Bridging the Gap Between Research and Practice in Online Learning

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Editors, Journal of Online Learning Research

We are excited to welcome you to the newest AACE publication, the *Journal of Online Learning Research.* This journal was born out of an idea that started in 2010. A team of researchers at that time, including Richard E. Ferdig (Rick), Cathy Cavanaugh, Niki Davis, Susan Lowes, and Joseph R. Freidhoff, were working together to get an open access journal off the ground. The research team's mission was to create a peer-reviewed, international journal that would focus on the "theoretical, empirical, and pragmatic understanding of technologies and their impact on K-12 pedagogy and policy in online and blended environments."

The team sought for the journal to include not only traditional research articles, but also grounded studies, those stories that too often go unpublished because the educators involved are all consumed with the day-to-day effort involved in making an education system work. Additionally, the wealth of knowledge involved in the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of a new idea or technology is often times lost because the format of that particular report may not fit the scope of a peer-reviewed journal. After a year or more of work to put the journal together, the team of researchers became overwhelmed with other responsibilities, and the journal's launch unfortunately fell to the wayside.

Fast forward to 2013 at the Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education Conference in New Orleans. We were having coffee with Rick who broached the idea to resurrect the journal with the help of AACE and to take on the editorship and run with it. After careful consideration, we drew upon the solid foundational work that had already been done by

the original group of researchers to form the *Journal of Online Learning Research (JOLR)* and applied to AACE to start this journal. We are forever grateful to everyone who has helped make this journal a reality and to AACE for their sponsorship.

Before we introduce the work that comprises our inaugural issue, we would like to give an overview of the scope and focus of the journal. *JOLR* is a peer-reviewed, international journal devoted to the theoretical, empirical, and pragmatic understanding of technologies and their impact on primary and secondary pedagogy and policy in primary and secondary (K-12) online and blended environments. This new quarterly journal is open access, free-of-charge, and distributed by the EdITLib Digital Library as well as available in print by subscription for libraries/institutions. *JOLR* is focused on publishing manuscripts that address online learning, catering particularly to the educators who research, practice, design, and/or administer in primary and secondary schooling in online settings. The journal also serves those educators who have chosen to blend online learning tools and strategies in their face-to-face classroom. *JOLR* is both international and interdisciplinary, publishing qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research from multiple fields and disciplines that have a shared goal of improving primary and secondary education worldwide. Most importantly, *JOLR* is theoretical and practical. Each research article is critically reviewed to ensure publication of rigorous and thoughtful research. Each publication must also contain pragmatic implications for research, policy, and practice.

Together with our associate editorial team for *JOLR*, including Joseph R. Freidhoff, Cathy Cavanaugh, Susan Lowes, and Peter Albion, we welcome you to submit your work. Whether it be action research, professional practice, inquiry work, or more traditional forms of research, we encourage and value different approaches and non-traditional pieces. We also welcome thorough literature reviews that identify existing gaps that we, as a field, must work to fill.

In this inaugural edition, we are honored to feature the work of some of the individuals who inspired the journal's idea in 2010.

The first article is by Cathy Cavanaugh, Christopher Sessums, and Wendy Drexler. In their article titled "A Call to Action for Research in Digital Learning: Learning Without Limits of Time, Place, Path, or Pace…or Evidence," Cavanaugh et al. explore the changing field of education and the need to be open to new ways of looking at opportunities and challenges in theory, environments, and strategies. Because of the emergence of data dashboards and other technology tools, they advocate for the empowerment of educators and the "flattening of our approach to digital learning research," where educators and learners become the researchers and traditional researchers become the guides.

The second article by Susan Lowes and Peiyi Lin explores a study where 600 online high school students use Rotter's locus of control questionnaire to reflect and think critically about their ability to regulate their learning in online learning environments. In addition to looking at self-regulatory behavior, the questionnaire was also used to see if the results would help teachers understand when online students need additional assistance.

Article three, "Investigating the Potential of MOOCs in K-12 Teaching and Learning Environments," is from Jennifer Nigh, Kristine E. Pytash, Richard E. Ferdig, and William Merchant. Their piece is about a MOOC designed to bring together high school students, preservice teachers, and inservice teachers to learn about how to teach in the 21st century. The research that is shared is focused on the K-12 population who enrolled in the MOOC, and it delves into a discussion about the potential of using MOOCs with high school students.

In the fourth article called, "Pioneering the Digital Age of Instruction: Learning From and About K-12 Online Teachers," Leanna Archambault and Jean Larson revisit and reapply Archambault's doctoral work by examining the evolving needs of K-12 online teachers, including the dominant factors and career paths that influenced their decision to teach online, what online teachers viewed as the most important attributes one must have to be highly effective, and what training/preparation K-12 online teachers received and found to be most helpful in fulfilling their positions.

The final article by Joseph R. Freidhoff, Jered Borup, Rebecca J. Stimson, and Kristen DeBruler is called, "Documenting and Sharing the Work of Successful On-site Mentors." In this article, Freidhoff et al. provide three examples of mentoring models in the state of Michigan. The article explores the critical role mentors play in supporting K-12 online learners, how widely the models vary from one program to another, and the difficult questions that arise when it comes to accountability of online learners and funding for mentoring programs.

As Gutierrez and Penuel (2014) pointed out in a recent issue of AERA's *Educational Researcher*, to be relevant and rigorous, a component of effective research needs to be its direct and meaningful applicability to practice. As a sharing platform for the application of research to practice, *JOLR* will serve this role for the field of K-12 online and blended learning. We anxiously await your submissions to this new endeavor, and we look forward to continuing to learn with you as we work together to inform the field with thoughtful research.

References

Gutierrez, K. D., & Penuel, W. R. (2014). Relevance to practice as a criterion for rigor. *Educational Researcher, 43*(1), 19-23.