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How to cite:

Whitelock, Denise (2019). Moving forward with both theory and practice. Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning, 34(3) pp. 219–220.

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Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1080/02680513.2019.1664285>

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Editorial

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Moving Forward with both Theory and Practice

Welcome to the second Edition of *Open Learning* for 2019. This Issue highlights a number of fundamental concerns about current research in Open & Distance Learning, one of these being the role of learning theories in the field of Open & Distance Education. Our first paper in this Edition is by Agonács & Matos (2019) and focuses on Heutagogy. It draws attention to the development and debate which is taking place in this theoretical arena. One of the reasons for theories of learning constantly being updated is because they are trying to explore new ways of thinking. This is because learning is in itself so complex and there is no accepted definition of such a multifaceted concept (Illeris 2009).

Agonács & Matos (2019) explain that the concept of Heutagogy was developed by Hase and Kenyon (2013) and is in a sense an addition to Knowles' (1968) theory of adult learning which is known as Androgogy. The important difference between Heutagogy and Androgogy is that the learner not only becomes responsible for how to learn, but also what to learn. Strong links with self-regulated learning can be identified with this theory. What is interesting from Agonács & Matos' paper is that in the 19 years since the theory was developed, there have only been 21 publications using the theory in a practical context. The authors suggest that the theory might be better applied to MOOCs, an area not explored as yet. Taking on board their suggestion, some MOOC research especially with respect to Learning Design (Warburton & Mor, 2015) and Otto et al's (2018) work about the role of learning outcomes in MOOCs, would perhaps lend themselves to scrutiny with a Heutogogy lens.

The second paper in this Edition by Jenny McDougall (2019) draws upon a holistic theoretical approach to analyse her data. She states that the 'holistic' stance is not linked to any particular theory. However, she adopted this approach because Androgogy per se lacked the socio-emotional variables identified in other theories of learning which she believed was critical to her analysis. Her previous work (McDougall & Holden 2017) investigated oral presentation skills in distance and online education. That study adopted Androgogy as its theoretical lens and it is interesting to note how her current thinking is pushing the boundaries of her previous theoretical frame in order to understand more fully adult learning.

In contrast, the third contribution by García-Monge, González-Calvo & Bores-Garcia (2019), is a practice paper. It investigates online communities of practice which to date have not been extensively applied in Spain to assist with Physical Education training. They found there was a relationship between the two variables of status and sharing together with a balance between the development of knowledge and the socio-emotive support found within the group. Probing the barriers to participation in virtual knowledge sharing communities has been of interest across a number of domains (Javadpour & Samiei, 2017; Ardichvili, Page & Wentling, 2003). The latter stress that fear of criticism can decrease participation.

The final paper by Dawkins (2019) entitled "Mass email at university: current literature and tactics for future use" highlights that online communication in particular, is open to interpretation and can lead to a number of tensions and misunderstandings among participants. A finding also documented by Middleton & Cukier (2006). It is perhaps not surprising that when mass emailing a single message to a large group of students, less than a third of them open the email, and only 2.69% click on any link in

that email. The inference from these findings is that opening an email does not mean the message is read or that the student becomes engaged with its content. Making sense of learner engagement has been one of the goals of the Data Wrangling Team at the UK's Open University (Rientes et al, 2017) and Dawkins advocates more of an industry sector's approach to mass emailing, where test emails to check design and layout should be trialled. Further checks with A/B testing could be employed to understand how to persuade students to engage with critical information.

We also have a review from Anne Gaskell of the book "Open Education: international perspectives in higher education". This publication does bring together an important literature on open education but the book does not report the global reach as promised in its title. The chapters are mainly from Australia, Europe and North America but does, as Gaskell states, "provide discussion of many of the key themes and associated challenges related to open education and practice".

Finally, on behalf of Chris Douce, Lucy Rai and myself, I would like to thank our most recent reviewers for *Open Learning*, who are named in this Issue. We have been pleased to receive your ideas and contributions which assist with the future success of the Journal.

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