
Editorial

iPED Research Network:

Christine Broughan

Faculty of Health and Life Sciences,
Coventry University,
James Starley Building,
JS172, CV1 5FB, UK
E-mail: hsx235@coventry.ac.uk

Tony Carr

University of Cape Town,
Private Bag, Rondebosch, 7701,
Cape Town, South Africa
E-mail: tony.carr@uct.ac.za

Virginia King*

Virginia King Ltd.,
113 Beechwood Avenue,
Coventry, CV5 6FQ, UK
E-mail: info.iped@coventry.ac.uk
*Corresponding author

Philip Watland

Olds College, 4500 – 50th Street,
Olds, AB, T4H 1R6, Canada
E-mail: pwatland@oldscollege.ca

Piet Kommers

University of Twente, P.O. Box 217,
7500 AE Enschede, The Netherlands
E-mail: Kommers@edte.utwente.nl

Biographical notes: Christine Broughan is a Pedagogical Researcher at Coventry University. She has a two-year secondment to the inquiring pedagogies (iPED) network and has a key role in exploring the issues of the student learning experience. She is interested in research that examines the student experience at university and a key aspect of her role is to support academic staff in evaluating curriculum design and pedagogical practices. She has extensive project management experience and has developed a number of evaluative tools and reports for institutional research.

Tony Carr is a Staff Development Coordinator at the Centre for Educational Technology at the University of Cape Town (<http://www.cet.uct.ac.za>). His research and practice are mostly about the role of communities of practice in developing educator and institutional capacity to teach with technology. His other interests include online facilitation, online and mixed mode collaborative learning, online conferences and the educational use of wikis and blogs.

Virginia King is a Higher Education Consultant. She was formerly a Principal Lecturer in Computer Project Management and Leader of the Information Systems Group at Coventry University. Her research interests focus on the staff experience and the use of technology to enhance the currency, relevance and accessibility of educational provision. Her recent publications concern communities of inquiry, and the 'influence wheel' – a tool for evidencing the impact of educational developments. She is a Founder Member of the iPED (inquiring pedagogies) Research Network. She convenes their annual international conference (www.coventry.ac.uk/iPED).

Philip Watland is an Instructor of Learning Technology and the e-Learning Coordinator at Olds College, Canada (www.oldscollege.ca). His interest is in researching students' experiences of teaching and learning in technology supported learning environments. His role includes supporting faculty in the use of learning technology in both class room and online environments. His recent publications include 'Students' experiences of tutor support in an online MBA programme', in V. Hodgson, C. Jones, T. Kargidis, D. McConnell, S. Retalis, D. Stamatis and M. Zenios (Eds.): *Networked Learning Conference* (2008).

Piet Kommers is an Associate Professor at the University of Twente. His specialties are advanced learning tools such as concept mapping, virtual reality and mobile learning. His research and teaching stretch from teacher education via the European Joint Research Projects to international projects under the auspices of UNESCO. His recent publications are on learners' preconceptions and representations that express pre-intuitive ideas before the actual learning may start: *Cognitive Support for Learning* and *Imagining the Unknown*. He is the Editor of several research journals and organises conferences in mobile learning, e-society and web-based communities.

1 Introduction

This special issue focuses on web-based research networks (WBRNs) and learning communities. WBRNs provide advantages of anytime anyplace participation by researchers, their informants and, potentially, other stakeholders. Web-based learning communities (WBLCs) also bring together dispersed individuals by means of suitable technology. However, in this case, their aim is to develop vocational or academic understanding collaboratively. The purpose of this special issue is not so much to identify the technology, but to share lessons learnt regarding the pedagogies, management models and modus operandi which have demonstrable potential to enhance the future of such communities.

The guest editors are The iPED Research Network (www.coventry.ac.uk/iPED). iPED stands for 'inquiring pedagogies' and encapsulates the idea of higher education

research in a multi-media age. An exemplar of a WBRN and, to a lesser extent, a WBLC, it is active in facilitating research into teaching, learning and leading underpinned by international interaction amongst practice-based scholars, academic developers, innovators and managers. Since its establishment in 2005, iPED has benefited from the participation of several hundred colleagues from around the world. The iPED community has developed through the 'space of flows' (Castells et al., 2007) as its members' communication networks have provided continuously expanding information-sharing opportunities and new potential participants. iPED values diversity whilst aspiring to reconcile the differences which its members may perceive, such as home discipline or favoured research methodology. From its inception in 2006, the international iPED annual conference has taken an inclusive stance which encourages early career researchers and supports those who are economically or geographically disadvantaged to participate alongside more established colleagues. iPED's efforts to engage far-flung participants as easily as those co-located have been assisted by the gradual adoption of web-based conference applications for authors, peer-reviewers, delegates and virtual participants. The not insignificant costs of this technical, administrative and academic infrastructure are borne in order to develop collaborative opportunities. While recognising the competitive pressures on both individuals and institutions in the global academy (Clouder et al., 2009); iPED strives for mutual benefit rather than academic rivalry (Becher and Trowler, 2001).

iPED's other activities include the collaborative production of research outputs; the initiation, management and evaluation of pedagogical research projects; consultancy, mentoring and training for pedagogical researchers; and international dissemination through conferences and journals. These diverse endeavours have led iPED to be described as a 'meta-community', that is, a community of communities, which each exhibit the key attributes of communities of practice: joint enterprise, shared repertoires, negotiated realities and mutual engagement (Wenger, 1998). iPED is not unusual in finding the successful creation of such communities to be challenging when the timescales are tight, and participant background and motivation is diverse (Lawrence, 2006). However, iPED considers its composite communities to be valuable as spaces where individuals may develop their academic identity and the personal autonomy which may otherwise be under threat (Clegg, 2008). These WBLCs also provide the means through which to develop the 'useful knowledge' so necessary to academic careers and research-group validity (Boulton and Lucas, 2008). Finally, these iPED-hosted communities, though often transient and ad hoc, provide the 'texture and heterogeneity, which are integral to creativity' [Hanisch and Churchman, (2008), p.430].

