



Introduction to the sixth regular issue of JALT

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37074/jalt.2020.3.2.1>

2020 will most likely go into the annals of history as the year of the coronavirus (the electoral defeat of President Trump and Brexit are indubitably other earth-shattering events). The judgement on the responses to the pandemic in Higher Education (HE; the initial Emergency Remote Teaching has since made way to more sophisticated and better-prepared approaches to online learning and teaching in many cases) is still out, and in a couple of years, our assessment is bound to be less emotional (the emotional roller coasters ranged from the angst of the lockdowns to the euphoria of the vaccine discoveries) and informed by the benefit of more hindsight.

In early December of this tumultuous year, one of us (Jürgen – I henceforth use the first person singular) was invited to two conferences to present some of our ongoing COVID research (on behalf of Joey Crawford, Kerryn Butler-Henderson, Karima Lalani, and Shannon Tan), and my experiences were thought-provoking. Surprisingly, one of the conferences was conducted face-to-face. The precautionary measures undertaken by the conference organisers – the conference was held in a hotel in Singapore – were nothing short of extraordinary, and special approval by the Singapore Tourism Board apparently had to be sought. There was a mandatory pre-conference briefing that meticulously explained the use of face masks, face shields, designated seats throughout the whole conference with no ‘intermingling’, with refreshments and lunch being served directly at the tables of a huge ballroom. There were some 30 face-to-face as well as perhaps 40 virtual participants. While the presentations were of a high quality, my experience was nonetheless somewhat surreal. I always thought that a highlight of any conference are the networking conversations with other participants during breaktime – that this time, for the most excellent reasons, were strictly prohibited. I am unsure whether under the circumstances, I may not have preferred to rather participate online in the conference.

The second conference that I recently participated in had largely Malaysian participation and was completely virtual. It used an online events platform that I had been previously unfamiliar with (hopin). It worked rather well and it even had

a networking feature (where participants were randomly assigned for some kind of academic ‘speed-dating’). To me, this aptly demonstrated that the pandemic has led to a sophisticated use of web-conferencing technology that all participants seemed rather comfortable with. It is unlikely that I would have attended the conference in Malaysia (the pandemic notwithstanding), which to me, is an instance of *weiji* (危機) – problems can be well-disguised opportunities. To the two authors of this Editorial, 2020 was not only the year of the coronavirus, but also a year of international collaboration as well as some milestones of our humble journal. I started to reflect on this in the June 2020 editorial (Rudolph, 2020), and already the last issue of JALT had two contributions on HE responses to the pandemic. With academics fetishising the number of citations of their work (I admit I am no stranger to that palpable excitement of checking my google scholar page), we have acquired ‘bragging rights’: Crawford et al.’s (2020) article entitled “COVID-19: 20 countries’ higher education intra-period digital pedagogy responses” has at the time of writing been cited 173 times (and been downloaded in excess of 100,000 times via multiple locations, also thanks to the openness of the journal and the CC BY license). To the best of our knowledge, this was the first article to be (pre-)published on HE and the coronavirus, and it provided an early snapshot of 20 countries across all six World Health Organization (WHO) regions.

In the second quarter of 2020, we were involved in Bonk et al.’s (2020) exploratory case studies of a variety of universities across the globe. Some of our friends and collaborators are leading other journals (Fotini Diamantidaki and Margarita Kefalaki lead the *Journal of Education, Innovation and Communication* (JEICOM), and Joey Crawford is the editor-in-chief of the *Journal of University Teaching, Learning & Practice* (JUTLP)). Rather than competing with each other, we find it more meaningful to be mutually supportive, and we have arrived at fruitful co-operations that have led to publications on COVID and HE and beyond in all three journals. Particularly noteworthy is a collaboration with Australian and Singaporean students, entitled “Enabling cross-cultural student voice during COVID-19: A collective

autoethnography” that is about to appear in JUTLP (Wilson et al., 2020). Apart from yet another collaboration in this issue (Butler-Henderson et al., 2020a), quite a few additional exciting co-operations are in the works and will hopefully see the light of day in 2021 – which is hoped to be a much better year than 2020.

