



# Collective Voices of COVID-19

December 2020



# **Collective Voices of COVID-19: Otago Polytechnic experiences**

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## COLLECTIVE VOICES OF COVID-19: OTAGO POLYTECHNIC EXPERIENCES

The *Collective Voices of COVID-19: Otago Polytechnic experiences 2020* publication involves a rich compilation of real-time responses to COVID-19 from diverse 'voices' within Otago Polytechnic. Contributions included are from the Leadership Team, Broadcasts, diverse blogs, limericks and sonnets, stories, emergency teaching responses, source documents, acts of kindness, and more, supplemented by many excellent visual representations. The publication collectively captures this drawing together of all these contributions, which portray a very authentic snapshot of real-life and real-time responses to the COVID-19 experience here at Otago Polytechnic.

Submissions which have been peer reviewed are noted as 'Quality Assured' in the footer.

**An online version of this publication is available free at [www.op.ac.nz/industry-and-research/research/publications](http://www.op.ac.nz/industry-and-research/research/publications);**

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Karakia

# Timatataka / Beginning

Whakataka te hau ki te uru  
Whakataka te hau ki te tonga  
Kia mākinakina ki uta  
Kia mātaratara ki tai  
E hī ake ana te atakura  
He tio, he huka, he hau hū  
Tihei mauri ora!

*Cease the winds from the west  
Cease the winds from the south  
Let the breeze blow over the land  
Let the breeze blow over the ocean  
Let the red-tipped dawn come with a sharpened air.  
A touch of frost, a promise of a glorious day.*

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Preface

# **Learnings and reflections from COVID-19**

Megan Gibbons

Tēnā koe e hoa

It gives me great pleasure to write the preface for this special publication of *Collective Voices of COVID-19*. As the incident controller for Otago Polytechnic (OP) I have had plenty of time to consider and reflect on the learnings from our response and the impact on our learners, staff, and the business.

The main learning from leading OP's response to the COVID-19 pandemic is the importance of clear, timely communication that creates one source of truth. Communication needs to show empathy and deliver the message. Below I am going to share our learnings and highlight key areas of focus.

## **CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM**

We quickly pulled together our Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) when it became obvious this was not a flu strain that was going to miss our island nation. Our policy has a few lines on Pandemic/Epidemic and what to do, including suggested membership of the CIMT, but we quickly realised that the policy was not sufficient. It became obvious this team needed strategic oversight and the members needed to be at least Director-level to ensure they understood the big picture and had teams that supported them to get things done.

This team was available from early morning to late in the evening, seven days a week since mid-March, and worked together tirelessly to ensure we identified and addressed issues, and supported learners and staff. They were the link between national organisations like the Ministry of Education, the Tertiary Education Commission and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, and links to the wider community groups.

## **COMMUNICATIONS**

Communication needed to be timely, regular, humanistic, and have empathy. The points needed to be clear and it needed to come from one source only. We had to be fast as staff often communicated with learners rapidly and we needed to ensure that their communications didn't contradict what we had decided as an organisation. We succeeded in having fantastic communications for staff and learners because we had our communications experts lead the drafting of them. Others from the CIMT contributed to refining the communications, based on their areas of expertise, and the final message was personalised from me as the person sending it. The learnings from the unreliability of the emergency communications channels was to be prepared to send messages across numerous platforms to ensure we reached as many people as possible (social media, email, website, and intranet). This was very important for the learners.

## **PLANNING**

Prior to Alert Level 4, the CIMT met and worked through several scenarios. While they did not all eventuate, it did provide us with good thinking to inform decision-making and work through consequences. This high-level planning and discussion also meant we were quickly able to act as a team and trust each other, helped by having a rule that no idea is a 'dumb' idea.

## **PROBLEM-SOLVING AND DECISION-MAKING**

Each issue raised with us was unpicked, consequences thought through, and a decision made. If it could not be solved immediately then the person who raised it was notified of an expected timeframe for an answer.

## **PEOPLE**

Being kind and understanding of people's circumstances is key during critical incident management, as is the importance of clear communication and addressing queries quickly and clearly. We also provided support articles online, home-based exercise sessions and handy tips, as well as encouraging social interactions. It was important to acknowledge people's concerns and fears and help to address them.

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the lockdown in particular, challenged the thinking about how possible it is to work productively from home, and to maintain connections with colleagues.

## **LEARNERS**

We managed communications with our learners mainly from a central communications space, as well as from Facebook and Instagram. With our learners, we needed more communication platforms to ensure the message was getting out to the audience. Key messages about learning came from academic staff, and key messages about support came from the Student Success team. We needed to help learners cope with their changing world also.

## **FINANCIAL/BUSINESS**

We needed to focus on our staff and learners as our priority and then look at the implications around the needs for expenditure savings and impact on revenue. We have been lucky that we have been assured of our government funding as this has allowed us to work in this manner.

## **LEADERSHIP AND DELEGATION**

Finally, it has been important to have trust in my leadership and the decisions we have made as a team. The delegation at the time from the former CE to our team meant we were trusted to just get it done and this has been appreciated.

As this special publication highlights the collective voices of COVID-19, I urge you to read, view, and engross yourselves in the perspectives and learnings of others. This has been an unprecedented part of history and we sincerely hope it does not happen again.

*“He Waka Eke Noa – We are all in this together”*

Ngā mihi nui  
Nā Megan

### **Megan Gibbons**

Chief Executive and Incident Controller for COVID-19  
Otago Polytechnic

Introduction

# Collective voices, *Zeitgeist* and sensemaking

Michelle Barron, Lesley Gill and Oonagh McGirr

As 2020 draws to a close, we reflect on the extraordinary times we have lived in and the challenges we have navigated in the wake of the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. With this publication, we share the responses of a group of tertiary education professionals in Aotearoa New Zealand—the Otago Polytechnic whānau—to the unfolding ambiguity of COVID-19. We explore our reactions to this far-reaching health catastrophe and narrate our sensemaking as individuals within an organisation dealing with a unique and unprecedented crisis.

We begin by welcoming all to our reflective space with the karakia, invoking the power of the natural world. We deploy our collective ability to make sense of the myriad moments of adjustment in the era of COVID-19, charting experiences of agility, self-reflection, and practice. We discuss ways in which Otago Polytechnic and its people strive to achieve their mission—**Our People Make a Better World**—and work to support each other, ensuring minimum disruption for our learners whilst dealing with the irruptive nature of self-isolation in lockdown.

As lockdown loomed large, Otago Polytechnic's people provided suggestions for supporting colleagues. One of these ideas was to publish a weekly blog that offered mental, emotional, social, spiritual, and physical wellbeing advice and guidance. Each blog-post created touchpoints of personal experiences as well as proposing ways of processing the manifold effects of COVID-19. A simple and practical idea was to write a limerick; and so, a polytechnic-wide competition for the best limerick or sonnet was sparked.

A serendipitous conversation between the authors (Barron, Gill and McGirr) about wellbeing and the nature of work-life practices highlighted the need to identify ways of responding to the changing nature of research practice considerations. We sought to encourage participation in a lockdown-inspired poetry competition to garner the feelings, concerns and reactions of our people, and to document their courage, compassion and optimism.

Throughout this volume, born of a virtual water-cooler moment, we reflexively present our concerns and contemplations, capturing the spirit of our culture as we lived it—the zeitgeist of the uncertainty engendered by COVID-19. The organising principles

draw on multiple narrative methods, juxtaposing traditional academic articles (Martin Andrew; Sean Bell et al.; Oonagh McGirr; Ron Bull; Kathryn van der Vliet et al.; Leoni Schmidt; Yury Zhukov and James Staples; Don Samarasinghe et al.; Carolyn M. McIntosh; Bing Dai et al.; Alicia Liermann and Lesley Gill), with reflective pieces (Samuel Mann and Mawera Karetai; Helen Jeffrey; Gary Barclay; Liz Ditzel; Amber Paterson), and re-worked blog posts (Richard Mitchell; Lesley Gill). The self-penned poetry offerings (Hana Cadzow; Oonagh McGirr; Michael Goodliffe; Kathryn van Beek; Katie Scott; Federico Freschi; Lisa Short; Kerry Davis; Vaneeta D'Andrea) provide natural breakers for the core themes: learning and teaching practice, management and support of staff, and personal reflections.

We invite you to reflect on your own experiences and give thought to how these learnings might inform the next steps in our ongoing journey through our COVID-19 world.

*Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua: I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on my past.*

Essay

# Karakia

Ron Bull

The *karakia* of the olden Maoris [sic] was not like Pakeha prayers, but was an address to the gods in a regular form, a kind of petition to ask a favour, or in some cases a sort of charm or spell. The one used all depended on the occasion or what was wanted at the time.

So were the words of T. T. Tikao, widely acknowledged as a *tohuka* within Kai Tahu whanui, whose memories were collected by James Herries-Beattie in the 1920s.<sup>1</sup>

While his comments are inclined towards the sacred, they also indicate a sense of utility dictated by (a) 'occasion,' a set of prevailing circumstance, (b) 'what was wanted,' a desired outcome or purpose, and (c) 'time,' the particular chronological and perhaps ever changing epistemological perspective.

One of the primary roles of *karakia* is the demarcation between *Tapu*, the restricted, the extra-ordinary and *Noa*, the mundane everyday practice of ordinary life. Both of these *Karakia* in this book (among others used during the COVID-19 lockdown period) were used as a tool that encouraged a pause of contemplation: *Kia tau!* This is a purposeful act that allows participants to take time to acknowledge the *Tapu*, the extraordinary events and times that we live in. These *Karakia*, as opening and as closing, reflect all three of the conditions outlined above in the following ways.

The **occasion** was the set of extraordinary circumstances that lead to the almost complete shutdown of our ordinary lives through the COVID-19 lockdown period. This was marked by an unprecedented level of *Tapu* being placed over the entire country, a *Tapu* that we had to recognise and negotiate with and then set aside, to allow us to act in the ordinary.

When we ask **what was wanted** through the recitation of *Karakia*, the purpose, our staff *whānau* wanted to mark this difficult time but also to know that we shared a commonality and connection even though our normal had been disrupted.

The **time** chronologically was self-evident. However, as a staff *whānau*, we are beginning to more fully understand the role that *Karakia* plays in our lives: the need to pause, acknowledge the *Tapu* of the occasion, seek what we need in order to act normally and form our own unique response to these conditions.

The Karakia timatataka makes connection to wind and weather and how they impact on the world we live in. It indicates that after the cold and frost that a new day will dawn. It suggests that we should understand the conditions that adversely affect us to prepare ourselves for a new beginning.


During our lockdown, this was used to acknowledge the situation that we were in and to indicate that we needed to keep working towards positive outcomes. Each day is a new beginning, take time, pause, contemplate, reflect, and act.

With the Karakia whakamutuka we are looking towards clearance. When we complete a task or a day's work it is good to acknowledge the clearing of the work that has been done. This allows us to put these things aside and move on to the next part of our lives.

This was an important factor for us when we were working from home. We wanted to put aside our work and focus on whānau and the other important relationships and aspects of life.

When contemplating these, and any karakia, think of their words, the metaphors they contain, the knowledge that informs them and the context within which they sit. Pause, listen to them, let them guide you, let them connect you to time and place and people; past, present and future.

**Ron Bull's** whakapapa sits in the Titi Islands off the south west coast of Rakiura, a place that informs his identity and his practice. He is currently employed as Tumuaki Whakaako within the office of the Kaitohutohu at the Otago Polytechnic. His portfolio of responsibility includes embedding te reo me ōna tikaka Māori in all curriculum areas as well as in the learning environment within the institution. Ron's research focuses on mahika kai, traditional food practices particularly those linked to the Titi harvest.

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1 T. T. Tikao and James Herries Beattie, *Tikao Talks: Ka Taoka Tapu o te Ao Kohatu. Treasures from the Ancient World of the Maori* (Auckland: Penguin, 1990), 72.

# **The other side of a soapy orange: a journey through lockdown**

Gary Barclay, Helen McDermott, Laura Munro  
and Kathryn van der Vliet

In the autumn of 2020, the New Zealand Government took life-saving measures in response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. As a result, life as an Otago Polytechnic staff member changed a great deal over a short period of time. It also changed the way staff, their family and friends went about their daily lives. This article is a reflective piece based on the first author's experiences (from here on referred to in the first person) recorded in a 'Lockdown Log' and my attempts to cope with this extraordinary situation. For ease of reading, this work will be arranged by topic rather than a timeline of events.

To help the reader understand the perspective from which I write this, it may be useful to know that I teach at the Institute of Sport, Exercise and Health at Otago Polytechnic, and have a particular interest in sport, exercise and health psychology. I live with my wife (who is able to work from home), our two children (a daughter aged 12 and a son aged 10), and my 86-year-old mother-in-law.

On 26 March, 2020, New Zealand moved to Alert Level 4, bringing the country to a grinding halt. All non-essential travel and business stopped! No more sports, no more social gatherings, no more normality. I had been coping reasonably well with the first few days of Alert Level 4, getting things set up at home so that I could continue to work in relative comfort and so that our children could chip away at schoolwork. But then, on the evening of Sunday, 29 March, an old 'friend', a vulnerability to harm schema that I had been carrying around with me since childhood, came back to 'play' to such an extent that I became physically and mentally paralysed for the briefest of moments.

There I was, standing in the kitchen holding an orange! No, I do not have a debilitating fear of oranges, and normally, I would know what to do with this thing in my hand, but at that moment in time I did not have a clue! My normal approach to orange preparation and eating goes something like this:

1. Get orange from cupboard.
2. Get a plate and a peeling knife.
3. Peel the skin from the orange (feelings of pride if I can do the whole orange without the peel breaking).
4. Cut the orange into eight bite sized pieces (this is an old habit from occasionally feeding my wife an orange while she breast-fed our children years ago).
5. Consume orange.

But on this Sunday, in Alert Level 4, the experience instead went like this:

1. Get orange from cupboard
2. Thought—"Who knows who has touched this thing at the supermarket, I don't want COVID, I have to wash this orange, but how?"
3. Peel the skin over the sink with peeling knife.
4. Put peel in rubbish bin.
5. Thought—"I'm now holding a fleshy orange with my hands that have been touching the previously deemed dirty skin which might have COVID on it, therefore, my hands and orange are now 'dirty!'"
6. Panic! Moment of paralysis.
7. Thought—"Maybe I should just throw it out. No, that would be a ridiculous waste."
8. Solution: Wash hands and orange with soapy water!
9. Consume orange.
10. Lesson: never do that again! The only thing I could taste was 'Pam's Lavender Moisturising Handwash'.

I wonder what other COVID-19 induced habits will follow me and my family out of lockdown?

## **PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

With all forms of organised sport stopping in lockdown, our children could no longer take part in their two main summer activities, swim club and cricket, although my mother in-law was able to continue with her daily walks up and down our street. Prior to lockdown, my wife and I kept active by walking, cycling, running, and swimming which were mostly done individually, except for weekend family walks or bike rides. However, to keep us all active during lockdown, we started doing more activities together. The children suggested that we could alternate between walking, biking, and running. So, each day we would do one of those three activities. It was amazing to see so many other groups of people 'out and about' walking and riding, particularly during Alert Levels 4

and 3. Our children would often say, "It's (walk or bike or run) day, where could we go today?" They seemed to enjoy our experiences together and, as a parent, I experienced a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction from doing these activities together as well.

**Friday 24 April:** *It's a beautiful afternoon and the kids tell me that it's walk day. We decide to go around a big block which turns out to be 8 km! It took about an hour and a half but there is no complaining from the kids and lots of talking throughout. Really nice! Loved this experience!*

There was also a sense of pride in knowing that we were doing something as a family that was good for our health, and that our collective fitness was improving:

**Saturday 25 April:** *At 11 a.m. we go for a family bike ride. We make it to the top of [a local road]! The kids did so well! We had brief stops [and]...came straight home after taking pictures and having a snack at the top of the hill...So exciting that the kids did it, really proud! Later, at home, [my daughter] suggests that, next, we could work on only stopping twice!*

**Friday 1 May:** *We went for our family bike ride around 10 a.m. as I had meetings in the afternoon and wanted to get the ride done in good daylight. We did [the local road] again today and this time the kids only needed one stop! They did so well! Super proud!*

**Saturday 16 May:** *Had breakfast and got ready for the day. Hung out some washing and got some food ready for the day's bike ride. Feeling a little nervous about the planned ride...30 km and plenty of climbing. We know the kids can handle 35 km because we covered that last weekend. But this is an unknown...Started off on our ride at about 11:45 a.m. and got back at 3:45 p.m.! We spent 2 hours 32 minutes approx. of that actually riding. The kids did so well!...My legs were tired at the end of it, and the kids were amazing...they just knuckled down and got into it. I'm so tired now, can't stop yawning.*

In addition to our improving physical health and capabilities, our activities had other benefits as well. There were several occasions throughout lockdown when I experienced particularly low moods. These occasions were usually to do with parenting-related matters and/or various things going on at work:

**Thursday 30 April:** *[We go for a walk]...We go at a nice, easy pace towards [a local road], away from the most popular area, the 'Horse Track' as I can't really be bothered with [other] people at the moment. About three quarters of the way through the walk I notice that my mood has improved and I'm starting to feel more normal...Feeling a lot better than I had earlier in the day. I remind myself how I've managed to have a reasonably successful day considering the way I felt earlier.*

Now, as I write this in Alert Level 1 with lockdown being finished, there are noticeable changes in our behaviours and that of the community. School, and organised sport, and associated practices have started again, making it more difficult to 'schedule' our family activities, although we continue to make the effort to maintain our walk, bike, run rotation when possible. Sadly, the roads and footpaths no longer have the same buzz of activity that they did during lockdown, and cycling on the roads no longer feels as safe as it did in Alert Levels 4 and 3.

As a family, we are using a variety of strategies to help us continue our activities together. Possibly the most challenging yet rewarding change for me has been going at a 'family pace' as much as possible. I am, by no means, a 'super athlete' but my physical capabilities are currently greater than that of the rest of my family. Making the choice to go at 'family pace' has enabled me to be alongside and support the children during our activities. I can encourage where necessary, we discuss the sites we see, we share jokes, talk about our day and other topics, and they tell me to stop trying to sing. Occasionally there is an opportunity and desire to speed up and go at a more challenging pace for a while, then I circle back and we carry on together. Excitingly, as time has progressed, the amount that I have to circle back to meet them again has diminished as the family is slowly but surely gaining on me.

Another adjustment that we have made as life gets back to normal is to be prepared to have dinner a little later and we sometimes start dinner preparation prior to setting off. Due to the shorter days we now start bike rides as soon as possible after everyone is home and we limit the amount of time spent on the road, opting for a local track for mid-week rides.

## WORK

Having the ability to work from home during lockdown has been a privilege not available to many in the community, although very challenging at times. I could not speak more highly of the support that has been provided by the Polytechnic throughout my experiences of this period. Being able to continue teaching and communicating with staff and students throughout has enabled everyone to progress despite the challenge of working online and having children at home. I have struggled occasionally but felt that when I needed support of any kind, be that with students, with technology, or with my mental health I was able to reach out and get it. Even if my pride took a hit.

**Thursday 14 May:** *Looking forward to my classes today. Finding that I'm focusing on the feelings and emotions I will experience after I've done the different classes and it's helping with my mood. Classes go well today.*

In my school, some staff set up regular lunchtime quiz sessions which I enjoyed and

regularly took part in early on. There were also Friday online social catch-up sessions, although by the end of a long week I just wanted to get away from my screen, so I didn't attend these. Despite feeling very inefficient in the early stages of working from home, I, like many others, slowly adjusted to our new normal. In some respects, I felt a bit more productive at times working from home in that I could shut myself away in my room (another privilege not available to all) as opposed to being in the often disruptive environment of an open office space.

While working at home, I would wear my usual work 'uniform'. My children knew that I was 'at work' when I wore my work clothes which I would change out of at the end of the workday. I worked as close to my regular work hours as possible in an effort to maintain a routine, although the flexibility of working online did enable us to do activities during the day, in which case I would catch up afterwards. Although this was a way to make the most of a fantastic, sunny afternoon it didn't feel as pleasurable as doing activities at the end of the day as I sometimes struggled to 'switch-off' knowing I had to return to work.

**Wednesday 22 April:** *Given that it's getting a bit darker earlier we decide to go for our family bike ride at about 11 a.m. It feels strange riding in the middle of the work day in that I still have work stuff on my mind, things I need to accomplish today, so I'm not as relaxed as I normally am when doing family activities.*

## OTHER STRATEGIES

A strategy that I found useful for coping with the COVID-19 pandemic early on was to reduce my interaction with the news media as I found that the seemingly constant barrage of negative discussions was having a negative impact on my mood. So, when I wanted an update on the COVID-19 situation I would only go to the Ministry of Health news and media updates page. After some time, in addition to telling us how many new cases there were, the Ministry of Health started reporting more positively on the number of recovered cases, which I found helpful and this was the number I would typically relay to my children.

**Monday 4 May:** *Exciting news! No new cases of the virus! I can feel the excitement in my chest and upper body, it's like a shot of adrenaline (or is it that I just finished my coffee?).*

**Thursday May 7:** *Ministry of Health update, one new case linked to an existing cluster. 1332 have recovered which is 89 percent.*

We also kept our usual Saturday night movie routine going right through lockdown, and in the evenings, we would often watch an episode or two of a comedy called 'The

Nanny' which the children started to enjoy well before lockdown. If there wasn't a suitable family movie on, the children would want to watch 'The Nanny.'

