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Editorial

Thanksgiving

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In Canada we recently celebrated Thanksgiving Day, which reminds us of the many blessings in our individual and collective lives. I'm also reflecting with a thankful heart on those in our distance and open education community who have contributed to this and previous issues of this journal, and to scholarship in general, and who have freely shared their work with everyone. I also want to thank each of the reviewers and the associate editors who have donated their time and expertise to insuring the quality of the works published in IRRODL. Each article published in IRRODL has been improved by the critical review and suggestions for improvement made by these experts. I am also grateful to each of you for reading and subscribing to IRRODL. I trust that you will expand this blessing by passing on links and printouts of the work in this issue and perhaps even by writing a note of thanks to any of the authors. I am sure they will be thankful to know that their work is making an impact in our global network.

We are pleased to present another extensive issue of IRRODL that features eight research articles and three book reviews. In this editorial, I briefly review the contents of the issue with a hope that you are induced to read, bookmark, recommend, and forward links and RSS feeds to your colleagues and to your networks.

The first research article by William Sugar, Abbie Brown, and Kenneth Luterbach is entitled "[Examining the Anatomy of a Screencast: Uncovering Common Elements and Instructional Strategies](#)." I believe that this article is the first published that attempts to understand the structure and both implicit and explicit instructional designs of user-generated screencasts. Screencasts are a low-cost way to provide annotated descriptions of relevant content, and, in the process, to convey high levels of teacher presence through the rich human voices of teachers or designers. These features make screencasting a powerful and very cost-effective tool for online distance educators.

The second article "[Development of Interactive and Reflective Learning among Malaysian Online Distant Learners: An ESL Instructor's Experience](#)," by Puvaneswary Murugaiah and Siew Ming Thang is a qualitative analysis of a new distance education English language program delivered in Malaysia. English language is likely the most common course of instruction in the

world, and this study does an excellent job of analyzing the instruction and interactions through the lens of Gilly Salmon's five-stage model of e-learning competence.

[“A Review of Trends in Distance Education Scholarship at Research Universities in North America, 1998-2007”](#) by Randall S. Davies, Scott L. Howell, and Jo Ann Petrie continues a recent trend in the distance education journals to examine the scholarship of our discipline as presented in peer-reviewed distance education journals. The results of their review reflect my own experiences editing IRRODL for the past seven years. We have published much good research, but likely our collective work presents an overreliance on the relatively easy methodology of case studies and perception survey research. I trust this review, as well as those published recently in other distance education journals, will help us develop more extensive and rigorous research designs.

The fourth article by Michael E. Ward, Gary Peters, and Kyna Shelley is entitled [“Student and Faculty Perceptions of the Quality of Online Learning Experiences.”](#) This study uses student perceptions of a number of features of distance education delivery in both synchronous and asynchronous modes. Despite hundreds of studies showing comparable educational outcomes from distance and on-campus education there remains a lingering and usually overrated doubt as to the quality of distance learning experiences. This study demonstrates that student perceptions of distance delivery are not unfavorable when compared to on-campus delivery, thus providing additional evidence of not only the quality but of the acceptance of distance education formats.

[“Teaching and Learning Social Justice through Online Service-Learning Courses”](#) by Kathy L. Guthrie and Holly McCracken is a qualitative study that examines the development of values and ethical positions by distance education students. Too often distance education is perceived by the uninformed as only useful for teaching and learning of facts and conceptual ideas. However, a quality education also addresses the development of personal meaning and value systems. This article does an excellent job of demonstrating how this is done at a distance.

The next research article in this issue, [“The Pedagogical Enhancement of Open Education: An Examination of Problem-Based Learning”](#) is by Seth Gurell, Yu-Chun Kuo, and Andrew Walker. The article focuses on the use of open educational resources and most importantly discusses their use in problem-based learning activities. Problem-based learning has a long history of effective use in constructivist-based learning designs in face-to-face contexts. Bringing both open resources and problem-based pedagogies to online models of distance education addresses both the need for efficiency (reuse of open materials) and effectiveness (use of proven and engaging pedagogical activities).

Ining Tracy Chao, Tami Saj, and Doug Hamilton contribute an important article entitled [“Using Collaborative Course Development to Achieve Online Course Quality Standards.”](#) Quality course design is critical for effective learning, and this article from Royal Roads University illustrates a cost-effective way to produce and revise hundreds of courses annually while maintaining effective input and ownership from both subject matter experts and instructional and media experts.

The final research article, “[Online Instructional Effort Measured through the Lens of Teaching Presence in the Community of Inquiry Framework: A Re-examination of Measures and Approach](#)” by Peter Shea, Suzanne Hayes, and Jason Vickers uses the now familiar (though not uncontroversial) COI model to examine teaching presence. The article uses empirical data to expand the study of teaching presence beyond the participation of the instructor in online conferencing, which was the genesis of the COI model when it was developed over ten years ago. This study and its recommendations for future research will likely continue to evolve the COI model to be more comprehensive and thus of increased value to both teachers and researchers.

