TAKING FLIGHT: WORKING TO INCREASE FOCUS ON K-12 ONLINE AND BLENDED LEARNING IN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXTS

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This issue represents the start of the fifth volume of the Journal of Online Learning Research. As co-editors, Jered and I would like to thank the support of the Associate for Advancement of Computers in Education and the many people behind the scenes that make this publication possible. Editing a journal is a labor of love, and we continue to be impressed with the innovative and cutting-edge work being conducted in the field of K-12 online and blended learning. As we enter into our fifth year, our acceptance rate is 23%. We were fortunate enough to have published two special issues last year, one centered on diverse learners in online and blended learning, guest edited by Mary Rice, Mark Deschaine, and Daryl Mellard. Our second special issue, guest edited by Christopher Rozitis, Khendum Gyabak, and Krista Tomaselli, focused on instructional design in K-12 online and blended learning settings. Both issues are freely available at https://www.learntechlib.org/primary/j/JOLR/ and we encourage everyone to read the quality work that comprises both.

In the current issue, we are introducing a special international section. For our first contribution, we are pleased and fortunate to feature an article by one of our field’s pioneers, Cathy Cavanagh and her co-author, Meredith Roe. Their article, “Developing Pedagogy and Course Design Skills in Novice Virtual School Teachers in Australia” evaluates a professional learning program designed to prepare a novice cohort of online classroom teachers including pre/post measures of teachers’ capabilities using the iNACOL National Standards for Quality Online Teaching and National Standards for Quality Online Courses.
Since JOLR’s formation in 2014, the journal has sought to be more inclusive of international authors and contexts, recognizing that the field of K-12 online and blended learning goes way beyond the United States. We seek to publish and share what the broader global community has to share. Although we have had modest success with this goal (see Akpinar, Ardac, & Amuce, 2015; de los Arcos, Farrow, Pitt, Weller, & McAndrew, 2016; Kundu, 2018; Magalhães de Barros, Simmt, & Maltempi, 2017), we have not received as many internationally-focus manuscripts as we would have liked. With this international section, we begin a more concerted effort to recruit manuscripts that focus on international contexts. Our hope is that through a special section that will feature international research in blended on online settings, we will make progress toward our aim. The international section seeks to feature scholarship that has been conducted in international settings and/or features participants from international contexts as well as furthers discussion on cross cultural connections that may have implications for global educational settings. We encourage those of you to submit related work by emailing your manuscripts to us (leanna.archambault@asu.edu and jeredborup@gmail.com) for consideration.

For our general section, we see a growing number of articles focused on various aspects of blended learning environments. Elizabeth Anthony explores how principled teaching practices from traditional classrooms including flexibility and responsiveness, using assessment in instruction, and engaging students can have a substantial impact on student learning in blended-learning classrooms. In Anthony’s article, “(Blended) Learning: How Traditional Best Teaching Practices Impact Blended-Learning Classrooms” her research suggests that there might be more similarities between blended and traditional instruction than first realized and that practices that work in the face-to-face classroom can also be applied to blended learning environment.

Another article focused on blended learning in the math classroom is “Blended Learning in Middle School Math: The Question of Effectiveness” by Minaz Fazal and Melanie Bryant. Their article uses math achievement scores from the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), as well as the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) from 413 sixth grade students to quantitatively investigate the effects of blended learning on math achievement. In terms of facilitating growth in math learning, the authors found that a blended learning approach as compared to meeting grade level criteria. Their results suggest that schools may benefit from implementing a blended learning approach, particularly for students who need to make up academic growth in one school year, going beyond a focus on grade level criteria. Teachers and schools should consider blended learning as a way to focus on student learning growth, which may then result in higher achievement on criterion referenced state assessments.
A third article on blended learning focuses on incorporating a global project to support the development of global skills, collaboration, and awareness of global issues and cultural perspectives. In their article, “Teachers’ First Experiences with Global Projects: Emerging Collaboration and Cultural Awareness,” Kevin Oliver, Michael Cook, and Angela Wiseman share results from a global design projects looking across 22 teachers of different content areas at different school levels. Developed projects involved either sharing and comparing cultural information or engaging in global pen pal communication. Although students indicated high interest in global projects, the topics of discussion did not lend themselves to cultivating advanced cultural awareness, and student interaction fell short of higher levels of collaboration. However, the global project work described presents a first step to establishing further opportunities to foster global collaboration among classrooms.

The final article focuses on online teachers specifically through the application of a qualitative approach. Tadd Farmer and Rick West, in their article, “Exploring the Concerns of Online K-12 Teachers” use interpretative phenomenological analysis to examine two-stage interviews and bi-monthly journaling of seven teachers working in a state funded non-profit virtual school for middle and high school students. Major themes included personal, instructional, and relational themes, along with intersecting themes of responsibility, experience, and interaction, which as they note, correspond generally to the self, task, and student categories of concerns developed by Fuller (1970). Their results suggest that teacher preparation programs and online teaching organizations should focus on recognizing and resolving the concerns of teachers who work extremely hard in the online setting.

We hope that these articles are useful and relevant to your own work related to online and blended learning. As we enter our fifth year, we are so thankful to the growing world-wide community of researchers and practitioners in our field, and welcome new members and their contributions. We look forward to seeing many of you at the upcoming 2019 Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education (SITE) conference in Las Vegas. It is through such a supportive community that our burgeoning journal has taken flight. We invite you to consider JOLR as a potential publication outlet for your related research.
References


