

The Editorial by Johanna Mellén¹ and Petra Angervall

From inside and out: reviewing journal work

Since *Journal of Praxis in Higher Education*'s first issue in 2019, our journal team has worked hard to share, discuss, and spread our agenda. In doing so, we have tried to expand our interests, but also work on our internal journal identity. When asked about our scope and aim, we usually say that we want to create and maintain a journal that is independent, alternative, fresh, and highly relevant. We argue that we want a journal that is less ranking-obedient, but certainly critical and creative with high quality publications. Indeed, we even convey our preference for a slower pace over the potential constraints of being embedded in large publishing houses and external funding. In short, we say that our journal strives to be different in terms of what we see and understand as common praxis.

Recently, however, we have found ourselves facing some of the less encouraging consequences of these strivings: *Different* can be costly and stressful. We have encountered tensions between low efficiency in terms of number of published papers per year and attracting new authors (and submissions). We have also learnt that monetary means can become important when the inflow of manuscripts increases, to engage more editors and copy editors. It has also become clear that opportunities tend to be attached to keywords like *expansion* or *numbers*. In a recent national call for journal funding, of which we applied, the eligible funds were conditioned on basis of the numbers of published peer-reviewed articles per year. If we produce five more published articles per year than we do now, that will increase the applicable funds to us by a third.

Consequently, we have seen how the space for being critical, independent, and creative always is at risk of being circumscribed by the gritty work that must be done to run a journal. Today, we lack means to support the administration of JPHE, funding for copyediting, and time for editing. We have very little funding, and we do JPHE work during a time that is intended for other tasks (research publications, project applications, research seminars, conferences, collaborations, guest visits, mentoring doctoral researchers, etc.) or on time outside work. This means that our independence is not only for us to decide.

Consequently, in this editorial we want to explore the outside and inside of journal work and dig into questions that not only describe ordinary journal work

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from the inside or a couple of outside tensions, but also open up a debate about the contemporary conditions of scientific journal work. We think this kind of discussion would help us and others understand that these struggles we describe might be common for most small and independent journal teams today. Moreover, it helps us to understand how we could overcome these struggles. For example, if JPHE strives to be *different*, what is possible to offer as different? And, is this striving worth it, and, if so, for whom? We think that these questions can only be addressed if we revisit our claims of freshness, independency, and alternativeness. What is it that we (hope to) leave behind?

What we strive to leave behind is best illustrated by the actions we have taken so far as a journal team: We have worked hard to form what we think is a working structure that makes a difference by including voices from as many different contexts and perspectives as possible. This has resulted in a variety of team members from different countries, areas of expertise, experiences, and career positions. We have also tried to form a team where anyone can take the lead in developing new ideas and motivating change: a flat structure where decisions are made jointly. The team has also worked hard to invite Editorial Board members from a variety of nations, cultures, research interests, and knowledge areas.

JPHE also calls for a broad variety of papers, not only peer-reviewed articles but also alternative examples of research, forms of submissions, and intellectual challenges. We try to engage in different settings of dialogue in symposia, conferences, workshops, and research seminars. We engage in social media and on social platforms, in networks, and through several guest editors. We also constantly look for new reviewers, team members, and Editorial Board members. Thus, our reach is constantly under development and scrutiny. Yet, the potential of *difference* seems to remain constrained.

In an ongoing discussion on ResearchGate (Autumn 2022) researchers are debating some of the drawbacks of contemporary journal work. Under the topic of “Getting paid for publishing without paying reviewers” several researchers discuss the difficulties of finding reviewers and getting reviewers to engage in journal work (ResearchGate a). Similarly, under the topic “Are peer reviewers becoming exhausted with the constant demand to review articles?” the workload that reviewers undertake today is discussed. Some of the participants in this discussion argue that the burden of doing unpaid and heavy review work often is overseen, or not discussed enough. Why do we not, they argue, discuss why so many academic scholars experience a growing pressure of taking on more reviewer tasks? (ResearchGate b). This is also raised under the topic “Reviewers and editors need to be properly rewarded for their time” where it is highlighted that the workload for editors is most often unpaid but still demand high quality (ResearchGate c).

In connection, Acker et al. (2021) ask what different incentives there are for doing editing work for a journal, and what these in turn protect, develop, or guide.

Just as in the debate on ResearchGate they find that peer reviewing work is a big problem for many journals, and that desk rejects tend to increase due to difficulties finding reviewers or getting reviews done on time. Embedded in this dilemma is also the developmental and pedagogical aspect to reviewing and editing work.

These comments and research results highlight a couple of important inside and outside dilemmas of running a journal. In short, they raise issues of time and recourses for publishing an issue, and the possibilities we as editors have to develop something new. When we state that JPHE should be able to offer ‘free’ academic space, or alternative publishing strategies on the high-stake academic market, we also need to discuss how to do that, as well as the risks involved. Bruce Macfarlane uses the word *disturbance* in his Editorial from 2022, which not only could be a concept for our scope and aims, but also for our internal work structure. Macfarlane says: ‘JPHE, can help to disturb the *status quo* by engaging critically with the many tensions, dilemmas, paradoxes, controversies and by enduring questions that face educational researchers’ (p. 4). If we as a team also learn how to disturb the order of things internally, might we find ourselves less stressed?

