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Editorial

The e-Educator Project, which is the focus of two Special Editions (December 2008 and June 2009) of the Malaysian Journal of Distance Education, was part of a major Sino-UK initiative, the *Sino-UK e-Learning Programme (eChina-UK)*. This Programme, which forms part of a strategic collaboration between Britain and China in higher education, was established in 2002 by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Chinese Ministry of Education (MoE). The aim was to promote innovative developments in e-learning for the training of teachers/lecturers at secondary and tertiary levels in China. Key British and Chinese universities were selected to work together on specific projects, all requiring the development of high quality e-learning materials for the training of teachers/lecturers. It was hoped that by working together on specific tasks, the collaborative partnerships would yield a range of insights of benefit to both countries.

An initial set of projects ran from 2003–2005, and samples from the outcomes of those projects, along with design rationale, can be explored on the Programme website: <http://www.echinauk.org/>. All of the project members learned very large amounts throughout their collaborations, and so HEFCE decided to allow each of the projects to bid for additional funding so that they could build on the insights they had acquired and gain deeper and more substantial insights via a follow-up project. Three of them were funded, and these projects ran from 2005–2007. One of them was the e-Educator Project, which is the focus of this special issue. Further details and sample materials from all three projects can be found on the Programme website; additional information is also available in Spencer-Oatey (2007), which deals with background and policy information on e-learning in China, e-learning design and delivery issues, the interplay between pedagogy and technology, and insights into the collaboration processes that the project members experienced.

Two issues had emerged from the initial set of projects as being of crucial importance: the need for the effective training of online tutors/e-educators,

and the impact of intercultural issues in international collaborations of this kind. The University of Nottingham and Beijing Foreign Studies University decided to focus on the former, and aimed to develop a generic framework for e-educator training that would be relevant not only in China but throughout many parts of the world. They needed, therefore, to expand the scope of their collaboration and they successfully achieved this by working with staff at the Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang. The articles in this first Special Issue explore and discuss various elements involved in this Sino-UK-Malaysia collaboration, in particular the rationale for the e-Educator module, the continuing professional development enquiry based model adopted and the five curriculum themes.

The eChina-UK Programme is now nearing its end. The final phase is focusing on intercultural effectiveness in global education and is drawing out learning from across all the projects on issues associated with effective working in intercultural contexts (especially UK and China). The results of this final project of the programme, the *Global People* project, is to be made available in 2009, accessible via the eChina-UK Programme website, <http://www.echinauk.org/>.

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Reference

Spencer-Oatey, H. (2007). *e-Learning Initiatives in China. Pedagogy, Policy and Culture*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.