**Saturday 2 May:** *Had mini homemade pizzas for dinner, yum! Washed up and then watched the last few episodes of season four of, you guessed it, 'The Nanny'! At the end of the programme it said "Thank you for watching our 100th episode"! Holy crap, that's a lot! No wonder I'm getting sick of it!*

The children organised challenges for us:

**Sunday 12 April:** *[My children] designed a bunch of clues and challenges for us to complete...They did really well with some cryptic clues and fun challenges, including bouncing on the trampoline for two minutes as a family. It's been ages since we did that! Despite the annoyances of this lockdown it has been great in terms of us spending more time together, doing stuff as a family without the distractions of other commitments getting in the way (e.g. sports, practices, school, homework).*

We tried to focus our thoughts on things that we had control over:

**Sunday 17 May:** *Coming out of lockdown and the children returning to school. [My daughter] has mentioned about "feeling nervous". I acknowledge that she feels nervous and remind her about the 'controllables' - physical distancing (the schools have been saying [to stay] out of each other's 'breath' distance) and hand hygiene. I take some comfort from my reminder as well, and I also remind [my son] of the same things after I finish reading with him in bed.*

Mindfulness was another strategy that I used to help cope with the stresses of this experience; sometimes I used this well:

**Monday 11 May:** *The kids' behaviour gets the better of me during dishes so I go to [my bedroom] and try some mindful meditation. It seems to work! [I feel much more calm.] After ten minutes I return and help with washing up.*

A variety of other strategies and activities also helped us through, including, but not limited to, acknowledgement of previous challenges that we have overcome, focusing on evidence-based information regarding appropriate behaviours and progress, kite flying, board games, charades, treat meals, trampoline challenges, keeping in touch online with family and friends, and monarch butterflies:

**Wednesday 22 April:** *My work is disturbed by some excitement outside! One of our Monarch butterfly chrysalises has hatched. It's really cool! Took heaps of pictures and it's nice seeing the kids both treating it nicely, like a pet.*

But, perhaps most importantly of all, the most influential factor that has helped myself and my family get through this experience has been having a very supportive and

understanding wife who I can talk to openly about how I am feeling. Many other lessons were learnt or remembered throughout our lockdown experience that will stay with me and that helped our family through this time, but we did it well, thanks to you. Thank you for your hugs, your listening, your kind words, for buying the oranges and for passing the tissues when I needed them, my love.


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Poetry

# Climbing the wall

Kerry Davis

There once was a virus so small  
That threatened to infect us all  
We learned and we taught  
Locked up in our fort  
And tried not to climb up the wall

**Kerry Davis** is a Senior Lecturer, teaching in the Bachelor of Nursing programme and coordinating the Senior Person's Health course. Kerry's clinical background is acute care and she enjoys creative writing including poetry to help her to express and process her experiences.

Essay

# Dispatches from the L&TD war room

Sean Bell, Claire Goode, Emma Allen, Rachel Cash, Wendy Dore, Hugh Harlow, Amber Paterson and Simonne Wood

## ABSTRACT

In mid-March 2020, before educational institutions across the world closed their doors in response to COVID-19 directives, Otago Polytechnic's Learning and Teaching specialists convened in a virtual 'war room' to strategise for the challenges that lay ahead. Over the following eight weeks, beaming in from spare bedrooms and dining tables across the country, from Northland to Otago, the team worked tirelessly to forecast, develop, and co-ordinate the resources, training, and guidance needed for teachers and learners on the frontline. Managing steep learning curves, ed-tech dilemmas and issues of engagement, assessment, and pastoral care were all in a day's work. Our mission was to build capability through empathetic, iterative support.

In the weeks that followed, war room and frontline blurred into one as did the divisions between learner and teacher and private and professional space. The troops experienced birth and death, illness and growth, isolation and connection, raising the question: "How do you learn the things you need to learn in the context of your real life?" It was a difficult time, a meaningful time, which generated new insights into truly 'online' and 'blended' learning in effective, inclusive learning environments. These are our stories.

## INTRODUCTION

Otago Polytechnic's Learning and Teaching Development team (L&TD) works alongside academic staff across the organisation. We build capabilities in multiple aspects of pedagogical practice, including programme and course design, assessment strategies, technology-enhanced learning, blended delivery, the development of resources for lifelong learning, and continuing professional development. All of this we do to ensure the best possible experience and outcomes for our learners. As part of our role, some members of L&TD are assigned to a particular College or programme team as 'Academic Capability Partners', each acting as a liaison to assist in identifying the team's learning needs (including educational technology/blended learning) and exploring a range of

different learning opportunities, including professional development workshops, peer observations, and mentoring. This collaborative essay is an account by L&TD of our collective experiences during lockdown, reflecting on key personal and professional moments and learning.

## **THE REVEILLE**

War metaphors have been a notable feature in the discourse around COVID-19. We often talk about the *fight* against disease, so it is not much of a leap to describe a worldwide pandemic using the language of a military campaign. The war metaphor—engendering dread and fear in some, the thrill of purpose and camaraderie in others—highlights emotion and, in this respect, offers a useful starting point for a reflection on the learning of the team responsible for learning. Jennifer Moon has pointed to the relationship between emotional insight and the learning that emerges from reflection,<sup>1</sup> while the challenges presented by COVID-19 meant that the team not only had to draw on established capabilities but also develop new skills, calling on “the emotional capacity” to do so.<sup>2</sup> Emotion did indeed guide our new learning<sup>3</sup> as our reflection on COVID-19 brought forward a series of personal responses and an awareness of the whole self at work. The reality of working from home, without choice and for an indeterminate amount of time, led to both a merging of the personal and professional, and an examination of its consequences. These important, emotional experiences provided the bridge from reflection to reflexivity. Working from home put us squarely in a learning space we had theorised and promoted, and we were now confronted with our attitudes and assumptions about that space. Our experiences drew out questions about personal and professional identity and values, power and access, and the willingness to remain in doubt—essential elements to reflection and reflexivity for development, as identified by Bolton.<sup>4</sup> Media parrying between COVID-19 the great leveller<sup>5</sup> and COVID-19 the great revealer<sup>6</sup> became tangible as we confronted the inequalities that block online learning from becoming truly democratic. Our story begins, though, with a period of intense professional activity followed by an eerie stillness as we waited for battle to commence.

## **THE STORM BEFORE THE CALM**

As with every other educational institution, our world was turned upside-down during the COVID-19 global pandemic, and we had to demonstrate and implement our practice on a scale like never before. In New Zealand, we were aware of the spread of the virus in other countries, but were fortunate to have no confirmed cases until 28 February, 2020.<sup>7</sup> By 15 March, though, there were eight cases, including the first in the South Island.<sup>8</sup>

Monday, 16 March 2020: It all started with a seemingly casual chat with our CEO at the coffee machine: “We’re preparing to go into lockdown. Staff will have two weeks to prepare to teach online.” That afternoon, the L&TD team gathered (physically and virtually) to brainstorm our strategies to support staff shifting to full online delivery in the very near future. You could feel the energy in the room... this is what we do; we just never imagined we would have to do it so quickly.

Over the next 24 hours, driven by adrenalin and a clear sense of purpose, we pulled together materials and advice for staff across Otago Polytechnic (OP), ranging from pedagogical tips through to managing communications at a distance, ‘triaging’ as we went. This was not just about throwing together everything we could find or sharing an endless list of options. What did our staff need to know and be able to do now? We had to believe in what we were sharing, and we had to get the tone right. “It’s OK. We’ve got you, and you’ve got this... You can do this.”

By the afternoon of 17 March, our resources went live, but that was just the beginning. Our Academic Capability Partners spread out to all corners of the campus to work alongside their respective teams, as teaching staff scrambled to brainstorm, upskill, and experiment with unfamiliar technologies, while also calmly reassuring learners that their courses would continue. Others in L&TD drafted instructions, embedded screenshots, and solved problems we did not know existed. It felt like a campaign, one that drew on our different skills and our ability to function well as a team. We already knew we liked and respected each other, but we had not yet had the chance to test that bond.

Otago Polytechnic closed its doors at 5 p.m. on Tuesday 24 March, with New Zealand going into a national lockdown from midnight the following day. Someone commented that it looked like the place was being burgled, with colleagues carting computers, screens, files, and even office chairs to their homes to set up new workspaces. The physical intrusion of this equipment in our homes was perhaps the first visible sign of the personal-professional ‘knot’, with the two spheres becoming entangled. Some colleagues were more worried about teaching online than about the virus, others were in denial about the severity of the situation. Anxious team-mates could no longer be consoled with a hug.

## **ONLY CONNECT**

Initially, as for many people, we joked and waved as we began meeting online. We caught glimpses of each other’s homes and families, and pets became our new co-workers. It was as if the team took a collective breath; we had done as much as we could to prepare our colleagues for the shift to online delivery. Now, we had to be there to support them in whatever way possible from a distance.

Early responses were positive and emotional—a lump in the throat at seeing familiar faces online, the joy of hearing how teachers and learners were adjusting to this ‘new normal.’ There were heartening and inspiring conversations with teachers driven by a new enthusiasm to embrace educational technology and find engaging new things for their housebound learners to do.

New daily routines began to set in—9:30 a.m. team meeting; 1:00 p.m. watch televised press conference with the Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, and the Director-General of Health, Dr Ashley Bloomfield; 4:30 p.m. team meeting. We ventured out to buy groceries for family and neighbours, and shared our success stories, from trialling new recipes and home-schooling children, to simply managing to put on some ‘proper’ clothes and brush our hair. In between, a whirlwind of online meetings, workshops, and hurried emails meant the days blurred into weeks; our personal and professional identities combining into intensified instances of ‘bring your whole self to work’. We saw each other’s energy rise and fall. Some joked about the stresses of being in lockdown with a partner, while others longed for company. Connections were key.

Real life intruded in both joyful and sorrowful ways. One team member welcomed a new baby into the world, while another endured the compounded stress of their son in an Intensive Care Unit and the passing of their father. In our isolation, those key connections—with learners, manager and our teams—became a lifeline and even a way to manage grief.

## **RE-IMAGINING THE LEARNING FRONT LINE**

As well as providing support to staff across multiple programme areas, L&TD are also teachers. Consequently, lockdown placed us firmly in the reflexive space, defined by Salmon et al. as “thinking tied to action.”<sup>9</sup> While we have the skills and experience to develop and deliver learning experiences online, there was a realisation that many of our learners would not have chosen this if they could; they had never intended to be distance learners. Maybe they had imagined this new learning would take place in some virtual classroom, when in fact the reality was their being perched on a stool at a breakfast bar, with a data plan designed for texts and social media. Laptops were sometimes shared between partners working from home and/or home-schooled children. The lack of quiet space meant noise-cancelling headphones became a prized asset. Access to technology (and to learning) was beset with financial and logistical barriers for learners and teachers alike. We supported one facilitator teaching from a tablet and another who could only reach his learners by phone. Ensuring learning took place through the careful implementation of the experiential cycle and a realistic reassessment of the learning environment became paramount.

We tried to imagine what life was like for the learners and how they could still learn the things they needed to learn in the context of that life, rather than in the usual context of the classroom. This meant keeping the pacing flexible and not forcing the learners into a particular timetable. They might have family to take care of or be sharing devices and internet connections with housemates. Our priority shifted from the content we had to cover to where our learners would be and what they would be doing.

The personal experience of lockdown informed the learning strategies employed in the emergency remote-learning setting. Delivery of content through video conferencing brought its own challenges, as synchronous online teaching can block many of the unspoken cues relied on by teachers and learners in the classroom. Without body language and eye contact, interactions become quite unnatural. Teachers cannot get a sense of learner engagement, and learners cannot gain a sense of how their classmates feel about the lesson, leaving them feeling isolated. This isolation reduces the online relationships to a hub-and-spoke, with the teacher at the centre controlling the session, rather than a mesh or net, with everyone connected equally.

Providing learners with the resources and the support to take control of their own learning eventually helped them to feel more comfortable in the online space, developing the agility needed for lifelong learning post lockdown. Otago Polytechnic's student support website, *Student Support Te Ama Taurira*<sup>10</sup> contributed enormously to this, providing nearly all the resources needed for supporting students with their online learning. It was powerful to realise we were so well prepared with resources to meet our learners' needs. In regards to the Learner Capability Framework, OP's multi-disciplinary project to enhance the employability of our graduates, there was no reduction in engagement when we went online.<sup>11</sup> In fact, since returning to campus, learners have been requesting their own online sessions to obtain the guidance they need.

## **THE TRUE SOLDIER FIGHTS BECAUSE SHE LOVES WHAT IS BEHIND HER**

In 2016, a working group made up of academic and professional staff from different teams across OP proposed the adoption of four new organisational values, soon endorsed by the rest of the institution. While these values—accountability, caring, courage, and empowerment—have been genuinely embraced across the institution, lockdown provided the opportunity to examine reflexively whether the professional structures and practices we have created endorse those values. The responses, both within L&TD and from the teachers we work alongside, suggested that honouring those values was a strong influence on decisions made and actions taken.

'Brave' and 'enthusiastic' were the words frequently used to describe the teachers' move to teaching via Microsoft Teams meetings, which indicated a strong commitment to providing learners with the best chance of staying engaged with the course. There

was an awareness that being in lockdown, in sometimes difficult environments, was taking its toll on many learners and having an outside connection to a teacher—just knowing that they were there—was empowering.

Teachers and learners felt safe and supported, and saw Otago Polytechnic's people and evidence-focused response as a micro-version of New Zealand's handling of the crisis. Whilst the rest of the world seemed to be in turmoil, we found ourselves incredibly grateful for family, our workplace, and our country.

## THE LAST POST

G. K. Chesterton's much quoted line, "The true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him"<sup>12</sup> brings our war metaphor to a fitting close. We know, of course, that we were not in a war room, nor fighting a war. Nevertheless, the importance of believing in what we do was brought home to us in a very meaningful way. COVID-19 will have repercussions for vocational education well into the future, but these challenges will be met by living our values as we have done during lockdown.


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Article

# **Midwifery at Otago Polytechnic: keeping calm and carrying on through COVID-19**

Carolyn M. McIntosh

When Aotearoa/New Zealand went into lockdown on 25 March, 2020, the nation had been given 48 hours to prepare. Everyone who could was to work from home; only essential workers could continue in the workplace, with strict criteria to maintain safety. Schools closed and students on work placement were not allowed to continue. Schools were given two weeks to prepare for online delivery. The health sector was particularly hard hit. There was anxiety about what might happen next. The Italian health service had been overwhelmed and could not deal with all the cases of COVID-19. Recently retired health workers volunteered to return to work to help manage the crisis. Students were also looking for ways to support their colleagues. Distance learning became the norm.

Undergraduate midwifery at Otago Polytechnic (OP) is a blend of online and face to face learning along with practice placements. Tauira<sup>1</sup> meet weekly in small tutorial groups around the lower North and lower South Islands of Aotearoa/New Zealand. Although taking students out of practice was a challenge, there were enough learning resources to be able to continue with the programme uninterrupted. Postgraduate midwifery courses at OP are fully online, with online modules as well as synchronous and asynchronous online tutorials and discussion groups; lockdown impacted on midwives enrolled in these courses, as they too struggled with the new realities of midwifery practice during lockdown. In this article, I share some of our experiences as we worked through the ever-changing realities of COVID-19 in the School of Midwifery.

Even before we went into lockdown, I was feeling very apprehensive about the pandemic which had reached our shores. Every day there were increasing numbers of cases identified and deaths began to occur. I did not want to leave my house and I was grateful when our government came up with a strategy to keep us all safe and get on top of the spread of the virus in our communities. I have also been very thankful to have been able to continue my work and to keep myself safe at home at the same time.

On 20 March, advice was given that anyone who could work from home should do so and that all non-essential travel was to be cancelled. We were also introduced to the four-tier alert level system that would become so familiar. By 23 March, all taura practice placements with women and midwives had ceased, in the next couple of days everyone was to remain at their current residence for at least the next four weeks. Many midwifery taura needed to return home to their whānau as quickly as they could. We encouraged and facilitated these taura to return home. There was a lot of information generated as District Health Boards, community midwifery services and OP identified what the restrictions meant for each of them, and we had to interpret what this meant for us as a school. Our Head of School was quick to initiate weekly meetings to help keep all staff informed. Information also came from an OP committee for COVID-19 management established by Megan Gibbons, the then Deputy Chief Executive of OP. All these meetings, and getting to grips with changes, took up quite a bit of time. Decisions had to be made and everyone rose to the occasion and did what needed to be done. Once taura were removed from practice, we immediately began planning for what could be delivered online and what aspects of learning would need to wait until we returned to face to face learning.

For me, this coincided with a period of intense work, when I had a large volume of marking to complete. I am a Dunedin-based employee living in Balclutha and have for many years worked from home about 80 percent of the time. Other than anxiety about COVID-19, my life was reasonably normal. Working from home, especially when marking, allows me to use my time effectively. Many midwifery academic staff are employed off-campus in the lower North Island. As a school, we are used to communicating online through Skype, Microsoft (MS) Teams, AdobeConnect or by email, and do so effectively for the most part. All staff meetings take place online. We discovered a long time ago that it was most challenging for us to hold meetings with some staff face to face and others joining in online. When everyone is online everyone has the same experience and the meeting is geared towards an online environment. For us, it has always been a challenge attending OP meetings where we have been online and everyone else is in a room. During lockdown, meetings were very different and a much better experience for us than usual. We felt able to fully participate and much more included. All staff commented that this was a feature of working through lockdown that we felt worked well for us.

I was very lucky—my work continued pretty much as normal—but for some, both staff and taura, there were extra challenges. Everyone was at home and needing to work or study. Not everyone has a designated workspace as I do, and they often had to share with a partner who was also working from home. For those with school age children, there was little quiet time to devote to work and schoolwork had to be supervised on top of everything else. So, although these staff might usually find working from home quiet and effective, this was far from the case during the COVID-19 lockdown.

I work with a group of final year midwifery taura who were on placement in various locations around the country. They too had to head home. For final year taura, well embedded on a long practice placement, this was particularly hard to leave. A positive aspect for myself, and this group of taura, was starting to meet up online via MS Teams. It gave us a chance to debrief practice scenarios and talk about this new COVID-19 world and what it meant for midwifery practice. This was a rare opportunity. Taura are busy on placement and hours are never static so it is impossible to organise a time to meet when everyone will make it. Final year taura were the first to be able to return to practice and did so when we moved from Alert Level 4 to Alert Level 3. Now I am catching up with them one at a time again and our group meetings have sadly ended.


All first year midwifery taura are given a bag of consumable items required for learning practice skills. Kaiako<sup>2</sup> too have access to a bag of equipment. We all had resources on hand to continue learning skills through video conferencing, either using Skype or MS Teams. As I usually teach skills face to face in Dunedin, my bag of equipment was there. I was lucky that a colleague, also from Balclutha, was able to get in just before the doors at OP were locked and pick up my bag for me. A lesson for me is to make sure I do have the equipment at home so I can continue teaching. It was not the usual learning experience for taura but it did allow them to continue learning during lockdown and taura have said that it gave them something other than COVID-19 to focus on. Taura reporting to our recent Polytechnic External Advisory Committee said they valued the effort that staff went to, to keep in touch with them.

As the undergraduate midwifery degree programme is already set up for flexible delivery, very little change was needed for our programme to be run at a distance. Some minor timetabling changes were all that was required. During lockdown, each of the three years of the programme was scheduled to be in class for a week-long intensive. Some aspects of the intensive sessions were valuable online, others made taura appreciate the face-to-face environment more. Postgraduate courses are already fully online and little change was needed for these courses, other than generous extensions for assessments, as midwives enrolled in these courses juggled the demands of work with study. Programmes in the School of Midwifery have been designed with flexibility in mind, and with support from the School and OP we were able to adapt to the needs of our taura during this unusual time.

As we return to our usual ways of working, kaiako are liaising with each taura to identify support needed to assist them to make up lost hours in practice alongside other course demands and the demands of family life. We are mindful of anxiety and stress for students and are working with students individually to identify and minimise this. We started this process with final year taura, moved on to second year, and are now starting this process with first years. We remain vigilant to the possibility that we might need to return to lockdown.

The unexpected crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic has created challenges for education. As our programmes already have a significant online component, we were able to realign face-to-face components readily to the online environment. Everyone in the School of Midwifery, staff and students, pulled together through this crisis with willingness to get through. Although we each had our own challenges, we are pleased to have been able to keep tauira at the centre of our efforts, keeping them engaged in learning, with as little interruption as possible.

**Carolyn M. McIntosh** is a midwife and Principal Lecturer at Otago Polytechnic School of Midwifery. She has extensive experience as a rural midwife. Carolyn has a research interest in learning and assessment strategies to support equality in midwifery education for all students in urban, rural or remote settings.

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- 1 Tauira - Student
- 2 Kaiako - Teacher



Poetry

# The Seed

Hana Cadzow

There is a seed in my belly and this time  
it is not a baby

still

I can feel it growing there

curling its fingers  
around my lungs and squeezing  
as birds call bright in the quiet  
so that my steps slow while I walk

catching at my breath  
when I'm not prepared and I see a mother  
carefully selecting birthday supplies  
and my heart races in the aisle of the supermarket

creeping out of my dreams and  
whispering to me  
just as the night is closing and my eyes  
are opening to the new day

dancing at the thought of a meal with friends


I smile when it tickles  
and I miss it when it stops

I water the seed patiently  
watching videos of grandparents meeting their grand-babies  
and rescued dogs being welcomed home

Slowly the seed opens  
Slowly the seed grows

Hope  
is that you?

**Hana Cadzow** is a Principal Lecturer in the College of Engineering, Construction and Living Sciences at Otago Polytechnic. Her research focuses on innovative engineering education with specific interests in workplace learning as well as the experiences of women and communities. Her creative outputs are varied but usually say more about motherhood and life than engineering.

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Article

# **Remote leadership in a COVID-19 context: how managers can support staff working from home**

Alicia Liermann and Lesley Gill

## **ABSTRACT**

This article offers insights into how leaders can effectively manage a dispersed workforce and proposes the importance of employee wellbeing in remote organisational settings. The existence of an engaged top-management is crucial in times where face-to-face interactions decrease and communication through technological devices is getting more common. It is up to the organisation's leaders to implement remote management practices successfully. Incorporating staff throughout the transitioning process and during day-to-day routines is paramount. Once the road to remote working is set, there will be no going backwards; indeed, only forward momentum. COVID-19 and the consequential lockdowns that followed necessitated an increased need for remote working.

## **KEYWORDS**

leadership, remote working, wellbeing, human resource management trends and challenges, COVID-19

## **INTRODUCTION**

Recent data from research conducted in the UK has shown that employees working for organisations offering their staff more flexibility (particularly in the sense of remote working) struggle less with prioritising their wellbeing and tend to perform better, presupposing proper workforce management.<sup>1</sup> This is one reason why in the last few years, remote working has become a trend across organisations.<sup>2</sup> In the recent COVID-19 lockdowns, many employees were forced to work from home. Self-leadership and learning new technologies while managing other factors such as isolation and home/

work dualities became the norm. This article acknowledges the self-leadership of many in the workforce who stepped up during this time, juggling work and home life at home, while focusing on how leaders can better respond to support employees in remote working situations during events such as COVID-19.