The individual members of the editorial team have been recruited from amongst the iPED research network, having been active as conference presenters, peer reviewers or facilitators. Despite different disciplinary backgrounds, nationalities and research profiles, we share a common interest in using a web-based approach to build effective communities. Our experiences in undertaking this editorial process have mirrored so many other emergent web-based communities where goodwill and compromise overcome technical, spatial and temporal barriers (Deepwell and King, 2009).

iPED concurs with the view that web-based collaboration between higher education institutions and other partners will continue to increase for both learning and research (Broughan, 2009). We present this selection of contributions as a helpful resource to those involved in such initiatives.

2 The papers

Rhona Sharpe and Jenny Mackness: ‘Evaluating the development of a community of e-learning researchers: from short-term funding to sustainability’.

Our peer reviewers found this a ‘tale worth reading’. It examines the all too familiar challenges facing WBRNs once initial funding has ended. The authors’ extrapolation from the distinction between emergent and project-centric communities was felt to be important. One reviewer noted that there are ‘few published descriptions of the birthing of legitimate communities of practice from people struggling together to improve a new or emerging practice. In this story, the transition point may be where the group moves from funded, semi-closed community to a more porous and inclusive community beyond funded members’.

Giustina Secundo and Francesca Grippa: ‘Designing, managing and assessing a Web 2.0 learning community to enhance inquiry based learning’.

Our reviewers felt this to be a most engaging paper which presents an intriguing model and research design. It considers the paradox involved in designing an integrated management model of a Web 2.0 learning community when Web 2.0 networks are generally associated with the emergence of participant driven activity which is inherently unmanageable. Of particular interest is the way that learning processes were explicitly linked with the tools intended to support them, and the actions of tutors and students in using them.

Gillian Brown, Megan Quentin-Baxter and Zoe Belshaw: ‘WikiVet: building a community of practice to support a self-sustaining wiki for veterinary education’.

This paper explores an exemplar of the inquiry-based learning models which Secundo and Grippa have outlined. It describes an innovative project that our reviewers considered to be applicable to a number of disciplines. ‘The question is whether the wiki can truly become a living resource that sustains a strong community of practice’.

Ellen Scales: ‘Leadership in a virtual community’.

This paper questions the question of the role of leadership in WBLCs. ‘The topic is not one of the technical side of online or web-based learning, but rather that of the human side of making the transition to online delivery. The topic is important. ... a valuable presentation to those directing distance and online programmes’.

Simone Staiger-Rivas, Alessandra Galié, Bernhard Hack, Maria Alexandra Jorge, Vanessa Meadu, Florencia Tateossian, Gauri Salokhe and Nancy White: ‘Learning to share knowledge for global agricultural progress’.

Peer reviewers highlighted the valuable lessons that the paper identifies for international organizations wishing to design and engage in online collaborative processes. The approach was felt to be transferable to other non-governmental organizations, ‘what I found interesting was the possible application of the web-based discussion forum out of the realm of the technologically literate into the realm of the user – in this case farmers, or their representatives’.

Acknowledgements

The editors would like to thank all the authors who took the trouble to respond to our call for papers. We very much appreciate the collegiate input of our peer reviewer panel, and the responsiveness of our selected contributors.

References

- Becher, T. and Trowler, P. (2001) *Academic Tribes and Territories*, 2nd ed., SRHE and Open University.
- Boulton, G. and Lucas, C. (2008) *What are Universities for?*, League of European Research Universities, available at <http://kampela-leru.it.helsinki.fi/?bmlkPT10> (accessed on 30 March 2009).
- Broughan, C. (2009) 'Tensions, challenges and future directions.' in iPED Research Network (Eds.): *Academic Futures: Inquiries into Higher Education and Pedagogy*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.
- Castells, M., Fernandez-Ardevol, M. and Qiu, J.L. (2007) *Mobile Communication and Society: A Global Perspective*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass.
- Clegg, S. (2008) 'Academic identities under threat', *British Education Research Journal*, Vol. 34, No.3, pp.329–345.
- Clouder, L., Deepwell, F. and King, V. (2009) '‘I’ and ‘we’: individual identity within communities of inquiry', in iPED Research Network (Eds.): *Academic Futures: Inquiries into Higher Education and Pedagogy*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.
- Deepwell, F. and King, V. (2009) 'E-research collaboration, conflict and compromise', in Salmons, J. and Wilson, L. (Eds.): *Handbook of Research on Electronic Collaboration and Organizational Synergy*, Information Science Reference, Hershey, PA.
- Hanisch, J. and Churchman, D. (2008) 'Virtual communities of practice: the communication of knowledge across cultural boundaries', *International Journal of Web Based Communities*, Vol. 4, No. 4, pp.418–433.
- Lawrence, K.A. (2006) 'Walking the tightrope: The balancing acts of a large e-research project', *Computer Supported Cooperative Work: The Journal of Collaborative Computing*, Vol. 15, No. 4, pp.385–411.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.