Although JALT (in terms of its publishing record) is still a toddler at the tender age of two and a half years, it is no longer a baby and it certainly feels that we have come a long way. The issue at hand is our thickest ever, and it is hoped, solely in the good sense of the word. In the past 30 months, we have published six regular and two special issues with a total of 130 articles (including peer-reviewed articles, interviews with educational thought leaders, EdTech reviews, articles of a more journalistic nature (including teaching case studies and teaching notes) and book reviews) by 160 contributors from 22 countries from all continents. The half year between May and November 2020 saw a 100% increase of article downloads which, together with a record number of article submissions, shows that our toddler is becoming increasingly popular. However, there is no rest for the wicked and we will not rest on our laurels.

While we did not conduct any symposia in the first half of 2020, no thanks to the coronavirus, we did four well-received online symposia, co-organised by Kaplan Higher Education Singapore and its partner universities’ Editorial Board members of JALT. A symposium with the University of Essex (led by Stephen Shukaitis) had the eye-catching theme *Educational alternatives. Alternative education* and was so well-received that we were compelled to stretch it over two days. Rob Burton (Griffith University) led a symposium on Nursing Education, Peter Waring (Murdoch University) a more generally-themed symposium on Applied Learning & Teaching, and Lena Itangata (University of Portsmouth) a symposium that was focused both on students’ employability as well as more academic exchanges.

This sixth issue of JALT has a wealth of articles and there are some not initially intended themes in this issue, the first, inevitably, being COVID and education. Kerryn Butler-Henderson and others present the first peer-reviewed article in this issue, entitled “COVID-19 in Higher Education Literature Database (CHELD V1): An open access systematic literature review database with coding rules”. The article is linked to an open access database (Butler-Henderson et al., 2020b) which we hope will be used by other researchers. Rather than every single researcher ‘reinventing the wheel’ and painfully combing through databases, it is hoped that this database provides an open-access resource to support future learning and teaching scholars to gain timely access to pre-examined literature on higher education during COVID-19. While the database version 1.0 only covers the first half of 2020, it may soon be updated. Butler-Henderson et al.’s article documents the method for the creation of the first version of the CHELD. 138 articles were eventually selected, using a rigorous systematic review method and tools (PRISMA approach, Mixed Method Appraisal Tool (MMAT), Quality Assessment Tool for Theory and Literature (QATTL)).

A second article on COVID and HE is contributed by Hilda Mulrooney and Alison Kelly. Their article “Covid 19 and the move to online teaching: impact on perceptions of belonging in staff and students in a UK widening participation university” is based on mixed-methods research at Kingston University. The lockdown and resultant emergency remote teaching reduced feelings of belonging amongst both students and staff, and while the benefits of online learning were acknowledged, both sample groups predominantly disagreed that remaining online would lead to a better educational experience as opposed to eventually returning to face-to-face learning and teaching.

Another valuable perspective on the pandemic brings us to the United Arab Emirates. Doaa Alterri and co-authors’ article “Transition to distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic: Efforts within the Higher Education sector in the United Arab Emirates” reconstructs the UAE government’s decision to close all higher education institutions’ facilities in March 2020 as a precautionary measure to contain the virus. The authors investigate the readiness and preparedness of several institutions of higher education in the UAE and highlight various foundations and educational platforms that were adopted to facilitate continued learning amidst the pandemic. Alterri et al.’s research usefully provides five university case studies and describes the implementation of preparedness plans, explanation of readiness and transition to distance learning, challenges encountered and solutions.

A fourth and final article on the pandemic and HE is provided by Thathsara Maddumapatabandi and Kelum Gamage. Their article’s title is: “Novel Coronavirus (COVID-2019) pandemic: Common challenges and response from Higher Education providers”. It provides a more big-picture, general discussion of HE responses and refers to a wide range of learning, teaching and assessment approaches and their challenges, and how they have impacted students.

