EDITORIAL

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SPECIAL ISSUE

Classrooms without walls/Borderless classrooms

The theme for this special issue of the *Journal of Learning Design* is **Classrooms without walls/Borderless classrooms.** Its focus is on how social media, cross-institutional collaboration and working across cultures has dissolved traditional boundaries both in terms of oceans and institutions.

The guest editors for this issue are a group of dedicated academics known as the *Grammar Gang* who maintain a global blog based around the use and usage of the English language [http://thegrammargang.blogspot.com.au]. The Grammar Gang's experience has been one of fascination as the humble blog they began in 2008 has allowed and encouraged conversations among diverse people who share a love of language no matter what their location or nationality. Put simply, the Grammar Gang — whose members have also provided the final paper in this issue — seek to exemplify and promote *classrooms without walls/borderless classrooms* through social media across institutions and various academic cultures using different varieties of English.

The five papers in this issue — all from Australian institutions — address **classrooms without walls/borderless classrooms** in a variety of ways but always with a keen understanding of using technology to change fundamental understandings of teaching and learning. The final paper in this issue, by members of the Grammar Gang, speaks of an "adventure across the hemispheres" while the first paper, by authors based in Australia, speaks of using current technologies to "reach out" and to defeat the "tyranny of distance" experienced by Australian students and academics.

Our first paper, by Rossi, van Rensburg, Harreveld, Beer, Clark and Danaher, describes a collaboration between staff at Central Queensland University and the University of Southern Queensland. The authors examine how Web 2.0 technologies and the use of social software can play a role in research collaboration and show how innovation has been achieved both in evaluating and investigating the effectiveness of learning designs in online courses, despite possible intra- and inter-institutional tensions. The key questions they address, in relation to five courses, are (a) "How do learners interact in online courses?" and (b) "What are the patterns, processes and consequences of learner-learner and learner-teacher interaction in online contexts?" The paper reveals that, although online courses can promote "learner-learner, learner-teacher and learner-context interactions," one of the

main constraints to such collaboration can be managerial and organizational. Such challenges, however, often serve to intensify rather than to weaken the collaboration between staff.

The second paper, by Parry and Baird, provides "a case study of a creative entrepreneurship class of multinational students in South Korea." In this study, the authors used Skype to set up a shared learning space between the South Korean students, a class of Indonesian students and the author of the course textbook. The challenges here were to encourage risk-averse students to be more open to risk taking in an entrepreneurial setting, and to stimulate creativity among students who were "multilingual, multinational and digitally savvy." Moreover, the authors wanted to reduce the gap between the classroom and the real world of entrepreneurship and to promote engagement between their students and the author of the textbook the students were using, moving beyond the confines of the printed page to a real-life discussion with the author. The findings show how their goals were more than realised and present a stimulating model for student-student cross-cultural and cross-institutional collaboration.

The third paper, by Dracup, presents online role plays as the means for story development. The author has focused on the Middle East Politics Simulation format and its use in three Australian universities. Her analysis shows that "strong engagement, learning and critical learning outcomes were able to be achieved," and challenges other researchers to examine this area within a multi-disciplinary framework. The findings suggest that more of us should also investigate this method of teaching.

The fourth paper, by Davidson, examines the "pedagogical reasoning and evaluation" of wiki use in education. This paper reveals how use of a wiki in the field of accounting studies enabled students to overcome barriers to communication and thus achieve greater collaboration in a group work assignment. Because wikis allow for greater transparency, all students are motivated to contribute, and traditional problems in group work, such as dominance of one member or non-participation of another, can be largely overcome. This was the experience of Davidson, whose students felt that they had "an improved level of communication and collaboration skills and gained an increased level of understanding of the course content" compared to when they worked on their assignments individually.

The fifth and final paper, by Duff, Miller, Johnston and Bergmann, introduces readers to the Grammar Gang blog, which began as a collaboration between Purdue University and the University of South Australia in 2008. It now includes editors from the University of Adelaide and Massey University in New Zealand. Its readership extends to people from all over the world, with more than 100,000 visitors to the blog each year. Interactions between the academic staff involved and the students and staff who visit the site are paramount in the blog's success and contribute to a borderless classroom, which has moved beyond a purely physical space and become a shared community which challenges traditional notions of ownership. Since its inception, the Grammar Gang has been a joyful adventure "across the hemispheres" – colourful, conversational and a celebration of language and learning. Participants from around the world participate in a classroom without its metaphorical walls – an experience which has led to this special issue of the *Journal of Learning Design*.

The papers in this issue present fine examples of collaboration between different groups and differing creative appropriation of available technologies to remove the walls of the classroom and allow teaching and learning across borders. In each case, the affordances of social software have helped to bridge the gap Parry and Baird identified as existing between the university setting and the reality of "the professional world beyond". Australia has traditionally been viewed as a remote place 'down under' and technology-enabled education assists in reducing the tyranny of distance. It is perhaps an interesting and unplanned coincidence that all the papers in this issue have come from Australians. The technologies referred to in this special issue demonstrate how educators now increasingly use the very platforms that are second nature to and create social cohesion among their students. The challenge remains for academics to follow the example of their students and become risk-takers in order to promote greater collaboration and enhance the learning experience for all in a future classroom without walls.

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