



MONOGRAPH

Specific didactics in times of COVID-19

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When the editorial board of this journal agreed to publish a monographic section on the effects of COVID-19, by no means did we pretend to be original. In fact, to date there have been dozens of special issues and monographs on this topic. The generalized haste in which calls for papers made the issue of the effects of COVID-19 on education go viral. The requests to fill in online questionnaires on the topic was such that some of us, including the author of this text, felt fed up with the phenomenon. That virality and that haste can also naturally involve a decrease in the quality of the papers published. In the case of *Didacticae*, the editorial board decided to take it easy. The deadline to submit contributions was June 2021. That made me fear that, by the time the issue was published, the topic would already be worn out (well, it already is, up to an extent) or, even worse, *démodé* (unfortunately for the journal only). Luckily for the journal, and unluckily for the rest of humankind (so there!), the latter did not happen. Here we are, still with stats of those infected with COVID-19 in newspapers and TV news. Less frequently and with less insistence on the deaths, truth be told. I must admit we also get to know the percentages of people vaccinated and the good news on the minor seriousness of the effects of the darn bug.

The SARS-CoV-2 and its tens of variants, besides making us learn the, for many unknown, Greek alphabet, has turned our routines upside down, first overnight, then with greater reaction margin. This has made it possible for the review of the articles included in this monographic section to have a somewhat more detached point of view, thanks to both the passing of time and to letting the authors' ideas rest for a while. This is not the case, though, of the editorial that precedes this section ("This was not subject matter of my degree"), by Gemma Barrera Gil, written in January 2021. Hers is a very touching text, which could not make us prouder. This text conveys our feeling of uncertainty because of the change in the regular functioning of classrooms, our feelings of being there without being able to be fully there, which doesn't make us feel completely uncomfortable, but not fully at ease either. This awkward normality which we are all living and that makes us inevitably put ourselves in not only the teachers' shoes, but also in the students'. They are the "champions" of the pandemic, as they have now the task to not only grow up and mature (take that!), but also to adjust themselves to the restrictions and changing rules depending on the stats of the day and the people in charge of deciding them. Nothing which, in principle, should be an unsurmountable obstacle thanks to



technology –or so says the theory, ladies and gentlemen–. Of course, using technologies keep us all connected, but also disconnected from reality. The irony. Being without being there. Without knowing until when.

The monographic section starts with the paper by Amando López Valero and colleagues from the Universidad de Murcia titled "*Competencia comunicativa, didáctica de la lengua y adaptación socio-sanitaria: ¿Una aceleración de la cuarta revolución industrial?*" ("Communicative competence, language teaching and socio-sanitary adaptation: An acceleration of the fourth industrial revolution?"). Although its framework is the Didactics of Language and Literature, from the start we had it clear that it should open this section. Why so? Without this being its main aim, it shows how the changes in our daily communication in times of COVID-19 go beyond those in the classroom and affects us all in our simplest routines. We could not agree more either with its rationale: the paradox of being permanently connected yet feeling more and more isolated. Certainly, the daily use of technology also involves changes in our language usage and in the approach we can adopt to teach it, opting, for example, for a competence building approach which includes digital and information competences. This approach, though, might also involve a decrease in the students' lexical development due to the passivity with which they receive the information. More for less.

It was also unintended to end up with three more manuscripts with communication at their core. Let's be honest: technology, as well as dealing with physical distance, are crosscurricular. We are also more or less familiar with technological platforms devised for teaching. There is this new platform released on a recurrent basis, cuter than its precedents, with that feature which makes it special, but which is not going to revolutionize the world of teaching. That was the MOOCs' job back in the day, and not only by their virtual status, but by their generosity. Not even virtual reality seems to find its place in teaching. What certainly was unexplored was a pandemic context which gave us no option but to use technology as our main *modus operandi*, not to mention *vivendi*.

If we already consider that teaching writing is challenging, it might even be more so virtually. This is the starting point for Cristopher David Herrera Navas, Gabriela Ibeth Saltos Piguave and Edgar Efraín Obaco Soto in their manuscript: "*Producción de textos mediante entornos educativos virtuales del software Ardora: Una experiencia de aplicación en pandemia*" ("Text production using Ardora software in virtual education environments: An application experience during the pandemic"). The results in this paper show that using the Ardora software improves the production of the texts produced by the participants in the study. However, and going back to the same old, same old, the authors do not find in Ardora the magic tool that solves all the students' writing problems, including aspects such as punctuation, coherence and cohesion.

