

Editorial – Inaugurating the *Journal of Open, Distance, and Digital Education (JODDE)*

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Welcome to the first issue of *JODDE*!

We are delighted to launch the first issue of the *Journal of Open, Distance, and Digital Education* (*JODDE*) with this editorial. Our readership may wonder whether we really need yet another new journal and what is actually meant by open, distance, and digital education (ODDE).

In fact, there are already numerous journals with different specialisations in the broad field that we understand as ODDE. Based on a cluster analysis, Zawacki-Richter and Bozkurt (2023) described four different groups of journals in ODDE: (1) journals coming from educational technology, learning and computer science (e.g. *Computers & Education*), (2) educational technology journals from K-12 to higher education (e.g. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education*), (3) distance education journals with a focus on higher education (e.g. the *American Journal of Distance Education*), and (4) journals dealing with technology-enhanced learning in school settings (e.g. the *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*). So where does *JODDE* fit in this spectrum?

Whereas the majority of research publications in the main journals come from the higher education context, *JODDE* is open to all sectors and levels of education. Our journal aims to promote the publication of critical scholarly works and the exchange of knowledge among educators, researchers, policy-makers, and administrators in K-12, higher education, adult, and continuing education, including those situated in professional training settings such as the military, medical and allied health fields, and corporate workplaces.

Furthermore, various bibliographic studies have shown that most of the studies published in the aforementioned journals deal with aspects of learning and teaching with digital media – issues related to instructional design, learner characteristics, or interaction and collaboration patterns in online learning settings (see Zawacki-Richter et al., 2009; Zawacki-Richter & Latchem, 2018). This is probably the greatest difference between *JODDE* and most journals in the field of ODDE.

Following the 3M-Framework (Zawacki-Richter, 2009; Zawacki-Richter & Bozkurt, 2023), *JODDE* welcomes previously unpublished manuscripts that advance the understanding of ODDE on the macro- and meso-levels of educational systems and institutions in undergoing digital transformation, including papers reporting on qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods studies; critical reflections; systematic reviews; theoretical or conceptual papers; and position papers.

Authors are encouraged to submit papers related, but not limited, to the following topics in ODDE:

- history, theory, and research trends
- global perspectives and internationalisation
- digital transformation of educational systems
- ODDE for sustainable development
- diversity, equity and ethics
- organisation, leadership, and change
- professional development and faculty support
- institutional infrastructure and educational technology
- costs and finance
- quality evaluation and assurance systems and policies
- (open) educational resources and digital library services
- learner support and counseling

Papers on micro-level practice, for example, evaluating the impact of single teaching and learning interventions without an institutional or system dimension, are not within the scope of *JODDE*.

ODDE overcomes borders and aims to make education available for all. It embodies the value proposition that education should be accessible and equitable to all. Given that national agendas are increasingly intertwined with international developments, conflicts, and crises, it becomes necessary to view ODDE from a perspective that takes into account the international interconnectedness of regional developments and agendas. Therefore, it matters that people from different sociocultural backgrounds can have their voices heard in *JODDE*. To achieve this aim the journal is run by a board of editors from a wide spectrum of contexts who bring along a diversity of perspectives from the field.

We hope to publish the second issue of *JODDE* by the end of this year. The call for papers will be available on *JODDE*'s website soon. We are trying to ensure a rapid review process and will follow the rolling issues approach, i.e. as soon as an article has final acceptance, it will appear directly in an open issue so that authors do not have to wait long for publication.

As we all advocate the idea of open education, *JODDE* is therefore an open access journal and does not charge any publication fees. *JODDE* is established with the support and funding of the Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg in Germany. It is published by the [Center for Open Education Research \(COER\)](#) in the Institute of Education.

Why Open, Distance, and Digital Education (ODDE)?

With the acceleration of digital transformation, in particular, propelled by the COVID-19 pandemic in the early 2020s, online learning and teaching have entered the mainstream of education at all levels, including K12, higher education, professional and vocational training, and continuing education. However, the transition to online learning was often an ad hoc arrangement to prevent the disruption of learning and teaching. The term Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) was coined for this practice, which differs significantly in quality from carefully designed online learning and teaching (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Hodges et al., 2020).