With the recent outbreak of COVID-19 resulting in a global pandemic, working remotely has not only become desirable but essential for many businesses as they entered lockdown.<sup>3</sup> The new norm is physical distancing and staying at home, interfering with the concept of people working in offices and having face-to-face interactions.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, it is arguably more important than ever for leaders to understand how their workforce can be managed remotely. Although this article will take the circumstances of the current pandemic into account, its novelty may imply a lack of valid and reliable data up to this date, which is why no assumptions about its enduring impact on employees and remote working are made. Rather, it is an opportunity to explore research within the field of remote workforce leadership, especially under the circumstances of organisational chaos and crisis management such that COVID-19 has generated.

To gain an insight into the concept of remote leadership, this article reviews contemporary theory covering the aspects of managing a remote workforce, focusing on how organisations address employee wellbeing, the challenges impacting working remotely, and how they can be avoided or resolved by managers.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, remote leadership and working from home have been rising trends.<sup>5</sup> Researchers have explored managing a remote workforce and gaining valuable insights on how working from home can affect people's wellbeing positively and negatively.<sup>6</sup> Overall, researchers agree that remote teams need an engaged top-management to function effectively. Johnson argues that without proper guidance and expertise, there is little hope for the concept of remote leadership to succeed.<sup>7</sup>

The question resulting from this claim is what managers can and must do to support their dispersed workforce. Three key concepts that highlight successful remote leadership and implementation are discussed next.

### **Healthy work-life balance**

For many, the idea of working from home implies improving one's work-life-balance. There is no need to waste time stuck in traffic and emails can be checked while having breakfast with the family. Whilst this can be a welcoming benefit of working from home, the transition into working remotely is not always easy and can put significantly higher pressure on employees.<sup>8</sup>

Employees often fail to distinguish strictly between job and leisure, unconsciously blurring the lines between time at the job and time at home.<sup>9</sup> The resulting effect is that employees struggle with switching off and unwinding at the end of a workday.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, some employees develop a feeling of isolation, lacking social interaction at work and becoming alienated from the organisational culture,<sup>11</sup> which results in a decrease in productivity and efficiency regarding the employee's performance at work.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, those struggling with their wellbeing may not be comfortable directly communicating this issue.<sup>13</sup>

Whilst this may sound like a problem the employee has to tackle alone, it can be argued that leaders have a duty to ensure their workforce's wellbeing, and ultimately have to set the ground for a healthy work-life-balance. Watson argues that health management needs to be accepted and integrated in a leader's mindset and conveyed to employees.<sup>14</sup> However, leaders still overlook the importance of mental health.<sup>15</sup>

### **Consistent and effective communication**

'Communication is key' is a common phrase and in the context of remote leadership, it becomes even more crucial. In a traditional organisational setting, where employees do not work remotely, face-to-face interactions ease the communication process.<sup>16</sup> Questions can more easily be asked and answered, and the day-to-day business and decision-making processes tend to work smoothly and efficiently.<sup>17</sup> However, even in such an organisational setting factors, vertical information flow can hinder employees to be heard and understood, resulting in a lack of employee satisfaction and engagement.<sup>18</sup> The implication for leaders of remote teams is that communication not only needs to happen from the top-management to employees but vice-versa. Employee input is a valuable commodity.<sup>19</sup>

According to Aileen Izquierdo, interim chair of the Florida International University Department of Communication, managers must step away from the generic one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to internal communication, and need to understand that, whilst leading remotely, messages must be specific and well-targeted.<sup>20</sup> Whitney Johnson claims that miscommunication is much more likely to happen in a remote workforce, as individuals interpret messages differently, especially when non-verbal communication is lacking.<sup>21</sup> The author states that once she recognised how each employee reacted differently to messages received, and once she learned how to understand her employees' diverse styles of communicating, leading a remote business became a lot easier.

Leaders need to be trained in communicating with their staff. Miscommunication will happen in the initial phases of remote leadership.<sup>22</sup> Leaders learn how to communicate effectively to run a successful business.<sup>23</sup> An understanding that internal communication

will be different with a dispersed workforce is key to building effective communication, thereby avoiding frustration for staff and managers.<sup>24</sup>

### **The use of technology**

The use of technology is inevitable when working remotely. Although employees have easy access to computers and can rely on a stable internet connection in the office, leaders cannot assume that their workforce has equal access to reliable technology at home.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, organisations should feel encouraged to provide their employees with the needed technology and offer IT support and services.<sup>26</sup>

Appropriate technology is especially crucial as usage of non-corporate devices and the lack of measures to prevent unauthorised third-party access to confidential company data makes the employee and the organisation vulnerable to cyber-attacks.<sup>27</sup> According to a study conducted amongst USA workforces during the COVID-19 crisis, 61 percent of respondents did not receive a device from their employer, only seven percent were provided with antivirus software, and only 50 percent were offered IT support during their transition into working remotely.<sup>28</sup>

Providing one's workforce with needed technological devices is not only essential under the aspect of cyber-security, it is also a prerequisite to staying connected, contributing to employee wellbeing.<sup>29</sup> Online tools such as Google Hangouts, Zoom and Skype can be used for catching up, or for organising social events,<sup>30</sup> and to create a greater feeling of togetherness. Leaders can encourage their employees to make use of their webcams during virtual meetings to create a feeling of physical presence.<sup>31</sup>

## **DISCUSSION**

This section discusses how theory can be applied practically, how remote leadership links to organisational strategy, business planning and human resource (HR) planning.

### **Organisational Strategy**

The best strategy to manage a remote workforce depends on diverse factors including a business' mission and vision, which can greatly influence organisational excellence.<sup>32</sup> At its best, working remotely increases flexibility, lowers expenses, and grants the organisation access to a greater talent pool.<sup>33</sup> In the worst case, it can hinder business operations and effective communication, negatively affecting inter-organisational transparency.<sup>34</sup> Regardless of an organisation's business objectives, the most important strategic aspect of leading a remote workforce is to include the staff actively throughout the transitioning process and during day-to-day routines.<sup>35</sup> Employees must understand

the change process and how it will influence their working life to be committed, which is why leaders need to establish a corporate purpose and justification for how working from home can create value for both the organisation and its workforce.<sup>36</sup>

Once employees are engaged, a shift in the corporate culture can happen, meaning that leaders and employees collaborate in “strengthening” what works and “balancing out” what does not in the new business setting, thereby creating an environment of togetherness.<sup>37</sup> This approach is advisable as working remotely leaves a lot of room for errors and disruptions.<sup>38</sup> Changing an organisation’s culture takes time and must by no means be linear. Leaders should rather accept the uncertainty, risks and setbacks, and see those as an opportunity to evolve and become more resilient.<sup>39</sup>

### **Business Planning**

As remote leadership often involves having to deal with errors and unforeseen challenges, organisations with a dispersed workforce should consider developing their adaptive capability, and thereby become more agile. Agile organisations can proactively seize opportunities, react to threats in a timely manner, and make effective and sustainable changes to their organisation.<sup>40</sup> However, leaders of organisations with adaptive capability must be agile themselves and must resist the temptation to micromanage, which is why top-management commitment and expertise is crucial.<sup>41</sup> Agility not only helps to efficiently solve inner organisational problems, it can also help firms to better respond to today’s fast-changing business environments and can ease the process of creating competitive advantage.<sup>42</sup>

### **Human resource planning**

Human resourcing plays a significant role in leading remotely and can simultaneously become more challenging regarding the increased isolation of managers and staff.<sup>43</sup> Implementing an effective HR plan can therefore be helpful in dealing with the new organisational setting and can identify where adaptations are needed. An HR plan of the following four steps can pave the way to effective HR practice:

**Step 1:** assess current HR capacity

**Step 2:** forecast HR requirements (demand and supply forecasting)

**Step 3:** develop talent strategies (all aspects of HR practice)

**Step 4:** review and evaluate HR plan<sup>44</sup>

It is important to identify an organisation’s current HR capacity to distinguish where workforce requirements may not be meeting the business’ objectives. After that, arguably the most complex step in HR planning is the development of talent strategies.

Here, it is not only important to recruit the right candidates that are a valuable asset and a cultural fit for the business,<sup>45</sup> providing training and enabling employees to develop further is also a crucial part of effective HR planning.<sup>46</sup>

Human Resource managers may struggle to keep up with employees' performance and development, whereas virtual employees may worry that 'out of sight is out of mind,' and their capabilities are not being recognised.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, it becomes even more important to have an effective HR planning set in place.

Staff performance must be measured accurately and under equal premises.<sup>48</sup> However, studies have shown that employees working from home have a lower chance of being promoted,<sup>49</sup> which may relate to the lack of accurate performance measures and performance visibility. Employee performance management systems can support leaders in assessing their workforce adequately.<sup>50</sup> In addition, SMART goals (specific, measurable, actionable, relevant, and timely) can help employees understand what is expected from them.<sup>51</sup>

Another aspect of effective HR planning in a remote working environment are policies on office hours. Flexible working means that fixed office hours become redundant.<sup>52</sup> However, when restructuring guidelines on attendance, there should be clear rules and expectations.<sup>53</sup> Here, setting up equitable policies can be helpful in maintaining good employee relations. To collect data and keep track of an organisation's HR practices, Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) are used.<sup>54</sup> In a remote business setting, computerised HRIS are inevitable and can support HR practices. However, data must be collected effectively and be easily accessible.<sup>55</sup>

Business objectives can always change and so may an organisation's HR practices. Constantly reviewing and evaluating the HR plan is therefore an inherent part of the plan itself.

## **CONCLUSION**

Overall, it becomes clear why remote leadership and working from home have become trends across organisations in the recent years, particular within the COVID-19 landscape. The organisation and its employees can greatly benefit from the flexibility gained when working remotely.<sup>56</sup> For businesses, workforce management practice can decrease costs and increase productivity, ultimately resulting in financial profits.<sup>57</sup> Employees can benefit by improved work-life-balance and from an increase in wellbeing and job satisfaction.<sup>58</sup>

However, the lack of physical interaction can be troubling. When not managed correctly, it can lead to miscommunication, frustration, and ineffectiveness.<sup>59</sup> Employees feeling unheard and excluded in the decision-making process often fail to perform to their full


potential, and managers may miss out on valuable input and overlook talent within their own workforce.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, managers must be trained in effective communication, leading a dispersed workforce. Technology should be used to stay connected.

Furthermore, organisational strategy must be aligned with the new opportunities this pandemic is opening up. Challenges of the remote workforce and businesses are encouraged to become more agile to operate sustainably.<sup>61</sup> Managers can support their workforce by actively listening to feedback and by offering rewards and opportunities for development, for instance, in terms of promotions or remuneration.<sup>62</sup>


Adapting to this new coronavirus environment is not easy for leaders or their employees. However, risks and setbacks should be seen as an opportunity to acquire expertise, and once the 'teething troubles' are conquered, the new corporate opportunities should be celebrated. Remote leadership can work, and when it does there should be no going back to old norms post- COVID-19.

New research is being conducted on a larger scale in response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and its long-term effects, offering further insights to tackle the challenge of leading remotely, especially under the new circumstances of organisational chaos provoked by this global crisis.

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Poetry

# Sonnet 01

Kathryn van Beek

Shall I compare thee to a lockdown day?  
Thou art more varied and less desolate.  
Chill winds do shake the dying leaves of May,  
And lockdown's lease hath all too long a date.

The eye of government doth coldly shine,  
Even online shopping now is thwarted;  
Hope of receiving woollen goods declines,  
And outdoor pursuits are now reported.

Thou shalt not break thy two-metre resolve,  
Nor lose possession of thy stockpiled food.  
Thy civic spirit shall not now dissolve,  
Nor shall woe brag thou linger in its mood.

So long as internet unites OP,  
We may connect – albeit virtually.

**Kathryn van Beek's** work has appeared in The Sunday Star-Times, takahē, Mindfood, Fresh Ink, and in her short story collection, Pet. Kathryn is currently studying towards a Doctorate of Professional Practice on the topic 'writing for positive change.' She is also a member of the Communications team at Otago Polytechnic.

# **Reflecting upon COVID-19 lockdown: unexpected connections**

Liz Ditzel

## **ABSTRACT**

This short personal narrative relates to a unique teaching experience in Wuhan, China, connecting the author's experience of isolation, physical distancing, handwashing, being kind and staying safe at that time, to similar aspects experienced during the recent New Zealand COVID-19 lockdown.

## **INTRODUCTION**

At 11:59 p.m. on 25 March, 2020, New Zealand entered Level 4 lockdown; a public health strategy designed to stop the rapidly spreading coronavirus otherwise known as COVID-19. This state of emergency, ending slightly over a month later, resulted in all but essential workers being required to stay at home, unless going out to shop in carefully managed conditions or exercising whilst staying two metres apart from other people. Reflecting upon this lockdown period reminded me of my experiences of temporarily living in Wuhan, now a name familiar to most people due to international headlines associating the city with the outbreak of COVID-19.<sup>1</sup>

In Wuhan, as a visiting teacher, I was fortunate to live in a four-star university campus hostel. However, it lacked a hot water supply for washing or drinking, and shower wastewater was carried away into uncovered drains running outside the building. Upon arrival, my host warned me to drink bottled water only and use this for toothbrushing. Accordingly, throughout my stay I was hypervigilant about hygiene, handwashing, and I carefully practised most of the public health measures that are now entrenched in our daily lives as an outcome of the devastating COVID-19 pandemic. I knew that if I became sick in China, I would not know how to seek or access help because I only spoke English. In what follows, I describe the unexpected connections between my two different month-long isolation experiences, one related to my being isolated by language and in part a fear of becoming ill, and the other through being isolated but connected by technology as part of a national emergency.

## WUHAN, CHINA, OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 2002

In late 2002, I was invited to teach a four-week Human Resources Management (HRM) course as part of a postgraduate programme at The Huazhong University of Science and Technology, a public research university located in Guanshan Subdistrict, Wuhan, China. Excited by this prospect, I checked a Lonely Planet guide to find out that Wuhan is the sprawling capital of Central China's Hubei province containing many lakes and parks, including the expansive picturesque East Lake. Temperatures ranged from very cold to very hot in the summer.<sup>2</sup> Local delicacies included catfish (found in the many lakes) and pigeon. From this brief introduction, I decided that being a vegetarian was the best option for this trip and that it would be sensible to take a good supply of staple food items such as muesli, instant coffee, and milk powder to at least start my day with familiar food and a much needed coffee.

Provisions, passport, and travel visas taken care of, I packed a small suitcase with laptop computer, lecture files and, just in case, some videos. Arriving in Wuhan Airport after an overnight stop in Hong Kong, my host and I travelled a long distance to a staff hostel at the university where I quickly stood out as the only European guest. After settling in—my room had the luxury of a flush toilet, cold-water shower, small firm bed, desk with a 20L thermos of hot water for washing and drinking—I was shown the way to the Business School classroom; my teaching space for the next four weeks.

The first morning I was greeted with a room packed with 90 students and 20 staff, and an unfamiliar keyboard with no English letters. Stuck until my laptop was connected; I introduced the course by talking slowly into a microphone. Crowding eased when faculty staff clapped and left during a break. By then my laptop was connected and much relieved, I delivered my first lecture using prepared PowerPoint slides. However, the students were unfamiliar with PowerPoint and found reading words on the screen difficult. The long morning ended when the class fell asleep during one of my most engaging videos! Somewhat disillusioned, I listened to the English-speaking Class Captains who kindly told me that students expected the course to follow the content of a Chinese textbook. They gave me the 'Teacher copy' that thankfully included English instructions and case studies.

Next day I followed the textbook plan and organised students into small groups to solve the first case problem. This worked! Students excitedly talked and made notes about solutions and their enthusiasm was fuelled by a plentiful supply of cases. I organised a class competition for them to present their solutions. They loved doing this, but always wanted to be told the right answer at the end of the sessions as this was what they were expecting. And so, the rhythm of teaching continued—each day a new part of the textbook, a case study, followed by the right answer. I began to relax and to accept this as OK. Rather than my usual practice of challenging students to think about different scenarios, I realised that this instructional style of teaching was what was expected. It

also justified using a case study for the final exam; one that students understood and that provided enough content to be marked in written English, a daunting prospect for the majority.



Figure 1. Liz and Class Captains outside the Business School, Wuhan, 2002. Source: author's personal copy taken by a student

## **DUNEDIN, NEW ZEALAND, MARCH-APRIL 2020**

Dunedin daily lockdown life began with the same breakfast as eaten in my small room in Wuhan; the exceptions being that only UHT milk was available in China at the time, and my coffee is now made by my husband using a home espresso machine. Next, the daily shower thankfully with warm water and a brisk walk around the neighbourhood before settling into a routine of preparing or delivering classes online using a computer set up in a home office/bedroom. As in China, I used one textbook hastily retrieved from work, and accessed other teaching resources through WiFi on a limited data broadband plan.

Each lockdown day presented new communication and teaching challenges due to the complexity of bringing together 110 students online, some of whom were in remote areas with limited connectivity. Thankfully, there was always a supportive teaching team or Otago Polytechnic staff member to ask for help through email or phone. Most problems were quickly resolved, allowing the remaining 72 students to successfully work together in small groups to present their assessments online using a PowerPoint, short films, online quizzes, and case studies. Learners' concerns about passing this

assessment were addressed by modifying the marking criteria to accommodate these changes. Class feedback was positive, many learners indicating that they preferred the online presentation option as it enabled them to be more creative. Like the Chinese students, these learners appreciated the adaptability and flexibility afforded to them and that their concerns about passing this assessment were addressed and resolved at short notice.

The first two weeks of lockdown presented a raft of new challenges, like those encountered upon arriving and adjusting to different routines and practices in a foreign country. Among these was the new 24-hour work pattern with no clear boundaries due to being online most of the day, checking in with colleagues, replying to students, and participating in meetings. This intensive schedule replicated my Chinese working week with Monday to Saturday classes running from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Sunday as the only day of rest.

Lockdown life also centred around safety, staying at home, walking around local streets, watching out for neighbours, nodding, and smiling to people, keeping physical distance and washing hands vigilantly. For me, non-teaching time was reflective, looking out of the window, watching the sky, thinking about life, chatting to family by phone or Skype, reading about the world, or listening to news. The pace of life eventually slowed down—shopping was limited to a weekly trip to the supermarket, usually with the same list of grocery items. Sleep was somehow more restful with no outside commitments and/or places to be.

Safety was fundamental to my Wuhan routine as well. Confined to the campus precinct, I walked the same roads after class, smiled and nodded to people as I visited the same market stall for the same food items; usually a charcoal baked sweet potato, fruit and either walnuts or freshly roasted hazelnuts from the local street corner vendor. Before dark, I safely returned to my room, locked the door, washed my hands before eating and later connecting via dial-up landline internet to talk to people back home or read Otago Daily Times headlines. Physical distancing involved teaching from an elevated platform in the classroom and avoiding close contact with coughing students. Being kind was reciprocal; I smiled when I knowingly paid too much money for fruit at the market, and vendors laughed at me carefully stepping around buckets of live catfish.

## **SO WHY AM I WRITING THIS NEARLY TWENTY YEARS' LATER?**

Firstly, because of the unexpected connections between briefly living in China and at that time fear of becoming ill due to infection, the current COVID-19 pandemic that allegedly began in a Wuhan 'wet' market (one in which live animals are sold), and the


requirements of the national lockdown recently experienced by us all. As previously described, my daily routine in Wuhan included many of the recently practiced elements of lockdown, that is, physical distancing, handwashing, being kind and staying safe.

Secondly, I learned many valuable lessons from my short experience of being a foreign teacher in an unfamiliar environment. I learnt to carefully listen and respond quickly to learner's needs, an attribute that underpins my current teaching practice. In the first week of the HRM course, the Class Captains explained to me that while proficient in spoken English, most of the class were afraid of failing a written English course, hence my decision to use a case study in the final exam. I kept the following note from a student "Dear Miss, We really liked doing the cases from the book – it made our life so much easier for us. We liked the rulers you gave us from New Zealand for our prize. Thanks!" Roles were reversed however, when the Class Captains completed the daily class attendance register for me, as this was a list of Chinese characters in small font that I could not decipher.

Thirdly, like many New Zealanders who read, sang, or performed family musicals during lockdown, I found by chance that many Chinese students could recite English nursery rhymes learned in earlier years. I gained an appreciation that words and music are powerful teaching tools and challenged students to find new rhymes and stories, so we could share these in class. This learning was extended by singing and performing the actions for some rhymes, such as *Three Blind Mice*; practising these in class was a noisy affair that lifted energy levels for everyone. This sense of community, closeness and fun helped to build friendships among students whilst bridging language barriers. In some of the NZ lockdown presentations, groups used stories or poems to illustrate concepts, and others challenged participants to turn on their cameras for an online 'TikTok' competition.

To conclude, my reflections on the key aspects of being in lockdown in NZ enabled me to connect two different isolation experiences. Although unheard of at the time, COVID-19 gives a name to the fear that I had of becoming ill in China, justifying my actions to maintain hygiene and reduce the chance of infection. During my time in Wuhan, I was also acutely aware that, in the absence of English-speaking people in my hostel or access to a telephone, there was no way of calling an Embassy for help in an emergency. To feel safe, I kept my Kiwi passport in a secure travel pouch sewn into my clothing and stashed it under the mattress at night. Finally, like the thousands of New Zealanders who have returned home due to the pandemic, I felt a huge sense of relief to land on home soil and am truly privileged to live in Aotearoa/New Zealand a country whose COVID-19 lockdown response has protected the 'team of five million'.

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- 2 The average temperature in Wuhan in January is 1°C, and is 33°C in July.



Poetry

# Sweet OP unlimited

Oonagh McGirr

In the first weeks of COVID-19 lockdown, we shifted to working offsite and online like the rest of the nation.