Macfarlane uses the word ‘disturbance’ in a way that reminds us of the feminist physicist Barad, and her concept of *diffraction* (2007, 2014), which refers to the physical phenomena of light being at the same time particles and waves. These particles and waves define what can be described as a doubleness of light, which queers the notion of ‘dicho-tomy—cutting into two—as a singular act of absolute differentiation’ (Barad, 2014, p.168). Difference is not one (JPHE is not only different) but two (moving in light of difference). Barad also argues that there is no new matter, no new light, only new patterns shaped by shifting lenses; by letting the light in in different ways. That is, there is no leaving the old behind, the old is always part of the new. Being different is, thus, a constant act of balance, from inside our journal team to the outside world of demands, possibilities, and interests. Barad illustrates this by citing visual artist Trinh T. Minh-ha in a passage that shows how stepping outside common praxis is/must be a continuous action:

The moment the insider steps out from the inside she’s no longer a mere insider. She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Not quite the same, not quite the other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out. [...] She [...] moves about with always at least two gestures: that of affirming ‘I am like you’ while persisting in her difference and that of reminding ‘I am different’ while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at. (Trinh T. Minh-ha, as cited in Barad [2014, p. 175]).

Barad might argue that JPHE is different because of how we as a team balance on the threshold and how we internally debate, highlight, and question ourselves and

our outside role. We can keep standing on the threshold, waving to be recognised as eligible for funding so that we can offer some compensation to the members of our team, while we simultaneously keep questioning the basis for us waving. While doing so, we will hopefully stay true to Macfarlane's ideas (2022) about disturbance and criticality. We want to keep on striving to be 'a journal that places debate and discussion of the purposes, practices, forms and effects of higher education genuinely at the heart of its mission' (Macfarlane, 2022, p. 5). This in a context where we often find ourselves so overwhelmed with work that we hardly have time to finish.

Rising from this act of balance is the first issue of the fifth volume of our journal. For this issue, we let the light, in its doubleness, diffract through what Stephen Kemmis calls the 'post pandemic prism' in his contribution. Kemmis's text, 'Facing the world: pedagogical praxis through a post-pandemic prism', is a non-peer reviewed contribution that we hope can call for debate on how higher education institutions in the aftermaths of Covid-19 have the opportunity to transform from within to meet future challenges.

This issue also includes Getahun Abraham and Petra Angervall's interview with Gun-Britt Wärvik, the coordinator for an international partnership program between Sweden and Ethiopia. Through this contribution it becomes obvious how we are at constant risk of cutting the world into two, not the least when we try to bridge it through forming partnerships across countries. Indeed, we still hope that the interview provides a prism through which it is possible to challenge these absolute differentiations.

The four peer-reviewed articles included in the issue take on a broad spectrum of knowledge objects, all in a creative and critical way. In 'Gender equality in Swedish academia: unpacking the toolbox', Charlotte Silander diffracts the idea of neutrality, providing a compelling argument for the need to view gender equality measures taken in Swedish universities differently. Hanna Laalo, Henri Koskinen, Pekka Stenholm, and Päivi Siivonen's article 'Shaping and negotiating entrepreneurial selves in academic entrepreneurship education', in turn, shows how the concept of Entrepreneurial education in Finnish higher education becomes a governing technology that put market logics at heart of course practices. However, the authors also provide a story of student resistance, a lens through which potential transformation becomes visible.

Transformation is similarly at core of 'Negotiating interculturality in internationalising higher education: a multi-voiced exploration', written by Frank Hang Xu, Vivien Xiaowei Zhou, Christine Penman, and Sibylle Ratz. Here, a particular theoretical lens is used to trouble the 'interaction problem' in the internationalizing classroom, finding that educators need to recognise themselves as intercultural actors instead of experts, as well as understand knowledge as situated, to shape a truly transformative praxis. A similar focus is presented in the

article ‘Diverse views on supervision: Insights from interviews with EAL supervisors in Sweden and Indonesia’, by Musrifatun Nangimah and Robert Walldén. They outline how dimensions of undergraduate supervision are described differently across contexts. In the breaches that emerge through the analysis, it is possible to find a critical space for further research on the situatedness of supervision practices.

Finally, none of the above contributions would have been presented here if it had not been for the authors that rely on us to publish their pieces. We are also fortunate to have reviewers that provide authors and editors with insightful thoughts and critique. Thank you! And, not to forget, our editors in JPHE constantly work to shift their lenses to create new patterns that let us think and act differently. For this, the journal management of JPHE is eternally grateful. Let us continue our disturbance!

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