

Introduction

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Since 1995 the *Journal of Distance Learning* has occupied an important and unique place in the body of literature pertaining to distance, open, and flexible learning in New Zealand. Its success is underpinned by the existence of a group of extremely talented and dedicated educators who devote their time unstintingly to the DEANZ Executive. From this year the journal will be undergoing a further maturation as the newly appointed permanent editors, Bill Anderson and Mary Simpson, take up the reins. Bill and Mary have already voiced suggestions for further strengthening the publication's existing processes and infrastructure, and we look forward to those ideas being implemented.

This issue went through several iterations before its final form and content emerged. It was originally conceived as a themed issue, the idea being that articles would be sought that contributed to an overall history of the development of open and distance learning in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Time has its own way of shaping outcomes, however, and although the eventual selection still bears the hallmarks of that early planning, the four articles presented span a variety of topics.

The first paper sees Don Bewley continuing on from his earlier article "Distance Education in New Zealand:

An Historical Sketch" (1996). In this account Bewley looks at some of the developments that have shaped the more recent directions of flexible learning in New Zealand, particularly at the post-school level. Bewley's ability to present a big-picture view while focussing on key influences makes him ideally suited to an undertaking of this nature.

Nola Campbell, the author of the second of the two historically themed articles, has been referred to as a pioneer in New Zealand with regard to online learning, predominantly in the area of teacher education (McLachlan-Smith & Gunn, 2001). Campbell's endeavours bring her into direct contact with current thinking and innovation in New Zealand schools, and she uses this connection to shape an overview and analysis of early eLearning developments in this sector.

In the next article, Mark Nichols explores the topic of justifying eLearning initiatives from a financial perspective. Tempting though it is for educators to focus on more altruistic aims in the provision of eLearning opportunities, the reality is that accountability must be sought at all levels. Nichols' timely discussion draws on practices followed in the corporate sector, and suggests ways in which they may be applied in tertiary education institutions.

In the final paper, Ruth Smith outlines a study that was prompted in part by her own experience as an online learner. This experience, coupled with the widening of her own professional role as a tertiary learning adviser and (fledgling) eEducator in a private training establishment, led her to ask some key questions about staff and student support in the online environment. Smith takes a case-study approach within the context of her own institution, but the outcomes and insights of her research have immediate application to other programmes and courses.

This issue also offers three book reviews, all of which are for publications that clearly have much to offer readers looking for guidance in eLearning and distance education.

I hope you will enjoy reading this issue of the journal, and will continue to support the publication and its umbrella organisation, DEANZ, into the future. I would like to thank those who have contributed: the authors, advisors, and reviewers who gave so freely of their time and expertise. I wish the incoming editors well in their new venture.

REFERENCES

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