At our virtual all-staff meeting on Friday, March 29, as we debated the imminent change for our organisation from independent polytechnic to subsidiary member of the New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology (NZIST), I spontaneously composed this to acknowledge the conversations and feelings of our whānau. The overarching tenor of those online exchanges was one of collaborative resilience: that the change to a new era and a single NZIST with Otago Polytechnic Limited as a subsidiary had not, and would not, diminish our unlimited aspirations and appetite for innovation.

There once was a wee ITP  
A jewel in New Zealand's south sea  
Home to self-leading teams  
Crafting greatness of dreams  
Sweet Otago—long may she be  
*Unlimited!*

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# Gardening in the age of COVID-19

Helen Jeffery

Summer was warm and long, with a good amount of rain. The Wakatipu gardens were prolific, almost everyone had one. Those that did not toiled in someone else's in return for produce. Everything flourished just nicely, thanks in part to the culture of growth that permeated even the rockiest of soil beds. Not quite the growth of last year some noticed, perhaps we were getting just a little over-ambitious thinking that would happen year after year. After all, soil that is not well nurtured does not give relentlessly, and there had been a pattern of less compost and more forced propagation by many of the gardeners. However, the harvest was still good enough, with plenty to go around, even for the out-of-towners. The experienced managed their bountiful gardens through judicious use of the many willing and skilled workers new to the district.



Figure 1. Untitled. Source: Nina Luong on Unsplash

February seemed normal really. Overall, the usual autumnal patterns were followed. Every-day gardeners started to harvest and put aside for the rainy days of winter. Lots of bottling and pickling and freezing, satisfied grins on most faces. Some gifted colourful bottles of sauces and jars of jam, beautifully labelled, and gratefully accepted by those less fortunate in their endeavours. Gardens of grandeur continued to be planned, words like multi-level, five star, and developers

dream were bandied about as the cash was splashed. The more insightful focused on environmental damage and bemoaned the sheer numbers feasting. Despite this, a hint of angst with news of the season in the northern hemisphere, not going at all well, and we do so often follow their trend...



Figure 2. Bounty. Source: author



Figure 3. Headlines. Source: Mountain Scene, February 2020

March came along softly at first, but with a little edge to it – winter will be hard this year, some were saying. Look what is happening up north. The master gardener and her team stepped in; Levels 1 to 4 were declared along with a State of National Emergency, yellow and white stripes emerged all around. Seemingly suddenly a frenetic 48 hours to prepare for Level 4 lockdown. Go to your bubble and stay there. An almost total gardening ban, just like that. Associated levels of concern varied from garden to garden, depending on their position, size, and the care the gardeners had taken. For some it was business as usual, leaves were raked, and compost piles turned. A final shopping spree for seedlings before the opportunity was gone, and conversations over the fence about what to do to ensure everything thrived.



Figure 4. Lockdown. Source: author

The understanding that we reap what we sow held fast, and patterns of behaviour matching patterns of nature provided resilience to these gardeners. The very lucky could garden from their bubble. Many others however were sombre, understanding they were not best placed to see this through. Despite their best efforts, plants were already wilting.

April and true autumn, the colours were amazing. Days shortening but warm and still, and so very quiet. The laughter from the primary school playground, usually resonating across Arrowtown and bouncing back off the hills, had ground to a halt. The warmth was a surprise really, after such a poor forecast for the immediate future. The gardens continued to survive despite doom merchants dominating the media. Growth had of course stopped, but people shared what they had and so there was almost enough to go around. Almost. Some shared more readily than others, it is a skill

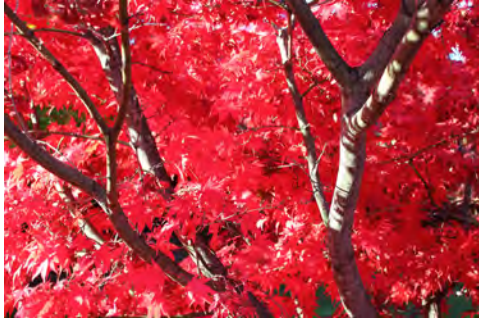


Figure 5. Autumn. Source: author

Queenstown airport this month last year, down to just sixty-four individuals this quiet April! Even the neighbours' helicopter is grounded...and teddies cheekily peeped from the most unexpected places.



Figure 6. Peeping Ted. Source: author

End of April and the longest four weeks of gardening history slipped into the slightly easier Level 3 – Restrict. Restrict most elements of life, social and gardening. The occasional bubble could merge with another, go visit your elderly mother. Despite the growing cold, some continued to nurture their garden as best they could. Permission had been given for slightly more payWave transactions which helped. The more prudent were reasonably relaxed, with a mixture of concern for others and relief because of their own good fortune. Tough brassicas would make it through, they were grown to survive. Runner beans frosted and were uprooted marking the end of their time here in this season. Some seed beans would have been left in the ground, these are the ones that would burst forth when the spring came, unexpected and celebrated. The very last sweet strawberries – overstayers really, their red merging with the colour of the changing leaves, quietly hunkered down below the radar. A little tentative investment in the future by gardeners who know and trust. Broad beans and garlic, buried with an aged look about them, but renowned for being the first to step up when the sun returns. These were the astute and experienced gardeners, not all were in this position. Some had only just begun their careers and did not have season after season of dark and wormy compost layering the bedrock, let alone the knowledge of what to plant and when. Dramatic rhetoric emerged from their lockdown milieu - economic bloodbath, humanitarian crisis, carnage is coming. Others who had taken short cuts, perhaps relied on size and position as their security, despairingly left their gold-plated trowels

many need to learn. A level of kindness between strangers emerged promoted by the master gardener, propagated by the media but nevertheless taken up by many. Old fashioned community emerged, neighbours met neighbours, chatted in the streets, kept their distance in a closer kind of way. They heard the birdsong and celebrated near silent airways. Did you know two hundred thousand people came and went through

many need to learn. A level of kindness between strangers emerged promoted by the master gardener, propagated by the media but nevertheless taken up by many. Old fashioned community emerged, neighbours met neighbours, chatted in the streets, kept their distance in a closer kind of way. They heard the birdsong and celebrated near silent airways. Did you know two hundred thousand people came and went through



Figure 7. Headlines. Source: Mountain Scene, April 2020

stabbed into the barren slowly freezing earth. They also became concerned for their gardens' ability to survive the winter intact. As the frost settled directly on the bare dirt, cold and quiet, it was clear that this summer end was like no other.

The winter bit hard and gardeners talked amongst themselves about where we had come from, the path we were on. 'Unite against COVID-19' is all well and good,

however unity is difficult when disparity is thriving. This strange new way of having to be seemed to open minds and discussions in all kinds of direction, mostly on the health of the gardeners and on the state of their plots, but also broader. So many opinions - too much fertiliser here, not enough care there, soil health and biodiversity and the benefits or not of single harvest crops. Some said that we should have diversified more as growing just the usual was never going to work in the long run. Others complained that the crops were too prolific with all those plants, tumbling over each other, some climbing on top of others, filling up all the space and pushing against the boundaries. It would suffocate us in the end. We needed just the special ones, just the exclusive high-end veges that demanded Michelin star chefs, served on plates coordinated with outdoor dining décor and matched with the just right wine. Wine was, after all, declared an essential service. Many however promoted the everyday veg, the types that we could all relate to. It is all well and good having a few specialties, but at the end of the day there is nothing better than digging around in the potato patch and discovering potatoes. Many agreed that maybe now is a chance to be intentional, to choose a new direction. There are many muddy paths in horticulture.

The master gardener had stepped up to her task. Her trust in science and her natural green fingers was settling, she gave clear and direct instructions on what to do next and why. Word-smithed beautifully, even the children felt included, what with Easter Bunny and Tooth Fairy concerns allayed. The health of the nation came first, through instruction - stay home, wash your hands, stay safe. Dig it in. Have trust, fields would bloom. Gardeners were supported, so much so that some who had never had gardening opportunities began to feel excluded. Theirs had been a hard road well before the rains came, now the nouveau poor emerged, seemingly needing twice as much to get by on. All in all, copious produce was shared from the master garden itself, keeping the wolf at bay. However, the enforced inactivity was to the detriment of the soil. It rained, and sometimes it just rains too much.

May sees the end of the State of National Emergency, although a 'State of Personal and Whānau Emergency' continues for many. Level 2 is introduced, and more gardens begin to share their produce. Arrowtown celebrates, the sound of school bounces again from



Figure 8. Winter. Source: author

Granted, a difficult and fine balancing act. The gardeners take up their tools, determined to make the most of what remains in their plot. Many who had left for elsewhere long ago are returning, despite our winter we have become the greener pasture. Those who had put down genuine roots as stipulated by the immigration rules are checked for contamination then welcomed home. Others are not so lucky, there is more to making a home for life than choosing the plot. Lockdown has passed for now, but many remain locked out.

Spring is in sight, but the warmth is a way off yet, and uncertainty continues to reign. Some gardens will flourish quickly, some will need complete re-planting, and some will return to bedrock or weed. This is gardening in the age of COVID-19.


the hills and how to plant for the future is debated (in groups of no more than 100). Community rallies as best it can as art emerges and rents reduce. However, the fundamental landscape has changed, possibly for a long time to come. The certainty of uncertainty plays with the gardener's minds.

June brings relief to the restrictions; Level 1 is so nearly normal, but many do not know where to begin. What was the point in a gold-plated trowel anyway? Ideas germinate. Perhaps we should select the seed that will produce what is most important to us. The master gardener works with her landscaper, a salt-of-the-earth kind of chap with a good head for figures and direction who has been managing the umbrella. The focus begins to shift from gardeners to the soil.



Figure 9. Headlines. Source: Mountain Scene, June 2020

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Article

# Work Integrated Learning: plan B

Kathryn van der Vliet, Helen McDermott, Gary Barclay  
and Laura Munro

## INTRODUCTION

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) involves learning in the community, but how can you gain experience in a workplace and in the community if you are not able to leave your home and engage in industry? This was the challenge we faced when New Zealand entered a nationwide lockdown for the first time in 2020.

Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) is the term used to describe educational activities that incorporate academic learning and workplace practice. When WIL is embedded as an element of learning activities, it enables students to develop a combination of academic and practical knowledge and skills which better prepares them for the workplace.<sup>1</sup>

## WHY IS WIL IMPORTANT?

There are a wide variety of reasons why WIL is important. Work Integrated Learning enables students to develop capabilities such as communication and leadership skills, teamwork and confidence. They also gain valuable industry experience and relationships leading them to expand their networks. In addition, WIL helps students relate theoretical concepts discussed in class to industry environments. Students gain insights into their own strengths and weaknesses, thereby identifying areas for personal development.<sup>2</sup> WIL provides industry with the opportunity to see students in a professional context. Cooper, Orrell and Bowden suggest that “integrating curricular learning with workplace experience provides students with an opportunity to combine theory and practice in a real-world work environment, deepening students’ knowledge and understanding, and enhancing work-related capabilities.”<sup>3</sup>

## **IN THE BEGINNING.....**

Before the COVID-19 lockdown period, first year Bachelor of Applied Science (Health) students followed Plan A, a structured WIL placement arrangement with our community providers. Plan A worked positively for all involved. Students were in teams, and each term the teams rotated around four different community WIL placements related to their study. These community WIL placements included delivering a fundamental skills programme in early childcare centres, delivering a Perceptual Motor Programme (PMP) at a local primary school, assisting in aged care facilities, and creating and delivering an inhouse wellbeing activity to their classmates and staff.

Our community relationships with providers were solid with good feedback and this provided an ideal learning experience to build confidence in our first-year students. COVID-19 created a time of instability as providers and Institute of Sport, Exercise and Health (ISEH) staff were trying to keep up with a rapidly changing environment. Leading into the lockdown period, a stop was put on three of our placements with aged care being first, with PMP following a few days later, and then early childcare centres. In the space of a few days we went from running a structured placement programme to some kind of chaos.

The pre-lockdown period was an unsettling time as providers, staff and students were preparing to leave their work and study spaces to operate from home. There was a sense of urgency when making phone calls and sending emails as staff tried to gain some confirmation and clarity from providers in this unknown environment. Based on staff communications with providers, some felt that they needed time to evaluate the new circumstances they found themselves in and were unsure and hesitant to make a call around putting a stop to the placement arrangements we had in place. Added to the communication challenges was the complication of a public holiday in Otago on 23 March, making the challenges even greater as many students and providers were unable to be contacted. The 4 p.m. Government announcement that New Zealand was now at Alert Level 3 and heading into Alert Level 4 by midnight on Wednesday, 25 March, gave us confidence with our decision making. New Zealand went into nationwide lockdown for the first time in its history and WIL, as we knew it, ceased.

Once lockdown had been imposed, we identified the urgency in which we were facing to create an alternative Plan B as we were unsure if, and when, Plan A would be available again.

## **THE CERTAINTY OF PLAN A**

Prior to the lockdown, Plan A worked well; students were learning and gaining confidence in industry. In their first year, health students had structured placements

and we were able to advise them at the beginning of the year which organisations they would be working with. At the start of each term, students would be inducted by their WIL provider and begin their weekly placements. It was a clear process and easy to follow for ISEH staff, industry providers and students.

But how could we develop an alternative experience online? How could we develop a Plan B that provided students with the benefits of an applied learning experience in the community while never leaving their bubble? Our initial response was to meet as a team and focus on how to build on what had already been established. We wanted to keep students connected to industry and build on their confidence, while at the same time offering something worthwhile to our providers as they too were trying to adjust to a situation that was very fluid and uncertain.

## **THE DEVELOPMENT OF PLAN B**

The development of Plan B included the following actions:

- brainstorm alternative ideas
- contact providers to see if they were supportive of initial ideas
- assess options
- develop a plan
- fine tune plan
- present task to students
- provide a great deal of support for students
- offer support to providers.

Based on our initial brainstorm, Plan B was created. Students who were unable to continue WIL placement requirements based in public settings contacted the provider they would have been involved with for Term Two had we not been in lockdown. Students prepared questions for their providers during a 15 to 20 minute telephone or online meeting. Where possible, and with prior permission from the provider, meetings were recorded. Students were encouraged to write notes throughout their provider meeting to capture key points.

Students gathered information from their providers and reviewed the plans that providers had to help participants (for example, pre-school children, school children, the elderly) stay involved in activities similar to those the students would have delivered or supported, had the lockdown period not occurred.

Questions were asked such as:

- Are providers doing anything to fill the void?
- What are providers offering?
- How well do providers feel these initiatives are working to help with participant health and wellbeing during lockdown?

Following the meeting with the provider, students wrote up their findings and reflected on how the current lockdown situation may have impacted the holistic health of the participants, with links to supporting literature. They were asked to consider potential positive outcomes likely to result from the situation and to identify what was being offered. They were also asked to consider potential negative outcomes likely to result from the situation and what was being offered.

Students identified any gaps or opportunities that could be put in place to support the holistic health of participants given the restrictions of being in an online environment. Students then developed a resource (for example, information sheet, video, set of games) that could be used by the provider to help them and their participants' holistic health. In this way Plan B attempted to mirror the interactive aspects of Plan A, using research and communication with providers to develop hands-on activities. This ensured that students were utilising their practical skills despite the fact they were unable to physically put them into practice.

## **CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED**

During the COVID-19 lockdown, when practical community experience was not available to students, it was a challenge to find the extra time and focus that staff needed to create Plan B. Staff needed to develop this plan in a short space of time amidst a challenging environment. Communication between staff and some providers proved difficult due to early childcare centres being closed and the staff not having access to their professional emails from home. This meant the number of available providers was fewer than expected. One community programme was shortened due to not having the full year to deliver, resulting in both students and the provider not receiving the complete experience they were hoping for.

At a time of increased online communication, there was a significant increase in emails resulting in several students struggling to keep up with requirements. Some students needed more support than others, and in a few cases students needed reminders about their commitment to Plan B. It appeared to be easier for some students to sit back and not participate in an online forum, than in the practical WIL tasks of Plan A.

There were also challenges for the providers. In what was an already stressful period, providers were asked for extra support, requiring them to give feedback to students on their completed resource. Although providers usually give feedback on students each term, being asked to give additional feedback on resources developed by students created extra workload. One added frustration was that some students delayed in contacting providers despite clear instructions on the task and knowing that providers were expecting them to make contact. This may have been due in part to students not having had much time in industry prior to the lockdown period to develop comfortable relationships with providers.

## **BENEFITS OF PLAN B**

Plan B was successful in maintaining student connections as they worked in small groups on their community resource. Online learning had created some disconnection between the students who were no longer learning on campus, but these WIL tasks provided students with a reason to communicate with each other, thus retaining and building relationships. In this way, they built on the Bachelor of Applied Science Graduate Profile skills of communication and teamwork.

Plan B created an additional opportunity for the placement coordinator to support students and providers. Students received valuable feedback from staff, giving them confidence to expand on what they had developed. As a result, students strengthened their relationship with providers and there were opportunities for continued growth with interviewing providers, learning different ways to use technology, and being creative in their thinking.

Some students were advised by their providers that they would find the completed resource useful at their organisation. Students could feel proud of their work and staff could see students' progress in adapting to the environment around them and identify new strengths. Staff gained confidence in being able to create an alternative to hands-on community placements that continued to enable a richness to the students' learning journey. Plan B gave students the opportunity to achieve many of the capabilities contributing to the successful learning outcomes of WIL, such as teamwork, leadership and communication skills, and confidence.<sup>4</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

Plan B was a positive learner experience. During an unprecedented time at Otago Polytechnic, it ensured that we could continue our commitment to integrating learning with experience in the workplace. Plan B encouraged community connections and enabled students to grow in confidence.

We found that many students needed extra support, either in the form of clarification of the task, reminders to keep on track and check-ins to see how they were progressing. As with any group work, some took the lead while others sat back. Most students took the feedback on board and created resources that would be able to be used in industry by providers. We would recommend this alternative plan as a viable learning option when students are unable to be physically present in the community.

Plan B has shown us it is possible to adapt students' learning, creating a beneficial learning experience to meet learner outcomes while not physically being in industry.

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- 1 "What Is Work-Integrated Learning?" Work Integrated Learning NZ, accessed July 2, 2020, <https://www.nzace.ac.nz/what-is-work-integrated-learning/>.
- 2 Denise Jackson, "Employability skill development in work-integrated learning: Barriers and best practice," *Studies in Higher Education* 40, no. 2 (2015): 350-367, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2013.842221>.
- 3 L. Cooper, J. Orrell, and M. Bowden, *Work Integrated Learning: A guide to effective practice* (New York: Routledge, 2010).
- 4 Jackson, "Employability skill development."

Article

# On COVID-19, change and future capability

Oonagh McGirr



Figure 1. Courage. Source: Oliver Cole on Unsplash

## INTRODUCTION

The following article is taken from a piece written during the irruption of the coronavirus, COVID-19.<sup>1</sup> It was posted in a blog shared with our colleagues in early April 2020, as part of our internal communications stream. I include a sample of the responses to the article and a summary of context at the time of writing, almost four months after the initial post was published. I have re-worked some of the initial post for ease of reference and contextualisation.

## WHIRLWIND

It has been a bit of a whirlwind ride for the world these past few weeks—and our world of education has been quite literally turned upside down and inside out. As we shift from the normal day-to-day, which is rooted in the face-to-face and in-person space, we are presented with challenges and opportunities in equal measure.

At times like these, our ability to reflect critically and to take an optimistic view in the face of apparent adversity will stand us in good stead and help us to navigate what is a certainly uncertain future—which will be forever changed by COVID-19.

## ADAPTERS AND ADOPTERS

It is clear from the feedback we are receiving that some of us are adapters, some of us are adopters, and some of us are a mixture of both in terms of technology-driven-and-enhanced working-from-home. If we cast the net wider, and take the long view, we acknowledge that the nature of our student body may well change, as will expectations of learning and teaching in the post-COVID setting.

## IRRUPTIVE DISRUPTION

The pandemic disruption requires us to think differently. Combine this with our recent shift to Otago Polytechnic (OP) (un)Limited<sup>2</sup> and we have the makings of a strategic and practical pivot. Reflecting on the ongoing change in our world from a professional perspective, we do well to consider the following points as we prepare for the post-lockdown state:

1. an increased role for online, blended learning and flipped curricula
2. the emergence of niche (cross-cultural) learner cohorts seeking unique learner experiences
3. the need to foreground learner experiences informed by unique cultural perspectives
4. an increase in (the need for) technologically proficient education practitioners
5. a reduction in geographical movement of learners (more global regionalisation)
6. a heightened focus on work-life balance and flexible working models.

Scanning this (initial) list, as we think of OP and our practice, we have positioned ourselves well for our new future. Consider the rapid shift we have made as a collective, supported by our service teams who have enabled us to move swiftly into the online space—and we have responded well to the challenge.

Capable NZ<sup>3</sup> provides a proven model of successful synchronous and asynchronous multi-site facilitation of learning and teaching for work-based learning, fit for the new

era. Equally, our teaching teams across OP have stepped out and up, ensuring that multiple approaches to course delivery meet the learner need.

Undoubtedly, we will all emerge from our bubbles with views on how we can re-calibrate our working lives so that we are able to pivot as necessary without compromising the rich and renewed connections with whānau.

## **EMBRACING CHALLENGE**

This change we are living, brought about by the enforced lockdown of COVID-19, is one for which we have been preparing and for which we are well equipped as an organisation. Our challenge now is to keep moving apace and to embrace the new as it emerges, all the while planning our OP pivot.

## **INSPIRATION AND THE PLAGUE**

Mindful of the need for inspiration in these tricky times, Irish tech leader Paddy Cosgrove's perspective is helpful indeed as he reminds us of the outcome of a previous lockdown—at Cambridge University in 1665 at the time of the Great Plague: “Isaac Newton decided to work from home. He discovered Calculus and the Laws of Motion. Just saying!”<sup>4</sup> Let's call on our institutional value of Courage to see us through.

## **IN RESPONSE**

The post generated useful feedback from colleagues across the institution, who exercise their right to reply, sharing their ideas and perspectives in real time in the blog comments section.

#1 Right on the button... The current space reminds me of this whakatauki - *ka mate kainga tahi, ka ora kainga rua*.