Virtuality dramatically affects those subjects with a great practical load or thought of for an in-person execution in the so-called "real life", as explained in the two following manuscripts. In the first case, the paper by Paloma López-Zurita, titled "The impact of COVID-19 in an ESP course: An unforeseen adaptation to distance teaching", is a case study delving into an ESP course whose approach, due to the pandemic, had to be changed overnight, thus becoming an eminently practical subject. The survey administered to the students of this subject shows the aspects that should be improved in this subject in an emergency situation. Truth be told, though, the experience was not deficient. Who succeeded in everything when the pandemic



forced us to change our way of doing things? What makes this paper special is seeing how students compare face-to-face contexts with the newfound situation. The favorite context, in the interactional sense is, again, the face-to-face one. No wonder. However, the author admits that this new situation has led to the fast development of our digital competence, in an environment which has come to stay.

The second case is that by Jessica Pérez-Luzardo titled "In-person university classes in lockdown: Interpreting students' perceptions of in-person, blended and remote teaching during the pandemic" ("*Universidad presencial confinada: Percepción de los estudiantes de Interpretación de la docencia presencial, semipresencial y no presencial durante la pandemia*"). Her paper also revolves around a subject where communication is key, more specifically, Interpreting. After presenting the curricular adaptation implemented, Pérez-Luzardo examines the answers to a virtual survey where students expressed their opinions comparing in-person, blended and virtual learning environments. We could once again say "and the winner is..." regarding aspects related to interaction and to quality and facility to access Internet, but some other aspects are seen as advantages, such as not having to commute and having a higher flexibility.

The communication block closes with the manuscript by Melisa Soledad Gigena and Azahara Cuesta García "*Estaciones de aprendizaje en una clase de ELE en línea para adultos: percepciones sobre sus facilidades y dificultades*" ("Learning stations in an online Spanish as a foreign language class for adults: Perceptions about benefits and problems"). The focus of this qualitative study is an innovative teaching methodology: learning stations in two online groups. The fourteen interviews with students, the four focused observation reports by teachers and a teacher's log reveal the great number of possibilities that virtual environments present and the effort made by teachers to cater for each of their students, which is a common thread in all the papers in this section. However, measuring the energy which this attention takes, as well as the challenges of time management and the type of instructions teachers should give, are not less important issues when it comes to virtual environments. Luckily, besides the teacher's own perception, the students can also make us notice which aspects we should improve in our practices in such environments.

The last paper in this monographic section is one that stands on its own as for its area of expertise, although the challenges it presents are similar to those mentioned above. We are referring to "Practical laboratory work in Natural Sciences class during the pandemic: Experiences in Argentina and Colombia" ("*El trabajo práctico de laboratorio en clase de Ciencias Naturales durante la pandemia: Experiencias en Argentina y Colombia*"), by Fanny Angulo-Delgado, Alejandro Calle, and Carlos Soto-Lombana, of the Universidad de Antioquia (Colombia), along with Erica Zorrilla and Claudia Alejandra Mazzitelli, both of the Universidad Nacional de San Juan (Argentina). The authors delve into the adaptation of laboratory practical work in a virtual environment in two Latin-American countries. Although the results show that the teachers were able to adapt their teaching strategies by using the available digital resources and reconsidering the initial objectives, that effort was limited to a great extent by the virtual situation, as the students with fewer resources had limited access to the Internet and so their learning opportunities were much fewer if compared to their richer peers.

From the manuscripts included in this paper, as well as from those which were rejected, it can be envisaged that the communicative aspects are not only crosscurricular, but crucial in



a pandemic situation were teaching went virtual in its entirety overnight. If we come to think of it, it has been many years since the Internet was first introduced in teaching practices, yet the digital divide has by no means been overcome in all these years, be it due to lack of digital competence, be it due to the difficulty in accessing the Internet in poorer areas. Not everyone has the same learning opportunities, and even less so in pandemic times. We had better do something about this. Right now.