Editorial: Research as a Conversation

"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place."
~ George Bernard Shaw

Evans (2008) reported that, with the emergence of online academic journals, fewer scholarly articles are being cited because researchers do not have to dig as deeply to locate foundational research; consequently, researchers are building upon fewer and less divergent findings across fewer journals. As a result, they are reaching consensus more easily than they did in the past. Larivière, Gingras, and Archambault (2009) also found that it is not uncommon for scholarly articles to remain uncited, although they added that non-citation rates vary significantly across disciplines. It seems that one unintended consequence of greater access to scholarly information is a lack of meaningful discourse among researchers.

The research process might be viewed as a conversation that can occur not only between researchers and participants, but also among authors and readers of scholarly publications as well as among all of the researchers who have examined an issue over time. Currently, it seems that not all researchers are considering all of the voices in conversations about issues that they choose to examine. Instead, they might review and advance only the research that is included among the first few results of an online literature search. Without our engaging in meaningful conversations, misunderstandings can occur that might have important implications.

Whereas some conversations on topics that are relevant to online graduate education are just beginning, others have been ongoing for some time. In this issue of the *Journal of Online Doctoral Education*, we hope to begin some important conversations and advance others. To this end, perspectives of students and graduates of online doctoral programs are examined to contribute to discussion of topics that are relevant to online graduate education. It is hoped that the works included in this issue represent a next step in the line of research upon which future researchers can build to gain a more sophisticated understanding of important issues. One issue that is receiving significant scholarly attention involves how to most effectively prepare online doctoral students to become successful independent researchers. To promote understanding in this area, Semich and Hineman used an action research approach to investigate the first-year experiences of online doctoral students and their perceptions regarding whether the sequence of research courses they completed contributed to their preparation for their dissertation work.

Another issue that is pervasive in the online graduate education literature is student sense of community. There is literature to suggest that students taking online courses might feel less connected to their peers than students at brick-and-mortar institutions due to the physical distance between them and the asynchronous nature of content delivery. This lack of connectedness has also been associated with undesirable outcomes, such as non-completion. However, sense of community has not been examined extensively among online graduate students attending strictly online institutions in particular. It is possible that individuals who choose to pursue a doctoral degree online desire a sense of community to a lesser extent than other students; therefore, it might be less

important to promote connectedness in this context. To begin to address this important gap in the literature, in her brief report, Bianchi-Laubsch investigated the extent to which these students feel and desire a sense of community.

A third issue of interest relates to perceptions of online degrees among employers. After successfully completing their dissertation, graduates of online doctoral programs enter the job market in hopes of finding gainful employment. Many individuals who are responsible for making hiring decisions in various industries do not view applicants with online degrees as favorably as they do those with degrees from traditional universities. However, those opinions are slowly starting to shift in many industries. In her reflection paper, Stone focused on the experiences of graduates of online doctoral programs who pursue academic positions at brick-and-mortar institutions, discussed strategies offered on how these graduates might successfully obtain such a position, and described her personal experience of obtaining a faculty position after obtaining an online doctoral degree.

We believe that these works make important contributions to the online graduate education literature and have practical and scholarly implications. They have started or advanced the conversations on these timely and relevant topics, but scholarly discourse must continue. We sincerely hope that future researchers will continue to expand upon these lines of inquiry to promote the research and practice of online graduate education in general and online doctoral education in particular.

We encourage authors to participate in these and other discussions that are pertinent to online graduate education by submitting papers for review to be considered for publication in future issues of JODE. We invite the submission of many types of works related to online graduate education, including research papers, brief reports, critical reviews of the literature, scholarly reflections, and book reviews. Please visit www.jode.ncu.edu for more information. We look forward to continuing the conversation.

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