Editorial *Open Praxis* Volume 13 Issue 2

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ABSTRACT

This second Open Praxis issue in 2021 includes seven research papers.

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We present this second *Open Praxis* issue in 2021 apologizing for the publication delay and thanking our readers and, specially, our authors, for their patience.

Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic has implied difficult times all over the world, and with regards to the editorial processes involved in the publication of an international journal such as *Open Praxis*, it has led to delays in all of them. Paradoxically, we have received more submissions than usual but, at the same time, it has been more difficult than ever to complete the peer-review processes within the deadlines we were used to. We hope, with your collaboration, we will adjust our timing and recover the rhythm soon.

Also, during the past months we have been working on the renewal of the *Open Praxis* website and internal management system, which was launched in mid September 2021. As ICDE highlighted in its newsletter (*https://www.icde.org/icde-news/open-praxis-re-launched*), ICDE has released its open access scholarly journal *Open Praxis* with a new graphic design and on a new platform. The journal is now hosted by Ubiquity Press, an open access publisher of peer-reviewed academic journals, books, and institutional repositories. The ICDE Secretary General, Torunn Gjelsvik, explains that "As Ubiquity Press is 100 % open access, and states that: … *the aim of academic publishing should be the widest possible dissemination of research*, we found that their values and goals were a good fit with ICDE's mission and ambitions for our own open scholarly journal". The open access model of *Open Praxis* is named "the platinum route", which is the most supportive of open access: it does not limit readers' access to publications, nor does it limit authors who cannot afford publishing charges. All the financial effort is made by the publisher and supporting organisations, and by volunteer work of peer-reviewers. With the new site and technical support from Ubiquity Press, we hope to reach out to new readers and sustain the management of the journal while continuing to provide an open access publishing service to the ICDE and *Open Praxis* community. One important aspect is that all users of the old *Open Praxis* website need to register again in *https://openpraxis.org* as a reader, author and/or reviewer.

Finally, before introducing the papers included in this issue, we welcome the new members of the Editorial Board, appointed by the ICDE Board for the period 2021-2023 and listed below:

- Tian Belawati, *Universitas Terbuka (UT)*, Indonesia

- Brenda Padilla Rodriguez, *Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo Leon (UANL)*, Mexico

- Cindy Ives, *Athabasca University (AU)*, Canada

- Paul Prinsloo, *University of South Africa (UNISA)*, South Africa

- Marta Mena, *National Technological University*, Argentina

- Ebba Ossiannilsson, *Swedish Association Distance Education (SADE)*, Sweden

- Mark Nichols, *Open Polytechnic of New Zealand*, New Zealand

And we thank the past members of the Editorial Board, who have contributed to the development of the journal in the past years.

- Beatriz Malik, *Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED)*, Spain

- Hemlata Chari, *University of Mumbai*, India

- Gangappa Kuruba, *University of Botswana*, Botswana

- Thomas P. Mackey, *SUNY Empire State College*, New York, United States

- Alan Tait, *The Open University*, United Kingdom

- Belinda Tynan, *RMIT University*, Melbourne, Australia

- Joel Warrican, *University of the West Indies*, Barbados

- Yang Zhijian, *Open University of China (OUC)*, China

After these updates about the journal, we introduce the seven research papers included in this issue.

The first four papers focus on learners' experiences in online settings, from different perspectives.

In the first article (*Making Barriers to Learning in MOOCs visible. A Factor Analytical Approach*), Maartje Henderikx, Karel Kreijns, Kate M. Xu and Marco Kalz, based in the Open University of

the Netherlands, deepen in previous research from the group and present a study derived from the doctoral dissertation of the first author. They categorize six factors that can be barriers to learning in MOOC: social interactions, academic skills, content-related issues, technical skills and problems, situational issues, and individual motivation. The identification of these factors, some of them MOOC-related and others not MOOC-related, can help to increase awareness about learners' performance and to support online course design and development.

In the next paper (*Using Grounded Theory Approach for Examining the Problems Faced by Teachers Enrolled in a Distance Education Programme*), Sutapa Bose, from the Indira Gandhi National Open University in India, analyses the experience of teachers as learners in a distance teacher education programme. She identifies a set of barriers for learning, none of them academic-related, and focuses on the role of counsellors as non-academic support providers. The findings have led to improving the preparation of counsellors so as to better support learners and improve completion of the teacher education programme.

In the third paper (*On Becoming an Online University in an Emergency Period: Voices from the Students at a State University*), Volkan Kukul, from Turkey, explores learners' perspectives in the transition to online learning experienced during the pandemic. The study, using the Transactional Distance Theory as a framework, collects students' opinion about the overall online experience, the course content, the interaction with instructors and the teachers' competencies. The findings can inform future decisions about the planning and implementation of distance education beyond the pandemic.

The last paper about students' experiences focuses on learning design, as well. Kate Lister and Ruth McFarlane, from the UK (*Designing for wellbeing: An inclusive learning design approach with student mental health vignettes*), show their work about students' mental health as a barrier for learning, and propose vignette design as a means to represent students' journeys and support wellbeing. The qualitative study includes the identification of barriers and enablers to education, the design of vignettes, and their use and evaluation.

The next research paper relates to the role of teachers in online environments. Irfan Simsek, Sevda Kucuk, Sezer Köse Biber and Tuncer Can (*Development of an Online Teaching Competency Scale for University Instructors*), based in Turkey, present the validation process of a 15-items instrument structured in fours factors in relation to online teaching competency: Pedagogy, Facilitation, Technology and Course Administration. The scale can be useful for online education providers.

The final two research paper cover geographically wider experiences, one in relation to OER and the other one in relation to micro-credentials.

Frank J. Müller, from Germany (*Say no to reinventing the wheel: how other countries can build on the Norwegian model of state-financed OER to create more inclusive upper secondary schools*), introduces the NDLA as a state-financed OER platform and presents an interview-based study that highlights different aspects in relation to this Norwegian initiative, such as legal or technical aspects, sustainability, or peer-production by teachers. The paper aims to serve as an insight for other countries willing to set up an OER large-scale platform.

The last research paper (*The state of micro-credentials implementation and practice in Australasian higher education*), by Ratna Selvaratnam and Michael Sankey, from Australia, explores a fast developing field through a survey-based study that collects information about micro-credentials from 37 institutions in Australasia. The authors provide an overview of the situation in the region, where the presence of micro-credentials has increased.

We hope this variety of research articles will be of interest and will facilitate reflection and good practice in the field of open and distance education.

Special thanks from *Open Praxis* to the authors and reviewers who have contributed to this issue.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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