



JALT Editorial 5(1): Higher education in an age of war

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Introduction

Amongst the numerous contributions in this issue of JALT, there is an interview with Stephen Brookfield that focuses on power. The interview was conducted in March, when Russia's invasion of Ukraine was only a few weeks old. Although the interviewers (Jürgen Rudolph and Shannon Tan) were tempted to ask Stephen Brookfield about power in the context of autocrats such as Putin, we resisted that temptation as we did not want to stray away too far from our core topic of power in higher education. However, upon further reflection, we have decided that this editorial must to a small extent address Russia's war in Ukraine, as it has quickly become one of the most important events in the 21st century.

The war in Ukraine is controversial. Although it is the most extensively documented conflict ever, it is difficult to discern what is real, fictitious or from a state misinformation campaign. In the battle of spinning media narratives, the truth may easily become a casualty. It has been reported (Rainsford, 2022) that the Russian media and public are not allowed to use the word 'war'. This state propaganda somewhat echoes French postmodernist philosopher Baudrillard's (1995) problematic perspective that there was no Gulf war. The current war is taking an enormous toll on Ukraine, with millions of people internally displaced, millions of especially women and children having fled the country, thousands killed, destroyed infrastructure and levelled cities. It also has other unintended catastrophic consequences: limited Russian and Ukrainian food exports raise a spectre of a global food shortage, mass impoverishment and political unrest.

The war in Ukraine and the battle over the accuracy and legitimacy of history, knowledge and reality remind us of the need to teach critical thinking. Critical thinking helps us see through manipulative and politically distortive usages of language to suit ideological purposes. It keeps us

open to surprises and makes us question our assumptions (Brookfield, 2012). For example, after the fall of the Berlin wall and the end of the Soviet Union more than 30 years ago, it was a common assumption that war in Europe would no longer be possible. This paradigmatic assumption has been proved to be false. In using the war in Ukraine as an opportunity to teach critical thinking, we can follow a generic model of gradual sequencing that prominently features modelling and scaffolding (Brookfield, 2012). In an era of weaponised lies and alternative facts (Levitkin, 2017), it is of paramount importance for us and our students to think critically, question information and seek to think beneath the surface. Critical thinking has a central role in education, from kindergarten to university, with the purpose of education being the creation of an informed citizenry. Although critical thinking – and teaching critical thinking – are challenging, it is when both teachers and students realise their own responsibilities for creating a learning community that learning is at its most useful and critical thinking is at its most empowering.

Scopus indexing and articles in this issue

While the problematic situation of the world that we touched on in the preceding section may leave many readers with emotions of anger and sadness, we are happy to report some exciting news at least in the context of our humble journal. As of last month, we have been informed that JALT is in the process of being indexed in Scopus. Scopus is not only the world's largest article and citation database, but also often regarded as the most prestigious index for education journals like ours. While we expect to receive a multiple of submissions as compared to pre-Scopus-indexing, we still intend to continue with our developmental and friendly approach to authors and their submissions. This milestone for JALT is the result of a team effort. The achievement would not have been possible without our fantastic Editorial Board members, Associate Editors, peer reviewers, authors

and readers. Special mention must also be made to Kaplan Singapore, our publisher, and its enlightened leaders.

The articles in this issue exhibit the usual great diversity of topics, article types, and countries of origin. There are nine research and review articles, two interviews with educational thought leaders, one EdTech review, two opinion pieces, three brief articles and six book reviews. Authors are from a wide variety of countries and all continents.

The first article of our current issue is by Caleb Or and Elaine Chapman on "Development and acceptance of online assessment in higher education: Recommendations for further research". The authors review the development of online assessment, in particular studies on student and teacher perceptions of online assessment published over a 15-year period. With online assessments being commonly used in higher education, it is crucial to assess the perceptions of the stakeholders in using this mode. Or and Chapman found that while students' perceptions are generally positive, academic staff members' perceptions have been more mixed.

The next study by Cherng-Yih Yen and an international team of co-authors examines how online social presence will predict various aspects of students' social interconnectivities in the social network of discussion boards within an online course. The factors studied in Yen et al.'s quantitative research were: in-degree, out-degree, betweenness centrality, closeness centrality, eigenvector centrality, reciprocated vertex pair ratio, and PageRank. The study's results show that only the predictive utility of social presence for all social network interconnectivity was supported. The roles of influencer, liaison, transmitter, social strategist and prestigious figure can be distinguished in a community of learners. The authors' findings support the need for online instructors to facilitate, guide, and support their students to navigate through the convoluted social interconnectivity effectively and continuously.

The third article by Kim Beasy et al. reflects on a unique student support programme within a School of Education in Australia and the perceptions of the academic staff who designed and delivered the programme. A combination of written and spoken critically reflective encounters were used to explore dimensions of student support. It was perceived that this programme has positively influenced some students in developing feelings of connectedness, building self-management skills and understanding commitment, and in establishing a foundation for a student experience that fosters a pathway towards a teaching career. Findings suggest that addressing students' needs necessitates a shared understanding of what constitutes student success and how this is interpreted within a support programme.

