

Increasing the flow of research through CINZS with the ULearn Research Stream

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This special edition of *Computers in New Zealand Schools* acknowledges and celebrates the achievements of New Zealand teachers and researchers who presented in the Research Stream of the recent ULearn 2011 Conference, held in Rotorua in October. The ULearn Conference is an annual event run by CORE Education that in 2011 attracted over 1600 participants, mainly teachers in New Zealand schools. The University of Canterbury e-Learning Lab were pleased to partner with CORE Education to offer the Research Stream, following on from the inaugural Research Stream in 2010.

The aim of the Research Stream is to continue to celebrate achievements in the school sector and to encourage the dissemination of research across all educational sectors, while maintaining the participation of teacher leaders at the centre. The Research Stream raises the profile of practitioner researchers engaged in the schooling sector, and in teacher education and professional learning communities, and blends their work with relevant research and development in other sectors. In this way the Research Stream aims to increase the power and flow of ULearn for its participants nationally and internationally, and in this special issue of *CINZS* we combine that with the power of this journal.

This year virtual learning was a central theme of the Research Stream, which showcased New Zealand research including Craig McDonald-Brown's insights into the information

privacy practices and attitudes of New Zealand adolescents. Niki Davis and Darren Sudlow highlighted the potential of online learning communities through their discussion of the achievement of the Southern Central Divide schools in implementing personalised blended learning across the regional cluster that spans the South Island. The theme of online communities of practice also featured strongly in Hazel Owen's overview of a Virtual Professional Learning and Development pilot for personalised and contextualised professional learning opportunities for teachers; while Jocelyn Cranefield, Pak Yoong and Sid Huff contributed two informative papers highlighting the role of online communities of practice to support deep knowledge transfer through a six-stage knowledge embedding cycle, and the facilitation of professional learning through an unofficial blogging community linking cluster-based communities and a global edublogging network. A team from the University of Canterbury including Julie Mackey, Des Breeze, Philippa Buckley, Nicki Dabner and Fiona Gilmore shared their post-earthquake survival tips for blended learning in times of civil emergency and crisis.

Following in the virtual learning theme, this special issue includes two articles which have been extended and developed from their ULearn presentations. Firstly, Vicki Needham, Anne-Marie Hunt and Linda McMurray describe the strategies and practices identified as being most effective by students and staff utilising a Moodle-based online learning environment for initial teacher education in a bicultural context that serves Rotorua schools. Secondly, Philippa Buckley and Fiona Gilmore analyse the challenges and achievements related to redesigning initial education courses for blended learning. While situated in the context of initial teacher education, both articles highlight strategies and approaches of interest to anyone engaged in designing online or blended learning experiences.

The remaining two papers complement this focus on online learning. Nicki Dabner and Aleta Chowfin offer a unique perspective on project-based professional development, as their paper provides reflections in- and on-action while implementing blended learning with primary school students. Dabner sets the scene by describing the role of project-based

learning within her masters course, while Chowfin's reflections on her experiences illustrate the power of critical reflection as a professional learning strategy, along with practical strategies for implementing online learning in a primary classroom.

The final paper in this edition is a thoughtful analysis by Kathryn Mackinven on the role of digital tools within the Nature of Science strand of the Science curriculum, and their role in supporting connections between school science and 'real' science. Mackinven advocates for the potential of digital technologies to engage students through critical thinking, communication and collaboration, and encourages further research in this area.

The annual ULearn conference has become an institution to inform developments in teaching and learning in New Zealand, as noted earlier. In particular ULearn gives a venue for teacher leaders and their students to celebrate and showcase their achievements with support from key bodies including the Ministry of Education and companies that service the sector. CORE Education provides the wonderful earthquake-resistant foundation and in 2010 the eLearning Lab in the University of Canterbury partnered with CORE to increase its flow, influence and sustainability with a reinforcing research stream. You can find the proceedings of the research streams of Ulearn2010 and Ulearn2011 on the Ulearn web site <http://www.core-ed.org/ulearn/>. The publication of the proceedings and this later special issue of *CINZS* contributes in three ways:

1. Improving dissemination beyond the October conference event
2. Recruiting additional contributing participants
3. Increasing the benefits with recognition of quality assured research outputs.

With this special issue of *CINZS*, the ULearn Research Stream has also opened the flow of communication with the leading New Zealand journal for e-learning in the New Zealand schooling sector. We aim to make that a permanent feature with your support. For teachers who teach through e-learning we also look forward to opening a flow with the DEANZ

conference in April 2012 and into its journal JOFDL.

Please enjoy your participation in this refinement of an exciting research stream that now flows through ULearn and the opportunities it brings to enhance education in New Zealand and worldwide. Thanks to everyone who has made this possible.

Julie and Niki, as the leaders in this collaborative initiative, look forward to your feedback so that we can make this research stream into a braided river that fits with New Zealand's ecology.

Heoi anō, mauri ora

References

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