



Introduction to the third issue of JALT

Jürgen Rudolph^A

A Head of Research, Senior Lecturer and Academic Partner Liaison, Kaplan Higher Education Singapore

Christopher W. Harris^B

B Executive Dean, Academic & Industry Engagement, Kaplan Higher Education Singapore

Yeo Zhiwei (Eric)^C

C Lecturer and Academic Partner Liaison, Kaplan Higher Education Singapore

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37074/jalt.2019.2.1.1>

The first half of 2019 was exciting for all involved with JALT. An international conference, EDU2019, took place in support of JALT (amongst other journals) in Athens, Greece, in May, 2019. EDU2019 was capably and charmingly organised by JALT Editorial Board Members Drs Margarita Kefalaki and Fotini Diamantidaki, and the action-packed conference was attended by some 100 participants from 21 countries. And then there were three exciting symposia at Kaplan Singapore, again with the offer to publish contributions in JALT: a University of Essex-Kaplan Symposium on Pedagogy and Play in Teaching Today led by JALT Editorial Board Member Dr Stephen Shukaitis (in April, 2019); a University College Dublin-Kaplan Symposium on Applied Learning & Teaching (in May, 2019) made possible by JALT Editorial Board Members Drs Orna O'Brien and Matt Glowatz; and a Griffith-Kaplan Symposium on the Scholarship of Effective Learning and Teaching in Nursing and Clinical Education, conceptualised and executed by Associate Professor Rob Burton (yet another JALT Editorial Board Member). Becky Shelley and co-authors' and Nilanjana Saxena's contributions in this issue were presented at the University of Essex-Kaplan symposium, and we look forward to publish other contributions either in the regular, semi-annual issues or in the occasional guest-edited special issue of JALT.

We are also excited about the global character of the four peer-reviewed articles in this issue, with contributions from four continents (the U.S., Australia, Europe (the UK) and Asia (Singapore)). The international diversity of JALT is further highlighted with 'informed journalistic' contributions by Ukrainians and a Brazilian, and a book review from Lebanon.

While the editorial team of JALT certainly believes in continual improvement, we would like to take this opportunity to clarify our position when it comes to certain publication practices that we view as less-than-healthy. First the good news – also for contributors to JALT: "It is widely accepted that having an article published as open access increases citations" (Lockley, 2018, p. 150). But there is much bad

news, too, even about open-access journals. Out of more than 10,000 open-access journals, 30% charge a processing fee, and perhaps shockingly, "in the UK, 81 percent" of such journals charge such a fee (Lockley, 2018, p. 150). We are less than impressed with such practices, some of which may well be considered predatory.

Discussing possible contributions to JALT with potential authors has elicited a variety of reactions over the past 18 months, from enthusiasm all the way to subtle rejection. It is in this context that the strange seductiveness of rankings and other forms of performance measurement deserve a brief discussion. In the wonderfully-titled *Learn how to write badly: How to succeed in the Social Sciences*, social psychologist Michael Billig reflects on his own vanity and insecurity with regard to the citation count:

"It doesn't seem to matter how others are mentioning me, whether they do so in passing or at length, whether in complimentary or critical tones. All that matters is that I am mentioned, again and again. It gets worse. Sometimes, I have compared my scores with those of others. I am pleased if I am mentioned in more articles than they are, and my mood will be spoiled if their numbers surpass mine... Do I really think like this? Do I really care about the numbers? I must do. What a knob head" (Billig, 2013, p. 155).

The obsession with peer-reviewed journals and their rankings has led to "at least 22 widely available journal ranking systems" – it has been polemically asked whether we will soon witness a 'ranking of journal ranking lists' and then a 'ranking of ranking of journal ranking lists' (Tourish, Craig & Amernic, 2017, pp. 50-51). Top-tier journals have astronomically-high rates of rejection, leading to a tongue-in-cheek, spoof response in the form of a Journal of Universal Rejection (www.universalrejection.org) that devastatingly states that "all submissions, regardless of quality, will be rejected".

In 2005, physicist Jorge Hirsch came up with the Hirsch index (now popularly known as H-index), initially meant to measure the relative quality of theoretical physicists' research output and impact. Ironically, while Hirsch cautioned that the h-score "should only be used as one measure, not as the primary basis for evaluating people for awards or promotion" (cited in McDonald, 2005), this appears to be exactly what has happened in some institutions.

With Google Scholar H-scores being highly transparent and on public display, they can be (mis-)construed as the reflections of "personal qualities such as intelligence, creativity, scholarship, efficiency and commitment" (Alvesson & Spicer, 2017, p. 103). Publications become part of a positive self-image. Half-jokingly, Alvesson and Spicer (2017, p. 104) write: "Maybe the next step will be just to write your H-score on the badge each academic wears at conferences. In this way, everyone will instantly know whether you are worth talking with or not".

