the published articles over that period and how they sit within the open, flexible, and distance learning field of research. Student engagement, motivation, retention, and the support required by learners have been a constant source of interest over these 8 years. These publications are even more relevant today, with the COVID-19 pandemic and the massive shift to online learning during 2020 and 2021. The special issue devoted to online teaching and learning, which was published in the first half of 2020, was a response to the demand for high quality previously published articles. They provided ideas, guidance, and information to educators across the world who were grappling with the shift to unfamiliar modes of teaching and learning.

Learning design approaches have emerged as an enduring area of research in my time with the journal. These approaches include learning design methodologies and specific approaches such as blended learning, flipped classrooms, and the adoption of mobile, social media and massive

open online courses (MOOCs). I'm heartened to see more attention being paid to the exploration of experience unique to Aotearoa New Zealand, including the learning of te reo Māori in online contexts, and Māori peer-mentoring programmes being offered to Māori students studying online. The research is timely, and more is needed.

Looking to the future, specialist journals such as this one will be more important than ever given the proliferation of published articles (since the emergence of COVID-19) that give little thought or attention to the rich history of the field. Without it, truly new and innovative research runs the risk of being lost in the plethora of the already known. The pandemic has also highlighted areas that require more in-depth research. Primary among them is digital inequity, particularly given that online learning will continue to be part of learning and teaching.

I wish the Editor-in-Chief, Alison Fields, and the new Associate Editor, Simon Atkinson, all the very best as they continue to lead this valuable contribution to the field of open, flexible, and distance learning research in Aotearoa, New Zealand. It has been a pleasure being part of it.

Maggie Hartnett

Papers in this issue

This issue contains four articles highlighting a range of contemporary issues in open, flexible and distance learning of interest to an international audience. The articles come from New Zealand, the United States, and Vietnam, and all focus on successful learning delivery and engagement in open, flexible, or distance learning.

Karaka-Clarke et al. delve into the experience of kaiako (teachers) in synchronous online teaching and learning in the compulsory schooling sector in New Zealand. This work focused particularly on bicultural values and practices, and if and how these were incorporated into teaching and learning practices. This is an important aspect of education in a country where an estimated 25% of the school population are Māori learners. The incorporation of bicultural values and practices may help students to connect with their learning, but the findings showed an uneven uptake and room for improvement—with many kaiako lacking the confidence to implement these practices. This highlights an important aspect of online learning for future consideration and action.

Crary et al. provide a different view of the same topic of experience and connection with blended-synchronous course delivery, this time with higher-education students in the midwestern United States. The blended-synchronous format is defined in this article as “the synchronous instruction of face-to-face and remotely located students”. Their study compared the experiences of students who were predominantly face to face with those who were predominantly remotely located, and found that while actual classroom engagement was comparable in both groups, there were differences in accessibility. Perhaps most notable was the emerging distinction and division felt by both groups. This detailed study provides much food for thought.

Thach and Phuong investigate the attitudes and intentions of higher-education lecturers in their uptake of learning management systems (LMSs) in emergency remote teaching in the developing country of Vietnam. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a need for new ways to deliver teaching and learning. This article looks at the reality of lecturers who are best equipped for face-to-face delivery moving to online systems, and the difficulties the transition to emergency remote teaching can bring. Results indicated that “teachers’ internet self-efficacy plays a very important role in having favourable perceptions about ease of use” and that institutional support for maintaining the quality of teaching and learning online and promoting students’ engagement will greatly help lecturers in this position in the future.

The final article in this issue, by Brown et al., is a counterpoint to the debate of LMS uptake by higher-education lecturers, this time from the developed country of New Zealand. It centres on the same context of emergency remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, and is a position piece rather than empirical research. Brown et al. suggest that higher-education lecturers are central to online course development, and they should determine the alternative means of instruction during emergency remote teaching. The focus of this position piece is the LMS, not just as a storage facility for content, but for active teaching and engagement with remote learners. A framework for formalising professional development of proficiency with an LMS is outlined and this, along with support for lecturers, provides a possible way to the maximise benefits of LMS use during the rapid move to online and remote teaching.

A final word

As Editor-In-Chief, I want to give my heartfelt thanks to Maggie for her great contribution to the *Journal* over the past 8 years. She has given a substantial amount to the journal in time, thought, and quality, and has been wonderful to work with. Thank you Maggie, on behalf of myself, our Team and Board, and all our contributors and readers.

Our new Editorial Team member, Simon Paul Atkinson, will be introduced in the next issue.

Alison Fields

References

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Biographical notes

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Maggie Hartnett is a senior lecturer in the Institute of Education at Massey University, New Zealand. She teaches in the area of digital technologies and coordinates postgraduate qualifications in digital education. She is a senior fellow of Advance HE and Associate Editor of the *Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning*.

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Alison is an information scientist and Director of Research at InfoSolutions. She conducts research in health information, and contracts in the education sector. She is a fellow of the Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA) and has a Doctorate in Education. Her research areas encompass elearning, online learner support, health information, library services, and continuing professional development. Alison is an executive member of FLANZ and Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning*.

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