

Editorial

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As an editorial team publishing our second volume, we hope that we do not suffer from the ignominy of the sophomore or second album curse. In this issue we bring together a range of topics and methodologies that we hope will be of interest to the ILTA community.

While many of us might well have a vision of the role that digital technology can play within education; we are also mindful that we are engaged in a complex sociocultural activity whose effects are changing and unpredictable. The question arises as to how can leaders and managers be supported in negotiating and understanding an increasingly complex digital world? The report from Lawrie Phipps and Donna Lanclos in this issue outlining their observations of five iterations of the Jisc Digital Leaders Course for Higher and Further Education provides one possible answer to this question.

In terms of a suite of research methodologies, the three research reports in this issue draw on a wide range of approaches and methods. However, despite the mixture of methodologies, the three research reports share one consistent theme; a focus on improving the student experience. In Chris O'Toole's article, he provides us with insight into the issues faced by students and trainers as they grapple with an increasingly diverse student body. We can no longer (if indeed we ever could) assume that our learners are a homogenous group. While many of our readers may well be very adept with online pedagogical techniques and strategies, this article makes a strong case for the development of intercultural communication competencies for those engaged in online delivery. Irene O'Dowd's article represents a methodological shift away from the phenomenological approach of Chris O'Toole to a decidedly quantitative one via learning analytics. The promise of learning analytics is that it can help facilitate retention, engagement, personalized learning and ultimately student success (Dietz-Uhler & Hurn, 2013). What is needed is a way of interrogating these claims; this article sets out to add to the evidence base regarding online

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engagement, in this case the use of formative online quizzes. Suzanne Stone and Anna Logan's research report invites us to consider how we can employ social media tools to foster and encourage connectedness in the online learning experience. Adopting a mixed-methods approach over a three-year period, their study makes a cogent case for the use of WhatsApp as a tool to challenge the perception that online learning can be a second class educational experience in terms of its ability to create a shared learning environment.

Martin Weller's position paper on the open education practice landscape is an opportunity to consider just how 'current' open educational practices are? From the lofty heights of a digital 21st century, it is too easy to assume that little happened before the advent of Web 2.0 in terms of providing opportunities to create, publish and share resources. This paper certainly disavows that assumption, arguing that the origins of open education can be traced back to the Middle Ages though the 17th century and into the 20th century with the advent of 'open' universities. The analysis (Weller et al. 2018) of open education practices (OEP), including open educational resources (OER), social-media and open access publishing, highlights divergences and interactions between the different aspects. Within these spaces and lines of interaction lies the potential for new opportunities for research and changes in practices.

The commitment to 'openness' in education as espoused by Martin Weller certainly chimes with us as editors and with ILTA, which has a commitment to supporting an open journal; neither charging the readers to access articles nor the authors to publish and assigning the copyright to authors themselves under a permissive version of the Creative Commons license. However, it must be acknowledged that the value of open approaches are not a given in higher education including in Ireland. Support for, and awareness of, open educational practices by senior educational leaders in Ireland has been argued to be low compared to other jurisdictions for example (Brown, Costello & Nic Ghiolla Michil, 2018).

In an academic world where decisions about tenure, promotion and funding may depend on output metrics, where and how you publish can have an impact on one's professional life (Gaines 2015; Yang & Li 2015). In such instances, while someone may have a philosophical commitment to open education practice, unless institutions are prepared to take a more expansive view of the value of open access publishing, choices may in fact be quite limited.

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