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## EDITORIAL

# Editorial

Martin Weller

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The Special Issue from the EADTU 2017 conference contains four articles.

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This issue of JIME publishes some extended papers from the 2017 EADTU Conference. EADTU (The European Association of Distance Teaching Universities) hosts an annual conference, addressing issues relating to online, open and flexible higher education. The 2017 conference was hosted at the Open University in Milton Keynes, in October with the theme of “Higher Education for the Future; “Accelerating and Strengthening Innovation”. The proceedings and videos are available at the EADTU website.

George Ubachs, Director of EADTU writes:

“Within the scope this year of “Higher Education for the Future; Accelerating and Strengthening Innovation” we covered intensified and deeper transformation of teaching and learning in higher education, based on e-learning and online education. New modes of teaching and learning create new opportunities for enhancing the quality of the learning experience for on campus students, for reaching out to new target groups off campus and for offering freely accessible open education through the internet (OERs, MOOCs). These can be categorised as follows:

- 1) blended and online degree education will allow higher quality degree education for larger student groups, who will even belong to smaller communities and enjoy intensive education, linked to research and innovation;
- 2) flexible continuous education and continuous professional development online, including new types of short learning programmes, will prepare students for innovation and entrepreneurship in business; and
- 3) online open education through OERs and MOOCs will enrich citizens in order to participate better to society at large.

The conference was well attended by representatives from more than a 100 universities from 30 different countries all over the world and with

participation of higher education institutional policymakers, governmental bodies involved in innovating HE, deans and directors, educational innovators, university staff and umbrella organisations in higher education.”

In this issue four papers were selected for further development and publication (one is still being reviewed). In ‘A Learning Design Methodology for Developing Short Learning Programmes in Further And Continuing Education’, Lillian Buus (2018) details the collaborative design process in place in Denmark, with teachers working alongside learning designers to produce modules. The paper by Miguel Santamaría Lancho and colleagues (2018) provides interesting results in the use of a Latent Semantic Analysis-based automatic assessment tool at UNED (Spanish National Distance Education University). The students theme is also the focus of the paper by Angeles Sánchez-Elvira Paniagua and Ormond Simpson (2018) which provides an overview of the Student Support area of the EMPOWER project over the past two years. This aims to empower students to become life-long self-directed learners in open, online and blended-learning environments. Finally, Hewson (2018) addresses an often overlooked aspect of education, namely the emotional engagement by examining feelings and perceptions on online courses and their learning context. By using a market research methodology this unusual approach emphasises that distance students operate in a complex environment and study is often not their priority.

What all of these papers do is move the conversation beyond merely technology. They are focused on the context within which that technology operates. There is also a theme of empowerment and collaboration running through them, whether that is working with teachers to produce courses, or helping students use essay technology to improve understanding. This sympathetic and contextualised application of educational technology marks these papers out and they are worth a read.

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### Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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