

## Guest Editorial

### Open access for development: A tale of two journals

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The Caribbean region comprises a number of islands and mainland countries which border on the Caribbean Sea. Described as small, developing countries, they share a history of colonisation by the English, French, Spanish and Dutch (some countries still remain colonies) resulting in varying language and culture groupings in the region today. Human resource development is a primary concern of governments in the Caribbean, with increased participation in post-secondary education viewed as an important aspect. Because of the relatively small population distributed across mainly small islands, distance education is seen as an important means of providing cost-effective access.

In 2004, I was fortunate enough to be appointed to The University of the West Indies (UWI) as the Director of the Distance Education Centre (UWIDEC), responsible for the delivery of university education in 16 countries in the English-speaking Caribbean. In 2008, UWIDEC merged with several other outreach departments to form the Open Campus of UWI. The Open Campus is simultaneously a virtual campus and a distributed physical entity with 50 learning centres throughout the Caribbean. It is currently developing and implementing a range of methodologies and formats for the delivery of Open Campus programmes, including blended learning modalities (face-to-face, online, and distance) along with the distribution of print and software materials. But like so many other higher and tertiary education institutions in developing countries, the University finds the costs of educational materials, texts and journal subscriptions to be prohibitive.

In a traditional publishing model, the market provides a financial incentive to produce and update quality journals, texts, ancillary materials such as study guides, images and examination banks, and to invest in their marketing and distribution. These costs are passed along to the institutions and students and become a major part of the cost of education. Unfortunately, few institutions and even fewer students in the developing world can afford commercial journals and textbooks. UNESCO (2002) noted the potential benefit of open educational resources (OER) for expansion of education in the developing world, and there has been a steady growth in the number of individuals and institutions making materials available as OER. Over 200 educational organizations, including the UWI Open Campus, have signed the Cape Town Open Education Declaration (Open Society Institute, 2007), a manifesto to remove

barriers to education through the sharing of OER. In principle, users of 'open' educational resources are free to use, adopt, modify and re-publish the materials to suit their own purpose. Creators of materials may assign specific rights to the reuse of their OER and usually do so through a Creative Commons License (Lessig, 2010). The most common licence provisions require acknowledgement of the source, but allow free non-commercial use. Several large institutions have made their distance education online courses available in this way, e.g., the Open University in the UK. The growing cost of texts has also inspired collaborations between Rice University's Connexions and the Community College Consortium for Open Educational Resources (CCCOER) to produce open textbooks (Baker, Thierstein, Fletcher, Kaur and Emmons, 2009).

The open approach is also applicable to academic journals, and in 2004 I joined with others to persuade UWI academics to publish in open access journals and for the university to publish such journals. In one Academic Board meeting, after I had been waxing lyrical about the virtues of such an approach, one cynical professor challenged me to create an open access journal that would be peer-reviewed and internationally recognized. And so, in March 2005, the *International Journal of Education and Development Using ICT (IJEDICT)* was born. The journal aims to strengthen links between research and practice in ICT in education and development in hitherto less developed parts of the world, e.g., in developing economies (especially small states). It provides a space for researchers, practitioners and theoreticians to jointly explore ideas using an eclectic mix of research methods and disciplines. It brings together research, action research and case studies in order to assist in the transfer of best practice, the development of policy and the creation of theory. Now in its eighth year, and with a readership of many thousands, *IJEDICT* carries peer-reviewed articles mainly by authors in developing countries. The most popular article has been accessed over forty thousand times since it was published in November 2006 (*IJEDICT*, 2012). Although the journal is distributed for free, it maintains a rigorous academic review standard using the Open Journal System – open source journal management software that itself is free to use. Not only does *IJEDICT* assist development by making knowledge freely available to its readers, it also assists in professional development by providing extensive reviewer feedback to early-career authors.

In a similar fashion, *The Journal of Pedagogic Development* (edited by David Mathew and Andrea Raiker) facilitates the professional development of critically reflective practitioners by encouraging pedagogic research and sharing across communities of practice. In the same way as *IJEDICT*, it offers professional development to authors writing for the journal through the peer review process. It also has an eclectic mix of research methods and disciplines – combining enquiry, practice, experience and scholarship. This edition of the journal includes an action research project on improving course related information, an article on curriculum change to transform undergraduate learning, a paper exploring the experiences of new FE teachers during their first year of teaching in the post compulsory sector, and a scholarly discussion of the pedagogy of Paulo Freire.

These two journals – *IJEDICT* and *JPD* – are just two of the many open access journals now available, and it is of the utmost importance that they are all supported by

academics and institutions in order to ensure freedom and openness in the availability of knowledge.

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## Improving Course Related Information of Computing Degree Courses for Enhancing Learner Development

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### Abstract

In this paper, I present action research based on Norton's ITDEM model (Norton, 2009), which I applied to investigate an observed course related information problem in the Department of Computer Science and Technology, University of Bedfordshire. The data collection was a combination of both interviews and surveys. Three lecturers and 100 students from the department participated in the action research. The collected data was analysed using thematic and content analysis. The findings of the investigation identified a problem in course related information integration and presentation. Both the lecturers and some students thought that the problem has impacted on the students' learning and development. In an effort to tackle the problem, useful approaches proposed by other universities and the valuable suggestions made by the participants have been collected for further investigation and adaptation. Overall, action research is found to be a helpful methodology to improve course related information of computing degree courses, which will not only help prospective students' course selection and enhance existing students' learning and development, but also build up the department's and university's reputation.

### Keywords

Action research, computing course related information, learning experiences and skill development

### Introduction

A problem was observed by the course teams of BSc Computer Animations, BSc Computer Game Development and BSc Computer Graphics – students, especially year one students, have a lack of realism on what skills are needed for the course and a lack of understanding of what the course is about, which has started to impact on the students' learning and development. The course teams think there is a need to improve the students' understanding and realism on the requirements of the course and their skills development.

I decided to carry out action research (Earl-Slater, 2002 and Norton, 2009) to investigate what causes the students' misunderstanding and lack of realism on what knowledge and skills are required to complete the course, and how the problem can be resolved. In this paper, I first explain what I believe is the root cause of the problem; second I introduce the methodology of how I investigated the problem; third I report my findings and implications from my investigation; finally a