The entire field of distance education - where we come from - is now in transition. Twenty years ago, Peters (2004) noticed this paradigm shift which was brought about by advancements in the Internet with networked computers. It now seems to have become a reality. Everything is now online. Nevertheless, this shift is not tantamount to "'online' and even 'distance education'" (Nichols, 2023, p. 142). So how should we describe the current state of this field of educational practice?

Since the turn of the millennium, new terms such as e-learning, online learning, blended learning, hybrid learning, technology-enhanced learning, and flexible learning have come to the fore. As early as 1999, Alan Tait observed that the boundaries between distance teaching and conventional campus-based universities were blurring in that "the secret garden of open and distance learning has become public, and many institutions are moving from single conventional mode activity to dual mode activity" (Tait, 1999, p. 141).

While distance education or open and distance education used to be a prerogative for dedicated distance education institutions, it is now being practised in educational institutions in general. Therefore, it is imperative to promote communication between old and new players in the field. On the one hand, "campus-based universities with the intention of jumping on the bandwagon of distance education should not ignore the history of distance education. Instead, they should learn from its successes and avoid the mistakes it has made" (Xiao, 2018, p. 12). On the other hand, learning from new players enables old players to improve themselves. Communication of this kind is essential to the continuing evolution of the field.

We title our new journal “Open, Distance, and Digital Education” (ODDE) following the recent *Handbook of Open, Distance, and Digital Education* (Zawacki-Richter & Jung, 2023). ODDE combines open and distance education to mark the historical origin of recent online education and adds digital education to capture newer manifestations of teaching and learning using digital media in the current practice of many educational institutions:

We conceptualize ODDE as an overarching term to refer to all kinds of learning and teaching processes in which knowledge and skill base of educational technology, digital media, and tools are used to present and deliver content, as well as facilitate and support communication, interaction, collaboration, assessment, and evaluation. Thus, ODDE is not monolithic in form. It includes various types, from technology-enhanced education to flipped learning and blended learning, and to fully online education. (p. 6)

However, there is no consensus on the terminology we should use to conceptualise the complex field of ODDE, as we refer to it here. Mark Nichols, President of the International Council of Distance Education (ICDE), the world association of distance teaching institutions, has pointed out in various places that we are dealing with a mishmash of different terms and understandings (Nichols, 2023; 2024).

In the first issue of *JODDE*, we therefore want to open a discussion about terminology and have invited Mark Nichols to write an article about the naming of our journal. He takes a thoroughly critical stance towards ODDE. Building upon open and distance learning (ODL), he makes the point that

The terms ‘open’ and ‘distance’ themselves, though familiar, are not necessarily a stable platform for revisiting terminology as it relates to different models of education. These terms have their own evolution and may not represent the fittest possibilities for changes to the design of educational practice. Adding ‘digital’ to ODL is a descriptive fix, however it is unlikely to provide scholars with the fittest option for discourse in the longer term. (Nichols in this volume, p. 10).

In contrast to ODDE, he proposes a framework with the vision of education being available, inclusive, scalable, and sustainable, bringing in the term of ‘design’ for operation models that support openness in this sense: “‘Distance’ might be best replaced by the term ‘designed’, which emphasises the importance of educational models as they seek to become more open” (p. 14).

We do not see eye to eye with him on several issues. First, while we admit that “traditional boundaries are not what they used to be” (p. 3), we do not agree that “the ‘traditional’ and ‘non-traditional’ distinction no longer applies” (p. 3). The connotations of the terms “traditional” and “non-traditional” have been evolving in the past decades although their respective fundamental/core features remain essentially unchanged. Therefore, their distinction is relative rather than fixed and absolute. We cannot use the distinction criteria developed, say, 50 years ago to talk about the distinction of traditional and non-traditional education today. No matter how open campus-based universities are today, they remain far more “traditional” in numerous aspects than distance education institutions, including open universities.