Although not directly focused on the pandemic, Yewande Akinola and co-authors’ article “Virtual Reality as a tool for learning: The past, present and the prospect” surveys a fascinating aspect of virtual learning and teaching. Virtual Reality (VR) is a rapidly growing area in education, and schools and training institutes have been utilising it to improve students’ learning experience, create an interactive environment, and build students’ confidence. Yet, the vast benefits of VR have yet to be fully explored in all fields of endeavour. Thus, the article by Akinola et al. also discusses future applications of virtual technologies and their potential in various disciplines.

Christopher Harris (JALT’s co-founder and former co-editor-in-chief) and Hazel Tan discuss how blended teaching and learning can be successful in the Singapore context. In “You can teach old dogs new clicks – the importance of teacher use of online content in a blended higher education course in Singapore”, Harris and Tan investigate the effects of instructors’ use of online learning materials on the subsequent out-of-class online participation of students enrolled in a blended learning course. The purpose of their study was to identify concerns which determine the learning outcomes and participation of teaching and learning activities in the Singapore context. It was found that the

teacher's use of the online content in the physical class had a positive effect on students' subsequent online participation out-of-class. These findings suggest that educators may consider integrating online content synchronously in the physical class, rather than designating it as supplementary.

Sina Erdal and Andrew Wood investigate "Diverse student bodies and diverging performance trajectories", in particular the divergence of performance between British and Chinese students as they progress through their degree studies in the UK. A large dataset was utilised to allow for classification of students according to their previous educational experience. This allowed the researchers to investigate the different progression trajectories. Results show that students who progress with identical grades subsequently experience a systematic divergence of performance that depends on the subject they are studying and their previous educational experience. The performance of Chinese students was comparable or even superior to other international students and those from the UK, especially for quantitative courses. Erdal and Wood's findings facilitate the understanding of student achievement and have practical implications for student recruitment, curriculum design and student support. Ian Van Deventer, in "A conceptual review of demerit points as punishment and social necessity", investigates students' learning behaviour in relation to the use of electronics during class. With the proliferation of, and easy access to, technologies such as smartphones, laptops, and tablets, students would inevitably engage in non-academic activities during lessons, eventually distracting themselves and others in the classroom. To combat such disruptive behaviour, van Deventer controversially suggests that an application of motivation theory (reward and punishment) in the form of giving demerit points could encourage increased academic achievement in students.

In his startlingly-titled conceptual article "To tell the truth sometimes it pays to lie", John Hulpke discusses the appropriateness of lying. Immanuel Kant's ethical rigourism preached the biblical "Thou shalt not lie" and the German philosopher advised his followers that one must always tell the truth. However, Hulpke quite persuasively argues that life is more complex than that, and on occasion, lying may be necessary. Hulpke provides specific examples and mini-cases related to lying and convincingly shows their applicability in facilitating conversations in the classroom or online.

Kayla Waters's "Slacking on: Lean practices in applied education" is a thought-provoking piece that is highly recommended to all overworked academics – in other words, all academics. Waters proposes a "lean" resourceful approach to career management to address risk, optimise student and community outcomes, and sustain effective engagement over time. The lean approach teaches individuals to eliminate tasks from our to-do-list, or to do tasks poorly on purpose! The deliberate action is to create the necessary slack to treat top priorities and selected tasks carefully with the respect they deserve.

Another excellent and important article is provided by Kyriaki Koukouraki. The centrepiece of her article is the concept of critical global citizenship – an admirable concept

in the age of populism – and Koukouraki provides examples from the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classrooms. In her conceptual contribution, Koukouraki argues against the neoliberal approach towards 'global citizenship' and the Westo-centric hegemony associated with it. In her historically and philosophically-informed piece, Koukouraki provides practical examples of how critical global citizenship within HE may be fostered by focusing on critical thinking and intercultural competence.

While our journal focuses on HE, we are also open to outstanding pieces on other educational realms. The last two articles in the peer-reviewed section thematise secondary schools in the UK and in Uganda. Qing Li and her distinguished co-authors write about "Dynamics in a Mandarin lesson in a British secondary school: Asymmetric power and teacher-student rapport management". Using conversation analysis, their study reveals the asymmetric power between the teacher and students and how the teacher managed the teacher-student rapport in the class. Different types of power are observed (reward, coercive, expert and legitimate power) during the lesson, and Li et al.'s study also shows how an experienced teacher successfully manages a class and achieves educational goals.

