Welcome to the final bulletin of 2015 of the Open and Distance Learning Association of Australia (ODLAA). As we approach the end of the year, I would like to take some time in this bulletin to reflect on the many highlights of an eventful and stimulating year in the field of distance education. ODLAA, although predominantly an association representing Australian interests in Distance Education, has members from all over the world. I am once again privileged as a South African committee member to edit this month’s edition, particularly in the light of South Africa having hosting the 26th ICDE conference in October at the beautiful resort of Sun City during October 2105.

ODLAA has certainly been an association that has been “on the move” during 2015. Our executive committee members are geographically dispersed all over Australia and as far afield as South Africa. The ODLAA executive committee meets online regularly every month via a Blackboard Collaborate technology. At least once a year the full committee meets Face to Face usually in one of the Qantas meeting rooms at Melbourne airport. As can be seen from the map below, this necessitates many miles of travel for most of the committee members. It is during these Face to Face meetings that the strategy for the following year is discussed and debated and planning for the next year is agreed upon. The annual Face to Face meeting was held on 20 March and at this meeting our new ODLAA website was unveiled and after a few queries was ready to go live. I think all our members will agree that the updated website has enhanced our image as a professional society and is serving our
members in a positive manner. Please remember to check the new site regularly as you will find interesting and important information and links.

Members of the ODLAA committee have also travelled extensively during 2015. Our president, Som Naidu spent 3 weeks in China (June 1-21st) in the Faculty of Education at Tsinghua University and at the Open University of China in Beijing, and a week at Universitas Terbuka in Indonesia (May 20-22nd, 2015) offering workshops on getting published in high impact peer-reviewed journals. In September Som represented ODLAA at the STEMFest'15 conference in Saskatoon, Canada and also at the 26th ICDE conference in Sun City, South Africa (October) where he ran a similar workshop on publishing in high impact journals. The annual ICDE SCOP conference was held in parallel with the ICDE conference in Sun City this time and Som was in attendance there, as well as at the UNESCO high level policy forum which was held in Pretoria soon after the ICDE conference. In November 25-27th Som was invited to deliver a keynote address at the China International Distance Education Conference hosted by the Open University of China in Beijing, where he spoke on “How online learning is changing the face of education”.
Diane Hockridge spent a few weeks touring South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe with her family and managed to find time to attend the International Research café held at Unisa in Pretoria on 8 October 2015. Diane shared the program with Dr Elena Barbera from the Open University of Catalonia in Spain and Prof Johan Traxler from the University of Wolverhampton in the UK. Diane gave a presentation on Learning Design for Distance Education in Australia. Diane also attended the ICDE conference in Sun City and presented a paper titled: Analysing and evaluating learning designs in online higher education: applying an activity-centred framework and mapping conjectures.

Jenny Roberts attended the European Conference on Educational Research (ECER) which was held in Budapest in September and jointly presented a paper on effective learning strategies based on mind/brain education theories. She travelled later that month to the International Association for the Study of Cooperative Education (IASCE) where she presented a paper on her research on investigating the theoretical perspectives of interaction in distance education and how the theory of cooperative learning can contribute to this debate.

As usual, committee member Jo Osborne, has been instrumental in conceptualizing, coordinating and implementing the various webinars that ODLAA hosts for its members and other interested people. A report on her recent webinar follows later in this bulletin.

Our newest committee member, Sharon Kerr, has brought her marketing expertise into the ODLAA committee and introduced a dedicated ODLAA twitter account #ODLAAorg. This site was very popular during the ICDE conference and followers were able to stay up to date with the events even if they were many miles away.

Diane Hockridge and Sharon Kerr have been responsible for the content that is placed on our new ODLAA website and update the news on a regular basis. Our treasurer, Shane Moore not only maintains the finances and record keeping in an impeccable manner but also overseas all matters of governance and compliance. Sherrell Whittington is our very competent and capable secretary and somehow manages to succinctly reproduce minutes of our sometimes
very lengthy and heated monthly discussions. Sherrill has also been very active in our negotiations to bring together the ODLAA conference with the STEMfest one. The outcomes of these negotiations will be reported on later in this bulletin.

Our vice president is Mututota Kigotho who has been overseeing the development of the new ODLAA strategic plan which has been drawn up in order to steer ODLAA on a future oriented path that ensures its relevance to its members and also to the wider family of distance education both within Australia and further afield. He is being ably assisted by Barrie Todhunter who remains ODLAA’s voice of reason and calm logic and who always manages to steer us back in the right direction when the ship steers off course into choppy waters.

Jenny Roberts from the Institute for Open and Distance Learning at the University of South Africa (Unisa) was part of the scientific committee that evaluated the extended abstracts for the ICDE conference and also presented 2 papers at the conference. One paper focused on the changing roles of academic staff in distance education and the other paper discussed whether the role of technology in distance education has impacted on time management and workload of distance educators.