Second, we do intend to use the term ODDE to “summarise different models of education aligned with its general orientation” (p. 4) as correctly observed by Mark Nichols. However, this does not mean that it is the equivalent to “digital ODL, and so needs to find its place alongside those other contenders already being applied to describe emerging educational practice” (p. 4). We use ODDE in the sense of multiplicity, “not monolithic in form” as clearly pointed out in our definition, while Mark Nichols seems to interpret ODDE in the sense of singularity, as a monolithic term.

He argues:

It is unlikely that ODDE can be considered the meta-term for all educational models that are non-traditional in their pursuit of more openness and flexibility in higher education through digital means. ODL, and so ODDE, is already facing an existential crisis from those 'traditional' universities orientating themselves toward more accessible, flexible, and open education without any reference to ODL in its classic guise. (p. 5)

The point is, even if "traditional" universities do not refer to ODL in their pursuit of more accessible, flexible, and open education, this cannot deny the fact that their innovative practices are rooted in ODL. So why is ODL already facing an existential crisis? Our understanding is that traditional mainstream ODL universities are facing an existential crisis, not ODL.

Third, when describing the evolution of modes to models, Nichols argues that "'traditional', though it might still be practiced in the form of its original binary, can now more properly be considered to have extended into a variety of different models" (p. 7). However, as a matter of fact, distance education began as "an evolutionary offshoot of in-person education" (Dron, 2021, p. 45). Distance educators have "drawn on face-to-face instruction in some aspects, especially in the early days", according to Xiao (2018, p. 259), who also argues that as ODL evolves, new and innovative practices keep emerging, which in turn are fed back into "traditional" on-campus education.

Fourth, as for replacing "distance" with "designed," it seems that they are not concepts of the same nature. In a sense, all educational programs are the result of design; even ERT, as mentioned earlier, was the product of design, though poorly designed. Therefore, using "designed" in place of "distance" does not help distinguish different models of education appropriately.

Overall, Mark Nichols places ODDE on one end of a spectrum that is now filled with a "terminological soup" (see Figure 3 in Nichols' article). However, with *JODDE* and the term "ODDE," we do not intend to adopt a polarised approach. We see ODDE as an overall umbrella term that embraces and integrates previous and current practices, ranging from fully offline, digitally supported, internet-supported, and internet-dependent to fully online (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2014, p. 9).

We thank Mark for his critical and thought-provoking contribution to *JODDE*'s inaugural issue and appreciate the discussion to follow that will catalyse further debate within different perspectives on the terminology of ODDE.

Invitation to read

With this introduction to the rationale, background and scope of *JODDE*, we now open the inaugural issue. Six invited articles (that all went through regular double-blind peer review) appear here. They all take a meso or macro perspective on ODDE, opening with Nichols' reflections on the concept and terminology of ODDE itself. Paul follows with a critical perspective on university leadership in digital transformation and the implications for success and failures of university leaders. A group of authors from the Commonwealth of Learning (Jah, Mays, Balaji and Scott) deal with digital policy for equity and openness. They examine the experiences of a selection of Commonwealth countries in building policies that could make education systems more resilient, open, and equitable. With the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, progress towards achieving the goals of the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (quality lifelong learning for all) is "seriously off track" (United Nations, 2023); Laurillard discusses the features and opportunities that ODDE afford for contributing to achieving SDG 4. Brown and Duarte

follow with an article reporting on a global mapping review of current practices of micro-credentials, exploring the gaps of quality assurance in frameworks and policies for micro-credentials. Finally, Veletsianos and Houlden present results from a research project on the under-explored perspectives of youth on three speculative futures describing higher education in 2033, examining which futures youth found hopeful or otherwise, and the reasons for their thinking.

Our "Oral Histories and Engaged Perspectives" section is another special feature of JODDE. This interview section serves as a repository of firsthand accounts and personal narratives, capturing the lived experiences and perspectives of influential individuals within the field of ODDE. In this issue, we proudly publish our first interview with Tony Bates which was conducted by interview section editor Kathryn Johnson. Tony has been a pioneer of distance education and online learning with over 50 years' experience. He began his extraordinary career as a Professor of Educational Media Research at the British Open University, where he worked for 20 years as one of the founding staff members.

We would like to thank our esteemed colleagues for their willingness to publish in the first issue of *JODDE* and we wish our readers a stimulating read.

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