Introduction

It is my pleasure to introduce this issue of the *Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning* (*JOFDL*). We are proud to debut this two-issues-per-year publication cycle in 2011, which follows the recent re-naming of the journal, reconstitution of the Editorial Advisory Board, and our move to an open, online format as part of our ongoing efforts to improve the journal as a scholarly outlet of the Distance Education Association of New Zealand (DEANZ).

This second issue of the year, *JOFDL 15*(2), is a themed issue, focusing on open educational practices (OEP) as a mechanism for opening relatively closed educational systems. This theme is an extension of the growing use of open educational resources (OER). In highlighting the role of open content, OER have drawn attention to OEP as a means to increase access to educational opportunities, widen participation in education, promote social justice, and potentially transform formal education through the concept of 'openness'. The recent Open Education Quality Initiative (OPAL) report titled *Beyond OER: Shifting Focus to Open Educational Practice* (OPAL, 2011) argues for the use of open content in the form of OER in combination with open educational structures in order to transform learning. The suggested transformation implies shifts toward both open education and open learning. These include three main movements. The first is innovation in adopting open educational practices within relatively 'closed' educational institutions. The second is changes in the form of policy or regulatory interventions across a broad range of educational contexts in order to not only support but also promote openness on the part of educators in sharing what they have; for example, knowledge, resources, and networks. The third is increased attention to learner choice in the content, pacing, and mode of study in formal education as part of the 'opening' of learning in formal and informal learning situations. These themes are explored in this issue, which seeks to advance understanding of the intersection of formal education, open education, and open learning with reference to Open Educational Resources (OER), OEP, and open learning architectures.

The focus on OEP is a timely accompaniment to the groundswell of activity around openness in 2011. Open Educational Practices, which promote highly flexible open learning through innovative use of technology, are evident in the operation of increasingly popular learning-driven initiatives. Peer-to-peer University (P2PU), the University of the People (UoPeople), and innovative credentialling schemes such as the Open Badge project, are examples of open practices being used with online infrastructure and collaborative practices to support highly flexible learning. The Open Badge project is an innovative credentialling scheme which seeks to recognise learning associated with emerging literacies and skills. Another notable example of OEP in formal education is the OER University (OERu) concept, which has grown from a concept to a critical mass of over a dozen affiliated anchor partners in 2011. The OERu is a virtual collaboration of accredited educational institutions seeking to provide free learning and affordable credentialling to all students by combining OER, flexible learning pathways, and opportunities for credit on a reduced-fee basis from a network of accredited OERu member institutions ("OER University," n.d.). Some readers of *JOFDL* will undoubtedly be familiar with this initiative due to strong representation from the New Zealand, Australian, and Canadian education communities as founding anchor partners of the OERu.

So, as 2011 draws to a close and we take stock of some of the accomplishments in open education this year, we invite you to explore the theme of open educational practices in *JOFDL 15*(2). This issue contains five pieces, including four themed articles on OEP and one non-themed piece. The first article is an invited contribution from Professor Ulf-Daniel Ehlers, first author of the *Beyond OER* OPAL report. His article provides an overview of the findings of the report, and highlights relevant aspects of the recommended shift in attention from open content in the form of OER to activity and supportive structures associated with OEP. The second article, by Tony Coughlin and Leigh-Anne Perryman, looks at The Open University's OpenLearn OER

repository. Coughlin and Perryman explore differences in the representation of various disciplines within OpenLearn, and seek to both account for those differences and explore the implications of these differences for the agenda of widening participation through open education. The third article, by Melissa Highton, Jill Fresen, and Joanna Wild of Oxford University, contrasts the prevailing views of Oxford University as 'closed', 'exclusive', or 'elitist', with the university's history of investment in openness via OER and more flexible, open practices. The authors draw a picture of openness at Oxford that may resonate more than you expect. The fourth piece in this issue examines OER and OEP in Australia. Carina Bossu, Mark Brown, and David Bull overview OER developments in Australia before foreshadowing the results of an in-progress OER research project funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council. Finally, the issue concludes with a non-themed article from Jennifer Redd and Denise Schmidt-Crawford on the use of iPod touch apps to support secondary-school students' language skills.

As editors of *JOFDL*, Mark Nichols and I hope you enjoy this themed issue and the new two-issue publication cycle. We are always interested in your suggestions for future themes or other feedback on the journal. If you would like to comment, please email us at editor@deanz.org.nz. Finally, look for our next issue in conjunction with the 2012 DEANZ conference to be held in April in Wellington.

References

OPAL (2011). *Beyond OER: Shifting focus to open educational practices*. OPAL Report 2011. Essen, Germany: Open Education Quality Initiative.

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Ben Kehrwald
University of South Australia
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