

The Pandemic and Higher Education

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None of the papers presented here reflects on the Pandemic situation. In due time, journals will be filled with research papers on the effects and workings of the Pandemic for academics, students and organizations in higher education. One general theme will be if the changed contexts for teaching and learning we have seen in the time span from February/March 2020 until the present situation will throw significant light into how the future will be. In a report presented by the US organization EDUCAUSE, well before the pandemic, the following trends were foreshadowed:

In the social domain, wellbeing and mental health, demographic changes and equity and fairness will be high on the agenda. In the technological domain, AI, new digital learning environment, and leaning analytics and privacy questions will cause concern. In the economic domain, cost, adjustment to the labour market and climate change will take foreground. In the political domain, decreasing funding, estimation of value of higher education and political polarization will need attention. Finally, the dynamics of higher education itself will influence our path to the future: changes in student population, alternative pathways to education and online education.

None of these forecasts anticipated the demands of a rapidly evolving pandemic globally. The latter points of the list provided by EDUCAUSE have been the focus of this journal over the last 17 years. We have seen trends come and pass, and watched trends oscillate with the shifts of fashion. In our experience we see that global actors take over the market: Blackboard, Moodle and Canvas. ZOOM and Webex are winning similar positions and a host of add-ons and potentially brilliant contenders try to gain the same advantages. One example comes to mind: one software – no name mentioned – cost a Norwegian institution nkr 30 000 for a license for a studentbody of 40 000 – before the pandemic. After the pandemic, the price for a smaller institution with a studentbody of 15 000, has risen to nkr. 350 000. Another example: the realization of strict GDPR regulations in

Europe hampers the use of software in significant ways. The main VLE/LMS-configurations are affected by the different GDPR-arrangements in US vs. other continent and states. The global market for educational software are seriously affected by the globalization and the escalating disharmonies in international collaboration. It does not help that some providers act like profiteers at this time and age.

In this edition of our seventeenth volume we offer five articles. In the first, Marcia Håkansson Lindqvist of Mid Sweden University, contributes with an analysis of one Swedish one-to-one laptop initiative. Her take is on how parents conceive of this phenomenon. She describes how the initiative was a mixed blessing, and one sees easily its applicability to the present condition for most student. In the second paper, Rob Miles, of the United Arab Emirates University, has written the paper: “Identifying the contradictions in the technology enhanced language classroom”. It contains an account of a theoretically sophisticated – and highly critical research project in a region not often reported from in Northern academic journals. The paper questions the positive impact of a 1:1 laptop initiative in a context quite different from the Swedish example. Tor Jørgen Schjelde and Ingrid Nilsen Lie of Tromsø University, the Arctic University, present the third paper: “The impact of emotions on learning and motivation in producing and presenting digital stories.” Digital stories have been a strong interest for this journal over the years, and their paper opens new avenues of research into the role of emotional engagement in the production – and reception of digital stories. Three authors, Reidun Lied, Hanne Maria Bingen of VID specialized University and Simen A. Steindal of Lovisenberg Diaconal University College present the paper: “Collaborative Online Learning Using a Blended Learning Design for a Physiology Course in Nursing Education”. It describes an implementation of Salmon’s model for online collaborative learning in a blended learning context for part-time nursing students. Salmon’s model is widely used and is here contesting its applicability for this group of students. Last, Brita Bjørkelo of Norwegian Police University College/University of Bergen, Aslaug Grov Almås of Western Norway University of Applied Sciences and Ingrid Helleve of the University of Bergen present their joint paper: “Perceived adequate education in ethics: A way to tap into ethical Social Networking Sites awareness?”. It provides a very good argument for applied training in ethical issues in teacher training also will prepare them for counteracting illegitimate student use of Social Network Sites.