Editorial for EJEL Volume 14 Issue 4

Rozhan M. Idrus and Nurkhamimi Zainuddin

Welcome to this special edition of EJEL, which shares a selection of extended papers initially presented at the 11th International Conference on E-Learning (ICEL), which was held in June 2016 at the Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia. In this issue five papers are presented which discuss and reflect on research into the assistive role of technology and the realization of redesigning the learning environment for more learner focussed challenges facing the educational experience of the 21st century.

Technology is becoming more immersive and more seamless, which has given rise to a 'new pedagogies' paradigm. It is time to explore the origins of pedagogy and the often overlooked traditions of thinking and practice associated with it. As we come full circle with the infusion of technology, pedagogy has to be considered through the lecturers' planning and thinking, as well as the way in which they address the learners, care for and about them and the way they bring learning into and to life.

We are now also faced with a 'new classroom' paradigm where the learner enters a 'classroom' in which it is possible to ascertain where, when and how the learner undertakes educational tasks as the environment is highly digital, virtual and open. With the availability of pedagogically articulated content from open resources and the support of the Internet, students are no longer confined within the four walls, nor the constraint of 'official' schooling hours.

Leveraging the technology itself, teachers must now prepare and present to the learners a buffet of educational resources so that learners have the ability to choose where, when and how they might want to conduct their studies. The teachers play an active facilitating and participatory role in the digital learning environment of the present time. This has been well explored by our contributors in the issue.

The contribution by Wendy Barber and Sherry King is highly engaging, perhaps without them realizing it. Although the issue being addressed is the concept of problem based learning, they have most aptly made the realization that digital learning environments require significant pedagogical shifts on the part of the teacher. Further, in an effort to manifest the educational outcome of problem based learning (PBL) via an online delivery mechanism, they have once again stumbled on the realization that that proficiency in teaching online is fast becoming an essential pedagogical skill. More importantly, the protocol and conduct of PBL via Adobe Connect and the interplay of student-centred and collaborative learning, the shifts in teacher-learner roles and the ability for students to take ownership of the learning; become involved in the assessment process, and define their own course of learning has given rise to what the authors describe as a perception that the pedagogy becomes virtually invisible. In truth, this is the immersive and seamless trait of technology and affordance to teachers to be creative with the pedagogies and have a wider variety of non-specific learning outcomes based on the new needs (as in technology enhanced) of students. There is no doubt that this paper will be referred to from both the use of technology and instructional design of PBL.

The following two contributions highlight the learner-centred teaching and learning experience in 21st century class environment. Through the promotion of e-Learning in the campus of INTI International University, a simple research project was devised to investigate students' perceptions on different learning environment: face-to-face, multimedia and web. In two studies conducted over two years by Yap Wei-Li, Neo Mai and Neo Tse-Kian, the learners were given the opportunities to be taught in the face-to-face teaching approach and the use of the PowerPoint (referred as F2F), and a face-to-face encounter via the interactive multimedia learning module, and at the same time students were allowed to access the same learning module from the computers (referred as MM). They were also allowed to adopt their own independent learning by accessing the web-based interactive multimedia learning module (referred to as Web). This was conducted in a quasi-experimental design. Although the assistive role of educational and multimedia technologies in the experimented Weimer's Learner-Centred Teaching model could promote better learner experiences by increasing retention rate and improving learner motivation, this effort was more of an acculturation process in the use of technologies and creative pedagogies in the campus and the commitment for the provision of facilities in the teaching and learning process.

The acculturation quest for technology enhanced activities in the campus of INTI International University continues through the work of Fui-Theng Leow, Mai Neo and Soon Hin Hew in their use of technologies and media-rich content to co-construct new meaning and knowledge. As simple as it sounds, these key attributes such as improved work relationships, improved leadership, and refined collaborative learning has critical

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impact on students' learning. With the support of web resources, engaged online communication and meaningful presentations utilising the social tools and media for delivering messages, the students' learning experience becomes one with the technology itself in the digital educational environment.

In a manner of natural progression of the (digital) learning environment, the remaining two papers address learning management systems, namely Blackboard and Moodle. From their case study, Vuyisile Nkonki and Siyanda Ntlabathi sought to classify and evaluate the form and function of teaching and learning innovations using Blackboard. Although the SAMR models were used as interpretive lenses for the study, the authors admitted that the transformative learning potential of Blackboard depends on the fundamental reconceptualization and reorganisation of the teaching and learning dynamic. To be fair to Blackboard, it can only serve teaching and learning innovations stemming from the content creator, and not being the initiator of the pedagogical underpinning as it remained a tool at best. At the end of the day, the onus is on the teacher to accentuate 21st century digital learning scenarios via the use of technology (in this case, Blackboard) to significantly transform the teaching and learning tasks.

Nurkhamimi and colleagues presented to us their showcase of the utilization of Moodle in the offerings of postgraduate open and distance learning (ODL) courses by Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM). Based on Moodle, an e-learning system known as the Global Open Access Learning (GOAL) System was established, serving two mandatory courses (Research Methodology and Data Analysis) and the many applications and features that contribute to the increase of shared knowledge and communication between students. In tandem with Blackboard, the successful use of the Moodle platform in the teaching and learning context critically depends on the teachers having knowledge about the tools, being aware of how they should be used and being capable of organizing all the communication process. Only minor cosmetic and interface issues are required for further enhancement of the appropriate use of the system.

The selection of papers for this Special Issue demonstrate the evolution and future direction of e-learning research and the interdisciplinary nature of the e-learning field, which can be positioned within the focus to the learner and learning experiences as well as key attributes in achieving core competencies of the future generations. The acculturation is encouraging as we seek to align the capacity and capability of multimedia computing to excite, motivate and alleviate educational experiences to a new realm.

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Guest Editors