When one home/place fails or is not suited, have another home/place to go to. Have two strings to your bow. I think it is pertinent for our situation of today where the *kainga/modus operandi* doesn't work. We have had to adapt/adopt a different way of thinking and operating. To lean into right brain creativity, be resourceful, resilient and think outside the square. Like Newton's experience, it is in times of adversity that brilliance shines.

I agree that our learnings of today—both micro and macro, will change our perspectives forever. One thing is guaranteed in education and life, change will always happen! Be scary if it didn't.

#2 Excellent post. Very pragmatic and inspiring in a 'tipping point' of time.

#3 Totally agree... Even in a programme that has offered a lot of what you suggest for years we are reevaluating things we do and how we do them and there is no doubt we won't go back to business as usual. There is always room for change and improvement. I too agree OP was already well positioned and appears to have migrated quickly into the world we currently face and can already see the conversations happening about what the future might look like.

#4 I agree... Having worked in technology-enhanced learning for a number of years now, I can clearly see a silver lining in this difficult time, both professionally and personally. Seeing our academic staff step up to the challenge like they have, makes me really proud to work for OP, and I am looking forward to being part of us taking on the challenge to 'keep moving apace and embracing the new'.

## SUMMARY AND REFLECTION

In summary, I would say we have been courageous and pragmatic in our approach to COVID-19. Undoubtedly, the way we dealt with the practical operational challenges of the incipient coronavirus, was influenced and inspired by the consistent approach of the Ministry of Health New Zealand. OP's Critical Incident Management Team replicated the clear messaging and collective leadership required in such difficult times. Our staff engaged in discussion and debate, and challenged us to keep communications open. We drew on our values—Caring, Courage, Empowerment and Accountability—and we worked to keep each other safe and positive in the midst of this global upending of everything.

As we returned to normal six weeks after the initial lockdown, our discussions have continued, scoping the new and hitherto untapped ways of working, embedding them in to our daily practice, and challenging that which we believe to be redundant. We have found ways of working more collaboratively, economically and sustainably. We also discovered that we like and need the human contact and personal interactions that we, as social creatures, require.

On a practical level, it is safe to say that our shift into the technological space of teleconference meetings and virtually facilitated learning was a sharp one. Our learners told us they appreciated the blended (emergency teaching response) approach; they also shared with us that they are equally thankful to have returned for a fuller campus experience.


Our sector, in the midst of the eponymous Reform of Vocational Education,<sup>5</sup> faces much more than a mere merging of its dispersed institutional servicing of multiple stakeholders; COVID-19 has intensified the challenge to be future-fit. Incipient economic recessions, major transformation of the national economy, a need to

respond to the emerging, and existent need for re-skilling and adaptation place further pressures on our people and our endeavours.

## FUTURE PRESENT

The future is now here, imbued with the tenor of the irruption, behoving us to think differently, plan accordingly, and not take any of those previous ways of knowing, being and doing for granted.

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- 1 Oonagh McGirr, On COVID, Change and Future Capability, accessed July 1, 2020, <https://www.op.ac.nz/hub/news/item/6462>
- 2 Referring to the change in status of Otago Polytechnic, which ceased to be an independent legal entity in April 2020 as a consequence of the establishment of the National Institute for Skills and Technology in New Zealand. Otago Polytechnic is now a limited company. The reference to 'unlimited' denotes our belief that despite the change, we are still independent in our ambitions and desire to continue innovating and growing our practice.
- 3 Otago Polytechnic, *Capable NZ*, n.d., <https://www.op.ac.nz/study/capable-nz/>.
- 4 Paddy Cosgrove, Tweet, Dublin (@@paddycosgrave 2020, March 5).
- 5 New Zealand Government, *Education (Vocational Education and Training Reform) Amendment Act 2020* (Wellington, New Zealand, 2020), <http://www.legislation.govt.nz/>.



Poetry

# Ode to RoVE

Federico Freschi

Just as we were about to be ROVE-ered  
We found ourselves instead COVE-ered.  
Stuck in our bubbles,  
Lamenting our troubles,  
And starting each day quite hungovered.

**Federico Freschi** is Professor and Head of College of Te Maru Pūmanawa | College of Creative Practice and Enterprise at Otago Polytechnic. A widely published art historian, Federico was formerly the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa.

Article

# Unmasking: visual politics of COVID-19

Leoni Schmidt

## ABSTRACT:

This article explores visual images posted online in response to COVID-19. These range from alerts to cartoons to provocative artworks engaging with the issues highlighted by the pandemic. These artworks are political in the sense that they speak of and to power, while unmasking the unimaginable, the merciless, the revelatory, and the enabling. It seems timely to investigate what could be learnt from these images and also to see them in longitudinal perspective through reference to visual images created at other times of social stress.

## PRE COVID-19

Plagues and pandemics are not new and neither are the arts' responses to them. An online science site<sup>1</sup> draws attention to the twenty worst epidemics over recorded time. The oldest known event dates back about 5000 years in Northeastern China at Hamin Mangha. Other sites in the region attest to a widespread regional epidemic that happened so suddenly that proper burial was impossible. In chronological order, the plague of Athens in 430 BC had a death toll of an estimated 100,000 people; and the Antonine Plague killed more than five million Roman citizens in the second century AD with historians suspecting that smallpox was to blame for this catastrophic event that changed the political landscape in heralding the demise of the Roman Empire and the rise of Christianity.

Other epidemics occurred during medieval times, with the Black Plague of 1346-53 AD being the most well-known for its pan-European devastation of a whole continent (and parts of Asia). Owen Jarus writes about the political effects:

The [black] plague changed the course of Europe's history. With so many dead, labor became harder to find, bringing about better pay for workers and the end of Europe's system of serfdom. Studies suggest that surviving workers had better access to meat and higher-quality bread. The lack of cheap labor may also have contributed to technological innovation.<sup>2</sup>

The 14th-century Italian writer Giovanni Boccaccio's famous *Decameron* was written during the Black Plague and contains 100 stories told by 10 young people sheltering in a secluded place from the pandemic. The visual arts also produced a plethora of images in response to the plague. One example is Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *The Triumph of Death* (1562) inspired by the plague and created in response to his own troubled milieu approximately 200 years later when the Counter Reformation and the Spanish Inquisition devastated many parts of Europe.



Figure 1. Detail from: Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Triumph of Death*, 1562. Public domain licence<sup>3</sup>

At the time of the plague and later, many images (such as the one reproduced above) focused on devastated bodies, scavenging animals, tools of decimation (such as scythes, axes, and lances) and skeletons signaling an apocalyptic outcome.

Other images (see an example in Figure 2 below) showed the gruesome tasks at hand, as illustrated in this broadsheet communication dated 1666 and issued in London. Mass graves being dug, lines of people carrying coffins or attending funerals, soldiers monitoring movements – images we now see in the media again during COVID-19.



Figure 2. Detail from: Broadsheet illustrating aspects of the Black Plague, dated 1666. Creative Commons Attribution only licence CC BY 4.0<sup>4</sup>

Many epidemics and pandemics followed the Black Plague, notably the Great Plague of London in 1665-66 (100,000 killed) and the Spanish Flu in 1918-

20 which had a devastating death toll of 50 million. Nearer to our time, the Asian Flu (1957-58), the AIDS pandemic (35 million killed and 40 million living with it), the Swine Flu (2009-10), Ebola (2014-16) and Zika (2015- ) have continued to sow destruction amongst populations. Interestingly, the Spanish Flu did not originate in Spain. Jarus points to an example of how 'fake news' could stain the reputation of a country as early as the 1920s:

Despite the name Spanish Flu, the disease likely did not start in Spain. Spain was a neutral nation during the war and did not enforce strict censorship of its press, which could therefore freely publish early accounts of the illness. As a result, people falsely believed the illness was specific to Spain, and the name Spanish Flu stuck.<sup>5</sup>

Jacqueline Rose recently published an article in the *London Review of Books*<sup>6</sup> in which she focuses on Albert Camus's *The Plague*, first published in 1947 with exponential interest shown through book sales since the arrival of COVID-19. Reading this and the book itself is akin to a strange experience of displacement. The pandemics of 1346-53, 1957, and 2020 connect around the topic of how human beings deal with disaster and what the political effects of disasters can be. There are many complexities to Camus's novel.<sup>7</sup> Those that speak to me in particular are the ones which seem especially pertinent to our time: the unimaginable, the merciless, the revelatory, and the enabling – often overlapping and non-discrete complexities. Camus points out that the scale of a pandemic is unimaginable. After a certain number of cases, our imagination fails to comprehend the size of the disaster. He also focuses on the merciless nature of a pandemic: it spares no one – part of the novel narrates the harrowing death of a child – and causes extreme pain and distress. Rose expands on the revelatory nature of a pandemic in as much as it reveals existing problems or strata in society which had hitherto been masked or ignored. She also refers to Julia Kristeva's insight<sup>8</sup> that many people find a pandemic enabling in the sense that it frees them to undergo therapy of some kind, a process they might normally not have been involved in. Revelation and enabling can also take on other layers of meaning making, such as when social hierarchies are upended in carnivalesque<sup>7</sup> fashion: the high becomes the low and the low becomes the high.

## COVID-19

This part of the article explores how the complexities suggested by Camus play out in visual imagery posted online during COVID-19. Visual 'politics' in the title of the article signals that we are dealing with power when we focus on responses to COVID-19. In light of events, the World Health Organisation's recent plea that COVID-19 should not be politicised seems naïve, despite best intentions; it is inherently highly politicised as its effects impact on the lives and livelihoods of people, on their power or disempowerment.

COVID-19 felt as if it came as a thunderbolt. Here in New Zealand we started hearing about it early in the year but it was really only by March that it became more than background noise. And, then, very quickly we went into total lockdown for four weeks and slowly back through Alert Levels 3 and then 2, and now—mid August—still in Alert Level 1. Thousands of New Zealand citizens and permanent residents are returning to our country and go into quarantine and isolation. The Labour-led government responded to the threat through visual alerts<sup>10</sup> and other clear communications. Nonetheless, a few people have literally ‘escaped’ from quarantine, thereby irresponsibly endangering other people’s lives, and providing fodder for cartoonists<sup>11</sup> and for an opposition party to politicise the threat in ways which are not addressing the underlying issues of the unimaginable, the merciless, the revelatory, and the enabling. In a context where millions have lost their lives and the end is not nearly in sight, the world at large seems unable to yet face these issues. As has often been the case in the past, visual images signal these ahead of other actions or encapsulate them in eloquent form.

## VISUAL POLITICS DURING COVID-19

### *Unimaginable*

Recent aerial photographs showing endless mass graves dug in Brazil bring the unimaginable into the sphere of the ‘somewhat imaginable.’ The dug graves in a 17th-century broadsheet come to mind (see Figure 2). The image below is not a figment of anybody’s imagination but a direct result of documentary photography using an aerial



Figure 3: Paulo Lopes, COVID-19 mass graves dug and filled in the Vila Formosa cemetery, São Paulo, Brazil, 2020. Image courtesy Paulo Lopes, @BWPressFoto

drone. The way the frame of the photograph has been cut on one side, suggests a much larger whole, a continuation of rows and rows of graves waiting for bodies to arrive. Workers in overalls look like emergency personnel in their garb, there is little sign of bereaved family members or funeral proceedings—at least these were visible in the earlier broadsheet. A mechanised and repetitive approach is signaled here. Such images extend our imagining of the scale and scope of COVID-19. They make it impossible for us to remain content with Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro’s shrugged off reference to a “little flu.”<sup>12</sup> In New Zealand some people are concerning themselves with escapees from quarantine. Images such as these could function as a corrective; maybe we could all focus on the merciless, revelatory, and enabling aspects of COVID-19 in the face of the unimaginable scope and scale which our country has avoided so far.

### **Merciless**

COVID-19 – like previous pandemics unimaginable in their scope and scale – is merciless. One way in which this manifests across the world at present is in the plight of the homeless. People have been urged to self-isolate, to observe social distancing, to regularly wash their hands, to use sanitiser, to wear masks. Such instructions seem to have ignored the ways in which homeless people – and those living at close quarters in slums, shanty towns, and overpopulated townships – are in no position to abide by the ‘rules’. Tommy Fung is an artist who works in Hong Kong, using the city as a backdrop for social commentary, amongst other things on COVID-19. The image below (Figure 4) shows a man sitting on a Hong Kong pavement, while a post marked with “SurrealHK” indicates that viewers are looking at a street performance – not an actual homeless person – which forms part of a larger event. A face mask is distorted into the familiar skeleton motif known from many centuries of apocalyptic imagery around the figure of death (see Figure 1 above as one of many examples). Here, the skeleton-like mask becomes a living creature resembling a snake and also the kind of reptilian imagery found in invasion films, for example in H.R. Giger’s face hugger designs for the *Alien* films franchise, and for *Slither* (2006), a reference to pulp 1950s sci-fi, where aliens make themselves at home in and on the human body.



Figure 4. Tommy Fung participating in the SurrealHK event, A Face Mask that Hugs Your Features, Hong Kong, 2020. Source: courtesy of Tommy Fung @surrealhk

A number of genres are combined in Fung's work, each bringing a set of associations to the whole: apocalypse, invasion, aliens, human aversion to the reptilian, masks and their obliteration of individual identity, and the plight of those without a home in our century of homeless refugees in their millions. These associations work together towards a revelatory aspect of COVID-19: we notice social issues as they are foregrounded by the pandemic, although they pre-date its advent. In New Zealand, homeless people were offered sanctuary during high alert levels of COVID-19. It remains to be seen how far this intervention will survive post-COVID.

### **Revelatory**

COVID-19 revealed not only the plight of the homeless, but also some of the anomalies in our social stratifications. Before COVID-19, the work that doctors, nurses, paramedics, supermarket workers, cleaners and many other frontline personnel do was often taken for granted or viewed in terms of endemic hierarchies – doctors being higher up and hospital orderlies being lower down the scale, for example. During the pandemic, such workers are working in close tandem and putting their own and their families' lives in danger for others' sake. One medical doctor in New Zealand, for example, lived away from his family during lockdown, alone in a one-person bubble, so as not to put them in danger were he to contract the virus through regular contact with patients.

Frontline COVID-19 workers have been celebrated like never before in our time. They have been cheered by crowds, hand clapping have welcomed them to work, and many images of their sacrifices are now in the public domain. The concept for a mural by Duyi Han, represented in Figure 5, goes further. From a series called *The Saints Wear White*, this concept is specifically for a mural, thereby reminding us of the mural tradition of fresco painting on a large, monumental scale. Combined with the format of the Renaissance chapel with its rounded altar wall and long side walls, the image works in association with the religious veneration of saints and narratives from the Bible as found in, for example, Giotto's frescoes in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, Masolini and Masaccio's work in the Brancacci Chapel in Florence, and Michelangelo's painting of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. Instead of religious figures, we see frontline health workers in protective suits and instead of an altar, we see a hospital theatre trolley as the focus of action. This concept drawing for a completed work acts as a way of reversing roles from the religious to the secular, from the high to the low, from the divine to the everyday.

The reversal of roles and status as part of a carnivalesque strategy is posited by literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin in his book on *Rabelais and His World*.<sup>13</sup> According to his analysis of Rabelais' medieval *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, the carnivalesque emerges as that which coincides with carnival (or any event outside the ordinary) which upends the existing order by substituting surprising new forms for the old, it subverts existing norms and tries to establish a new order in the place of the accepted, even if only temporarily. This strategy emerges during stressful times and is often a response to heretofore

unimaginable events such as merciless pandemics. In his analysis of Boccaccio's *Decameron* (mentioned above), Bakhtin argues that the Black Plague created "new conditions for frank, unofficial words and images...and enabled Boccaccio to adopt another approach to life and to the world..."<sup>14</sup>

The substitution of healthcare workers for 'saints' may signal a temporary reversal of roles and new approaches to the world during COVID-19. However, artworks often presage shifts in socio-political organisation. Such a shift is evident in New Zealand where an image of the Director-General of Health, Dr. Ashley Bloomfield, found its way alongside one of Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern into an artwork by Jason Hoyt in June 2020.<sup>15</sup> Duyi Han's substitution reveals a similar shift: those whose work previously went relatively unnoticed rose to prominence during COVID-19, whether they be frontline workers or advisory scientists. Such images enables new ways of thinking about social hierarchies and the respect afforded to those who can help societies survive cataclysmic events such as pandemics.



Figure 5: Duyi Han pays tribute to the medical workers in Wuhan, concept drawing from *The Saints Wear White*, 2020 courtesy Duyi Han, @duyi.han

### **Enabling**

Tommy Fung's digital methods allow for surprising combinations of images in the cityscape of Hong Kong. In the image represented in Figure 6, a crowd of people form a pyramid at the top of which a few participants vie for available masks. At first sight, the image seems to show a surge of people in desperate need of limited resources. But, there are other layers of reference included here too. One of these relate to the nature of protests during COVID-19 when large crowds of people defy rules to show their solidarity for social issues more important than their own wellbeing, such as for *Black Lives Matter* or for the continued autonomy of Hong Kong. Furthermore, the image reminds one of a famous painting by Théodore Géricault titled *The Raft of the Medusa* wherein a group of disenfranchised sailors reach up in pyramid format to wave a white rag in desperation for survival after their shipwreck. One could argue that COVID-19 created contexts of desperation in many parts of the world and that the conditions for socio-political protest were created by its strictures and the underlying anxieties and paranoia revealed by pandemics.



Figure 6. Tommy Fung uses digital works to comment on the COVID-19 outbreak in Hong Kong, Meanwhile in Hong Kong, 2020. Source: courtesy of Tommy Fung @surrealhk


## POSTSCRIPT

The first half of this year has seen designers rushing to create visual alerts to inform people, cartoonists to add spice and bite to debates, artists grappling with ways to communicate the underlying issues highlighted by the pandemic. As we have watched news online, images signaling the magnitude of deaths occurring every day have brought the unimaginable closer within our reach. We have baulked at the merciless onslaught of the virus, especially as affecting those who have little recourse: the homeless, the closely quartered, children, the elderly. The fault lines of artificial stratifications and hierarchies

have been revealed: who and what are really important when it comes to a matter of survival? Partly due to the context of the pandemic, new ways of thinking and doing have been enabled, not least the Black Lives Matter protests, as well as other collective actions. In this context, it is interesting to note that the famous UK artist Banksy drew graffiti on a wall of an underground train, urging people to wear face masks. The work was removed as no graffiti is allowed on the London Underground – a bureaucratic move out of step with the role of artists as enablers of collective action.

COVID-19 is likely to remain with us for some time to come and so are its effects and impacts on the socio-political sphere. This article is my first attempt to unmask its visual politics. With time will come further insights and a series of writings delving deeper into the power playing out visually in a world wherein COVID-19 has very likely come to stay for a while.

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- 1 Owen Jarus, "20 of the worst epidemics and pandemics in history," Live Science/All About History, 20 March, 2020, <https://www.livescience.com/worst-epidemics-and-pandemics-in-history.html> accessed in July 2020.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Triumph\\_of\\_Death\\_by\\_Pieter\\_Bruegel\\_the\\_Elder.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Triumph_of_Death_by_Pieter_Bruegel_the_Elder.jpg) accessed in July 2020.
- 4 Credit: Wellcome Library, London. Wellcome Images [images@wellcome.ac.uk](mailto:images@wellcome.ac.uk) <http://wellcomeimages.org> Nine images of the Great Plague of London in 1665 Woodcut 1924 The Great Plague of London Bell, Walter George Published: 1924 Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nine\\_images\\_of\\_the\\_plague\\_in\\_London,\\_17th\\_century\\_Wellcome\\_L0016640.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nine_images_of_the_plague_in_London,_17th_century_Wellcome_L0016640.jpg) accessed in July 2020.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Jacqueline Rose, "Pointing the Finger," review of *The Plague*, by Albert Camus, *London Review of Books* 42, 9 (7 May 2020): 3-6.

- 7 Albert Camus, *The Plague* (Harmondsworth UK: Penguin, 1947/48).
- 8 See Kathleen Miller on Julia Kristeva and the plague in *The Literary Culture of Plague in Early Modern England*, (New York: Springer, 2017); Julia Kristeva, "Humanity is rediscovering existential solitude, the meaning of limits, and mortality", interview with Julia Kristeva by Stefano Montefiori for *Corriere della Sera*, 29 March 2020, [http://www.kristeva.fr/corriere-della-sera-29-03-2020\\_en.html](http://www.kristeva.fr/corriere-della-sera-29-03-2020_en.html) accessed in July 2020.
- 9 The 'carnavalesque' in this context refers to Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of role reversals in Medieval and Modern literature.
- 10 See visual alerts at [https://www.google.com/search?q=covid-19+alerts+nz&client=firefox-b-d&source=Inms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewja89vO-8vqAhVTyTgGHaxzCHAQ\\_AUoAXoECAwQAw&biw=1280&bih=630&dpr=2](https://www.google.com/search?q=covid-19+alerts+nz&client=firefox-b-d&source=Inms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewja89vO-8vqAhVTyTgGHaxzCHAQ_AUoAXoECAwQAw&biw=1280&bih=630&dpr=2) accessed in July 2020.
- 11 See example of a cartoon about quarantine escapees at [https://www.reddit.com/r/newzealand/comments/hq26a4/jeff\\_bell\\_epidemic\\_of\\_escapes\\_the\\_national\\_hotel/](https://www.reddit.com/r/newzealand/comments/hq26a4/jeff_bell_epidemic_of_escapes_the_national_hotel/) accessed in July 2020.
- 12 Jair Bolsonaro quoted in Anelise Borges, "A little flu': Brazil's Bolsonaro playing down coronavirus crisis," *euronews.*, April 10, 2020, <https://www.euronews.com/2020/04/06/a-little-flu-brazil-s-bolsonaro-playing-down-coronavirus-crisis>
- 13 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968).
- 14 See Adrian Stevens, "Carnival and Comedy: Bakhtin's Misreading of Boccaccio," *Opticon*, 1826 (2007): 1-5.
- 15 See "Artwork of Jacinda Ardern and Ashley Bloomfield as superheroes reaches \$2600 on Trademe," *NZ Herald*, June 15, 2020.



Poetry

# Love in the time of Corona

Katie Scott

Safe in our spheres, two metres divide us;  
to what end 'safety' that keeps us apart?  
iambs and pentams defy the virus;  
Writ love, Cupid's arrows, hits true the heart.

