Introduction to Section II

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This issue of *Online Learning* contains four papers from our regular submission process. The studies in this section examine facilitation of productive discourse, uses of social media, interaction, and student success in online learning environments.

The initial paper in this section is "Scaffolding Progressive Online Discourse for Literary Knowledge Building" by Marc Nachowitz of Miami University, Ohio. This paper provides a lucid description of the design of online discussions that are likely to lead students to engage in progressive, literary discourse. Building on the work of Scardamalia and Berieter, the author investigates the use of online discussion scaffolds—for example, sentence starters such as "I used to think…" and "But now I think…"—as ways to get students engaged in more reflective discussions in online settings. Using design-based research, analysis of discussion submissions indicates that direct instruction in progressive discourse in combination with classroom review of online discussion contributed to student learning. This study is helpful in advancing our understanding of knowledge building with a useful overview of the literature and approaches used in the field of computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL).

The second paper in this section is "#DigPed Narratives in Education: Critical Perspectives on Power and Pedagogy" by Suzan Koseoglu of Goldsmiths, University of London, and Aras Bozkurt of Anadolu University and the University of South Africa. The authors' goal was to understand how educational narratives grow and spread on social media. They used social network analysis and thematic content analysis to identify three main narratives. From their findings they identify pedagogic capacity as another conceptual lens through which to explore the growth and impact of critical narratives in education. This paper expands the theoretical toolbox for research in digital learning.

Next is "Increasing Undergraduate Success: A Randomized Controlled Trial of U-Pace Instruction" by Raymond Fleming, Laura Pedrick, Leah Stoiber, Sarah Kienzler, Ryan Fleming, and Diane Reddy of the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. This experimental research examines components of an instructional approach developed at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee designed to improve student success in undergraduate education courses in psychology. The approach combines mastery learning with "amplified assistance" (communication of high expectations, motivational support, and proactive instructor support). The study investigates the components individually and in combination and also evaluates a control condition with neither of the components. Results showed no significant difference in course grades within the U-Pace model. Significant differences did exist between students in "regular" face-to-face instruction and the combined U-Pace approach. The authors also found that students assigned to the combined condition did significantly better on a cumulative exam compared to the individual components. Finally, U-Pace instruction was found to be effective for both at-risk students and students not at risk. This is a well-designed and tightly controlled study of an effective

instructional intervention that begins to tease apart the active ingredients in a scalable approach to improving student outcomes.

The final paper in this section is "Increasing Interpersonal Interactions in an Online Course: Does Increased Instructor E-mail Activity and a Voluntary In-Person Meeting Time Facilitate Student Learning?" by Bianca Cung, Di Xu, and Sarah Eichhorn of the University of California, Irvine. In this paper the authors investigate the effects of increasing instructor interaction and voluntary face-to-face meetings on student performance in a precalculus course. Precalculus serves as a gateway course in higher education, and interventions that improve success can have broad impacts on the likelihood of degree completion, especially for academically weaker students. In the treatment group, students benefited from well-structured instructor e-mails that were sent on a regular basis to keep them on track and a voluntary weekly face-to-face meeting where students could ask questions about content that was unclear. Based on a sample of matched students, the authors conclude that these practices increase interactivity and result in better outcomes for students. Specifically, students in the higher interactivity condition scored four percentage points higher on their course final exam than students who did not receive this treatment. The higher level of interpersonal interaction also helped increase student final grades by almost half a grade. This is a useful study of a specific intervention that promises to improve online learner outcomes in a way that scales to larger contexts.

We are pleased to bring you these papers as well as the studies included in Section I. Please read, discuss, and share this work and consider contributing to the scholarly dialogue supporting the advancement of online education.