



Open, Flexible, and Distance Learning: Changes to the Journal, Changes in the Field

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Abstract

Change and more change. This editorial, like the last, notes several changes happening within the Journal and in the wider context of open, flexible, and distance learning. A quick look at some of the social commentary on change provides the backdrop for events and decisions described more fully in this issue of the journal. Changes to the editorial team and Editorial Advisory Board are announced and the papers for this issue are introduced. Ideas to identify change, manage change and live with change are set within the world of open, flexible, and distance learning.

Keywords: open learning; social commentary; change

Introduction

As noted in the last Editorial—the times they are a-changin’. Change is inevitable, and it seems our reaction to it and the strategy we choose to deal with it is entirely up to us. In his *Reflections on the Human Condition* (1973), Eric Hoffer wrote:

The central task of education is to implant a will and a facility for learning; it should produce not learned but learning people. The truly human society is a learning society, where grandparents, parents, and children are students together. In a time of drastic change it is the learners who will inherit the future. The learned usually find themselves beautifully equipped to live in a world that no longer exists. (p. 22)

It reads like science fiction but is actually social commentary. Hoffer provides a good description of life in our rapidly changing technological world, the pace of which has increased markedly in the 40 years since *Reflections* was written. Education is concerned with the learning process, not simply the acquisition of knowledge. It is primarily about people and about learning. In Hoffer’s terms it is a hallmark of a ‘truly human society’.

So what does this mean for open, flexible, and distance learning? It is itself one of the changes happening in our increasingly technological time. It is education adapting itself to the new environment, creating accessibility for a wider proportion of society. The transfer of existing formal education to the new technologies is met with a rise in accessibility of informal education through MOOCs, collaborative software, and other avenues. It is up to us to ensure that education is still education, to make use of the available ways of engaging our students, and to be an active part of the ‘learning society’.

There is plenty to ponder there for both our learners and ourselves, providing a very broad sweep of ideas to guide whatever learning opportunities we develop next or how we (re)use the ones we currently have.

In this editorial we outline some of the recent changes at the Journal, and introduce the papers in this issue.

Change in editorial roles and Editorial Board

Distinguished Professor Niki Davis is standing down from her role in the Editorial team. Niki was Editor-In-Chief of *JOFDL* from 2014 to 2017, and stepped back to the role of Associate Editor in 2017 due to other commitments. She is now standing down from the editorial role entirely. The Journal has been served well with Niki's contribution in both leadership and editorial vision. We thank Niki again for the care and expertise she has provided to both the journal and the editorial team and wish her all the very best in her future endeavours. Alison Fields and Dr Maggie Hartnett continue in their roles of Editor-In-Chief and Associate Editor respectively.

There have also been a number of changes in the Editorial Advisory Board. Three members are retiring this year: Peter Albion, Mary Simpson, and Bill Anderson. Peter (Professor of Educational Technology at the University of Southern Queensland), Mary (formerly Associate Professor of Education at Otago University) and Bill (formerly Director, Distance Learning at Otago University) are distinguished members of the open, flexible, and distance learning community and have provided support and advice to the Journal over many years. We thank them very much for their contributions over an extended period and wish them all the very best for the future.

Replacing them are three new Editorial Board members: Kathryn Kennedy, Keryn Pratt, and Derek Wenmoth. Kathryn (Director of the Michigan Virtual Learning Institute), Keryn (Postgraduate & Distance Coordinator [Education], Otago University) and Derek (Director of eLearning, CORE Education) bring a new set of skills and talents that will help the Board to support and guide the Journal over years to come. We welcome these three people to the Editorial Board.

Articles in this issue

The three articles in this general issue come from a variety of viewpoints on rather different topics. All contribute to an area of open, flexible, and distance learning, and all come from a New Zealand experience or perspective.

Barnett and Te Wiata report on a Māori peer mentoring programme offered to Māori students studying at a distance. It uses a kaupapa Māori methodology and a model of Māori student success to investigate the value and benefits of a programme already in operation. Results cover benefits and opportunities not only for the mentees but also for the Māori student mentors.

The Bassett and Robson paper is the last of the 2016 FLANZ Conference papers to emerge as a fully-fledged article. The topic of middle leaders is explored, with a focus on opportunities to engage with effective appraisal and leadership development for those who lead 'from the middle'. An investigation into current practice and development-seeking is outlined and a possible programme to fill the identified gap is mooted.

The final article, by Nichols and Meuleman, outlines the case study of a new educational designer, charting the transition from other work into this new area of expertise. A narrative inquiry is used to follow the journey of the new education designer; contemporaneously written journal entries were the main source information. A mentoring relationship is described, and themes are derived from a content analysis of the journals. The article ends with a practical section of 'Advice to new educational designers' which may inform others embarking on this journey.

References

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Biographical notes

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