Diane Hockridge, Jenny Roberts and Som Naidu attended and presented papers at the 2015 ICDE World Conference in Sun City in October 2015

At the 26th ICDE World Conference held at Sun City, South Africa (14-16 October, 2015), a Prize for Innovation and Best Practice, was awarded for the paper titled: “From OER to OEP: Shifting Practitioner Perspectives and Practices with Innovative Learning Experience Design”, co-authored by Som Naidu, with colleagues from the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL). This paper was based on the ‘OER-based e-Learning’ professional development online course that was adapted, developed and implemented by OUSL in collaboration with Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), led by Prof. Shironica Karunanayaka (from OUSL) and guided by Som. Following a selection process by the Editorial Board of Open Praxis, the ICDE’s scientific peer-reviewed, open access journal, this prize was awarded for Innovation and Best Practice in Open, Distance, Flexible, Online Education and E-learning, and the paper is accepted to be published in a future issue of Open Praxis. Congratulations to Som, and his fellow authors!
ODLAA’s focus for 2016 will be to coordinate the 2016 Distance education summit which will take place later in the year. The last conference was held in 2013 in Manly, Sydney and we are currently conceptualizing and planning next year’s event. Please watch out for regular updates on the website and twitter account which will provide all the necessary information regarding the conference.

The *Distance Education* journal under the editorship of Som Naidu remains the central focus of ODLAA. Three editions have been published during 2015 and the journal continues to attract relevant, progressive articles that probe comprehensive issues in distance and online education. The special edition of the journal in 2015, Vol 36(2), concentrated on the theme of organizational models for managing time and workload in distance education. This edition was guest edited by ODLAA committee member, Jenny Roberts, together with Elena Barbera from the Open University of Catalonia and Thomas Huelsmann, visiting professor at the University of South Africa (Unisa).

The special themed edition for 2016 will present a collection of articles based on papers that were presented at the recent ICDE conference which was held in Sun City, South Africa. It is being guest edited by Prof Paul Prinsloo from the University of South Africa (Unisa).

The executive committee of ODLAA would like to take this opportunity to wish all our members and their families a well-deserved rest and holiday as the year draws to an end. If you are travelling, please take care and appreciate the time that you are able to spend with family and friends this festive season.

**ICDE 2015 CONFERENCE – SUN CITY, SOUTH AFRICA**

Almost 1000 delegates from over 67 countries made their way to the Sun City resort, north of Pretoria, South Africa to attend the 26th ICDE World conference in October 2015. The conference was hosted by the University of South Africa (Unisa) which is the only comprehensive open distance learning institution in South Africa. The resort of Sun City provided a backdrop of African bush, wildlife and culture and an opening ceremony that dazzled and entertained even the most serious and staid delegates.
The main conference venue filled to capacity for the opening ceremony

One of the highlights of the conference was the keynote address by Tressie McMillan Cottom, assistant professor of sociology at Virginia Commonwealth University in the USA, when she made the statement “Online education can help break down barriers to access to tertiary education for disadvantaged students but only if there is equal access to resources or if imbalances are addressed affirmatively”. Her warning was that unequal access to education will result in deepening inequalities.

Other keynote speakers included, Audrey Watters, Laura Czerniewicz, Harold Jaroche, Joyce Sietziniger, Wayne Mackintosh, Aziza Ellozy and Mandla Makanya.

Following on from conversations that were initiated during the 2014 MOOCs4D conference at the University of Pennsylvania, the MOOCs4D11 continued at the 2015 ICDE conference under the theme “The potential of MOOCs as a transformative lever for promoting education as a global common good”.

A new innovation at the ICDE conference was the development of the Doctoral consortium which was spearheaded by Prof Mpine Makoe, the head of the Institute for Open and Distance Learning (IODL) at Unisa. This stream was included in order to facilitate and provide a collegial environment where doctoral students in the areas of Open Distance and
eLearning, OERs, MOOCs and Technology-Enhanced Learning could present their work to a group of mentors and peers.

During the closing ceremony it was announced that the 27th ICDE International conference will be hosted by Contact North, Canada and will be held in Toronto. Congratulations to Contact North and we are all looking forward to joining you in Toronto in 2017.

