Introduction to OLJ Volume 27, Issue 3

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On behalf of the Online Learning Consortium (OLC), it is my pleasure to provide a brief overview of the third issue of 2023. However, before introducing these papers, I would like to note the ongoing success of the journal. With the support of OLC, the *Online Learning* Journal now ranks in the 94th percentile of all journals in education and through this support remains fully open access. I would like to preface this introduction with a warm thank you to OLC and encourage readers to learn more about OLC here: https://onlinelearningconsortium.org/join/free/

The September issue of the Online Learning Journal includes 13 articles from our regular submission process. These articles discuss supporting refugees in online settings, the importance of relationships in remote education settings, online engagement and how it may vary by cultural context, cognitive presence, online mentoring, modelling online student satisfaction, diversity, equity, and inclusion, and more.

In "Leveraging Digital Literacies to Support Refugee Youth and Families' Success in Online Learning: A Theoretical Perspective Using a Socioecological Approach" authors Mary Rice and Aijuan Cun of the University of New Mexico argue that typical narratives about refugees begin with a deficit approach, focusing on struggles of refugee youth in digital learning contexts. This article seeks to redress this emphasis on challenges and to identify and theorize a more holistic asset-based approach. To do this the authors review prior research and apply Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological framework outlining shared responsibility in digital and online learning. The authors apply socio-ecological thinking to systems in online learning highlighting the individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and public policy theoretical and practical implications for design and teaching with refugees in online environments.

The importance of relationships between participants in online learning systems is also central to our next article, "Building Community Online: Moving toward Humanization through Relationship-Focused Technology Use" by Staci Ann Gilpin of University of Wisconsin, Stephanie Rollag Yoon, and Jana LoBello Miller of the University of Minnesota. The authors note that 80% of teacher candidates in the U.S. are female and that applications to teacher preparation programs are dropping. This decline in interest in teacher preparation shows up in online course provision with teacher preparation representing only about 5% of online courses for undergraduates. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that there is a growing teacher shortage in the U.S. The paper seeks to address two related questions using qualitative methods. The first question asks how relational-focused implementations of synchronous discussions influences online learning communities and learning (and how this might lead to more inclusive online learning environments). The second question investigates how teacher candidates' experiences with online learning communities affect their teaching identities (and how these identities might be more compatible with persistence and effectiveness in teaching careers). The authors posit a direct link between feminist pedagogy, building relationships in online learning, and expanding access and equity, leading to higher persistence rates in online learning, especially focusing on teacher candidates. Results suggest that relational-type student-led small group online discussions are a promising pathway as they expand accessibility and equity through community

development and culminate in learning while also positively influencing future teachers' identities.

As a result of the COVID pandemic many institutions with little experience in forms of distance learning were abruptly required to transition to emergency remote instruction. Confronted with the locally novel challenge of offering instruction via information technologies, these institutions began to grapple with longstanding questions in distance education, such as what does it mean to be engaged in this form of learning? The next paper in this issue, "The Influence of Collaboration, Participation, and Experience on Undergraduate Learner Engagement in the Online Teaching-Learning Environment" by Nour Al Okla, Eman Ahmed Rababa, Shashidhar Belbase, and Ghadah Al Murshidi of United Arab Emirates University investigate the factors that influence undergraduate learners' engagement in online classes and how instructors can improve learner engagement. The authors conducted an expansive review of the literature to identify various models of learner engagement including cognitive, behavioral, affective, and social dimensions. Through a survey, the authors reveal participants' engagement levels in the online environment were shaped by their collaboration, learning opportunities, utilization of educational technology, and the learners' relationships with their instructors and colleagues. Somewhat surprisingly, prior experience with online learning did not correlate with higher levels of engagement. This may reflect the fact that online learning is somewhat new to the region and institutions may need time to develop all of the infrastructure that support mature online programs such as consistent faculty development, course design, and faculty and student supports.