But words alone cannot sate this longing.  
How long? how long must we remain immured?  
When's done, this penance for uncheck'd thronging?  
When's check'd corona? When will we be cured?

O! that truest love could breach this prison;  
O! that love could raze these walls to rubble.  
But trapp'd, untended, love's bloom will wizen,  
'til vaccine's prick burst this wretched bubble.

Star-cross'd are they that lockdown alone. Ah!  
Fey be love in the time of corona.

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Blog Post

# Riding the COVID-19 roller coaster

Lesley Gill

## INTRODUCTION

Lockdown was looming as we avidly watched daily updates on the spread of the coronavirus. With the prospect of isolation from colleagues and the expected mental and emotional impact on us all, I pondered how I might be able to support my colleagues. I figured, if I was feeling 'things' through the lockdown others would be too, and I could use my background in emotional intelligence training to scaffold others' COVID-19 journeys. I wanted my stories to create a connection to help others incorporate the mental, emotional, social, physical, and spiritual aspects of *their* COVID-19 journey into the changes we all needed to make through this time. The framework of Hauora fitted beautifully with this goal, and so it became the overarching model that threads through all of the blogs. Hauora is a Māori concept that consists of a holistic perspective of: taha hinengaro: mental and emotional wellbeing; taha whānau: social wellbeing; taha tinana: physical wellbeing; and taha wairua: spiritual wellbeing.

So, I sent an email to Kathryn van Beek, Senior Internal Communications Advisor, suggesting I could put some little 'bites' of encouragement related to resilience on Tūhono (Otago Polytechnic's internal communication system) during this COVID-19 season. She encouraged me to do it, and so I asked Brooke, my 11-year-old granddaughter how to write a blog. She sent me a link to her page so I could see what a blog looks like, and I took advice from 'Dr Google' too. Some of the things I learnt was:

1. Be real and relatable.
2. Make it relevant and interesting.
3. Start with the second sentence first (cut out introductory words).
4. Make it personal. Be vulnerable.
5. Add pictures that mean something.
6. Connect with others through sharing your experiences.
7. Don't be afraid to be honest and reveal emotion.

There are too many blogs to print them all, so an abridged version that captures many of the main issues is presented here. Thus, my blog writing began...

## BLOG 1: 25 MARCH, 2020

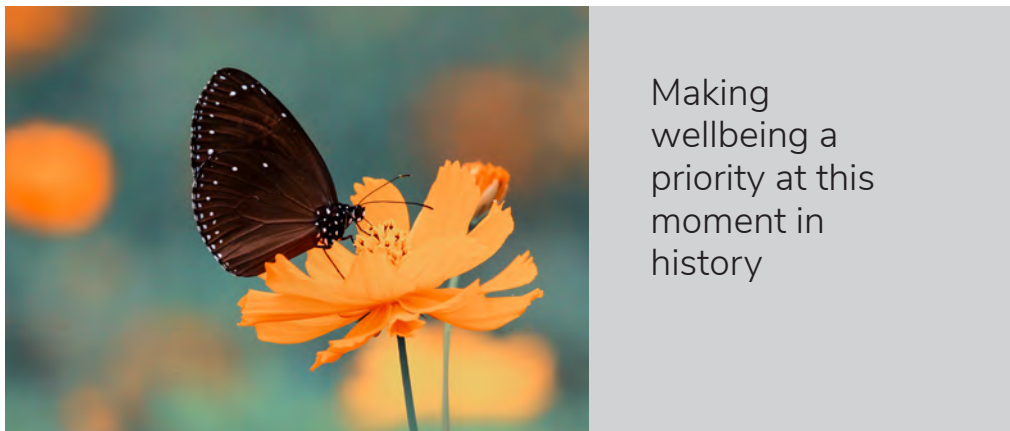


Figure 1. Untitled. Source: Boris Smokrovic on Unsplash

These are incredible times we are living in where the whole world is sharing a real-time lived event. Yesterday's announcement by our Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, caught us up in a moment of history in the making which will play out in each of our personal stories going forward in subsequent days and weeks.

Our thoughts and emotions ebbed and flowed as the effect of a national lockdown sunk in. Even though we anticipated this event, the reality of it still had a huge impact as we tried to figure out what it meant for 'me', my family, friends, colleagues and students?

My daughter's baby is due today. I will not be able to hold this wee darling for a month. I will get to see him through the lens of an iPhone. All of us have a similar story. There will be many events that we will celebrate 'virtually'. But we *will* celebrate because taking on board these measures today means we and our loved ones will be healthy and alive: short-term pain for long-term gain. Let's remember those people who are separated by geographical borders, particularly our international students. Knowing they can't go home is likely to increase theirs (or your) sense of isolation, loneliness and home sickness. At Otago Polytechnic we care! Let's make this care be 'felt' through our acts of kindness.

We are all experiencing mixed emotions: grief and loss for what we have had to cancel or put on hold; relief that our government is acting before there are many more people comprised with COVID-19; courage and hope as to how these events will activate how we design our futures, our creativity and innovation as we respond

proactively. Let's make our mental, emotional, physical, social and spiritual wellbeing a priority.

I encourage you to work on sustaining hauora, which in Māori philosophy consists of: **taha hinengaro**: mental and emotional wellbeing; **taha whānau**: social wellbeing; **taha tinana**: physical wellbeing and; and **taha wairua**: spiritual wellbeing.<sup>1</sup>

Ideas for actions that will sustain our wellbeing today:

- **Mental & Emotional:** Read something, complete a puzzle, write a note, reflect on your feelings.
- **Social:** Stay in touch with family, friends and colleagues via notes, Skype etc.
- **Physical:** Complete some physical activity: put on your coat and run (or walk!) around the house several times.
- **Spiritual:** For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Maintain your spiritual habits. Or start one. Hold on to faith and hope.

Hang in there! We are all in this together.

### BLOG 3: 6 APRIL, 2020

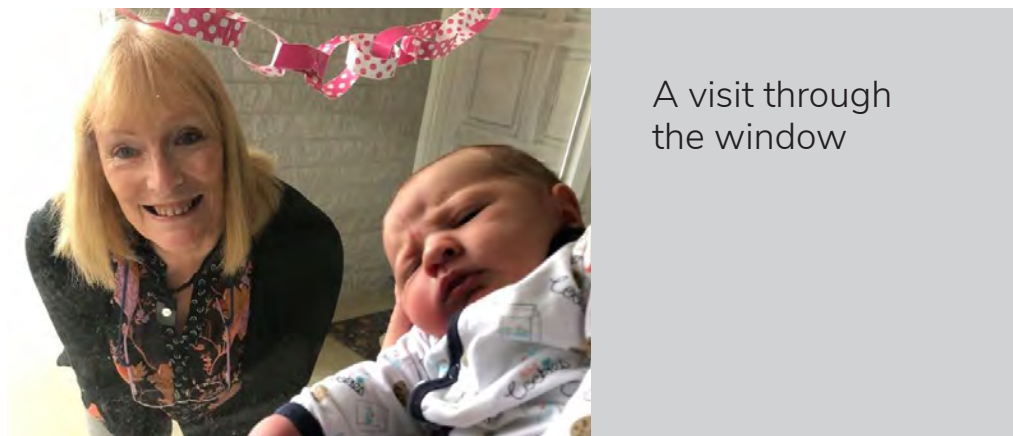


Figure 2. Nana meeting Hudson for the first time. Source: author

It is Week 3 under COVID-19 lockdown with the addition of Daylight Saving. It is like Groundhog Day! By the end of last week, I was feeling Zoom-, Skype- and Microsoft Team-ed out. While these platforms provide excellent channels for information and virtual connection, I am looking forward to catching up with people again **in person!**

Yesterday I contacted a 70 plus-year-old table tennis teammate to see how he was doing. He had not left his house for 11 days and had a neighbour dropping around groceries. He was lonely and afraid. I am glad I reached out. Who in our circles of influence—family, friends, neighbours, or acquaintances would benefit from a quick call from us that lets them know we are thinking about them? This is important as the novelty (if there was one?) has worn off. Cooped up is not that much fun.

Nevertheless, we need to keep our resolve! Staying in isolation is making a positive difference. As the Queen said this morning “It is a painful separation from our loved ones, but it is the right thing to do.” The few cases we have in New Zealand are getting the absolute best possible care because our hospital staff are not overwhelmed with COVID-19 cases. Our confinement is having a significant positive effect on the ability of the virus to spread. WELL DONE!

Here are some tips for maintaining our mental wellness. **These practical ideas cover the mental, emotional, social, physical, and spiritual ‘rooms’ of hauora.**

- Push yourself out the door for a walk: the weather is not a factor! Do not be a wuss/chicken!
- Make the bed—it is amazing how it creates order in your day.
- So does doing the dishes. Go to bed with a clean bench. It really helps our psyche and worth the extra 10 minutes at night, for how we feel in the morning.
- Do something fun and crazy with the kids. Surprise them with alphabet pancakes for breakfast! Eat dessert first!
- FaceTime with people, especially if you are on your own. We are social beings. Resist the urge to become a hermit.
- Write a COVID-19 limerick.
- Do something for someone else, which helps take the spotlight off our own circumstances. I baked for a family birthday: cinnamon spiced sponge with raspberry jam and whipped cream and snuck it around—and got to see the new baby through the window!
- Write down your thoughts and feelings. It will be great to look back over when it is over.
- Be thankful to God, family, friends—to everyone that crosses our path! Let appreciation be the gift that enriches every conversation.<sup>2</sup>
- Count it all joy, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness (James 1:2).
- Take advantage of this season to grow. It is a gift to have time with the people in our bubble, most of the time anyway. Make it memorable for the right reasons.
- For those in your bubble who are involved in primary care or a front-line role, give them extra helpings of kindness and care.

“It is not the mountain we conquer, but ourselves” (Sir Edmund Hillary).

We will get through this—together. We will struggle mentally and emotionally at some point. Have a safe week.

#### **BLOG 4: 15 APRIL, 2020**



Figure 3. Untitled. Source: Noelle Australia on Unsplash

It is great to see so many limericks and a few sonnets being posted. Feel free to give it a go! Working in this online world has been quite insightful as we are ‘invited’ into our colleagues’ homes via on-line video meetings. I have seen so many interesting ceilings in the last three weeks, as well as plants, paintings and pets!

This week, we focus on emotional health. Having time to take a break and rest over the Easter break helps us to adjust to this new equilibrium between working at home and living at home, and with all its ‘little’ challenges, as many who work at home with little munchkins running round will know.

By now, we will have identified some of the pluses of working from home. Perhaps we have turned the alarm clock off. The silence with very few cars on the roads has heightened our awareness of birdsong. The roads have morphed into extended sidewalks. The increased flexibility for mixing work-work and home-work, and ready access to the COVID-19 updates is great. The petrol we saved, and the car parking issues that the lockdown has resolved! Some people are ‘going to work’ in their slippers and/or pyjamas. Our pets are enjoying having their human servants (if you have a cat) or family, around more.

However, there are a few negatives as well. The biggest one for me is the lack of physical connection with my family, especially my grandchildren. I know many others are feeling the loss of this connection too.

While the silence in our neighbourhoods (except for some lawn mowing, chainsaws and other activities) is refreshing and peaceful, silence can also be extremely 'loud' in expressing of isolation and loneliness. Keeping up with the news seems to have become a new daily convention, as I flick between Al Jazeera and one of our national TV channels to keep abreast of what is happening in New Zealand and around the world. While this is useful, we need to be wise. While informative, the news update also reminds us of our frailty, and the surrealism of what we are living through right now. Our empathy for others expresses itself at times, in feelings of grief for those who have lost family and friends. In particular, the circumstances in which some people have died, pulls deeply at our heartstrings.

Worryingly, the closeness of family dynamics have resulted in higher levels of domestic violence, as people's usual coping processes are put under pressure, and challenges such as living constantly in close quarters with others, financial pressure, feeling trapped, isolation from regular support, built up resentment, and/or misunderstandings spill over.

It is normal for our emotions to fluctuate more at times such as this. However, they do need managing. Emotions help us experience all kinds of events more fully, which also includes what we are experiencing in these COVID-19 events. Emotions provide valuable information to help us make decisions. However, some people make decisions only based on how they feel. Without taking time to consider what is unfolding, we can either shrink back and opt out, or go into full combat mode. It is important to pause so that we can acknowledge what is happening on the inside of us, as well as taking a minute to think about how the way we respond—responsive, withdrawal or outburst—will have on others.

The biggest 'negative' is in how our unhealthy reactions serve to break down relationships that we value; a high price to pay for a quick-tempered personal attack on someone we love. We wouldn't do it to strangers (I hope) but somehow, we feel 'safe' or 'entitled' to dump on someone we love. (We've all done it). We don't want to be like that, so let's employ the golden rule: do to others as you would have them do to you. In other words, don't do to others what you wouldn't want them to do with you. Let's moderate our reactions, so that "peace can reign in the valley" (as the saying goes) so that we actively and unselfishly encourage others. Let's take a moment to reflect on the big picture to help us get through this tough season with relationships intact, and healthy emotional strength. No judgement. No shame. No more.

A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle (Anon).

Positive emotions build resilience while focussing on negative emotions drains our tank. “What emotions have I been experiencing recently?” Are they being expressed appropriately to the situation? If not, it is time for some honesty, asking for help, or to stop doing and saying things that are compromising our integrity. Let’s take some of this precious gift of time to find the courage to seek emotional healing if we need it.

Stay in touch! While FaceTime and phone calls are second-rate to actually being there, they keep us connected. We are social beings. Our emotional wellbeing strengthens with social connection.

Be kind to yourself. Be kind to others—they might be going through harder stuff than us. None of us is perfect; we are all dealing with ‘stuff’ of some sort or other as we do the best with what we have. Focussing on the positives will build and maintain our optimism and emotional health, which is important as we dig in for these next weeks. Do take care out there!

Therefore, encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

## BLOG 6: 28 APRIL, 2020



## Social wellbeing

Figure 4. Happy human. Source: Alyssa Stevenson on Unsplash

Since my last blog Easter happened; the celebration of Jesus' death and resurrection, and new life which finds parallels in hot cross buns, Easter eggs, bunnies and chickens and so on. We also commemorated ANZAC Day, the day that the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps set out to capture the Gallipoli peninsula in an allied expedition. In New Zealand, 100,444 soldiers from a population of just over one million served in World War 1. In 1939, New Zealand's population was 1.6 million of which 140,000 New Zealand personnel served overseas for the Allied war effort, and an additional

100,000 men enlisted for Home Guard duty.<sup>3</sup> This is the first year we could not attend an ANZAC Day service. This week, on-line school started for many children and ANZAC was a focus for their studies. My father served in World War 2 so I had many questions posed to me about him, which was a great way of celebrating his life and contribution.

The photo (Figure 5) is of my Dad with his Mum the day he got on the train in Greymouth heading to Burnham in 1940.

This week I am talking about social wellbeing. The Māori concept of **taha whānau** (social wellbeing and family health) relates to the “capacity to belong, to care and to share where individuals are part of wider social systems.”<sup>4</sup>

We have all found innovative ways of connecting with our families and friends through web-based setups and other ingenious ways. Earlier this week a family member sent ‘treat’ groceries to their sibling by ordering them online and sending them to her address. What an unexpected surprise! Not only was she cheered by some treats, but also felt thought of, loved, and cared for. Many of us have dropped off baking or done shopping for someone, or some other small act of kindness to someone in our circle of family, friends, and neighbours, or responded to specific needs we have heard about. Some of us have learned about areas of need that we have donated to that cause. All of these heartfelt responses are what make us deeply human as we put feet to our empathy. Otto Fenichel<sup>5</sup> viewed empathy as a shifting seesaw between participating in another’s emotional experience and experiencing one’s own response to the situation. Paul Gilbert<sup>6</sup> defines compassion as “the sensitivity to suffering in self and others, with a commitment to try to alleviate and prevent it.” I really like this explanation, as our own tough experiences increase our empathy for others, through these touchpoints human suffering. What other fun things can we do to stay in touch? We hope the hardest ‘yards’ are behind us. Let’s stay vigilant to keep it that way! Take care out there!

Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint (Isaiah 40:31).

We will remember them!



Figure 5. Dad saying goodbye.  
Source: author’s family collection



Figure 6. Untitled. Source: Chris Sansbury on Unsplash

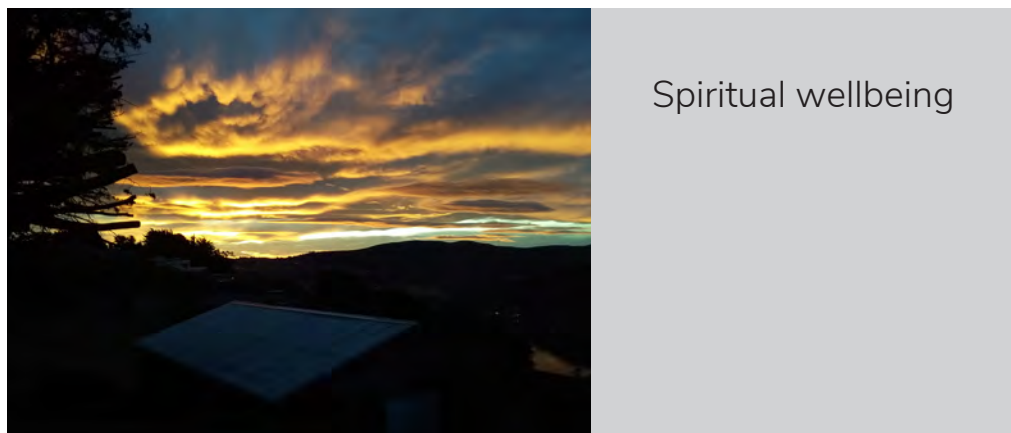


Figure 7. Waverley, Dunedin. Source: author

A walk tonight was rewarded as the sky put on a beautiful display. This week we are focussing on spiritual wellbeing, an area we sometimes overlook. Taha wairua or spiritual wellbeing refers to “the values and beliefs that determine the way people live, the search for meaning and purpose in life, and personal identity and self-awareness.”<sup>7</sup> Peter Scazzero comments “True spirituality frees us to live joyfully in the present.”<sup>8</sup>

In this global pandemic, our thoughts and emotions are both creative and deeply disturbing. Comments I have heard this week are that some people feel that COVID-19 is a gift, and they love this new way of living and working. Others feel fragmented, exhausted, experiencing feelings of grief, missing ‘real’ people, and normal jobs are taking so much longer. We have moved from ‘autopilot’ to ‘manual’. Our brains are working hard to deal with it.

Also, COVID-19 and lockdown may have acted as a trigger to previous tough times, including to emotions wrapped up in that earlier experience, which is quite normal. While that unease can be tough, we can also take courage that we not only survived but also transformed *through* that time. It just isn’t pleasant while we learnt some amazing things about our strengths, increased our resilience so that we can empathise, relate to and comfort others.<sup>9</sup> Some lessons I learnt through a season like that:

- 1. You cannot hold back tomorrow.** It comes all by itself. That means this season will end. Yay! ‘Tomorrow’ will be different from ‘today’. We will know new things, experience new innovations, and learn new things about ourselves and others.
- 2. Make the challenge your friend.** The chaos (real or metaphorical) is your friend if you say ‘yes’ to it. It is a springboard into tomorrow (See Step 1).
- 3. Keep breathing!** (Which also happens automatically). Sometimes the isolation and silence is palpable. You can hear yourself breathing; the day is long. However, the sun will rise again, and a new tomorrow is coming. (See Step 1 again). You will be renewed and refreshed, and ready for it!

You are stronger than you think, and with God's help, nothing is impossible.<sup>10</sup> We have all had a 'stop the bus, I want to get off' moment, where we are expressing that the hectic pace of life is getting to us and we need a break. I agree! Just don't make it permanent. Remember to get back on.

We need to pace ourselves and find rest and restoration in each day. Burn out usually happens because people think they can just keep going, saying they will take a break at the end (of the project experience<sup>11</sup>). That is like saying, "I will save up all my sleep till the end of the month and take it all at once!" How would you do? We are not machines, but even machines get oiled and maintained. Let's ensure our spiritual wellbeing is receiving attention.

We know we can trust God who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.<sup>12</sup> Spiritual wellbeing acknowledges the Someone bigger than ourselves who we connect with. For me that is God. I have trusted him since I was 16 years old and he has been faithful through 'thick and thin'. The traditional hymn by Daniel W. Whittle written in 1883 says it well:

I know Whom I have believed,  
And am persuaded that He is able  
To keep that which I've committed  
Unto Him against that day.

Listen to this song of thanksgiving, *The Goodness of God*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0FBb6hnwTo><sup>13</sup> This song takes our eyes off ourselves and onto our Maker. Check out Psalm 139: 13-16, verses that show how we took form in secret, a bit like the butterfly (but bigger).

A prayer: "Lord, help me to be still before you. Lead me to a greater vision of who you are, and in so doing, may I see myself as you see me. Grant me the courage to follow you, to be faithful to become the unique person you have created me to be. In Jesus' name, amen."<sup>14</sup> God bless.

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29:11).

## BLOG 8: 13 MAY, 2020



Moving in to  
level two...

Figure 8. MacAndrew Bay. Source: author

This week I have enjoyed joining my daughter's bubble. She lives in Dunedin. I look forward when our regions open up to see my other family members, and eventually visit my brother.

What things have you done to look after your mental, emotional, social, physical and spiritual health? I completed a 1000-piece Wasgij puzzle, hung a bird feeder, walked to MacAndrew Bay and back several times, which takes about 3½ hours. I am enjoying engaging with new technology to increase engagement in classes. I made some delicious bagels (<https://www.thekiwicountrygirl.com/homemade-bagels/>) for the first time in an attempt to replicate the smoked salmon and cream cheese ones at my favourite cafe.

I have just heard the announcement regarding moving to Level 2, happening on Thursday. I can see people booking into their hairdresser (Check THIS out! <https://nypost.com/2020/03/26/hairdresser-makes-wacky-umbrella-shield-to-block-coronavirus/>), gym and favourite coffee shops! Some staff will be returning to Otago Polytechnic while others of us will continue to promote learning from home. One word that describes where we are at in this unforgettable year is flux: a continuous state of change.