Jenny Roberts and Som Naidu dancing to the sound of the African beat

**Impressions of the ICDE World Conference (Diane Hockridge - ODLAA executive committee member)**

It was a great privilege to participate in the 26th ICDE World Conference, which was certainly not your standard academic conference. For me, there were three particular aspects that made this conference stand out:

1. **Its African flavour**

   From the spectacular opening ceremony featuring amazing African singers and dancers to the colourful beaded Rhino key-rings on our welcome bags, this was a thoroughly African experience. But the African flavour wasn’t only associated with the entertainment and culture, it infused every part of the conference, as speakers and participants from many African nations, contributed to the conversations on how we can grow capacities for sustainable distance e-learning provision. As the conference progressed the challenges of openness, justice, equity of access, and humanising pedagogy, at a large scale, with limited resources were openly and robustly discussed, and the contributions of African participants widely appreciated.

2. **Its (almost) all-female keynotes**

   Five fabulous female keynotes weren’t afraid to tackle the tough issues around openness, equity, access and copyright. Tressie McMillam Cotton started the open access conversation by stating that ‘open is not enough’ and suggesting that we need to confront issues of political and economic as well as educational structural disparity that prevent just access to education. Audrey Watters exposed some inherent tensions in educational technology questioning what the EdTech narrative, which promises much, actually delivers. Laura
Czerniewicz discussed the ‘coca-colonisation’ of knowledge and reminded us that what happens in the copyright arena matters profoundly to education. Joyce Seitzinger encouraged us to empathise with learners using learner experience design principles. And Aziza Ellozy provided some helpful ideas for faculty development in the complex landscape of ODEL. (The male keynotes, Harold Jarche and Wayne Mackintosh were pretty good too!)

3. Its punchy and provocative panel discussions
In my experience panel discussions tend to be either tedious affairs in which lots of disconnected pontificating takes place, or discussions that veer wildly off track as one presenter takes over the discussion. But this was not the case at the ICDE conference where the panel discussions were one of the highlights of the whole conference. Wonderfully managed by Paul Prinsloo, (unanimously agreed via conference Twitter feed as the best panel-discussion leader ever), was an entertaining, dogged and focused panel leader who ensured that the panel discussions actually focused on key issues of relevance and importance, that they actually were discussions, and that they were interesting. Well done to Paul.

I could mention so much more: the wonderful MC Divya Singh who entertained us with delightful stories; the weirdly over-the-top Sun City venue with its fantasy palaces and fake elephants; the friendly hospitality of the UNISA staff who were so welcoming; and of course the stimulation of meeting and hearing from so many ODEL practitioners from literally all around the world. The 2017 World ICDE Conference to be held in Toronto, will I imagine, have an entirely different flavour, but the opportunity to engage with educators who are committed to finding and sustaining best practice in ODEL will still be its focus.

**2016 ODLAA SUMMIT**

In our previous bulletin we advised that the 2016 ODLAA summit would take place in Perth and would be joining together with the annual STEMFest conference. For reasons beyond our control, the STEMfest conference has now been moved to India. The ODLAA committee is currently finalizing details of our ODLAA summit which is being planned for 2016 and we will advise all members as soon as we have the final information. In the meantime diarize 24/25 November 2016 as probable dates for our new, revised conference which aims to be representative of the whole spectrum of distance education and online learning. A planning team has been set up for the 2016 Summit: watch this space for more details as they become available.
THE NEW ODLAA WEBSITE AND TWITTER ACCOUNT

Don’t forget to visit the new ODLAA website which can be found at www.odlaa.org. We welcome suggestions and comments from all ODLAA members. Please send any information that you would like to be included on the website to ODLAA executive committee member Diane Hockridge at diane.hockridge@gmail.com.

Our Twitter name is: @ODLAAorg

If you have friends or colleagues who are involved in the Open and Distance Learning profession, who are not yet members, please encourage them to contact become a member of ODLAA and membership details can be found on our website www.odlaa.org.

ODLAA WEBINAR SERIES

We are delighted to say that the recording of our most recent webinar held on 19th November is now available to view from the ODLAA website:

- Assistive Technologies Improving Learning Access

True to the aims of the presentation both the webinar itself and this recording include simultaneous closed captions. This has been achieved by the combined efforts of the Global Access Project, IBM Accessibility, the Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education & Training, and the University of Tasmania. Please feel free to share this information with your colleagues.

Just as ‘distance’ and ‘classroom’ modes of education delivery are blending, it is becoming increasingly evident that students don’t need to have a recognisable physical or learning disability in order to benefit from the use of assistive technologies. Those who are time poor because of work or family commitments, and those who have English as a second language are just two examples of people who may prefer to listen to their readings rather than engaging with traditional formats.

The webinar includes presentations by Sharon Kerr (GAP) and Peter Fay (IBM). ODLAA received 55 registration requests for this webinar, and at the time of writing we know the recording itself has also been accessed 51 times!

Future themes

ODLAA is always looking for speakers and webinar topics of interest to the open and distance learning community. Please email jo.osborne@utas.edu.au with suggestions and offers to contribute.