A second paper that investigates online learner engagement in specific cultural contexts is "Engagement in Online Learning among Thai and German Students: The Role of Classmates, Instructors, Technology and Learning Environments across Country Contexts" by Christin Grothaus of Mahidol University, International College, Thailand. Grothaus argues that engagement is not a monolithic construct and that cultural differences shape how students experience engagement in online courses. The author also notes that while any previous researchers have called for more investigations of cultural forces impacting technology mediated environments most studies on engagement and educational technology are of quantitative nature, particularly studies conducted in Asia. Grothaus therefore asserts that qualitative cross-cultural studies such as this one is lacking. The author inquires how German and Thai students perceive online learning and engage with it considering behavioral, cognitive, and affective dimensions of engagement. Further, the study investigates the role of instructors, peers, tools, in shaping student engagement across the two groups. Finally, the paper seeks to understand differences and similarities in engagement in online learning across groups and how these are related to the country and cultural context. Using interviews with 11 Thai and 9 German students, the author reveals cultural differences in online student engagement supporting their hypotheses.

The next paper in this issue relates to teacher preparation, in this case with a focus on special education. In "Special Educator Course Format Preferences," the author Rachel Brown-Chidsey of the University of Southern Maine seeks to understand how online learning options can best be designed to meet the needs of pre-service teachers in special education, another area that suffers from severe teacher shortages. The authors reviewed literature relating to the preparation of special education instructors and paraprofessionals and developed a survey designed to reveal their preferences for the organization of online education, noting that the flexibility and convenience of online learning appealed to these educators. A majority of survey respondent reported that the last course they enrolled in was a campus-based course. However, a

majority of these respondents indicated that their most preferred course format was asynchronous and online. Results also illuminate other nuances in preference dependent on educator status and course duration. The authors conclude that to address the shortage of special educators, university programs could benefit from identifying and offering courses in formats that are preferred by special educators, especially more online courses.

The next two papers in the issue investigate cognitive presence, a construct drawn from the Community of Inquiry model meant to reflect the cyclical nature of learning in collaborative online settings. The first of these, "(Meta)Cognitive Presence for Graduate Student Teacher Training," by Mary Stewart of California State University San Marcos, is helpful in defining cognitive presence in an accessible way and in examining how students move through its phases, triggering event to exploration, integration, and resolution. Stewart's study focuses on a deliberate attempt to design a course that would lead to higher levels of cognitive presence and employs qualitative research methods to investigate how articulating these mechanisms can help doctoral students to understand and transfer their knowledge to help their own future students. This is accomplished through a meta-cognitive pedagogical reflection that her students completed asking them to document the different phases of cognitive presence they experienced in her course. The data for the study consists of these reflections and Stewart coded and recoded this data to answer her research questions. The data reveal that cognitive presence does not only manifest in the expected learning activities, such as threaded discussions, but shows up in other areas of the course and made also be invisible to instructors and researchers who do not explicitly ask about it. A meta-cognitive activity such as employed by Stewart is a helpful mechanism for supporting and revealing the development of this model of collaborative online learning as described by the cognitive presence construct.

The second paper on cognitive presence is "Examining the Development of K–12 Students' Cognitive Presence over Time: The Case of Online Mathematics Tutoring" by Stefan Hrastinski, Stefan Stenbom, Malin Jansson and Olga Viberg of KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden, and Mohammed Saqr of the University of Eastern Finland. These authors provide an in-depth investigation of the sequences that may occur in the online collaborative learning process as described by the cognitive presence construct. Using learning analytics and a content analysis framework designed for a mathematics context, the authors document how the phases of cognitive presence unfold during tutoring interactions. They note that, while the idealized sequence can be found in the data (triggering event, exploration, integration, resolution) other sequences were actually more common. These finding provide additional empirical support for the model and position other researchers to investigate how the practical inquiry process unfolds in other educational contexts.

In "Two Stories to Tell: Different Student Outcome Measures Correlate with Different Instructor Adaptations to COVID-19," authors Quentin Charles Sedlacek of Southern Methodist University, Lily Amador, Emily Beasley, Krysta Malech, Viviana Vigi, Corin Gray, Corin Slown, of California State University Monterey Bay, and Heather Haeger of the University of Arizona explore equity issues related to COVID-inspired pedagogical changes. The authors review research indicating that indicated that the challenges related to the transition to emergency remote instruction disproportionately harmed students who were already marginalized in higher education and/or those who had only limited access to technology needed for online learning, many of whom were enrolled in Hispanic-serving institutions. They further discuss prior research describing the kinds of changes faculty made to adapt to emergency remote instruction and student perceptions of the quality of emergency remote instruction. The

contribution of the current study is to combine a summary of instructional adaptations and to describe their impacts on students. Specifically, the authors investigated the types of instructional adaptations students noticed in their courses—the instructional adaptations positively associated with self-reported motivational gains and other affective outcomes; and instructional adaptations negatively associated with "equity gaps"—defined as course grades.