Moving forward is not just a matter of retracing our steps since lockdown. Rather, it is the landscape of the brave, the adventurous, the explorers and pioneers! Count me in! We have this unique opportunity to redesign Otago Polytechnic's future of learning for our students and us and generate strategies and approaches that will position us on the cutting edge of world-leading advances in technology, sustainability, courage and resilience. Vivian Greene<sup>15</sup> (visionary, artist, author and entrepreneur) explained:

Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass  
It's about learning how to dance in the rain.

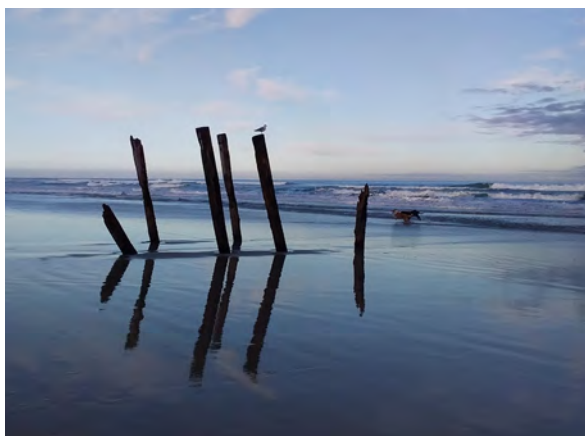
During this forced change to off-campus learning and working from home, a lot of great learning has happened for all of us, albeit through some exciting/scary/stressful moments amidst some fairly steep learning curves. I just love the way we have *lived* the 'we're all in this together' maxim. I am very grateful for all the admin, IT, leadership and collegial support that we have received, and also as we have sought to support others too. We all welcome change the most when:

- We choose to embrace the 'new', trusting that we will succeed in unknown territory.
- We continue to strengthen our relationships and build new ones.
- We maintain our resilience. The healthy habits that got us through the lockdown will get us through the 'un-lockdown'.
- We hold the 'new' in our hands; we must let go of the old.

We have rediscovered that **no one size fits all!** The lockdown has shown us we can all work flexibly and differently yet continue to achieve successful mutual outcomes. Let's keep our optimism high even though there is likely to be more change (some of it uncomfortable) as we adjust to living and working under Alert Level 2.

Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love (1 Corinthians 16:13-14).

### BLOG 11: 3 JUNE, 2020



Reaping the  
rewards of  
lockdown

Figure 9. St Clair Beach, Dunedin. Source: author

The numbers speak for themselves. Our solidarity and commitment to lockdown is reaping its own reward. Jacinda Ardern spoke recently of moving to Alert Level 1 next week. Life is beginning to return to normal. Steps forward in social connection are met with the challenge of economic growth. Thankfully, these next

steps are happening within this strengthening and reconnections of interpersonal relationships, so extremely necessary as businesses retrench and reinvent, as the nature of work changes.

My attitude will be the difference as to whether I enjoy it or endure change. Either way change is happening!

Reintegration into our building, offices and classrooms has begun. Soon things will look like they are how they used to be. But they are not the same! For one thing, we have changed. We also, will likely share this seesaw of mixed emotions. Let's remember—we are stronger than we think we are, and yet more vulnerable than we usually own up to. Show kindness to yourself and others.

Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand (Isaiah 41:10).

### **BLOG 13: 15 JUNE, 2020**



Self care and  
avoiding burnout

Figure 10. Hellebores in Spring. Source: author

So many of us have gone “over and above” to ensure continuity for the learner experience, as well as to support our colleagues. Shout out to our Learning and Teaching Development Team, HR Team and ISS Teams, as well as the many administrators and other support staff who have all worked tirelessly. In sum, we have all worked incredibly hard under trying circumstances. Well done!

As the school holidays and the break between semesters loom, IT IS IMPERATIVE that we all take some down time—time away from the laptop screen, time away from everything that engages our mind in work. If we don't, some of us will be falling over later in the year. What happens is that while we are riding the crest of the wave it is thrilling and energising, but we are burning up our reserves. The events of the last three months (COVID-19 threats, lockdown, social isolation, missed special events and so on),

have been subsumed on top of our normal workloads, and will have taken a toll on us. Some parts of lockdown were a relief, while other parts have pushed us to the end of our limits—but we stayed standing because we are strong. There are times when this year feels so surreal, especially given New Zealand has returned to relative normality while we still feel an ongoing unease and grief for what is happening overseas; both in terms of the pandemic and the protests; so much pain and loss of life and freedom—especially for the family and friends we have living overseas. We can only stretch so far. We must take time to recharge!

It doesn't happen accidentally—only purposely. Please prioritise your needs so that you can continue to meet other people's needs. If you fall over, others may also fall who were depending on you. Others who are already loaded will have to take on more. Here is an excellent article on 13 ways the busiest people avoid burnout: <https://www.themuse.com/advice/13-ways-the-busiest-people-ever-avoid-burnout> They combine all of the 'rooms' of hauroa: mental, emotional, physical, social and spiritual. As many who have learnt the hard way, if you push too hard...it's a long way back up!

Nobody plans to burnout. It sneaks up on us. We have all heard “but I have to get this work done.” That is true, but it is also accurate that work will always be there. At the moment I am trying to get my courses and other work 'ready to go' for Block 3 now, so that I can take time to slow down between the semesters. Some of us can't take time off. Here is a useful article on dealing with workload pressures while avoiding burnout: <https://qz.com/work/1462012/the-key-to-avoiding-burnout-when-you-cant-take-time-off/>. If you can, build in a break. Burnout is such an important issue, because not everyone makes it back up. Let's look out for those who are pushing the bounds. Let's use our internal locus of control to make great wellbeing decisions.

We are valuable and we are responsible for looking after ourselves. Have you got a self-care action plan?

While some people have no problem putting themselves first, some struggle to prioritise themselves (it's about balance—too much ego is also unhealthy). We need to think about ourselves too, and not think others are more important all the time. Some of us struggle to love ourselves, or even *like* ourselves. This is where looking after ourselves begins. Taking a break isn't about getting motivated for the next thing, it's about taking time to let ourselves catch up with ourselves, especially if we are a habitual over-thinker or over-achiever. Let's give ourselves permission to enjoy a well-deserved break to find balance over this once-in-a-lifetime (I hope) pandemic and work and family re-orientation season. Enjoy a well-deserved break.

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging...**Be still**, and know that I am God (Psalm 46 excerpt).

## BLOG 20: 3 AUGUST, 2020

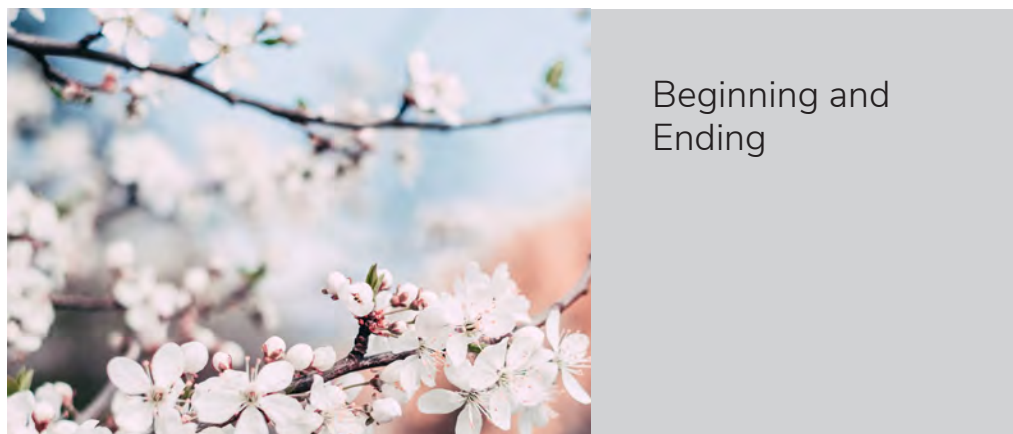


Figure 11. Untitled. Source: freestocks on Unsplash

I am reminded of why I started these blogs. As we prepared ourselves for Alert Level 4 lockdown, under the growing numbers of COVID-19 cases being reported, I wondered what I could contribute to encourage and support my colleagues. Drawing from my background in emotional intelligence I thought I might have a few gems to share as we navigate through the upheaval that the world-wide coronavirus created.

Twenty blogs later! Just as the trees begin blossoming, so another season begins. We have had several weeks now with no community spread. International borders are still closed, and returning New Zealanders are in quarantine. A few cases have been reported from those coming in or leaving New Zealand. A few people have risked the health of all New Zealanders when they broke out of quarantine. Their justification makes for very sad reading, as their desperation to connect with loved ones trumped their social responsibility to the 'team of five million'. This story is echoed in many people's anguish during COVID-19, as well as the significant change it has brought to many people's lives. Our hearts go out to countries who are still in the throes of COVID-19 or experiencing a second wave.

We are in an enviable position in New Zealand. However, now is not the time to slacken off our vigilance. Nevertheless, we are also able to move forward, personally and our economy. The cherry tree blossoming in our Otago Polytechnic gardens is a great reminder that seasons have a beginning and an end. We also need to remember that with many things in life we either get a breakthrough or we learn how to sustain and maintain life *with it or through it*. The complexity of this global event suggests the latter strategy, although a vaccine will bring a much-needed breakthrough.

Hauora, the *whare* of wellbeing concept has characterised most of my blogs, concentrating on strengthening ourselves in all areas of our life. As we build and sustain

well-being in our inner world, we can support the pressures and stresses that our external world demands of us. Often, as our external world extends, time to maintain our inner world decreases, and our coping abilities match our inner demise. Don't let that happen! Let's keep working to strengthen our inner self to match the growing demands of our external world.

Everything that has a beginning will have an end. As the American novelist, Sarah Dessen<sup>16</sup> said, "No matter how many pages of sentences and paragraphs of great stories led up to it, there would always be the last word." While my blogs may not be 'great stories', I do hope they have encouraged, inspired and strengthened us to become our best self during a most challenging season. God bless and ka kite koe ano (see you again soon), Lesley.

The Lord is my light and my salvation - whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life - of whom shall I be afraid? ... I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart (excerpts from Psalm 27: for the full Psalm, see <https://biblehub.com/niv/psalms/27.htm>).

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Reflective Piece

# **Positive powers: reflections on *Blowing Bubbles* radio programme during COVID-19**

Samuel Mann and Mawera Karetai

This reflective piece presents our personal reflections of the *Blowing Bubbles* radio show we began in March 2020 as New Zealand went into Alert Level 4 lockdown. We started the programme because we were interested in the role of positivity in the community, and we wanted to both celebrate and better understand that. We purposely picked positive, optimistic people who were maintaining that optimism in the light of COVID-19—not in a deluded manner, but as a deliberate response to what was an unprecedented and unexpected threat to our collective wellbeing.

The title of the show came from the bubbles used by the government to describe our households or small group of people we can be near during lockdown. It also celebrates Sam's mother's recovery from a serious accident a few years ago where she took a very positive approach and celebrated every day by blowing bubbles. We begin each show with "how's your Bubble life going...?"

Since 2012, Sam has co-hosted with Shane Montague-Gallagher a weekly radio show and podcast on sustainability topics called *Sustainable Lens*. Each week, we talk with someone making a positive difference and try to see the world through their perspective, through their 'sustainable lens.' The goal of the show is to talk with people from all different walks of life so that if someone comes into a lecturer's office anywhere in the world and says "but I'm a/an <insert your discipline here>, what's this sustainability stuff got to do with me?" then that lecturer can say "let's see if someone from your discipline has thought about those questions." Towards the end of each conversation we ask people a standard set of questions such as: what is your definition of sustainability? what has been your biggest success?, and what is your superpower? *Sustainable Lens* is a never ending task, and we're immensely proud of the 405 episodes (and counting).

*Blowing Bubbles* was initially planned to air only while New Zealand was in Level 4 lockdown. As we dropped down the levels, a decision was made to keep going. It became evident that while New Zealand was enjoying success in managing the spread of COVID-19, it was still rampant in other parts of the world, and there was interest from the listening community in better understanding how we shared messages of positivity

and shared responsibility. As it becomes apparent that COVID will not be ‘over’ any time soon, we have discussions with guests about how we can embed the positive changes we’ve made for a new normal and potential future disruptions.

In selecting people to invite to be guests on *Blowing Bubbles*, our primary criteria is that they can hold a lively conversation. Like *Sustainable Lens*, we have endeavoured to find people from a wide range of backgrounds—from a truck driver in rural Illinois, a student in Helsinki, to the Speaker of the New Zealand Parliament. So far we have recorded and broadcast 110 hours of *Blowing Bubbles* (<https://oar.org.nz/blowing-bubbles/>).

In this reflective piece, we focus on the attributes that people use to describe the ‘superpower’ that underpins their ability to do good work. Towards the end of each conversation, we ask the question “we’re writing a book of these conversations, it’s called *Tomorrow’s Heroes* – our team of people doing good work, what’s the superpower that got you into our mansion?” This light-hearted question prompts really interesting responses. Judging from the grins we get, many think of describing fantastical powers, but only a very few voice these as laser eyes or, invisibility. The answers people give provide an insight into the attributes that enable them to make a difference.

The point is, of course, that the supposed superpowers are not magical. They are attributes that everyone has to some extent. Unlike the impossibility of invisibility, these things are real and can be nurtured and developed in everyone.

Interestingly, no one questions whether they should be in our team—whether they are indeed doing sufficient good work. This aligns with our approach to selecting people for the show, that everyone is doing good things—even if that good thing is solely sitting at home surviving a pandemic. We need to celebrate and encourage things that have positive community impact—and in the case of the pandemic staying at home is what we are being asked to do.

A few people object to the notion of heroism: “oh I don’t believe in heroes, these are things that everyone can be doing,” or “it’s not about one person but the whole community,” but when we explain that this is our point, they are happy to describe the characteristics that enable them to contribute to the collective action.

This reflective piece, then, presents a compilation of the responses our *Blowing Bubbles* guests conveyed in answering the question: What is your superpower?

Jan Hellriegel, a singer-songwriter and music agent from Auckland said she wasn’t born with her superpower, stating that “one thing that gets me through is grit or resilience. Grit is a small word with a big meaning” and very useful during the coronavirus. Andy Williamson lives on the Isle of Skye off the coast of Scotland, who said his superpower is tenacity. “You don’t have to be the best at doing something, you just have to believe in it enough to do it hard, for long enough.”

Tamati Coffey who is a Member of Parliament (MP) and lives in Rotorua confidently said, “Do you know what? My superpower is being kind. It’s really, really simple...”

I have lived my life respecting other people, respecting other people’s points of views, if I ever make it, you know, anywhere in this world, I want it to be in line with my own ethos of looking after those people around you. When I’m on my deathbed and I look over, I look back on all of the things I’ve done in my life, I want to be able to say with honesty that actually I’ve lived it the way that I’ve wanted to live it, but I’ve been kind to people around me as well. That’s really important for me. I’ve got a tattoo on my arm, which is scripted off a piece of artwork that I saw when I was travelling around Australia, it says, “everything is as it is supposed to be right now.” And I love it, because it helps you to tackle some of those times when things don’t necessarily go your way, and you have a fixated idea about how things are supposed to go and they don’t go that way, so at times like that, both myself and my partner Tim have got it tattooed on our arm and we point to it in those moments, you know, and sometimes you don’t understand when things are going ‘wrong’, why they’re going wrong, but if you just assume that if they’re supposed to be as they are right now then actually it does help you to let go of things a lot faster and help you to pivot, you know, into something more productive with your time and with your mind.

Kindness, being kind to others and ourselves is one of the key ‘tag lines’ that has emerged all over the world given the very challenging situations that COVID-19 has imposed on everyone. We can also see that life-threatening experiences offer the opportunity to re-evaluate and recalibrate our lives, to figure out what is really important. In a great many of our guests, what is important is people. Chris Morland, Deputy Chief Executive of Otago Polytechnic, described his superpower as a “love for people” and Jens Mueller as “I like to see people become much better than me.” Dave Smith of Urenui wraps this in empathy “seeing the world from other perspectives” as did Whakatane journalist Hazel Osborne “the ability to see people for who they are...and contribute by telling the quiet stories.” Jeff Milham “listens” and Jonathan Hagger described “caremongering” and “people with others at the centre.”

The self is also important. Tracie Mackey described “being able to stand tall and grounded...I shall stand tall, no matter what.” Alison Clear of Hunua says her superpower is that she is a woman, and (amongst other things) this drives her to making things better for everybody. Kelli Te Maiharoa in Wanaka says her superpower is her connection to whenua.

Learning is an important superpower. Sir Michael Cullen of Whakatane says his superpower is being open to ideas. Tim Bell of Christchurch says his is “working with people with different perspectives” and Portland’s Stephanie Wahab says her superpower empathy is about “reaching for understanding.”

Andrew Perkins, a lecturer and composer who lives in St. Leonards, Dunedin, spoke of the symphony he had written to accompany a German text, about:

...the abuse of power and how that affects people in our world, it was a very impressionist work and a very political one nevertheless, how the fact that humans never learn from their mistakes, they seem to make the same mistakes over and over, and over and over again, and I hope that after this COVID-19 experience we won't forget, we'll remember what happened here, and I hope we remember how to stop that from happening again. If we have the courage.

Brian Aycock, who researches peace and humanitarian law in Tokyo, started to describe his usual superpowers as an ability to connect and a willingness to get involved but then added kindness, not just at an individual interpersonal level, but wider: "a collective recognition that our society as a whole can slow down...maybe we're realising that the never ending cycles of consumption and accumulation are not necessary", so his new superpower is "appreciating slowing down." Pam Corkery of Brisbane valued a similar grounding—her superpower is "keeping it real."

For many people, their superpower and their professional identity are tightly bound. Mirriam Sturdee, from Lancaster in the UK, works at the intersection of art and science, using sketch and creative practices to explore new perspectives on technology. Her superpower is an "ability to sketch without worry", a skill that enables her to be a "sketch activist." Martin Andrew describes himself as a storyteller, that "stories are hope."

For Sonny Teio, an IT manager from Snell's Beach, his superpower is about keeping it real, in his case "knowing why I was born." He describes knowing his purpose to "help people advance their goals and live a better life." His advice to become fearless can be seen in many others' superpowers, particularly those with a change focus. Nador Tanczos, for example, described "knowing it's up to us—to take power as people." For ecological engineer Kelly Hughes, this is "doing the right thing", for Innov8HQ's Heidi Renata it's "conviction." Jo Thompson of Capable NZ similarly described "knowing we can do things differently." Tauranga doctor Matt Valentine described a "selective blindness to the rules" so as to achieve better things for others. He argued that once you recognise your own privilege lets you bend and break rules for the good "you have a responsibility to do so—you are mandated to ignore those things that get in the way of changing things for the better." This 'better' hints at the importance of vision. People have an idea of what a better world looks like.

Lily Morrow Howden, who is "variously creative" in North East Valley described her superpower as "my childlike inspiration", artist Jo St Baker says her superpower is "shape shifting—being adaptable while remaining true to herself", Amy Scott in Mosgiel says her superpower is her energy and love for people's possibilities. Haydn Read of Ohope says his superpower is "helping other people find their superpower."

Open-water swim coach Dan Abel says he was dropped in a bucket of enthusiasm as a baby—his superpower is optimism. Similarly positive, Maria-Angela Ferrario of Lancaster in the UK described her “excitement and enthusiasm with a capacity to visualise an endpoint.” Ann Light, a professor of design and creative technology in Brighton on England’s south coast, said she spent lockdown “exploring the relationship between art, cultural change, transformative futures and how the creative communities are responding to the pandemic.” She described her superpower as “bloody mindedness” and that we need to use the opportunity to re-focus our attention and reflect on the opportunities that have emerged from this unpredictable pandemic event.

Comedian Michelle A’Court described “turning anger into laughter...celebrating small wins—the big picture stuff is pretty dark so celebrate the small stuff.” Tom Mann in Sydney says his strength is “looking on the bright side.”

Self-development coach Linda Ho also sees her superpower as “optimism”, but adds that this is a choice. She says we can reframe what we do in a positive manner—actively promote this by asking questions in your internal dialogue in ways that engender positive answers.

Others frame this optimism as looking for opportunity to make a difference, Lindsay Smith of Dunedin offers “always asking what can I do to make a difference.” Kylie Jackson of Goodwood sees her speciality as “connecting people with good ideas to make these ideas happen.” Making things happen is important for MP Kiri Tapu Allan who sees herself as a “visible representation that impossible is possible” and describes her power as “boots on the ground.”

Pasifika leader Thomas Wynn says his superpowers of faith and “the power of asking” are embodied in being the change. This superpower is both a noun and a verb.

This link between being optimistic and change—believing in change and taking action to achieve it—is a strong double power. Tim Jones of Christchurch described “having the sight of an eagle and the courage of a bear”: he can see where in a system to intervene, and having the strength and courage to do so. Rotorua-based international human rights lawyer Claire Mahon says that with privilege comes the responsibility to look for opportunities for transformation and the courage to stand up for them. Maeve O’Brien who works to develop resilient tourism says once she understands what has to be done, and for her this means learning to listen first in many different languages, then “I won’t shut up until it is done.” Policy analyst Phoebe Eden-Mann says her superpower is “arguing.”

Some see their optimism as empowering others and that we work best together. Catherine Delahunty says her superpower is “being good at leadership that is an opportunity for a collective action”, and Alexa Forbes’ regenerative focus is made real by her ability to communicate this and help others get excited about it. Richard Hamer, a community organiser in Whakatane described his superpower as passion, but clarified that this is a communal effort “we thrive on each other’s passions...passion breeds passion.”

Events such as COVID-19 which the world is still experiencing, teaches us the value of collaboration and a deeper sense of the collective, particularly as parts of the world are experiencing different trajectories of the COVID pandemic.


Reflecting on the programme, it is providing a window to the world to share things that people were doing during the pandemic and the ebb and flow in and out of lockdown. We had a conversation with Bill Tomlinson and Rebecca Black in Irvine, Southern California, who organised their family across the US to take turns teaching all their children via distance learning in what they called 'Dad School.' While all the children were being supervised at home, the burden of 'teaching' was shared. One example was when Bill had the kids doing a microscopic tour of their gardens, discovering all kinds of insects and plants in gardens across the country. *Blowing Bubbles* has enabled a sharing of those practices.