In the archives

There are now a total of ten webinar recordings available from the ODLAA website – go to www.odlaa.org/webinars and scroll down to the ‘Access Previous Webinars’ link to find summaries and recording links from 2012-2014.

NEWS FROM THE ODLAA PRESIDENT – SOM NAIDU
President’s Report of STEMFest’15 and 26th ICDE World Conference

Over September and October, I participated in two conferences (STEMFest’15 in Saskatoon, Canada and the 26th ICDE World Conference, in Sun City, South Africa). Here is a potted history of my activities.

September 22-25th (Commonwealth of Learning, Vancouver, Canada)

- Over the three days in September I had wide-ranging discussions with several people at COL including President Asha Kanwar; Sanjaya Mishra (Program Specialist-TEL and eLearning; and Balaji (Online learning).
- This included discussions with President Kanwar about her participation and contribution to a panel discussion and forum that I was coordinating and convening at the STEMFest’15 event in Saskatoon. I collected a video recording by Asha Kanwar (on Big Game Changers in ODL) as input to this workshop on ODL and STEM Education that I chaired and moderated.
- And while I was at COL, I recorded an interview on TEL issues with Sanjaya Mishra as part of its resources on TEL.
- Look, they even had a formal welcome plaque for me sitting on the reception desk at COL during the whole time I was there (but I am sure they do this for all guests to COL Headquarters!!).

September 26-October 2nd (STEMFest15, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada)

- During this week, I attended the STEMFest15 event in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada.
- The STEMFest event attracted 100s of primary and high school students from neighbouring provinces who came in their droves over the two days to hear about STEM education from experts and learn a bit about the opportunities it might have for them and their future careers.
- At this conference I chaired and moderated a three-hour panel discussion on the “Role of open, flexible, distance education and elearning in STEM Education”.

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• And during the five days, recorded several video sessions on the role of ODL and ODLAA in the promotion of STEM Education.
• At the STEMFest’15 conference I also hosted a display Booth on ODLAA and ODL. (See picture of our pull-down poster below)

![Poster](image)

• One of the highlights of this conference in Saskatoon, was the rich and vibrant cultural performances from aboriginal Canadians and Ukrainian Canadians, both groups which are very heavily represented in this part of Canada.

![Cultural Performances](image)

October 11–October 16th (26th ICDE World Conference -- SunCity, South Africa)

• During this week I attended the ICDE Conference at Sun City, South Africa.
• And ran a preconference workshop on “Getting Published in High Impact Journals” – with 74 participants) and co-presented two papers based on a project on OER—Based eLearning at the Open University of Sri Lanka. One of these papers received the Best Papers award and subsequently published in Open Praxis (ICDE’s peer-reviewed journal).

October 17th (Sheraton Hotel, Pretoria, South Africa)

• Following the ICDE conference, I attended the ICDE/SCOP meeting on “Higher education for the sustainable future we want. The way ahead for online, open and flexible learning: Opportunities and actions”. This meeting was organized by ICDE in partnership with UNESCO, COL, OEC and hosted by and at UNISA. At this meeting I co-chaired a working group meeting for Asia (Oceania) Group (from Australia/NZ/Japan/China/Indonesia/Korea/Regional Professional Organizations ODLAA/ACODE).
• In and around Pretoria, as is usually the case at this time, the jacarandas are in full bloom, and we were not disappointed.

The cultural performances at the ICDE conference were just as rich and vibrant in South Africa.

And under the big and broad smiling embrace of President Mandela, we felt most welcome in this beautiful country and part of Africa!

Som Naidu
FEATURED MEMBERS OF ODLAA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

In each bulletin we will be highlighting one or more members of the executive committee and/or an ODLAA member. In this final issue of 2015, we are sharing information with you about our secretary, Sherrill Whittington.

Sherrill Whittington is currently an independent consultant and has over two decades of international gender experience, starting with the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and served in various capacities in the United Nations, the United Nations Secretariat for the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, and UNICEF Headquarters and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in Timor Leste. She has worked on gender equality in education, governance and peacebuilding in countries as diverse as Bangladesh, Cambodia, Cote d’Ivoire, Nepal, Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Timor Leste, Bougainville, Senegal, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kosovo, South Africa, Mozambique and Tanzania. She was formerly a high school teacher, a policy officer in the Department of Defence and researcher in the Australian Parliamentary Library. Ms Whittington has a Master of Letters in Asian History,(UNE) a Master of Arts in International Relations(ANU), Masters in of Education(Professional Education and Training) (Deakin University), plus a Bachelor of Arts and a Diploma in Education(University of Newcastle).

In the forthcoming bulletins we would like to highlight different ODLAA members from all over the world. Please can you send your short bio (+400 words) plus a recent photo to Jenny Roberts email: buckjj@unisa.ac.za.

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