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Introduction to the fifth regular issue of JALT

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We live, work, learn and teach in tumultuous times. Covid-19 has been an unavoidable topic in the first half of 2020. Nobody knows when this horrific pandemic can be relegated to the dustbin of history, but if epidemiologists are to be believed, not anytime soon. While rereading the Introduction to JALT's December 2019 issue, it hit me that we were eerily prescient by musing over Nassim Talib's black-swan-type-of-events and the usefulness of self-isolation (Rudolph & Yeo, 2019). This was a time when to most of us, 'corona' still meant something to be drunk, preferably with a slice of lime. The black swan appeared soon thereafter, and in many countries around the globe, social isolation was enforced for months. The country I call home has done quite well with its Circuit Breaker approach (Bonk et al., 2020), leading to Singapore to be considered one of a handful of safest countries worldwide (Koetsier, 2020).

Personally, I have found the last months strangely productive. With no time spent on the daily commute (or even minor matters such as: dressing up for the office, small talk with colleagues or the occasional extensive lunch conversation), I can hit the keyboard straight after waking up and throughout my waking hours. Despite feeling rather lucky to do what I like (and importantly, getting paid for it), there is nonetheless an imaginary sword of Damocles – of uncertainty and existential angst – hanging on hopefully more than just a horse's hair over our heads. An Australian colleague recently commented that he could not recall having seen lecturers and students more stressed (and Australia, as Margarita Kefalaki and Sophia Karanicolas tell us in this issue of JALT, is supposedly the "lucky" country, thanks to, amongst other things, its large size and dispersed population).

In terms of my productivity, I have been writing more than I have done for many years, and while I always hope to do more than I actually get done, I have been feeling most fortunate to have been involved in a couple of multi-authored projects – one a precious small tome on *Why is it worth waking up every morning*, edited by JALT Editorial Board member Margarita Kefalaki (2020); one an article on "Pedagogy in the time of pandemic: From localisation to glocalisation" for our sister journal JEICOM (Bonk et al., 2020), and another article in this issue of JALT. More importantly,

JALT has both received and accepted a record number of articles, both for an outstanding special issue edited by Joey Crawford, Bill Baker and Mitch Parsell from the University of Tasmania (as a result of the Teaching Matters conference in November 2019) – of which most contributions are already pre-published – as well as the regular issue that is proudly introduced here.

I am writing these lines during a tumultuous time where concerns about a second wave are proving valid, or at least continue unabated and, though hope springs eternal, there is no vaccine or cure. One of the greatest ironies – and to me, this redefines the meaning of cognitive dissonance – is that some stock markets are near all-time highs (for instance, the tech-heavy Nasdaq briefly crossed the never-before-reached 10,000 mark), while the economy underwent one of its steepest declines in history, and unemployment in the U.S. rose at a hitherto unimaginable pace. The decoupling of main street from Wall Street (of the real economy from the stock market) is staggering. In the world's largest economy, the U.S., 20 million workers remain unemployed, and covid-19 has claimed more than 110,000 lives – and we have not even talked about the killing of George Floyd that has convulsed cities across the country and led to global anti-racism protests.

Our Journal of Applied Learning and Teaching is not the place to judge the performance of governments vis-à-vis the pandemic. It is one perspective that China's cover-up of the initial outbreak contributed to its own, and other peoples', suffering. Another (Chinese) perspective is the one of China as a model for taming the disease, and as the 'saviour of the world', by sending Chinese medical supplies (from masks to ventilators) to recipients around the globe, and flying Chinese medical teams to foreign countries to help them fight covid-19 (*The Economist*, 2020). Yet a different perspective would be to speculate on the incompetence and lack of empathy of populist leaders who appear to only care about their grip on power and being re-elected. Certain populist heads of state have appallingly advised to inject disinfectant or irresponsibly compared covid-19 to a mild flu (Tisdall, 2020). Perhaps it is no coincidence that the largest number of covid-19 deaths, as of 14 June, 2020, have occurred in the U.S. and Brazil. A related perspective may

be to elect more female, competent and compassionate women such as Angela Merkel, Jacinda Ardern, and Tsai Ing-wen and to avoid a certain kind of shallow, arrogant men (Tisdall, 2020).

