Delving Further into Blended Learning: Examining Professional Development Models, a Flipped Learning Approach, and Open Educational Resources

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As is commonly attributed, Charles Bowden once noted that “Summer-time is always the best of what might be.” We hope this finds you enjoying a rejuvenating and productive summer, filled with friends, family, and fun, together with time to read, reflect, and write. Our ongoing work continues, and we are excited to publish another issue of the Journal of Online Learning Research for 2017.

While this issue has implications for online learning, the four articles focus primarily on topics surrounding blended learning—an area that is especially under-researched. The first article, “Supporting School Leaders in Blended Learning with Blended Learning” contributed by Lauren Acree, Teresa Gibson, Nancy Mangum, Mary Ann Wolf, Shaun Kellogg, and Suzanne Branon, of The Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at NC State University, examines the Leadership in Blended Learning (LBL) program. Using a mixed methods case-study design, the program evaluation suggests that the LBL program was successful in assisting teachers with applying skills related to blended learning, including planning for and implementing technology to support learning, examining key blended learning components, and exploring traditional instructional models as opposed to new ones.
A second article that addresses efforts for quality professional development when it comes to blended teaching is “Mastering the Blend: A Professional Development Program for K-12 Teachers” by Michelle Moore, Heather Robinson, Anneliese Sheffield, and Alana Phillips from the University of North Texas. The article details four courses designed to help K-12 teachers build the skills necessary to design and facilitate student-centered blended learning environments. The article provides a helpful and detailed glimpse into their design process and reports the initial results of a program evaluation. The authors also invite readers to contact them if they wish to access the actual courses.

In their article, “Flipped Instruction with English Language Learners at a Newcomer High School,” Kevin Graziano and John Hall look at a flipped model involving English Language Learners (ELLs) attending a newcomer school, or a school designed specifically to support newly arrived immigrants with little or no English proficiency. The study looks at ELLs’ perceptions of flipped instruction and compares the academic performance of secondary ELLs who received flipped instruction in an algebra course to those who received traditional instruction. Findings suggest that the flipped model was enjoyed more by students, who performed slightly higher than those who experienced the traditional instruction model, but without statistical significance. The authors conclude that flipped instruction was a means to implementing constructivist learning pedagogies as well as differentiated, student-centered learning.

Finally, in their article “Usage Data as Indicators of STEM OER Utility,” Marcia Mardis and Chandrahasa Ambavapuru present an analysis of open educational resources (OER) by examining usage or “paradata” which consists of reviews, ratings, and number of views, downloads, favorites, and shares of OERs from the National Science Digital Library. This database represents the largest accessible collection of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) resources and is often used to access materials for online and blended learning contexts. Findings suggest that feedback from teachers contained mixed sentiments and that viewed resources were generally downloaded. While educator feedback is currently not an effective measure of resource quality, it is a prime area for future research.

These four articles offer a strong look at research related to blended learning from various angles including professional development opportunities designed for teachers, a flipped learning model for ELLs, and an initial look at evaluating OERs used in blended settings. We are excited to see these examinations delve into blended learning environments, as there exists a great opportunity to expand research in this area. We invite you to read and reflect, and to be inspired to consider how the articles contribute to your own understanding and lines of inquiry related to the topic. In addition, we strongly encourage you to submit your own work for consideration to be included in a future issue of the Journal of Online Learning.