

Editorial

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This special issue of JIME includes selected papers from the Symposium held in 2013 to celebrate the award of a Regius Chair in Open Education to the Open University. The award of this chair, the first Regius chair bestowed on the University, coincided with the 50th Anniversary of the proposal for the University of the Air. This was one of twelve University departments to have been awarded this prestigious award to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II. The Open University (OU) was founded by Royal Charter at the end of the second decade of Her Majesty's reign, and the first cohort of 25,000 students was admitted for study in 1971. The idea of the 'University of the Air' was first announced by Prime Minister Harold Wilson in a speech in Glasgow on 8 September 1963, whilst the development of The Open University itself was vigorously pursued by the Rt. Hon. Jennie Lee. Since then, the University has pioneered and mainstreamed a new discipline, 'open education.'

Open Education has been an important theme in the history of the University, University scholarship in open education has demonstrated that a radical open access policy works and that it is possible to teach university-level courses to unqualified students, at a distance, using pioneering teaching methods at the cutting edge of technology and pedagogic practice. The University is a leader in widening access to higher education, making by far the biggest single contribution of any UK university to this policy objective, with 20% of students studying each year coming from the 25% most deprived areas in the UK and 17,000 with a declared disability.

In this issue, the theme of open education is explored by four complementary papers. Mike Sharples and colleagues write on 'Mobile and Accessible Learning for MOOCs.' Their contribution to the debate on the benefits of MOOCs in widening participation in learning, explores two consequences of the move towards learners using mobile devices: context-sensitive features which enable a seamless continuity of learning across settings, and linking people in a location with others in a virtual representation of that place; and secondly social learning opportunities to connect people as they move within

and across locations which offers the potential for crowd sourcing of content.

Martin Weller then presents a critical examination of the arguments and discourse which have surrounded the discussion of MOOCs, identifying a number of narratives most prominently the narrative that education is broken and Silicon Valley technology initiatives can fix it. He offers a perspective on why MOOCs have gained such popularity as opposed to other open education initiatives.

For experienced practitioners it is difficult to understand why MOOCs are seen as so new and innovative, when many build on years of experience of online and technology supported learning. But on the other hand, McAndrew and Scanlon (2013) argue that more lessons from the experience of online education practitioners could usefully be adopted in the design of MOOCs.

Eileen Scanlon, Patrick McAndrew and Tim O'Shea in their paper '*Designing for educational technology to enhance the experience of learners in distance education: how open educational resources, learning design and MOOCs are influencing learning*' explore the links between educational technology, human computer interaction and design for learning. In doing so they have illustrated how interdisciplinary research can throw some light on the complex interplay between technology and pedagogy in the design of learning.

The final paper in this special issue by Ann Jones is '*Social media for informal minority language learning: exploring Welsh learners' practices*'. In this paper Ann addresses the important question of what role informal contexts for learning can play in supporting language learning. These share aspects of the open education agenda explored in the previous paper as learner intention and self-direction are the key drivers of progress. This paper reviews research on using social media for informal language learning, and contextualises this by examining how learners of Welsh language are making use of the potential of social media,

The Regius symposium on Open Education is to become a regular event as part of the Computers and Learning Research Group's Annual Conference. This research group founded in 1978 at the Open University provides a forum for staff and research students interested in the interactions between technology and learning to present and discuss their research and projects.

References

McAndrew, P. and Scanlon, E. 2013 Open learning at a distance: lessons for struggling MOOCs. *Science* 12/2013; 342(6165): 1450–1.

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