The largest covid-19-related tragedy is that of the global poor who are the hardest hit. In the U.S., around 40 percent of the people in households earning \$40,000 or less lost their jobs, with many finding it difficult to get by (Smialek, 2020), this in one of the world's richest countries. In emerging economies, there is oftentimes no social safety net whatsoever, and many poor people (frequently working in the informal sector) have the unenviable choice to either expose themselves to the virus (and to the authorities clamping down on them) or suffering from hunger and other abysmal aspects of extreme poverty. The virus appears to further increase the gap between the rich and the poor, and the haves and have-nots.

In this issue of JALT, three articles focus on the pandemic and Higher Ed (HE). The peer-reviewed section (with a total of nine articles) begins with a multi-authored article, entitled "Covid-19: 20 countries' higher education intra-period digital pedagogy responses". Six Editorial Board members were involved in it (Joseph Crawford, Bashar Malkawi, Matt Glowatz, Rob Burton, Paola Magni and me) as well as Kerryn Butler-Henderson and Sophia Lam. To the best of our knowledge, the piece is the first (pre-)published peer-reviewed article on the coronavirus and HE. As part of our new practice to systematically pre-publish all articles – that was implemented over the last couple of months, with the only difference between the pre-published and published article being the pagination – the article was pre-published on 1 April. The article's abstract has since been viewed more than 50,000 times and cited a dozen times, despite it not even 'properly' published as yet.

A second article centering on Covid was contributed by Margarita Kefalaki and Sophia Karanicolas with the creative title "COMmunication's ROugh NAVigations: 'Fake' news in a time of a global crisis". It is inarguable that fake news, disinformation and misinformation made the crisis even worse, and it is my firm belief that one of the most important things that undergraduates can learn at a university is to differentiate information and knowledge from rumours and rubbish. In other words, metacognition, our knowledge how to learn and where knowledge is located, is of critical importance. A third article, an (non-peer-reviewed) opinion piece by Michael Sutton and Carlos Jorge, discusses the potential for radical change in HE learning spaces after the pandemic. Specifically, game-based learning is considered for an andragogy based upon experiential education.

The coronavirus, however, is by far not the only important topic in our most substantial journal issue thus far. Lim Weiliang and Elaine Chapman develop and preliminarily evaluate a brief epistemic beliefs (referring to beliefs about knowledge and learning) instrument. There is a connection with Kefalaki and Karanicolas's article, as again knowledge and learning are at the centre of the discourse. Lim and Chapman's study provide the context of Singapore's education system moving toward the use of constructivist, rather than more traditional didactic, learning and teaching

approaches. As students with sophisticated epistemic beliefs may benefit more from constructivist approaches, the authors developed an instrument and conducted quantitative research amongst Singaporean polytechnic students.

Nimrod Delante discusses "challenges, paradigm shift and theoretical underpinnings of learning advising" in the context of a case study of James Cook University (an Australian university) in Singapore. Delante discusses the vital role of learning advisors and identifies them convincingly as teaching professionals who are key in HE. Learning advisors are on occasion perceived as 'inferior' when compared to other teaching professionals. Delante volunteers concrete proposals how to properly appreciate the roles of learning advisors and discusses them within key theoretical frameworks.

Ibtesam Hussein and Kathryn Schifflin write about their research in the U.S., but the issue of "University professors' perceptions of international student needs" that they focus on also resonate in other papers in this issue, such as Delante's and also to some extent (though it is largely 'local' students) in Lim and Chapman's. Hussein and Schifflin researched the insights of North American university professors about common challenges that international students face, and top of the list were their – at times – limited English proficiency as well as an imperfect understanding of American classroom culture.

