

Living and Learning Through a Pandemic: Supporting and Cultivating our K-12 Online Research Community

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On the heels of another online SITE conference (March 29-April 2, 2021), we stop to reflect on how much we have all learned as a result of living through a global pandemic. The need for teachers to be equipped with the necessary skills to teach at a distance is no longer a doubted claim. Critical are considerations of how we move forward, considering issues not only of teaching in a remote setting, but the role of a teacher, how it is transformed by the use of technology, and the importance of cultivating community – even when physically separated. Keeping the flexibility afforded to students, the focus on issues of equity and access, and the need for understanding, compassion, and self-care for both teachers and students are aspects we hope continue. A helpful resource related to our journal's central aim is the recent open-access volume published by AACE, and edited by Richard Ferdig and Kristine Pytash, titled, [*What Teacher Educators Should Have Learned from 2020*](#). We encourage our readers to check it out along with our newest issue.

To begin, we want to extend a warm welcome to Dr. Mary Rice who is joining our editorial team for the journal. Dr. Rice is an Assistant Professor of Literacy at the University of New Mexico. Her research focuses on inclusion in online learning, mainly for students who qualify for special education services. Dr. Rice brings a wealth of experience, having conducted research on online learning in 30 US states and having worked with scholars, teachers, and students in many countries, including Canada, China, Germany, India, and Sweden. In 2017, she was named an Emerging Scholar by the Online Learning Consortium and served as an assistant editor for the *Online Learning* journal. In addition, she is the current program chair for the Online Teaching and Learning special interest group of the American Educational Research Association. Dr. Rice has a strong record of publication and editorial service, with nearly 50 articles and book chapters, two edited special issues, and three books about inclusive online teaching and learning. We are fortunate indeed to have her joining JOLR.

We also wish to recognize and congratulate Cecil Short, who won the 2021 SITE K-12 Online and Blended Learning SIG Promising Scholar Award for his article, “K-12 Blended Teaching Skills and Abilities: An Analysis of Blended Teaching Artifacts.” Co-authored with Charles Graham and Emily Sabey, this article appears in the current issue and features an analysis of 959 artifacts focused on blended teaching to inform the competencies and dispositions central to K-12 blended teaching. As researchers continue to define the necessary skills needed for effective online and blended teaching at the elementary and secondary levels, findings from Short et al. provide a foundation for future research seeking to understand the competencies and practices that are significant to the practice.

In the second article “Assessing K-12 Online Teachers Knowledge of Online Student Identities,” Brianne Jackson, Monty Jones, Michael Schad, and Deverick Strand explore how K-12 online teachers are aware of student identity in their classrooms as well as their perceived skills in addressing the needs of an increasing diverse student population using the Multicultural Awareness Knowledge and Skills Survey Teacher Form (MAKSS-T; D’Andrea et al., 2003). While teachers felt they had a “good” grasp of potential student identifies, they did not feel confident when it came to understanding gender and affectional orientation. The authors highlight the need to prepared teachers to meet the needs of diverse online students. Given the growing diversity among students engaging in online learning, the need to prepare teachers when it comes to student identity is extremely important.

Looking at how high school teachers experienced blended teaching and learning, Diane Cunningham contributes a case study of four teachers by examining their beliefs and practices through interview and observational data

as well as artifact analysis. She shares her findings that authentic learning for students is at the heart of teachers' views when it comes to adopting a blended approach. Also central was a focus on formative assessment and feedback. As a potential result of professional development targeted on curriculum design and the use of instructional technology, issues surrounding technology did not present a challenge with implementation.

Finally, in their article, "A Peer Support Community on Social Media: A Counter Narrative to Cyberbullying," Heidi Stevenson and Carrie Davenport-Kellog provide an intriguing look at a case study focused on an anonymous voluntary peer support system created and facilitated by a high school student using Facebook. The goal of the system was to provide support against cyberbullying. Through an analysis of interview data, Facebook posts, and paper notes, the authors found that the group played a role in providing peer support and helping those who engaged with it to transcend social cliques. There were also implications when it came to hyperpersonal communication and the role that creator/facilitator played in the group. The peer-developed, organically-grown support system supported inclusivity and provided much-needed support against cyberbullying.

A common theme across the articles is how we, as a community of educators, can come together to support one another as teachers, learners, and most importantly, humans. The articles in this issue highlight the skills we need to facilitate online and blended learning and how we can help one another in developing these abilities. We also need to pay particular attention to valuing one another's identities and using spaces, both online and in-person, to provide support and assistance in affirming who we are. As this begins to close another academic year, one that has been challenging in so many ways, we hope that you find our community a source of help, guidance, and reassurance. As always, please consider submitting your manuscripts to JOLR to contribute to our growing body of knowledge and learning.

References

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