Openness and open access in JPHE

Editorial by Susanne Strömberg Jämsvi

We are currently witnessing a world of growing barriers, narrow nationalism and declining democracies. In such times with increasing boundaries and exclusion, openness is vital. In this editorial, I will elaborate on the notion of openness in relation to the Journal of Praxis in Higher Education (JPHE). As a starting point, I turned to the online Merriam-Webster Thesaurus for a definition of openness. The thesaurus defines openness in two ways: firstly, as in honesty, "the free expression of one's true feelings and opinions" and secondly, as in vulnerability, "the state of being left without shelter or protection against something harmful" (Merriam-Webster, 2025). In the following, I will use these two definitions to discuss essential characteristics of JPHE, and I will shortly present the contributions in this issue.

In the journal's first editorial, Aarnikoivu, Mahon, Agnafors, Hoffman and Angervall (2019) ask whether a new journal really is needed. They conclude that what is needed is a journal dedicated to *critical dialogue* about tensions across global higher education (HE). They formulate the key ambition of JPHE to facilitate *a wider discussion* about HE tensions and *conversation* within different parties and *keeping alive debates* about what constitutes the 'good' in HE. Such activities as dialogue, discussion, conversation and debate are not only communicative, but also relational, facilitating and enabling openness. Firstly, in connection to the definition of ¨free expression¨, which, when contextualised, could be defined as the free expressions of one's true research-based reflections and conclusions, to travesty the above definition. In the journal's ambition lies a genuine wish for honest and sincere *dialogue* and *conversation*, two activities with relational connotations. Drawing on their etymology, they respectively imply relations, i.e. *between speakers* (dialogue) and when people *turn to each other* (conversation). Is this not the case in all research journals, one might ask? Implicitly, perhaps, but explicitly and as part of the aim of journals, I am not so sure.

Let us slightly widen the picture. The practice of publishing is not solely a practice of dialogue. It is intertwined with career paths, funding opportunities and prestige, to name a few. By valuing the relational character of/in the journal, JPHE emphasises an approach that is not always highlighted in the ambitions and aims of contemporary publishing, that of being in a constant dialogue with others. JPHE values the reader and the texts within the journal are not only there as contributions to a knowledge base, but also as conversational pieces for people to engage in. The explicit ambition of the journal is to facilitate people's conversation; hence, the

reader is as important as the writer. Everyone knows that it takes two to tango, but I am not convinced that all scholarly journals explicitly have that ambition. In this sense, JPHE stands out. I believe that the explicit conversational ambition creates an open environment for trusting discussions.

Being a forum for critical debate built on dialogue, conversation and discussion, understood as relational openness, leads to the second above-mentioned definition of openness, namely the one about vulnerability, "the state of being left without shelter or protection against something harmful" ((Merriam-Webster, 2025). When I revisit the first editorial (Aarnikoivu et al., 2019), it is clear that centring the theme of the journal around *praxis*, constitutes an act of openness in two ways. I will use a quote from the editorial to show how.

> the theme of praxis is intended to reignite debate about the moral-social-political dimensions of higher education and attention to the consequences of what has been and is being done, as well as the role of refection, reflexivity, and different kinds of knowledges in enabling informed and morally-sensitive and socially just action. In this sense, the theme of praxis in higher education is arguably relevant for all disciplines and cuts across all higher education practices (Aarnikoivu et al., 2019:3).

First, *praxis* allows for contributions from a variety of disciplines and practices within higher education. It is open for anyone who wants to engage in issues that might have implications for injustice and unsustainability, that focus on power, policy and agency, and anyone who wants to partake in research-based discussions and problematisation about conditions, practices, arrangements from different perspectives. Contrary to the definition of openness as being "without shelter and protection", the journal offers a space where open research-based knowledge about challenges and tensions in higher education is requested, hence, protecting such discussions. This is intertwined with the above-mentioned notion of relational openness through dialogue and conversation. In this respect, JPHE becomes a safe space. Second, the very concept of *praxis* constitutes a guarantee that critical voices about consequences of higher education practices will be heard, in other words, that it is safe to openly and informed discuss these kinds of issues.

When voices are silenced around the world, most recently in the US, where DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) policy in HE among other areas is being banned by the Trump administration (The White House, 2025), it is with great pride I can conclude that JPHE encourages an openness and a safe space for raising issues that we cannot take for granted around the world. The editorials in the journal, for example, are explicit examples of how we understand openness and dialogue. Very

few journals have this ambition to reason and open for communication through the editorial.