Kizito Omona and co-authors' "Influence of parent-teacher interactions on initiation of sexual practices among teenagers: A qualitative study of Kawuku S. S Mukono District, Uganda" provides intriguing insights into an African country that most readers may know little about. In line with the intended global outreach of JALT, we were certainly thrilled to receive our first article from Uganda, after previously having received some contributions from Nigeria. The authors investigate the influence of parent-teacher interaction on the sexual behaviours of young people. A series of interviews and focus group discussions were held to investigate the interactions and impact on the sexual decision and practices of young people. Omona and co-authors' results show that appropriate sexual information and adequate interaction tend to lead to positive sexual behaviours and delayed sexual debut.

From the second regular issue of JALT onwards, we have interviewed educational thought leaders such as John Biggs, Stephen Brookfield and George Siemens. This time, we had the honour of interviewing the Vice Chancellor of the University of Buckingham, Professor James Tooley who variously has been called "the high priest of privatised education in Britain" (Wilby, 2013) and a "21st century Indiana Jones" (Coulson, 2007).

The interview was originally planned together with Dr Stefan Melnik (a mentor and friend of one of the co-authors: Jürgen; and also a friend of James Tooley) who sadly passed away before the interview was conducted. Stefan Melnik was a brilliant adult educator and charismatic, cross-disciplinary intellectual who is very much missed by his many friends and former trainees.

To us (we are admittedly biased), the extensive interview with James Tooley is one of the highlights of the issue. Tooley discusses his ground-breaking research on low-cost private education in developing countries. He has

co-founded (chains of) low-cost schools in Ghana, India, Honduras and, most recently, in England. We focus on James Tooley's fascinating research on private education for the poor, but also touch on a wide range of other topics, such as his unjust imprisonment in India, his own private school ventures in four continents, and the question of whether higher education is largely signaling or if it truly builds human capital. Despite his recent appointment as Vice Chancellor and the enormous pressures of leading a private university through a raging pandemic, James Tooley was most generous with his time and also contributed amazing photos to the interview.

The EdTech section has been a JALT feature since the beginning and Vanessa Stafford's excellent EdTech review "Teaching through Zoom – what we've learned as new online educators" is her second such contribution. Refreshingly, her article goes beyond a mere review of the features of Zoom – a video conferencing software that has sort of conquered the world by storm with its superior video and audio quality and intuitive features. Stafford critically discusses the pitfalls of assumption, the need for adaptability, and the importance of empathy when using tech such as Zoom. Apart from learning the technical skills, it is crucial to acknowledge that every individual learns at a different pace, and educators need to be flexible to the needs of the students.

The 'journalistic articles' section brings us back to the pandemic and starts off with Bina Rai's "A team of instructors' response to remote learning due to Covid-19. A 10.012 Introduction to Biology case study". Bina Rai showcases her remote teaching experience during COVID-19 through a case study from her work at the Singapore University of Technology and Design. Having had previous flipped classroom teaching experience was useful to Rai and colleagues, and they were able to proceed with pure online learning with minimal disruptions. She realised the importance of structure to the students and consequently made the decision to not make changes to the timetable. Each lesson started with a quiz or announcements, followed by an introduction to the topic of the day and the lesson plan. Examinations were also adjusted to take-home assignments. Such organised structure and flexibility were well-received by the students and they could continue to learn actively irrespective of the pandemic.

Gerard Clough and co-authors' "The development and delivery of a short, multi-dimensional Study Abroad programme with a twin focus on intercultural skills and employability" transports us to pre-pandemic days where study trips were still possible. Their instructional innovation paper also provides an alternative discussion of 'global citizenship' and picks up the thread from Kyriaki Koukouraki's earlier contribution in this issue. Clough et al.'s article outlines the rationale and implementation for an assessment centre approach to programme recruitment as well as a three-phase curriculum comprising (1) online and face-to-face pre-trip preparation, (2) a week-long study visit to Berlin and (3) a post-visit reflection articulated through critical-reflective writing and a group project exhibit.

