Introduction to *OLJ* Issue 25:4 Section II

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In addition to the papers associated with the American Educational Research Association Online Teaching and Learning SIG, we also have a selection of studies that have been reviewed and accepted for publication through our regular submission process. This year, the journal received several hundred submissions that were reviewed by more than one hundred reviewers. As an editorial team, alongside our reviewers and section editors, we have been working to clarify review processes, streamline decision-making and provide more useful feedback to authors who submit. Journal Editor-in-Chief Peter Shea and the Online Learning Consortium appreciate the opportunity to provide publication space for both established and new researchers. Those teaching and/or researching about online learning are invited to sign up through the journal system and volunteer to review as well as submit work.

The following articles investigate learner perceptions of new technologies and experiences with online learning, personalization, and analytics for optimizing online learning opportunities, and strategies for student support during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the first article in this section, "Examination of the Hexad User Types and their Relationships with Gender, Game Mode, and Gamification Experience in the Context of Open and Distance Learning" Dilek Şenocak, Köksal Büyük, and Aras Bozkurt consider the emergence of gaming and gamification. The researchers adapted a cross-sectional survey design to learn about Hexad user types of distance learners. Findings revealed that the most common user types were Philanthropists, Achievers, and Free Spirits, followed by Socializers and Players. The least common user type was Disruptors. Women tended to score higher than men on the Disruptor user type. Achievers, Socializers, Philanthropists, and Players preferred multiplayer game modes, while the game mode had little influence on Free Spirits and Disruptors. This article contributes to ongoing work to make gamification practices in online settings more gender-inclusive.

In the second article, "Examining Higher Education Instructor Perceptions of Roles and Competencies in Online Teaching," Florence Martin, Swapna Kumar, and Liane She categorized eight types of instructor roles: Subject Matter Expert, Course Designer and Developer, Course Facilitator, Course Manager, Advisor/Mentor, Assessor/Evaluator, Technology Expert, and Lifelong Learner. Through survey-based research with 141 online instructors, the researchers examined competencies that online instructors perform based on various roles. Many instructors reported using all the roles. Online instructors who participated in training and who collaborated with instructional designers rated the frequency with which they performed the roles to be higher. The findings of this study demonstrate that online instructors perceive themselves to have many roles.

In the third article, "Using Academic Social Networks to Enhance the Student Experience in Online Education," Tiffani S. Bateman engaged in a qualitative, interpretive, phenomenological study that explored the lived experiences of six online higher education students reporting active participation in an academic social network. Three core themes emerged from Bateman's data analysis: (a) acceptance and belonging; (b) self-validation; and (c) drawing from multiple perspectives about social media. The findings of this study provide a

foundation for future work in using and critiquing the use of social media in online educational experiences.

In the fourth article, "Understanding the Roles of Personalization and Social Learning in a Language MOOC Through Learning Analytics," Napat Jitpaisarnwattana, Hayo Reinders, and Pornapit Darasawang designed an LMOOC and implemented what they referred to as a "Social and Personal Online Language Course (SPOLC)." This language learning environment incorporated a recommendation system and emphasized personalization and social interaction. Several types of learning behaviors were related to course completion. The researchers found that working in groups and creating a learning plan were important factors associated with course completion while interacting with other learners online was not. These findings offer insight into course design as well as the productive arrangement of students for working in LMOOC courses.

For the fifth article, "An Overwhelming Cloud of Inertia": Evaluating the Impact of Course Design Changes Following the COVID-19 Pandemic," Joann S. Olson and Rita Kenahan explored the impact of course design changes that sought to help students meet learning objectives while also seeking to alleviate the unanticipated pressures created by external forces. The findings suggest that increased flexibility with due dates and access to course materials were the most helpful strategy for helping students deal with the disruptive events of the semester due to COVID-19. In addition, managing the disruptions and finding a sense of balance was important for both instructors and students. Such findings provide additional evidence as to the benefits of making small, but important shifts in practice for students.

In the sixth article, "Comparing the Outcomes of the Different Teaching Modes: All-in-Person, Hybrid, and Online, for Different Student Demographic Groups in a Business School," Douglas R. Moodie used data from four years of all the courses in the Coles College of Business at Kennesaw State University. The results of this study showed that for all demographics, students in hybrid course sections earned higher final course grades than those in online sections, which in turn, earned better final grades than those in AIP sections. While such findings were limited to one institution in the pre-COVID era, they may support future planning of hybrid courses as a matter of equity.

In the seventh article, "We Overwhelm Them with Hope": How Online Mentors Can Support Online Learners," Camey L. Andersen and Richard E. West analyzed responses from 143 mentors from around the world participating in a global higher education initiative. Results confirmed the effectiveness of four mentoring domains identified in the literature, reporting the most success from providing emotional and psychological support for students. Mentoring strategies, characteristics of an online role model, and online mentor confidence in students in gaining technology skills were all important ideas from the research. As online learning continues to grow the findings of this study can support the preparation and support of mentors.

In the eighth article, "Advancing Sociotechnical-Pedagogical Heuristics for the Usability Evaluation of Online Courses for Adult Learners," Isa Jahnke, Nathan Riedel, Kanupriya Singh, and Joi Moore identified an initial set of social, technical, and pedagogical related items (STP) heuristics based on literature. Next, the researchers analyzed this set using empirical data from two online courses. The set that emerged in their research has the potential to support more efficient evaluation online courses as evaluators and instructional designers work to optimize user experiences.

In the ninth article, "The Scale of Online Course Anxiety: Assessing College Students' Anxiety in Online Courses, "Xinyang, Li, William Lan, and Amanda Williams used an existing theoretical framework regarding the fundamental differences between online education and

traditional education to develop and test the instrument of Scale of Online Course Anxiety (SOCA). A sample of 170 students from a 4-year higher educational institution provided the data for the study. The total score and the four subscale scores show high reliability. A Confirmatory Factor Analysis exhibited solid goodness of fit between SOCA items and the factor structure hypothesized in previous research. Evidence of divergent validity showed that SOCA differentiates the state anxiety and trait anxiety as expected. Researchers and practitioners may be interested in using this instrument to determine how to support students in online learning experiences.

For the tenth article, "Student Perspectives of Online Teaching and Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic," Burhan Ozfidan, Orchida Fayez, and Hala Ismail explored the variables contributing to student satisfaction with online teaching and learning effectiveness. Data were collected through an online survey. The results of the study defined effective online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. In combination, eight criteria contributed to the definition: motivating students to accomplish, communicating effectively, meeting students' needs, providing access to a wide range of content, providing a well-organized course structure, providing numerous sources, providing explanatory feedback, and facilitating meaningful discussions. These findings add to the emerging knowledge base about what constitutes successful online learning practice in an emergency or sudden migration to a different modality.

The final article is "Reflecting on Best Practices in a Post-COVID-19 World" by Nathan Schrenk, Kelly Alves, Drew Van Dam, and Brianne Schrenk. In this article the authors demonstrate how they located and considered different research and practical resources to support remote learning. They also reflect on what they might retain beyond the pandemic.

While the COVID-19 pandemic continues to reach into 2022, affecting the lives of many in and outside of the academy, we nevertheless are hopeful for a peaceful and happy new year. We look forward to additional submissions, additional issues, and ongoing engagement with the online teaching and learning community.