

Introduction to Open Praxis volume 9 issue 4

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Open Praxis is a peer-reviewed open access scholarly journal focusing on research and innovation in open, distance and flexible education. It publishes contributions which demonstrate creative and innovative research, and which highlight challenges, lessons and achievements in the practice of distance and e-learning from all over the world. This last *Open Praxis* issue in 2017 is an open issue that includes eight research papers and one book review. 14 authors from Australia, México, South Africa, New Zealand, Spain, the United States of America, Thailand and the Republic of Korea have contributed to the different sections.

The first two papers deal with conceptual frameworks and models that can help to understand and improve educational practices.

In the first paper (*The ecology of the open practitioner: a conceptual framework for open research*), Adrian Stagg from the University of Southern Queensland (Australia), after explaining the relevance of local context to interpret open educational practices and introducing Bronfenbrenner's approach, uses his ecology of development levels to show how it can be used as a framework to undertake research to deeply understand OEP. In the first stages of an ongoing study, the author has applied the framework in four Australian universities.

In the second conceptual paper (*Fractal: an educational model for the convergence of formal and non-formal education*), Larisa Enríquez from Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, considering the challenges that universities currently face, presents a model for flexible education that deals with four dimensions: student-centered teaching, concept-based curriculum design, heutagogy and openness. In an iteration mechanism, this leads to a fractal model. The author provides two examples of application of this model and defends its usefulness to improve education.

The next two papers relate to educational resources, one focused on OER and the other in traditional textbooks.

In the first one (*Mainstreaming use of Open Educational Resources (OER) in an African context*), Tony John Mays from University of Pretoria (South Africa), presents a case study in a Kenyan university, framed in a wider research that included other African countries and institutions in the exploration of the transformative potential of OER. Using an interpretive and participatory methodological approach, the author explains the research process and findings in detail, and highlights the importance of aligning the introduction of OER with the overall institutional vision and mission, if willing to become mainstream.

In the second one, Sarah Stein, Simon Hart, Philippa Keaney and Richard White [*Student Views on the Cost of and Access to Textbooks: An Investigation at University of Otago (New Zealand)*] present a survey-based study focused on affordability and accessibility behaviours related to textbooks, undertaken in a face-to-face university where traditional (hard copy purchased) textbooks are the main resources used in the courses. Their findings challenge other studies' results, and the authors express the need to listen to students' voices and reflect about the changing nature of information provision.

The next three papers address the study of three online educational practices and explore their effects on students' learning.

In the first case (*Learning the psychology of the tip-of-the-tongue phenomenon through on-line practice*), Marcos Ruiz and María José Contreras from Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia - UNED (Spain) report about an experimental study in a distance course, where students' performance in the final exam was compared considering their previous participation in an online practical lab focused on a specific content included in the "basic psychology" course study program. The positive results encourage integrating more online apps and practice in the courses.

The second case (*The effects of participants' engagement with videos and forums in a MOOC for teachers' professional development*), by Fernanda Cesar Bonafini from The Pennsylvania State University (United States), focuses on MOOC-Ed, presenting a statistical study about the learners' profile and factors that predict completion. In this particular MOOC, the number of videos watched was not significant to predict completion; and engagement in discussion forums was. The author highlights the implications of these results.

The third case (*Effect of Tell Me More on EFL undergraduate students' English Language achievement*), by George Gyamfi and Panida Sukseemuang from Prince of Songkla University (Thailand), describes the use of an asynchronous online learning system (TMM) and its effect in the students' proficiency in English. Initial placement in any of the four levels, progress and final achievement were measured through online tests, and the study shows the improvement considering the different levels, as well as the role of the time devoted to the program.

Closing the research papers section, William H. Stewart from Gangnam-University of California Riverside (Republic of Korea), in his paper *Recognizing the expatriate and transnational distance student: A preliminary demographic exploration in the Republic of Korea*, attempts to recognize a specific type of students in the distance mode, different to the international student, and focuses in the case of South Korea to describe their profile. He also highlights difficulties encountered when undertaking this research about a yet quite unknown population.

Finally, the issue includes a review, by Daniel Domínguez, of the book *MOOCs and Their Afterlives: Experiments in Scale and Access in Higher Education*, edited by Elizabeth Losh and published by the University of Chicago Press in 2017.

In this issue 4th issue in 2017, we specially thank all the reviewers who have collaborated in the four issues in volume 9. Their names and affiliations are listed in the full issue and in the journal website (<http://openpraxis.org/index.php/OpenPraxis/pages/view/reviewer>).