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Editorial Introduction

Wrestling, Wrangling and Reaping Technology: Exploring the Complex Interactions amongst People and Technologies that Support Learning and Teaching in Higher Education

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The way that learning contexts are conceptualised is changing and learning environments are no longer confined to a physical space (Johnson, Levine, Smith, Smythe, & Stone, 2009). For higher education institutions the benefits of embracing emerging technologies are considerable and for students original educational practice has the potential to have a significant impact on both learning and teaching. A review of the literature, however, reveals that e-learning in universities is directed often towards the administering of learning and teaching rather than the implementation of interactive pedagogies (Hedberg, 2006; OECD, 2005; Reeves, Herrington, & Oliver, 2004). For example, educators most often use course management systems (CMS) as a place for making content available to students rather than developing activities that take advantage of the potential opportunities for interactive learning activities that are provided by new technologies. A significant challenge is, for all of their benefits, emerging technologies remain a "disruptive innovation—and an expensive one" (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2008, p. 4). Educators who are used to teaching in a particular way may be unwilling to invest the time and effort required to learn new teaching strategies; others may lack training and or access to the resources needed for support. This special edition focuses on the experiences of staff and students wrestling with the integration of emerging technologies within higher education curricula. The papers explore how people wrangled with the relationships among learning theories and teaching strategies, academics and students, and the affordances of the educational technologies. All papers offer insights about how technology may be used to reap rewards through supporting and enhancing learning and teaching within the higher education environment.

In *Academics Wrestling with the Dynamic Impact of Social Connectivity to Integrate Emerging Technologies into Higher Education Curricula* Mathews and Danaher offer a theoretical perspective on why academics wrestle to integrate technologies into their teaching and learning practice by

drawing attention to the fact that much of the integration process requires additional labour, which is often invisible to policy-makers and university administrators. Through the contemporary updating of Dynamic Social Impact theory the authors of this contribution show how academics who engage with interactive technologies can establish and maintain rich interpersonal relationships with their students which can subsequently lead to productive, sustainable educational outcomes.

The article by Elsden-Clifton and Jordan, *The Potential of On-line Lectures: Reaping the Rewards of 'Third Spaces'* explores the potential of software programs such as Elluminate Live™, a Web-based lecture program. Using data obtained from a session conducted by beginning teachers in a professional education program, the authors reveal how programs such as Elluminate have the potential to create learning spaces which displace traditional notions of control, generally associated with face-face and synchronous communication. The benefits reported include a space in which learners can assume greater control over educational interactions and a means of linking, in a concrete way learner experience and course content.

Similarly Hafeez-Baig, De George-Walker, Gururajan, and Danaher in *Challenges and Opportunities for Academics Adopting an Online Peer Review Teaching Model* investigate issues of shifting control of the timing and quality of assessment feedback from the educator to the learner in their article. In it they explore the challenges and opportunities for academics who adopted an on-line peer review teaching model.

The article by Kawka and Larkin, *Wrestling and Wrangling with a Worrisome Wiki*, recounts the experience of one early career academic over a four-year period who endeavoured to integrate the use of Wikis within a first year course, in an undergraduate education program. Through a process of reflective practice which involved developmental pedagogy and incremental change, the authors report a shift in student perspectives from use of the Wiki as an unpleasant course requirement to an "invisible learning tool." In their paper the authors acknowledge that a shift of this nature requires time, energy, initiative and practice if academics are to reap personal and educational benefits from technological integration.

The contribution by McGee and Bradley, *Immersive Virtual Reality*, examines how immersive virtual reality (IVR) may be used to reproduce aspects of clinical practice within undergraduate nursing and midwifery curricula. The authors refer to the competing demands for resources within health education sector, drawing attention to the reduction in numbers of nursing and midwifery student places and the costs associated the creation of IVR software. The time lapse between identification of an educational need and student access to interactive software within simulation laboratories is acknowledged as an additional constraint to the integration of technology within the curricula.

The last paper by Rossi and Luck, *Wresting, Wrangling and Reaping*, explores the development of educational practices and the transference of academic knowledge and skill in online learning contexts. Potentially

bringing together theory, research and practice in a contribution which promotes learner interaction, through assessable collaborative activities in online contexts in which students utilise synchronous and asynchronous communication tools. It also examines the positive and negative experiences of transferring the knowledge and skills learnt by working with one CMS when the institution decides to implement another CMS.

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Jo Luck and Dolene Rossi

Guest Editors

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