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Collaboration and Creativity During a Global Pandemic

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At the time of writing this editorial, the COVID-19 pandemic is still raging around the world and has taken a huge physical, financial, and emotional toll on many of our readers in many countries; thanks to the work of dedicated researchers, however, viable vaccines will soon become available (Chow, 2020). The creativity that led these researchers to their innovative vaccines is reflected, on a different level, in the ways interpreter educators and researchers internationally have come up with novel solutions in high-pressure situations. Conferences and workshops of course continue to be cancelled and replaced by online events, but, as Dr. Oktay Eser (Amasya University, Turkey) remarked recently in a Zoom meeting with Ineke, the pandemic has encouraged increased collaboration and sharing between interpreter educators globally. Educators in a wide range of spheres have come up with novel ways to interact with their students and colleagues. It is fascinating to see these creative solutions begin to be shared through research articles. For example, Braun, Davitti, and Slater (2020) describe highly multimodal and interactive Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) and the opportunities these provide for collaborative learning in interpreter education; and Henderson and colleagues (2020) report on the success of using Microsoft Teams to disseminate medical training and as a discussion platform for staff in London.

Figueroa and colleagues (2020) surveyed the responses of orthopedic residents in Chile on the use of several online learning modalities. They found that respondents missed the usual mix of practical and theoretical activities, and the same will have been true for students in our field. We know first-hand how very challenging it is for students to practice their interpreting skills in relative isolation online; even with well-organized mechanisms for teacher and peer feedback it is just not the same. We have a new appreciation for our face-to-face interpreting classes after this year! We have to acknowledge that we are in the privileged position of being in New Zealand, where – at least at the time of writing this editorial – our early and strict lockdowns have allowed us to return to relatively normal life. We are thinking often of our colleagues in other countries who are still in the thick of COVID-related challenges, especially while entering into the winter months.

Online events can result in new opportunities for joint research and collaboration from afar, which many readers may also have experienced this year. Ineke has presented to colleagues and students in Spain, the Netherlands, Hungary, Turkey, Australia, and the United States using a range of different online presentation modalities including Zoom, Google Meet, GoToWebinar, and Teams. In each instance, testing the “system” a few days ahead of the online event provided an opportunity to identify and address possible technical issues. Many of us will have become experts in a variety of new online teaching tools this year, whether it was a welcome challenge, or just out of sheer necessity!

Another positive that has come out of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the shining humanity and collegiality across our field. In our own work environment, first Ineke and then George have been lucky to be able to take 6-month sabbaticals this year, and our colleagues (including junior colleagues who are relatively new to teaching) have stepped up and taken responsibility for teaching and assessment, allowing us to take this opportunity. It has

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often required innovative responses to lockdowns at short notice, and we have been absolutely blown away by their commitment, creativity, and collegiality. They and we have grown a lot in the process, although given the financial restraints many higher education providers now face, we must hope that the increased workloads will not become the “new normal.” Many educators are still struggling with unprecedented workloads as they try to rethink sustainable delivery of classes, practicum components, and assessment.

As mentioned in our previous editorial, (Crezee & Major, 2020) pressures on educators and researchers have caused some delays in the review process. However, in all instances, correspondence with reviewers and authors alike have reflected kindness and collegiality which we appreciate so much. A good friend reminded us that no storm lasts forever, and together we will get through this.

Moving on to issue 12(2) of IJIE, we are very pleased to bring you a range of contributions from around the world: from the United States, China, New Zealand, and Norway.

We start with a research article by George Major, Rachel McKee, Karliah McGregor, and Lynette Pivac, “Deaf Women’s Health Vocabulary: Challenges for Interpreters Working in a Language of Limited Diffusion.” Motivated by a lack of description of women’s health vocabulary in New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL), the authors describe both ‘frozen’ and depicting signs (classifier constructions) used by deaf women to describe women’s health concepts and discuss implications for interpreters and interpreter educators.

Staying on the theme of specialized vocabulary, a research article by Judy Vesel, M. Diane Clark and Tara Robillard explores life science vocabulary (“Use of a Signing Bioscience Dictionary in Increasing Student Interpreters’ American Sign Language Life Science Vocabulary”). The researchers trained interpreting students on how to use a Signing Bioscience Dictionary (SBD), and then investigated the impact of this on the students’ ability to interpret undergraduate biology courses. Their detailed analysis highlights both the advantages and challenges of this approach to preparing students for interpreting work in this specialized domain.

Fang Tang’s research article, “Repair Strategy in Consecutive Interpreting: Comparing Professional Interpreters and Interpreting Trainees” focuses on spoken Chinese-English interpreting: Interpreters and interpreting students completed an interpreting task, which was analyzed for repair types, and then follow-up interviews were conducted. Tang discusses some interesting differences in the types of repair made by the two groups, which has useful implications for interpreter education.

Our commentary section begins with “Driving Without Directions? Modifying Assignments for Deaf Students in an Interpreter Education Class,” by Margie English, Brenda Nicodemus, and Danielle I. J. Hunt. Based on their own classroom experiences, the authors discuss practical considerations when adapting assessments for deaf interpreting in programs that have been more traditionally targeted to hearing students.

The commentary by Daniel Gile and Jemina Napier published in IJIE 12(1) sparked a response by Hilde Fiva Buzungu and Jessica P. B. Hansen, “Bridging Divides in the Interpreting Profession.” Buzungu and Hansen’s thoughtful contribution continues the commentary by Gile and Napier, further exploring the depth to which signed and spoken language interpreting are interconnected.

This issue also features an interview by Jo Anna Burn with Hoy Neng Wong Soon, a health and legal interpreter, about the challenges of interpreting between English and Samoan in forensic psychiatry settings. Our dissertation abstract section includes a PhD abstract by Paul B. Harrelson from Gallaudet University, an EdD abstract by Teddi Lynn Covey von Pingel from Arizona State University, and a PhD abstract by Amy C. Williamson from Gallaudet University.

Thinking ahead to our next issue (June 2021), we already have some interesting papers relating to online and integrated learning planned. However, there is still space for more! We would love to have an issue focused on interpreting teaching and research in these times of coronavirus. We welcome submissions (not just research articles, but also commentaries, interviews, and student papers) on all topics relevant to the journal, but we will particularly prioritize this topic for the next issue.

We hope all of our readers will stay safe and well – and find ways to connect with family and friends over the festive season, however creative they may need to be. We end with two quotes that we think relate to these challenging yet creative times:

The difficulty lies not so much in developing new ideas as in escaping from old ones. (John Maynard Keynes)

You must do the thing you think you cannot do. (Eleanor Roosevelt)

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