This leads to the different formats of the journal, which are yet another way of being open and inviting. JPHE offers a number of ways of engaging in scholarly discussions and I will mention three of these. *Research articles* is the most common format. Even though the format is the same, the articles are substantially different regarding scientific approaches, data collection, style and headings etc. The journal is open for explorative studies, narrated lived experiences, small-size as well as large-scale research, to give a few examples. A format that opens up for early thinking is *Notes from the field*. It is a format where the contribution is advanced enough to be shared and discussed in the journal, but not yet ready for peer review. The format enables an inclusive and holistic space for scientific thinking. Another way of encouraging praxis-oriented discussions is through the *Conversations* at the JPHE website. These conversations cover issues of contemporary challenges in HE concerning for example health, equity, morality, student transition, retention, diversity etc. The dialogue is facilitated by a Senior Editor. A strength with the conversations is that in an open and inclusive way, they bring to life and concretise lived experiences and practices in HE.

So far, I have elaborated on the openness of JPHE in a few different ways. In this paragraph, I will give a final example of openness, that of open access. The journal has always been an open access journal. In line with the very idea of JPHE as a journal that

> promotes research that has transformative potential, and assumes that through educational research, one can seek to promote justice and equality including the capacity of people to act in socially just ways (JPHE, 2025),

it is of essence that it is openly and freely available. A journal that "seek to promote justice and equality" has to be published open access, otherwise it contradicts its own mission. It sort of lies in its DNA. At the moment, the journal is being transferred to a new platform, the open access digital platform, Publicera, which the National Library of Sweden (*Sw. Kungliga Biblioteket, KB*) manages and develops as part of a government mandate. By moving to Publicera, it is not only open access to the scholarly material of our journal that is secured, but also long-term access to our publication in the future. That means that JPHE now becomes sustainable in a way the journal could not guarantee earlier. Maybe, there should be sustainability standards and labels within the scholarly publishing system. Even though Open Access nowadays is an obvious part of such a system, it still suffers from multiple challenges including that of sustainability, primarily in relation to financial matters

(e.g. Tennant et al., 2016). JPHE is excited about the open access standards at KB and praises their commitment of securing a sustainable open access for the times to come.

I will now turn to the contributions of this 15th issue, which in different ways reflect the openness of the journal. They are different in terms of content, context, structure, method, and research object. They address issues of power and inclusion. They touch on questions of involvement and relationships. They have transformative potential and function as eye-openers.

In Magnusson and Zachariasson's research paper *Collective dimensions of academic supervision: How the acknowledgement of different actors in degree project supervision can contribute to scaffolding*, they argue that a systemic approach to supervision, where more actors than the supervisor and the supervised student are included, is beneficial to the process. Specifically, they show how the acknowledgement of different actors, in this case course coordinators/seminar leaders, examiners and students, help degree project students to navigate in the context of thesis work, help them to evaluate their work and realise what lies ahead, and help them see their role in the process.

In Gayton and Węgorowski´s research paper *Looking back to move forward: Tracing students' experiences of transitioning to university*, they show that we can (still) learn from the changed educational realities of the COVID-19 when we try to understand students' experiences of university transition. They study how students cope with two concurrent educational changes: starting tertiary education and experiencing online education as normality. The students reveal that social factors, self-perception, learning strategies and teaching set-up impact their transition. The authors conclude that academic staff need to be aware of student transition as an ongoing process and to respond by pedagogy and with care.

In Collin, Jones, Pierson, Desroches, Bagga and Crosby's research paper *The Need for Deep Rest: Six Stories of Critical Grief Pedagogy*, they collectively narrate different interdependent grief experiences and the relationalities of modes of grief. They explore teaching and learning disability justice as a 'grief-facing' praxis that changes embodiment in higher education. They suggest *rest* as an essential tenet of CGP, not as a personal necessity but as a political act. They reveal how grief is entangled with systems of power and structures of oppression, that the personal is political, societal and social.

In Gynnild and Gynnild's research paper *Becoming an excellent teaching practitioner: a study of assessment design in a higher education institution*, they investigate 'the dark side' of a teaching excellence merit system through examining experiences of rejected applicants in the assessment process of obtaining an excellence award. Their study reveal that the applicants, all experienced teachers,

were shocked and confused when they met the assessors, that the assessors applied a narrower interpretation of standards and criteria leading to a right-wrong approach rather than a reflective one, and that the assessment design was not constructively aligned with the guidelines for the application. They conclude that neoliberal principles before academic values prevail in the assessment process.

In Arthur's research paper *A Preliminary Case Study: Challenges, Approaches, and Pressures in Policy Implementation of iCGPA*, she explores the potential advantages of proactive policy implementation over reactive approaches using the initial implementation phase at a university as a case. The study examines the influence of isomorphic pressure, i.e. that organisations within a sector tend to become similar, and challenges in the process. The author highlights the importance of early involvement and mandate of ground-level recipients, the responsibility of the sector to critically evaluate the rationale behind policies and the potential of rigorous testing prior to implementation.

To end this editorial, I would like to turn to everyone who is engaged in fulfilling the ambitions of JPHE – authors, people in different editor roles, board members, platform managers and, last but not least, readers – you all make this happen. Engaged in this scholarly journal, we all contribute to creating an open intellectual space – a moment of openness. Be proud!

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