Next are a teaching business case study and an accompanying teaching note by Irene Paniagua Martin (an outstanding Royal Holloway, University of London, BSc Management student at Kaplan Singapore) and Justin O'Brien (who is also a co-author of the previous article): "How Sarah Kauss turned her drinking bottle start-up S'well into a \$100m enterprise". JALT encourages such collaborations between students and professors. Martin and O'Brien explore the entrepreneurial journey taken by S'well founder Sarah Kauss in an effort to counter the environmental problem of disposable plastic waste by using a double organic business strategy. S'well was created using a low budget, word-of-mouth community and unpaid celebrity endorsement strategy and was established as a fashion power brand through carefully crafted, high end, retail, and charity collaborations. This teaching case study was developed from the lead author's digital marketing coursework, and the case is designed for use in marketing, strategy and entrepreneurship under- and postgraduate modules. The teaching note is separately published.

The final section is reserved for seven book reviews. John Hulpke reviews Ashwin and others' *Reflective teaching in higher education*. The book's key thrust is how educators can facilitate students to learn in a deeper and more sustainable manner. In his humorous and idiosyncratic review, Hulpke eventually recommends to pick up the book and Stop, Look, Listen and Reflect.

Cubie Lau reviews *Innovations in Asian Higher Education*, a book edited by Zhong and others. Lau critically appraises the book's six important themes: teaching innovations, doctoral education, online and mobile education, education for sustainable development, social/community engagement, and education futures.

Bina Rai provides a second contribution to the issue with her review of Sutton and Allen's *Emotify! The power of the human element in game-based learning, serious games and experiential education*. It is argued that an effective learning game experience is highly dependent on the Emotional Intelligent Engagement (EIE) factor. As a superior practitioner of game-based learning (GBL) in her own right, Rai believes that the contents of *Emotify!* address concerns at both individual and organisational levels and prepare individuals for GBL as a powerful, alternative method of teaching and learning.

Mohamed Fadhil's review on Connell's *The Good University: What universities actually do and why it's time for radical change* lauds the author's eloquent writing in their coherent narrative, broad examples and pointed arguments. Mohamed Fadhil (2020) provides an assured critical overview of the recommended book's contents and reflects on the work in the context of the global pandemic.

This leaves us with three reviews of Bloomsbury publications. Bloomsbury is perhaps most famous for being the 'Harry Potter' publisher, but they are of course also a leading academic and educational publisher. Michael D. Evans contributes a fourth review (three others have appeared in previous issues of JALT) of a work that has appeared in Bloomsbury's excellent *Perspectives on leadership in higher education series*, Branson et al.'s *Leadership in higher*

education from a transrelational perspective. Michael Evans concludes that the concept of transrelational leadership has potential for HE institutions and is strongly preferred to managerialism. He sees Branson et al.'s book as a valuable contribution to the series and the ongoing debate on the future of universities.

Sophia Lam reviews Banegas's *Content Knowledge in English Language Teacher Education*. Lam argues that this book provides a strong argument for designing and developing English Language Teacher Education (ELTE) by a variety of educators across the globe. Finally, Eric Yeo (who was part of the JALT founding team and who continues to support us in a consultative role) provides a reflective review on a volume edited by Robinson on *Classroom behaviour management in further, adult and vocational education*. Yeo starts the book review with a reflection of his personal teaching experiences as well as peer observations. He reflects on the diversity of teaching methods and effective classroom management techniques. Upon reading Robinson's book, Yeo gained insights of classroom behaviour management across the spectrum of post-secondary education levels. He recommends that all teachers, experienced or not, should consider picking this book up, prioritise the chapters that are most relevant to them, and reflect and apply.

The usual big Thank You must go once again to our fantastic Associate Editors and Editorial Board, our peer reviewers as well as the Management of Kaplan Singapore (especially Associate Professor Rhys Johnson, COO and Provost, and Mike Christie, VP Operations) for their continued support of the JALT project. Also, our esteemed Editorial Board member and Associate Editor Nigel Starck provided critical proofreading of parts of the issue (all remaining errors are solely our fault!). We sincerely welcome all feedback and ideas.

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