In another contribution from Australia, entitled "Re-orientating experiences: Considerations for student development through virtual mobility in STEM", Brittany Hardiman et al. explore how outbound mobility experiences (OMEs) provide a catalyst for learning environments that foster student development in a global context. The recent global pandemic has provided the higher education sector with an opportunity for wider implementation of online

experiential learning environments such as virtual mobility. At present, there is not much exploration of the potential of transforming physical, short-term, face-to-face mobility programmes within an online environment for undergraduate science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) students. Thus, this paper seeks to understand how we can meet the desired programme outcomes of a physical OME to support critical thinking of undergraduate natural science students, when the OME occurs online.

Chen Hungche and Yang Mingnuan investigate how the use of online student response systems (OSRS) in conjunction with an active question-and-answer technique affected student engagement and achievement in face-to-face classes. Results show that question-and-answer activities using OSRS (Socrative and Zuvio) platforms improve student engagement in large classes due to features such as anonymity and personalised feedback. Further studies need to be conducted with longer intervention plans in relation to vocabulary and reading comprehension tests.

Next, Kevin Adkins and co-authors evaluate a unique group of undergraduate researchers in their contribution on "A qualitative single-case study exploring the impact of a mentor and cohort on students' academic and career decisions". The researchers explore the influence of mentors on students' academic and career decisions. Results show that individuals who matriculated themselves as concurrently-enrolled students had fewer barriers than other students, for instance in terms of working with strangers and in labs. These findings present opportunities to fully explore the influence that a strong long-term mentor and extended participation in research have on students' postgraduate decision-making.

In "Determinants of university students' performance: Evidence from undergraduate economics students from a Bangladeshi University", Sayeda Chandra Tabassum et al. explore the factors that impact the performance of Bangladeshi university students. The researchers utilise an econometric model to explain the variation in the academic performance of undergraduate economics students. Several variables such as 'effort and motivation,' daily study time, the number of courses retaken, best friend's past performance and higher household incomes were found to be significant in impacting students' performances. Further research is recommended to compare the country's different economics departments or different universities.

The next two articles are our first contributions from Turkey and Papua New Guinea. In "Teaching nation-building and nationalism: a critical perspective of Turkish academia", Begüm Burak argues that nation-building policies should be seen as an attempt rather than a project that can be necessarily realised successfully. Her study offers a rich literature review that discusses the dynamics, key actors and stages of the nation-building process and nationalism and critically analyses how Turkish academia has dealt with nationalism education. Burak sheds light on how a revision in the dominant ideological framework of the state has led to changes in the content of history textbooks and curricula.

Motivation is crucial for students' mathematics learning at school. Jerome Oko's research focuses on the validity and reliability of a motivation scale questionnaire using the Rasch model (Partial Credit Model) in Papua New Guinea. The findings of his study reveal that researchers can produce different results from the construct validation depending on the selection of the methods of analysis employed. Oko's study contributes to the vast literature on how to improve student motivation.

In this issue, we have two interviews with outstanding educational thought leaders: Professors Antonia Darder and Stephen D. Brookfield. We are very grateful to Antonia Darder for giving us an unexpectedly extensive interview, despite her mourning the recent deaths of family members and friends. She is an internationally recognized scholar, artist, poet, activist, and public intellectual. This interview offers Darder's highly inspirational narration of how a colonized, impoverished minority woman became, against all odds, a highly regarded professor and activist-scholar. She takes us on a ride with her experiences in life (childhood, youth, encounters with racism and sexism) and her being strongly influenced by Brazilian critical pedagogue Paulo Freire. Through the interview, a holistic image of Antonia Darder emerges in which her work is a vocation and her life, research, teaching, activism and art are all intrinsically entwined.

The second interview follows up on a previous one with Stephen Brookfield in our journal (Brookfield et al., 2019). It was conducted as part of an ongoing book project with the working title *Teaching well* that Jürgen Rudolph and Shannon Tan are involved in. This interview may be seen as a teaser for the book that is planned to be published next year. It constitutes an extended version of one out of 13 planned chapters and focuses on how power shows up in higher education classrooms. In this interview, various influences on Brookfield's conceptual understanding of power, especially Michel Foucault's concepts of sovereign, disciplinary and bio-power and their applicability to education are discussed. In this context, we explore similarities between prisons and schools, the metaphor of the panopticon and the continued relevance of bio-power during the COVID-19 pandemic. The democratic practice of discussion groups is questioned (despite Brookfield's personal preference of that modality) and the lecture is reinstated as one of several useful options. We then arrive at Brookfield's concept of powerful teaching & learning and how teachers can exercise their power in ethical, productive and responsible ways.