In such a pursuit of 'research excellence', teaching may become something to be avoided if possible (not to mention administration). The myopic focus on 'research' leads to long academic working days. Alvesson and Spicer (2017, p. 105) ask rhetorically: "And what is the result of this great labour?" – before they answer:

"A constant flow of articles, which are judged by an increasing number of academics to be pointless technical exercises which are uninteresting, make little in the way of real contribution and have no impact beyond a marginal amount on a small group of specialists" (Alvesson & Spicer, 2017, p. 105).

It is certainly useful to be aware, and wary, of 'journal list fetishism' and the 4x4 (four articles in four-star journals) academic who, within academic managerialism, can be expressed as a number between 0 and 16 (Parker, 2017). We see JALT also as an opportunity for reflection as to what is valued by whom and why, and what is my research about and why does it matter? A famous quote by Albert Einstein comes to mind: "Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted."

Our third issue's peer-reviewed article section kicks off with an impressive contribution by Qadir Hicks, Brittany Hammond, Runa Winters and Jess Boersma on how educators in the U.S. and elsewhere can influence their students' quality of critical reflection. The second article by Becky Shelley, Can-Seng Ooi and Natalie Moore provides a methodologically-innovative 'extreme comparison' of the Children's University in Malaysia and in Australia. This is followed by James Kwan's meticulous mixed-methods research on postgraduate business students' educational goals, assessment preferences and approaches to learning in Singapore. The section is completed with Justin O'Brien's highly readable, instructional piece that bravely discusses failures of the flipped classroom approach. He counters these with highly innovative and exciting 'extraordinary seminars' that use 'discovery learning'.

As editors of this issue, we must not be blamed to be excited about every single contribution in it. John Biggs is one of our heroes, and world-famous for his SOLO taxonomy, constructively-aligned Outcome-based Teaching & Learning (OBTL), criterion-referenced assessment and students' surface and deep approaches to learning. He made us extremely happy by first agreeing to an interview via email, and then sending us a 7,000-word document in response to our questions. It gives us a sense of achievement and also hope that John Biggs, a great supporter of open-access journals, selflessly and without hesitation made this unique contribution to JALT. Nigel Starck (one of our most prolific contributors and a JALT Editorial Board Member) responded to our interview with John Biggs with an opinion piece that also reflects on his varied experience with journalism training at the university and beyond.

This issue has two ed-tech reviews, one by Nilanjana Saxena on Pallas Advanced Learning Systems' research-informed Virtual Learning Kit, and another one by Yeo Zhiwei (Eric) on Kahoot!, a gamified student-response system that uses a Freemium concept.

The 'informed journalistic' section begins with a contribution from Ukraine – a country that has been much in the global news. We are grateful to four distinguished Ukrainian authors – Alevtina Sedochenko, Eduard Rubin, Ivan Prymachenko, and Serhiy Babak – to have taken some time off their busy schedules, to give us a Ukrainian perspective on adult education, and how challenges can be transformed into opportunities. Ailson De Moraes (our JALT Editorial Board Member) then gives his perspective on what it takes to be an effective and successful educator in this time and age. This section is further enriched with another contribution by Justin O'Brien on using Lego as a reflective fail-fast group challenge in higher education.

The issue would not be complete without five reviews of carefully-selected books. Pamela Moore contributes a review of Badger's Bloomsbury publication on *Teaching and Learning the English language*. This issue's second book review, by Sandra Georges El Hadi, lets us travel from language-teaching to that of literature, and is on Diamantidaki's *Teaching Literature in Modern Foreign Languages*. This is followed by Michael D. Evans's (who is the Chairman of our Editorial Board) review of yet another Bloomsbury publication on *Leadership for Sustainability in Higher Education*. Peter Waring (our Editorial Board Member) thankfully reviewed an edited volume on *Learning Analytics in Education*. Finally, Jürgen Rudolph reviews an important edited volume on *The Corporatization of the Business School* that is also cited in this editorial.

Once again, we would like to thank our wonderfully-supportive Editorial Board that has been further strengthened in 2019; Associate Prof. Rhys Johnson, COO and Provost for Kaplan Singapore, for his continued faith in us; once again, Dr Nigel Starck for his proofreading of parts of the issue (all remaining errors are solely our fault!); and our academic colleagues near and far for continuing to trust us to share the JALT initiative with your networks. Finally and importantly, we welcome all feedback and ideas for JALT.

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