The top challenge of international students in the U.S. being their substandard command of English links up nicely with the next article by Li Jianjun and Yeap Peik Foong on English language learning in China. Li and Yeap come up with a dynamic systems theory model for reading motivation among English as a foreign language (EFL) learners in China. They convincingly show that the reading motivation for the many millions of Chinese EFL learners is a complex issue, and their holistic model was created to address this challenge. Li & Yeap's model is recommended for consideration when designing second language reading curricula and teaching and learning materials.

The remaining three peer-reviewed articles are from a variety of fascinating academic disciplines that transport us from physical therapy education to nursing, and eventually to architecture. Kerry Volansky asks: "What are best practices to teach 'hands-on' skills in a blended environment"? Despite the proliferation of online learning and teaching in physical therapy education, there is a gap that describes best practices used to teach 'hands-on' skills. Volansky comes up with a carefully curated list of best practices for physical therapy educators and recommends a blended learning approach to teaching orthopaedic "hands-on" skills. This article was accepted during the 'pre-covid-19 era' and it is hoped that such a blended approach can soon be pursued again, in the U.S. and elsewhere.

Sam Goh, Tang Mun Leong and Aini Ahmad discuss competence-based frameworks in nursing via a concept analysis. Goh and co-authors review various national competence-based frameworks and detect some shortcomings when it comes to the assessment methods

currently used by nursing regulatory bodies for their licensure system. They propose to use a modified Miller's model in nursing education.

The final piece in the peer-reviewed section is by Aleks Catina on "Dialogue and studio space: the architectural design studio as the setting for continuous reflection". Schools of architecture such as CASS at London Metropolitan University offer their students an iterative process of inquiries, reflection and actions in their design studios. Catina goes beyond a problem-based learning approach in order for architecture students to become truly reflective practitioners on their way toward professionalisation. I am impressed by the level of deep reflection in Catina's contribution.

JALT's issue at hand also contains an interview with HE expert George Siemens, entitled 'As human beings, we cannot not learn', where we discuss his theory of knowledge (connectivism), Massive Open Online Courses (an approach pioneered by Siemens) and learning analytics. In a wide-ranging interview, Siemens shares his personal experience of the utilitarian schooling system in his childhood which inspired him to have different perspectives on the interactions between education and technology, thus leading to his concept of Connectivism as well as his creation of MOOCs. Amongst many things, Siemens offers some clarifying insights from his seminal book, *Knowing Knowledge*, as well as a glimpse of his future work which will focus on how human and artificial cognition may influence knowledge processes and their impacts on society.

Including the interview with George Siemens, JALT has thus far featured interviews with four prominent educational thought leaders – previously, we had interviewed John Biggs, Stephen Brookfield and Bror Saxberg (Biggs et al., 2019; Brookfield et al., 2019; Saxberg et al., 2018). I have always enjoyed reading interviews, and I am increasingly convinced that this is an important genre. I recently came across an affirmation of this view:

Reading interviews and transcripts of conversations is a more dialogical and dialectical experience than reading the typical monograph. Also, in conversational settings, authors are compelled to be more concise and clear than they may be in their writing, and if they are not, good follow-up questioning won't let them obscure things (Gilman-Opalsky, 2019, pp. 6-7).

Vanessa Stafford provides the ed-tech review of this issue, another cherished component of JALT. She reviews Zeetings, a relatively new tool in the rich world of EdTech that, according to Stafford, combines the features of a slide platform such as PowerPoint with online polling functionality à la Kahoot! In addition, Stafford presents two case studies from her fascinating professional development sessions at Kaplan Business School Australia, demonstrating a variety of applications of the tool.