This issue's EdTech review is authored by Alfred Yong and Jürgen Rudolph. They review Quizizz, a gamified student response system, and highlight its main features. Quizizz is an online tool for formative assessment and can be utilised both online and offline as well as synchronously and asynchronously. In the authors' view, Quizizz compares favourably with Kahoot. In any event, it is yet another useful tool that helps engage students.

JALT's current issue also contains two opinion pieces. The first is by Sam Choon-Yin that is entitled "Post-COVID-19 and higher education". The COVID-19 pandemic has compelled higher education institutions (HEIs) to review their standard

operating procedures and purpose of existence. Sam's paper examines two thoughts as HEIs transition to a 'new normal' – the first relates to the future of online education in higher education and the second pertains to the relevance of degrees. It argues that stepping up the effort to ensure that university degrees remain relevant will be one of the most significant challenges HEIs have to work on.

The second opinion piece is by Jürgen Rudolph and Shannon Tan, entitled "The war in Ukraine as an opportunity to teach critical thinking". They explore the war in the context of various historical key events, reject a possible application of Baudrillard's perspective that 'there was no Gulf war' to the current conflict and compare Russian media fabrications with the Nazis' big lie technique. Rudolph and Tan argue that the war in Ukraine provides a reminder of the importance of critical thinking, discuss this complex concept and provide some advice how to teach critical thinking.

The next section contains three brief articles. In her entertaining article, Kayla Waters reviews the relevance of having meetings. With higher logistic and interpersonal demands of applied teaching, educators often have less time for meetings. While meetings are important, they are also frequently inefficient, ineffective, and demoralising. Hence, Waters reviews relevant studies on effective meeting redesign and recommends specific strategies for academics.

A second brief article sees Monideepa Becerra and Salome Mshigeni evaluate the role of a flipped class in an undergraduate epidemiology course. A quasi-experiment is utilised in evaluating students' attitudes, perceptions and self-efficacy of their epidemiology studies. Results reveal that these things changed significantly after the end of the course, reinforcing the benefits of integrating active learning with a more traditional lecture style.

The third brief article is entitled "Introducing the discovery case study: Brompton folding bikes". In it, Justin O'Brien and William Lanham-New seek to offer a learning design solution to the problem of student disengagement with case studies, and in particular, address the reluctance observed in some student groups to prepare for performative social learning encounters. A range of potential viable solutions are discussed before proposing the idea of a discovery case study (using the fascinating example of the Brompton folding bikes). The case study is further supported with reflective teaching notes on how to optimally use this innovative and immediately-plausible approach.

Finally, this issue contains six book reviews. Omona Kizito reviews *Understanding the higher education market in Africa* that was edited by E. Mogaji and coeditors. Africa is a huge and diverse continent, but the reviewed book goes some way in adding to our understanding of higher education there, discussing the history of colonisation in Africa, how formal education came about and the marketisation of higher education.

A second book review is contributed by Begüm Burak. She reviews Sam Choon-Yin's *Teaching higher education to lead: Strategies for the digital age*. The book is addressed to everybody with an interest in higher education and it

links technological development to demand for education, credentials of higher education and jobs while touching on issues of strategies and higher education policies for the digital age. Burak recommends Sam's book for a unique strategic perspective on our lifelong educational journey. Sam's aforementioned opinion piece in this issue builds on this book.

The third book review is authored by Nelson Ang who contributes a thoughtful piece on a graphic novel that is based on the great George Orwell's posthumously-published autobiographical piece: "Such, such were the joys". Whilst Orwell is world-famous for his political fable *Animal Farm* and his dystopian novel *Nineteen eighty-four*, he wrote many other awe-inspiring works in his relatively short life. Ang compares the text of this publication with Orwell's original and raves about its highly successful transformation into a graphic novel.

A fourth review is provided by Mohamed Fadhil. It is about M. R. Fernando and J. M. Francisco's edited volume: *University and school collaborations during a pandemic. Sustaining educational opportunity and reinventing education*. It is laudable that the book is available as a free e-copy (whilst one can also purchase a hard copy). Mohamed Fadhil argues that the book's significance lies in its discussion as to how universities from around the world are organic and flexible in their approaches and responses to mitigate and manage the impact of the pandemic.

The issue is concluded by two book reviews by Jürgen Rudolph. The first one is about Arthur Shelley's latest book: *Becoming adaptable. Creative facilitation to develop yourself and transform cultures*. Shelley answers how we can remain adaptable over time, both in our professional and personal lives in expanding our comfort zone, building resilience, accelerating our performance and reducing our anxiety.

Rudolph's second book review is about Stephen Brookfield's and Mary Hess's *Becoming a white antiracist*. The authors posit that race, especially anti-Blackness is the biggest unaddressed problem in the U.S. and this is very much a problem of white people. Brookfield and Hess argue against the myth of the 'good white people' and reconstruct how white supremacy benefits Whites and has inserted itself into their consciousness. Whilst strong on theory, the book aims to primarily serve as a practical guide for educators, leaders and activists. The authors have succeeded in this endeavor and the book comes highly recommended.

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