The next two papers look into supporting and mentoring students at a distance at the graduate and undergraduate levels. In "Technologies, Strategies, and Supports Helpful to Faculty in the E-mentoring of Doctoral Dissertations" Swapna Kumar of the University of Florida, Doris Bolliger of Texas Tech University, and Elizabeth Roumell of Texas A&M University investigate communications, research process, student support, and institutional support used by faculty who provide mentoring to doctoral students studying in online and blended settings. This paper provides a comprehensive snapshot of remote support for doctoral students and is useful as a starting point for understanding the technologies and processes involved in e-mentoring that is increasingly used in doctoral level education.

Next is "The Supervisor of Undergraduate Dissertations in a Web-Based Context: How Much Support and How to Give it?" by Najib Bouhout, Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University, and Aziz Askitou Mohammed Premier University, Morocco. These authors investigate the educational and motivational support provided by faculty supervising undergraduate dissertations. They draw from Mishra and Koehler's Technological-Pedagogical-Content-Knowledge (TPACK) model and develop their own framework that describes and explains faculty support for undergraduate dissertation work. The authors consider many of the same variables investigated in the previous paper (institutional supports, technologies, etc.) and add specificity about what is supported (motivation, educational processes). Interestingly, the authors find that institutional support variable impacts faculty's TPACK and has downstream impacts on their support for students.

The next paper is "External and Internal Predictors of Student Satisfaction with Online Learning Achievement" by Shixin Fang, Yi Lu, and Guijun Zhang of Fudan University. These authors note that there are relatively few studies on online student satisfaction in East Asian or Chinese college populations. While myriad studies of satisfaction have been undertaken in online settings (as we are reminded by another paper in this issue), cultural differences may shape online educational experiences. The authors suggest that the mechanisms that may determine student satisfaction could be different among Asian students. The investigators therefore adopted Rovai's persistence model but revised it based on Chinese students' cultural context of online learning. This paper suggests a new theoretical framework, including student characteristics, internal, and external factors to model and explain Chinese student satisfaction in online learning. Using a sample of 5,980 students the authors find support for their model and conclude that faculty play a bigger role in predicting student satisfaction that do external factors such as technology access.

In "Using a Variety of Interactive Learning Methods to Improve Learning Effectiveness: Insights from AI Models Based on Teaching Surveys" authors Zohar Barnett-Itzhaki, Dizza Beimel, and Arava Tsoury of the Ruppin Research Group in Environmental and Social Sustainability, Israel, use AI to investigate interactive online instruction. Specifically, they ask how the use and variety of interactive active learning methods in online courses is associated with student course evaluations, as well as learner perceptions of both instructional effectiveness and clarity of the teaching. Using data from more than 30,000 course evaluations, they find that not only the extent of use, but also the variety of interactive learning methods significantly

affects the perceived clarity of teaching and learning effectiveness. The study includes implications for both teaching and future research.

The final paper in this issue is "Faculty Perspectives on Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) in Online Teaching" by Ryan Miller, Cathy Howell, Beth Oyarzun, Shawn Knight, and Jacob Frankovich of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and Florence Martin of North Carolina State University. The authors argue that issues of inclusion, diversity, equity, and access within online teaching are not well understood empirically nor the focus of much faculty development in higher education. Using interview methods, the team conducted a qualitative case study with 21 faculty members to investigate how online instructors across disciplines experience and approach equity issues within their online teaching. The researchers revealed a disconnect between competencies and experience related to online teaching and IDEA issues. Faculty participants cited their comfort in exploring IDEA issues in face-to-face courses but not in online courses and were more comfortable discussing IDEA features in synchronous online courses than asynchronous online courses. These and other findings point to an urgent need for new faculty trainings on competencies related IDEA issues integrated with online instruction.

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