The section with usually shorter pieces (that do not undergo double blind peer reviews) is kicked off with the earlier-mentioned piece on the potential for radical change in HE

learning spaces after the pandemic by Sutton and Jorge. Next is our Editorial Board member Samson Tan's take on "Artificial Intelligence in education: Rise of the Machines". The arrival of the Fourth Industrial Revolution is an earth-shattering paradigm shift and also changes the world as we know it at breakneck speed. Despite the allusion to the Terminator movie franchise in his eye-catching title, Tan argues that the future of learning, like much else, will indeed be driven by the rise of the machines (in particular, AI, fuelled by 'datafication').

Nelson Ang philosophically poses the question "What is curriculum?" Ang argues that after many a learned contribution, curriculum remains a 'complicated conversation'. He asks some excellent questions and contends that the answers thus far have been underwhelming. The final piece in this 'informed journalistic' section is Lucy Gill-Simmen's inspirational discussion of a classroom exercise, entitled "Developing critical thinking skills: Using Edward de Bono's six thinking hats in formative peer assessment & feedback". Designed to develop undergraduate students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills through a peer assessment and feedback task, Edward de Bono's famous approach to thinking is gainfully applied.

The book review features five detailed book reviews. The books by Gabbard (*Silencing Ivan Illich revisited*), Choudhry and Vally (*The university & social justice*), Brookfield (*Teaching race*), Caplan (*The case against education*) and Yorkstone (*Global lean for higher education*) struck the reviewers as sufficiently salient and intriguing to go beyond the standard length of book reviews. It was delightful to have one of my former students (Shannon Tan) to contribute a critically reflective book review on *The case against education*, no less. Shannon Tan has also been instrumental in supporting JALT as its journal manager since the beginning of the year, and she has been uncomplainingly and efficiently dealing with an avalanche of projects. Much credit is due to her for continually improving the JALT website and too many other things to mention.

The usual big Thank You must go once again to our fantastic Editorial Board and the Management of Kaplan Singapore (especially Associate Professor Rhys Johnson, COO and Provost, and Mike Christie, Executive Director) for their continued support of the JALT project. Also, our esteemed Editorial Board member Nigel Starck provided critical proofreading of parts of the issue (all remaining errors are solely my fault!) and agreed to add the role of Associate Editor to his honorary portfolio. Also, Margarita Kefalaki and Joseph Crawford were extremely kind in agreeing to double up as Associate Editors, in addition to their role as Editorial Board members. My sincere gratitude continues to be due to academic colleagues worldwide for their continued sharing of the JALT initiative with their networks.

JALT is currently having its two-year anniversary of publishing, with (soon to be) seven issues published (five regular and two special issues). Such anniversaries are great opportunities for critical reflection. By July this year, the number of articles (including peer-reviewed articles, interviews, ed-tech reviews, journalistic articles, book reviews, introductions and prefaces) will have surpassed 100, and we have had around

140 contributors from 19 countries in four continents. Contributors have been from highly diverse backgrounds, exactly the way we like it, ranging from pro vice-chancellors and full professors to early career academics and students (the very reason for our professional existence as teachers). Geographically, contributions range from the next door in my office in Singapore to far-flung places such as Australia, the U.S., Ukraine and Lebanon. Our Editorial Board includes highly reputable academics from universities around the world.

In the past, JALT was supported by educational conferences in Greece and Tasmania, and no thanks to the virus, conferences had to be cancelled this year in Athens and in Singapore (we hope they will take place in 2021). With Kaplan Singapore and its partner universities, we also conducted six symposia over the last two years. We have now decided to move five symposia online for the remainder of 2020, and there are forthcoming symposia with the University of Essex (led by Stephen Shukaitis), Murdoch University (led by Peter Waring, Paola Magni and Anne Palmer), Griffith University (led by Rob Burton), University College Dublin (led by Orna O'Brien and Matt Glowatz) and University of Portsmouth (led by Lena Itangata) – the aforementioned wonderful scholars and teachers are all Editorial Board members of JALT. As always, I welcome all feedback and ideas.

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