

EJEL Editorial: Volume 13, Issue 4 Special Issue following ECEL 2014

The papers contained in this issue are the result of the 13th European Conference on e-Learning, ECEL 2014, held at Aalborg University, Copenhagen, Denmark on the 30-31, October, 2014. These papers represent the selective best from the proceedings.

Massive open online courses have been at the forefront of discussion in academic and business circles for quite a few years. Given that the latest technologies allow scalable ways to deliver the content, allow discussions among participants and track student progress, challenges have included assessing student progress and providing needed feedback to promote and secure student achievement. In their paper, Wilfried Admiraal, Bart Heusman and Olga Pilli approach the topic of MOOCs from the perspective of how self- and peer assessment might offer promising solutions for scaling the grading of complex assignments in courses with thousands of students. They also explore if intermediate assessments might engage more students in participating in the course. Their study is predicated on three Leiden University MOOCs built on the Coursera platform.

I was most excited to read Edilson Arenas' study on Affordances of Learning Technologies in Higher Education Multicultural Environments. Since I work for a multicultural institution of higher education, this investigation has potential for practical application at my own institution. This study argues that part of the problem of lackluster empirical evidence on the benefits of using technologies to improve learning is either the content or teacher-centric perspective of these frameworks. Thus, the need to explore the benefits from a more student-centric perspective. Further, the study draws on an ethnographic study of culturally diverse computing students and teachers within learning environments that blend online and face-to-face pedagogies. Arenas looks at aspects of teaching and learning such as (1) the nature of the subject and, (2) students' learning styles of intellectual inquiry. Biglan's classic model on academic disciplines and Kolb's learning styles theory as used to provide context to Arenas' hypothesis. The results are impressive and can be applied in a range of institutions.

Zwelijongile Gaylard Baleni provides enlightenment on Online Formative Assessment in Higher Education: Its Pros and Cons. This is a topic frequently explored and discussed in teaching and learning circles. Unearthing the impact of assessments in online settings is the focus of this investigation, especially formative assessments. The author used a missed method questionnaire on formative assessment with the primary focus on how formative assessment within online contexts operates. Multiple strategies for formative assessment were deployed dependent on such online tools as discussion forums and objective tests. Some of the most noticeable benefits consisted of improvement of student commitment, speedier feedback, enhanced flexibility around time and place of taking the assessment task and importance in the procedure for students and professors also benefited with less grading time. A savings on administrative costs was also realized. The findings and final analysis bore out that effective online formative assessment is an effective methodology in a student-centric approach. The paper is a story well told and worthy of continued focus on the encouraging results with low achievers.

It takes a Community to Develop a Teacher: Testing a New Teacher Education Model for Promoting ICT in Classroom Teaching Practices in Chile by Paula Charbonneau-Gowdy provides a fascinating subject. The paper adds to an emerging and needed dialogue on best practices in teacher education for preparing future teachers to use technology to promote grounded theory based practices in their classrooms. The case study was conducted over 12 months at a private university in Chile. Charbonneau-Gowdy asked the intriguing questions: (1) Do innovative technology-infused courses serve to enable beginning teacher participants to shed their traditional passive, rather narrow mindsets to adopt identities of effective, 21st century teachers; and, (2) Do opportunities to use various innovative technologies for learning have an influence on pedagogies teachers utilize in their teaching practices? The results are interesting and prove to be innovative and potentially game changing.

Using MOOCs to explore alternate pathways to traditional degrees is a frequent topic under discussion in contemporary higher education circles. Recently, several institutions have incorporated MOOCs into online course offerings leading to earning a MBA degree. In their paper, authors Rachel Fitzgerald, Maggie Anderson and Ross Thompson set out to consider recurring themes in the literature in the context of the design and delivery of a MBA which utilizes MOOCs in the schematic. The authors offer insight into incorporating MOOCs'

objectives with insuring quality and standards. Moreover, the paper explores options for sustaining the model and further empirical research.

A novel approach to achieving buy-in from higher education professors in the use of digital tools in their teaching practice is offered by Sue Greener and Craig Wakefield. Their study on developing confidence in the use of digital tools in teaching hypothesizes that by offering instructors the simple incentive of the use of mobile devices, they will more readily adopt new practices in the classroom. Their project was staged in three parts: (1) Presenting student feedback from courses taught by the subjects; (2) Surveying instructor opinions on the impact of the devices after issuance; and (3) Select interviews which focused on results of questionnaires. Stay tuned for the results which confirmed digital confidence issues and the pedagogical reasoning for integrating technologies.

Here's a different topical presentation on The Scoring of Matching Questions Tests; A Closer Look by Antonín Jančařík and Yvona Kostecká. While most contemporary educators are familiar with the mechanics and capabilities of electronic testing, this paper attempts to identify how the types of questions used in a test can affect student results on such tests expressed as test scores. The authors demonstrate how the number of distractors included in a question influences the overall test score. The results bear out that these types of assignments are of very little consequence if the end goal is to rank students or delineate between excellent performing students. Two methods of rectification of data obtained from tests made up of closed questions were used in the analysis. Further research using this summary outcome would be useful to obtain additional significance on electronic assessments.

Signe Schack Noesgaard and Rikke Ørngreen examined closely, The Effectiveness of e-Learning: An Explorative and Integrative Review of the Definitions, Methodologies and Factors that Promote e-Learning Effectiveness. These authors took a different approach of examining the effectiveness of e-Learning defined? How is the effectiveness of e-Learning measure? What makes e-Learning solutions effective? Notwithstanding, the authors not only found 19 distinctive ways to define effectiveness, but also how the use of the fulfillment of pre-defined learning objectives affect outcomes. Further, this paper deconstructs if e-Learning and traditional face-to-face learning should be gauged using exact definition of effectiveness. This paper provides timely and worthwhile information to the ongoing debate among traditionalists and futurists in the education arena.

Along the oft discussed theme of assessing outcomes in the electronic delivery of teaching and learning, Birgette Holm Sorensen and Karin Tweddell Levinsen explore Powerful Practices in Digital Learning Processes. The paper utilizes two empirical research studies focusing on learning design frameworks involving student agency and participation in digital production across subjects and disciplines. Focus of the unfinished study resides with preliminary evidence that the inaction between student-formulated requirements/learning objectives and the various forms of formative evaluations. Another finding was that students voluntarily initiate formative evaluations practices in their learning design. It is interesting to note that this study opens a new range of research interests.

The final study in this edition was collaboratively written by Saraswathy Thurairaj, Er Pek Hoon, Swaggata Sinha Roy and Pok Wei Fong. The authors very timely investigated, Reflections of Students' language Usage in Social Networking Sites: Making or Marring Academic English. This topic is one of contemporary concern and philosophical discussion. Considering that social networking is so integral as a form of communication on the global landscape, the effects of the language use on teaching and learning is significant. Descriptive statistical method was used to analyze data collected from questionnaires. The findings exhibited that frequency in the use of short text messaging did not severely affect the English language proficiency of participants. These findings advance the body of literature on the influences of social media on language. Promoting further research on this topic would be a beneficial result of the study.

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