A Time For Reflection: Recognizing Successes and Planning for Improvements

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For many in the field, the start of the academic year is a time when we update our CVs and reflect on the previous year's academic accomplishments. Our attention inevitably also turns to unfinished tasks that we were not able to squeeze into a summer that always seems to end up busier than expected. Thankfully the start of the academic year is full of possibilities that can energize our efforts.

Similarly this is an important time for the *Journal of Online Learning Research* (JOLR). We are quickly nearing the end of our fifth year, and while we have accomplished many of our goals, there is much work left to be done. Focusing on the positive, although JOLR is relatively new, Arnesen, Hveem, Short, West, and Barbour’s (2019) analysis of 356 K-12 online and blended learning journal articles dating back to 1994 found that JOLR published more articles on the topic than any other journal. They also concluded:

Familiar names surface regularly as key authors, but in the last few years there has been a rapid acceleration not only of new articles but especially of new authors. This infusion of new scholarship will undoubtedly lead to new ideas and trends in this area over the next decade. (p. 50).

We are proud that the journal is serving in this capacity, as this was the intention behind its creation. As the field’s growth accelerates, we hope to continue to be a leading publication outlet.
In a follow-up to Arnesen et al.’s (2019) broad analysis, the first article in this issue, “A Newcomer’s Lens: A Look at K-12 Online and Blended Learning in the Journal of Online Learning Research,” Hu, Arnesen, Barbour, and Leary provide an especially helpful examination of JOLR publication trends. Specifically, they analyzed all 51 published articles between 2015 and 2018. The analysis of 2- and 3-word phrases in article abstracts found a balance between online and blended learning. Professional development was also a common phrase indicating that the journal has focused both on practice and preparation. However, less than 10% of JOLR articles in their analysis focused on contexts outside of the United States. Barbour (2018) also highlighted this trend in a chapter for the Handbook of Research on K-12 Online and Blended Learning (Second Edition). We view this finding as an opportunity to better focus on international research and we launched the international section in the last issue. While the current issue does not include an article for the international section, we strongly encourage submissions from contexts beyond the United States.

Rice, Ortiz, Curry, and Petropoulos authored the second article in this issue, “A Case Study of an Adoptive Foster Parent Working to Support a Child with Multiple Disabilities in a Full-Time Virtual School.” This article is especially interesting because it addresses several topics needing attention from researchers—students with disabilities, parental engagement, and cyber charter schools. The goal of this research is not to provide generalizable findings. Instead, by focusing only on one parent, the article provides a rich description of the parent’s experiences and perceptions while her foster son was enrolled in a cyber school. We are confident that this research will provide insights into better supporting students with disabilities and their parents in cyber charter school settings. The authors concluded, “If virtual schools are going to expand and increase in quality as a viable learning option for all students, virtual educators should acknowledge those parents’ experiences and beliefs and work harder to do right by them.”

In the third article, “Interaction, Student Satisfaction, and Teacher Time Investment in Online High School Courses,” Turley and Graham compare outcomes in two types of courses. Early research in the field compared online and in-person courses. This research provides greater insight into what specifically can be done to improve online learning and is an indication that the field continues to mature. More specifically, Turley and Graham compared student evaluations and teacher logs in a math and English course that focused largely on learner-content interactions. They examined sections of the same courses that provided students with high levels of both learner-content and learner-teacher interactions. While t-tests did not find significant differences on most of the student survey items, some significant improvements were identified in the course with high levels of learner-teacher interactions. Teacher logs also found that teachers in courses with learner-teacher interactions spent more time on their courses, even for those sections in which they had far fewer students.
The final article, “A Snapshot of Successful K-12 Online Learning: Focused on the 2015-16 Academic Year in Michigan,” was the recipient of the K-12 Online and Blended Learning Special Interest Group’s Promising Scholar Award for 2019. In the article, Jemma Bae Kwon and her co-authors describe the state of online learning in Michigan for a single academic year. Focused on actual learning behavior and course outcomes, the article aims to provide helpful guidance to inform Michigan policy and infrastructure. According to the findings, the most important success indicator for online learning was students’ consistent, persistent engagement in their given course.

As the summer ends and the new academic year begins, we hope that you find this research insightful and useful in your own research and teaching efforts. We also hope that you consider submitting your manuscripts to JOLR for review. In addition to the general section, as noted, we ardently encourage submissions to the international section. We also invite nominations for the 2020 K-12 Online and Blended Learning Promising Scholar Award that will be awarded at SITE 2020 in New Orleans. We hope to see you there!

References