People were phoned from all over the world and were all keen to contribute. What we find on the whole was we are all doing the same thing—surviving under duress. On reflection, I am reminded that what we set out through listening to guests answering the question about their superpower, was indeed, that they're not really superpowers at all. They are powers that everybody can have and probably do have to varying degrees that makes a positive difference to others and their own lives. They are powers that we all have drawn on during this 2020 pandemic.


In review, radio provides an authentic and timely 'voice' for communicating individual perspectives as well as gaining insight into COVID-19 experiences using a witty and informative platform for reflection and social connectivity, offering access to all.

On reflection, we all have to do our bit. Currently it's supporting Auckland which is in Alert Level 3, while the rest of New Zealand is in Alert Level 2 (August, 2020). It is a kind of interesting and weird feeling as we are living in this global glasshouse, a bit like *The Truman Show*. It is going to be 'interesting' for a long time.

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Article

# **Reflecting on *then* and *now*: pedagogical being in lockdown via Zoom**

Martin Andrew

## **ABSTRACT**

This article presents a creative narrative enquiry into the aspects of online learning which proved crucial to my work as an online curriculum and materials creator in creative arts in the 2000s, that have proven invaluable during the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. Reflections on my practical experience of, and research into, e-learning and online communities of practice lead me to recognise how five key features of online education served as a solid grounding for responsive and pedagogically engaging teaching and learning in the age of coronavirus. Community of practice theory and pedagogy form the basis for this investigation of five constant features of e-pedagogy which are just as pertinent now as they were then—in the relatively early years of web-based learning. My historic narrative of now and then indicates that the affordances of online communities of practice with the greatest value to educational practice include the development of trust, the creation of critical friendships, and the need for outcomes that are impactful at the levels of both the collective and the individual. This reflective process enabled me to access aspects of my pedagogy as an educator that had long been in hibernation and to apply them directly to the act of becoming an instant e-educator in a time of crisis.

## **HERE WE GO AGAIN**

This article describes how my immersive, experiential learning in designing learning and curricula for online learning at a Master-level in the 2000s prepared me well for the emergency application of learning via technology during the 2020 lockdown period. The article demonstrates that my most transformative learning of the 2000s, namely that online learners required socialisation and a sense of belonging, emphasised the centrality of community of practice pedagogy<sup>1</sup> to what I call my 'pedagogical being'—that deep aspect of one's self as an educator so transformed by lived experience that it becomes core to one's educational philosophy.

## THEN AND NOW

On Friday, May 15, 2020, at 5pm, I finished my one hundredth lockdown teaching and learning session by Zoom. Just as Hoover had stood for vacuum cleaner in the '60s, so has Zoom become the key trope standing for all applications of its type, outclassing Skype, Groups, Anymeeting and other all-comers. I used Zoom for multiple pedagogical purposes: lecture- and tutorial-style interactions; two- and three-person learner-focussed mentor-led postgraduate critical conversations; and interest-group sessions informed by community of practice theory, which started with Lave and Wenger<sup>2</sup> in 1991.

In another life, fifteen years ago, I had been involved as an early-uptake curriculum and materials creator for 100 percent-online Master-level programmes in writing and creative arts and as a card-carrying ASCILITE (Australasian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education) conference-goer with multiple refereed outputs.<sup>3</sup> After creating resources for the mostly asynchronous delivery and teaching successfully with them for four years, I found myself so lonely for face-to-face, socially-mediated learning that I had to refocus my pedagogical being. Our pedagogical being is who we are, who we become and who we have the capacity to become when we engage in the flow of teaching and learning. Friday, May 15, took me back, and I asked myself, "What aspects of online education crucial in the late 2000s remain important in the early 2020s?" This article reflects on this journey deep into, turning away from, and returning to online spaces of learning to discover what, for me and likely for others, sits at the heart of online educational learning.

Creative academic stories of this nature draw on narrative enquiry and autoethnography to generate authentic narratives of the lived experience of those close to a phenomenon over time, leading to understandings about how the individual and the cultural are interconnected.<sup>4</sup> The subject of enquiry is the social reality of the narrator; myself as educator, 'being pedagogically' within a culture of electronically-mediated learning. In the tradition of 'narrative knowing',<sup>5</sup> this is a story that reflects a knowable reality.<sup>6</sup> As autoethnography drawing on the self as data, this article aims to transcend "mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation;"<sup>7</sup> in this case, in relation to the cultures we create when we teach and learn online.

During the 2020 international lockdown, my major Zoom interactions fell into three categories: (i) maximising the affordances of the webinar-ware to deliver content- and strategy-based language learning to large groups in Vietnam; (ii) harnessing the communicative capacity of the medium to create mentoring sessions where learners could be heard and critical conversations occur; and (iii) facilitating online communities of practice for the purposes of the sharing and building of professional practice, leveraging the potential of the information-sharing and breakout group affordances. Each of these three pedagogical contexts demanded my full reflective capacity, whether recollective

reflection, thinking-on-feet real-time reflection, or meticulous planning for learning. They also required harnessing the reserves of experience, taking me back to the late 2000s when the fresh modes of delivery and interactive materials my team created were nationally acclaimed.

The building of my comfort with and expertise in online materials creation and techniques of teaching and learning happened in Australia at an ambitious 'cyberversity,' and, as 'the Kiwi' on the team, I never wanted, to draw on the Māori saying, to be the kumara that declared its sweetness ("Kāore te kumara e kōrero mō tōna ake reka"). Instead, I wrote ten journal articles, only two of which I reference here, though they are now, in effect, my data. Next, I will briefly outline some of our learnings from this project and consider their applicability to the cultures of learning I have described above that occurred out of necessity not desire in the wake of the pandemic.

## **FIVE KEY LESSONS OF THEN**

The most prominent learning was that successful online learning in this context ('the first takeaway') involved creating and managing online communities of practice. Within these communities, tutors assumed the roles of 'e-moderators'<sup>8</sup> and curated 'e-tivities'.<sup>9</sup> In this terminology, from the UK's Open University, e-moderators serve a range of functions from facilitating discussion board sessions and chat groups to evaluating the shared discourse of individuals contributing to the e-community. The management 'netiquette' via a negotiated protocol was also central to the successful operation of the e-culture. The 'e-tivities' used were provocations, stimulus materials, and questions serving as prompts for critical writing on key concepts and topics related to the curriculum. After all community members had written a round of responses, a further level of prompts was added so as to deepen the criticality of the discussion and question any underlying assumptions.

The second 'takeaway' concerned the value of trust in e-education. Each 'subject' (as they call 'papers' in Australia) comprised 12 discussion board topics, and this course structure enabled community members to generate much 'shared repertoire' (to use Wenger's<sup>10</sup> term for the collective discourse generated by the community) and therefore constitutive of its culture. Over the 12 weeks, even the initially outlying and diffident learners were engaging with depth, and this is due to the trust fostered among learners.<sup>11</sup>

A third moment of knowing came from the realisation that critical friendship afforded a valuable and naturalistic pedagogical opportunity for writers. Learners either chose their buddies—perhaps known from previous units or from their own writings—or were sympathetically paired by the e-moderator. Critical friends functioned as mirrors and lamps in the process of critiquing creative texts for assessment. The acts of seeing their

own strengths and weaknesses in others' works and generating critical commentaries from a readerly perspective led not only to the building of trust between buddies but also to an increased sense of autonomy for the learners; that is, they were able to generate critique without the supervision of the e-moderator. Trust between buddies cemented trust within the broader community which developed via the passage of time. This trust, then, is a function of another of Wenger's features of a community of practice, 'joint enterprise',<sup>12</sup> working together on a similar task with similar motivations. These motivations were in part about assessment, but more about the earning of a professional identity.

The idea of professional identity brings me to the fourth and fifth critical moments or takeaways. The fourth item of critical learning is that everyone wants to belong; and belonging is fundamental to successful online education.<sup>13</sup> The concept of belonging lies at the heart of 'sense of community', a much-researched and -measured idea in the literature of online education. In 1986, when online education was young, McMillan and Chavis described "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that learners' needs will be met through their commitment to be together."<sup>14</sup> This sense of community evolves through collaborative and authentic practices that build partnerships and community allegiances between and among participants. This is the work of e-moderators, online lecturers and mentors. It aligns with the Wengerian concept of 'mutual engagement'.<sup>15</sup> Through mutual engagement, we create allegiances to current communities, and imagine belonging to aspirational communities in our professional futures. We might call these imagined communities, where we imagine alliances with people we have not yet met, and this act of imagined belonging improves engagement and fosters motivation.

This leads to the fifth critical moment or takeaway message, but far from last, key learning: that online learning in community needs to have something for the individual as well as for the community.<sup>16</sup> Lave and Wenger<sup>17</sup> argued there are connections between imagined community and desired identity. It was true of writers in the Master-level programme that this community of practice pedagogy enhanced individuals' understanding of their desire for a future life as a professional writer.<sup>18</sup> Not only did they contribute collectively to evolving community text and repertoire in the discussion boards, they also generated works of their own for critique, first by their critical friend and then by the e-moderator/assessor, and usually by the moderating eyes of other lecturers.

Workshopping is a core pedagogy in creative arts, and it involves the critical appraisal of work by multiple community members with different levels of what Lave and Wenger called 'legitimate peripheral participation' or LPP.<sup>19</sup> LPP allows less confident members and those with initial fears of imposter syndrome to observe the work of the group peripherally at first, becoming more active participants in the acts of scrutiny as trust and belonging build. Salmon<sup>20</sup> maintained this process of socialisation is one of the

cornerstones of e-learning but it does not account entirely for the fact that learners' engagement in education is tied also to both assessment and identity. Learning, online or not, is concerned with 'proving that you can be' (via assessment) and with 'becoming': the element of personal identity development, fulfilment and being closer to one's imagined communities of desire.

## **NOW: LESSONS APPLIED**

COVID-19, and the forced return to online spaces, led me to call these learnings to mind, and to apply them to the three main pedagogical contexts described above. I carried with me a quote from Hung and Der-Thang which encapsulated the five key learnings: "People, forming a community, come together because they are able to identify with something—a need, a common shared goal and identity."<sup>21</sup> Thus, grounded in my own experience, I armed myself to tackle online learning again.

In teaching examination English to communities in Vietnam, understanding such examinations are often 'make or break' moments for these learners, I leveraged the reputation I already had as a lecturer after many years of teaching there. For me this teaching was voluntary work: making life in lockdown meaningful for overseas communities with whom I had fostered alliances. However, in creating five hours of online learning a week, I had to fast-track my reflective capacity. The impetus began with recognising the common needs and shared goals of the learners (who ranged in age from teenagers to retirees). These goals involved enhancing competence in the productive skills of writing and speaking via carefully moderated e-tivities, knowing that speaking and writing are the aspects of language learning most concerned with identity. Each utterance or generated text is an act of generating an artefact of identity. I gave learners opportunities to engage mutually in a range of joint enterprises (such as text co-creation and peer assessment) and to share their repertoire (their homework writing and speaking recordings) on Google Drive for the scrutiny of others and ultimately me, their lecturer. The principle of maximising participation and output ensured everyone had their say, even in classes exceeding a hundred. The feedback required by the individual for learning complemented the collectivity of learning from each other's works-in-progress.

In my online work with postgraduate learners and with co-mentors, I invested in building trust and, hence, community. In the age of coronavirus, it was important to recognise the emotions and stories impacting us all; in fact, in many cases it was impossible to proceed with the work of education without first acknowledging the affective dimension. Conversations about coronavirus contributed to building trust, and lay the groundwork for constructive critical conversations about project work. We consolidated a sense of being in this together. Indeed the dimensions of mutual engagement and joint enterprise allowed us to examine the journey, and not just the

outputs, within our small-scale community of practice. Our shared repertoire are the drafts and other artefacts that are products of our community, and these are respected in the spirit of critical friendship and understood as texts representing the exploration and development of professional identities.

I facilitated communities of practice among mentors on my programmes and editors of two journals of which I am a core community member. The purposes here were both to keep track of how people were travelling with their work as mentors and also to share our stories and experiences as repertoire. Our joint enterprise is that we are all involved in facilitating the deep-learning journeys of other professionals, some with more applied experience than others. The sharing of stories of practice can build confidence and create a repertoire of ways of being that defines the group. Our ways of doing and practising mentoring are shared as a register of joint enterprise, and the effect of this is ideally to highlight our mutual engagement. In this context, I take this as meaning that we can all learn from each other.

Within sessions, which occur approximately every two to three weeks, it is important to keep up momentum by ensuring a learning trajectory for those who invest in the community regularly, but also provide interest for those whose schedules allow them to join the community infrequently. Each session needs to recognise the capital of individuals while keeping an eye on the learning needs of the community. As these sessions are populated with seasoned educationalists, it is important to have a transparent year-long curriculum and to ensure a changing range of dynamics both from session to session and within sessions. The affordances of the shared screen, the whiteboard and the breakout groups allow for a balance of led e-tivities and the sharing of repertoire among critical friends.

## **TOWARDS CONCLUSION**

As I reflect on the days of lockdown, I come to value my early grounding in e-pedagogy, a key constituent of my pedagogical being, all the more. Although I despair frequently at the vicissitudes of technology, I believe my grounding in the principles of community of practice theory and e-moderation enhanced my value as a member of the online communities to which I contributed in these weeks of enclosure. Taking time to build trust is crucial; it constitutes investment both in learning and in learners' identities. It builds the communities in which we work. The pedagogy of critical friendship comes to the fore in times of crisis and forms a model for the relationship between the assessor and the learner in all contexts of teaching and learning. Further, informal critical friendships, such as those between trusting and close learners, can consolidate motivation in complex times. Though the community becomes the medium of much of this learning, we should never forget that it is the individual trajectory of each member, of each learner, that is the primary project of our enterprise.

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Poetry

# Ode to friends (remember them?)

Lisa Short

There once was a lady at home  
Who said 'I don't want to moan  
But the thing that I miss,  
Is taking the piss,  
of my friends - it's just not the same on the phone.'

**Lisa Short** is a passionate horticulturist known for her irreverent humour and love of blue cheese.

Image source: Mickey O'neil on Unsplash

Article

# I, Avatar

Yury Zhukov and James Staples

There is a reason educators are stepping away from the title 'lecturer' and choosing instead to embrace the role of 'educator' and 'facilitator'. Part of this shift stems from a need to establish a meaningful and productive relationship with the students. But how do you enable their unique talents and help the students capitalise on their strengths when you don't even see their faces and instead communicate with the avatars on your screen? This article is a reflection on the correlation between formative group work, summative assessments, and pastoral care within an online delivery model for international students during an eight-week Strategic Management course.

The course had been taught online through three different levels of lockdown, which meant that the students did not have an opportunity to interact in person with either their educators, support team, or classmates. The authors reflect on the relative effectiveness of the online delivery model adopted by the campus, as well as the use of video essays, team video presentations, guided feedback conversations and recorded team brainstorming as methods of enabling a 'new normal' type of interaction between students that not only helps them better understand the course and material, but serves as an important source of interactions with classmates and a way to monitor pastoral care issues, provide learning support and give feedback in a way that would make facilitating learning online more sustainable.

## INTRODUCTION

The sudden shift to nationwide lockdown and the resulting need to move learning and teaching online emphasised the need for lecturers to move towards a model of learning facilitator, as opposed to deliverer of content. The notion of 'facilitator' conjures up ideas of a learning designer who develops student-focused and interactive learning spaces, allowing students to develop their skills and work collaboratively to build knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Moving from lecturer to facilitator can be challenging enough under normal circumstances but can be even harder when faced with a total disruption to your practice. Such a disruption is what faced lecturers at Otago Polytechnic Auckland International Campus (OPAIC) in March 2020. This article is an auto-ethnographic reflection on this change in practice from the perspectives of two members of the academic department: a member of the OPAIC Learning and Teaching Development (L&TD) team attempting to prepare

lecturers to create interactive and valuable online learning experiences for students, and one of the lecturers who had to adapt his own facilitation skills to create such an experience in his Strategic Management course.

It is important to look back at our institutional education philosophy that promotes student-centred and experiential learning because it was the most important tool that helped with the rapid and relatively unexpected transition to online delivery. It also allowed for the preparation time to be used to focus on the technical components, rather than urgently trying to rewrite the lesson plans so that they fit the new environment. The wonderful thing about it was that, from the design perspective, any student-centred or experiential exercise translated seamlessly into the online environment. The only thing left was to address the digital divide in our education strategies.

## **DEVELOPING THE AVATAR**

With a move to lockdown seeming inevitable, the L&TD recognised the need to prepare the lecturers at OPAIC to move their teaching online. Foremost in our minds was the priority of minimising the disruption to students' learning through an online process that would provide an effective learning space. The challenge for us was to create a process that would allow students to feel connected to, and supported by, their lecturers, while simultaneously creating effective self-directed learning spaces. We also had to be conscious of the continuous pressure<sup>2</sup> such a transition would have on the lecturers.

As time was limited, we had to focus on what was realistically achievable, both in terms of our own training of the lecturers, as well as their ability to restructure their classes. Our decision was to run two rounds of workshops as a priority, with possible further support sessions. The two workshops were prioritised in terms of what lecturers needed most to provide students with a minimum viable service. At the very least, lecturers would need a method of synchronously engaging online with their students – having online teaching sessions – which they had never before needed to do. As all OPAIC lecturers and students have access to Microsoft (MS) Teams, it was only logical that we use this tool for the online meetings. Hence, the first workshop would focus on preparing lecturers to use the basic functionality of MS Teams – enough for them to be able to run a successful online session where they could connect with the students and allow the students an opportunity to engage in their learning as a group. The training session focused on helping lecturers to set up class groups on MS Teams and to run meetings. The latter included the use of the microphone and camera functions, recording of the sessions, sharing screens and using the chat functions to encourage students to engage in the session. Although there is a wider range of functionality available on the MS Teams application, our intention was simply to get lecturers familiar with the basic tools, knowing that they could then feel more confident creating their digital avatar on their own or with support from L&TD.

Once we had completed the MS Teams training with the lecturers, our focus in the second workshop was to take online delivery beyond synchronous meetings with students. Our aim for this workshop was to encourage lecturers to think about the learning environment holistically. They needed to consider how their own responsibility as educators would change, moving them further from lecturers of content to facilitators of learning. They also needed to more carefully consider the learning environment from the perspective of the students, in order to provide a more meaningful learning interaction with them.

To help the lecturers navigate their new environment, our first task in the second workshop was to establish guidelines for online teaching. These guidelines represented a philosophy for online delivery and student engagement and emphasised the need to plan ahead in a way that was clear to students in isolation. Lecturers were encouraged to set weekly learning objectives, provide explicit instructions and learning milestones for students, exhibit heightened empathy for the students, monitor student engagement with a view to provide support where necessary, and above all create opportunities for students to interact with both their lecturer and their classmates.

We felt that, central to creating a meaningful and productive learning space was the need for lecturers to take some time to understand the characteristics of their online student in order to better address their needs. All students at OPAIC are international students. Some of them would have been with us long enough to feel confident in their abilities. However, other students would have been new to New Zealand at the time of the lockdown. For both sets of students, however, the lockdown was challenging. Living in New Zealand—and particularly in Auckland—can be expensive. During lockdown, when the students were unable to work, the financial pressure added to their anxiety. On top of this, they were in isolation far from home, separated from friends and family. Some were unfamiliar with online learning, or even self-directed learning, as they had always had a lecturer that they could turn to in class. In short, these students were scared and confused, in need of extra support, had questions that they did not know how to ask or answer, and were unfamiliar with online learning. The challenge for the lecturers, then, was to address these concerns through their learning design. They needed to provide a learning space that would guide the students effectively and give them confidence in their learning journey.

For this reason, much of the workshop that we provided for lecturers was about understanding the student and then using the tools at their disposal to create engaging learning experiences. Such a learning experience would require both synchronous online sessions with students and asynchronous tasks and activities that would inform those online meetings. Students would be able to access their learning content from their Moodle accounts, but in moving their learning online, the way Moodle was used had to be reassessed. No longer could it be a dumping ground for PowerPoint slides,

obscure readings and links to videos with no contextual explanations. Moodle needed to be the location for learning activities, the relevance of, and instructions for which would be clearly explained for students who did not have ready access to their lecturer when in need of guidance. It was vital that students could see how each task aligned to the course learning outcomes and the weekly learning objectives so that they could understand why they were being asked to read an article, watch a video, or apply the content of a PowerPoint slide. In addition, students should be given the opportunity to share their ideas with their classmates in tasks designed for interaction of peers, with clear outputs that showed engagement with relevant concepts and theories. The goal was for students to engage in these tasks, form questions and opinions, and then discuss these with their peers and lecturers during the online sessions on MS Teams.

Of course, while the L&TD team presented these ideas at the workshops with the lecturers before lockdown, we were also scrambling to come to terms with the hurried change in practice. While our thinking was grounded in literature about online learning, under the circumstances we did not have the time to experiment with the ideas. Nor did we have the time to ease the lecturers and students into using this new approach. Therefore, when we presented our workshops to the lecturers, we did not know whether or not it would be successful in the classrooms. It was therefore interesting to see how the lecturers would adapt to the environment and make their own interactive spaces with their classes.

## **ENGAGING THE AVATAR**

Strategic Management was a long-running Level 7 course that had been delivered to both Bachelor of Applied Management students and Graduate Diploma in Applied Management students. The aim of the course was to provide the learner with an ability to apply critical thinking to strategic concepts and practices in a rapidly changing environment. The course that was about to be run in the second term of the academic year 2020, however, was going to be different from all other iterations run before that. The L&TD workshops, team discussions and the immediacy and magnitude of the shift pushed for new solutions.

## **VIDEO ESSAYS**

The first activity used to introduce the students to a new system was recorded video essays. The purpose was not necessarily to contribute to their understanding of strategic tools, but to familiarise themselves with the tools at our disposal and new ways to submit assessments. The students were asked to record short two minute videos discussing their first impressions of their life in lockdown, their biggest challenges, and the techniques they had been using to get through it. Technically, that was a task that

most people could accomplish using their phones, but it did force the students to come out from behind their avatars and allowed the facilitator the first impressions of their needs and potential challenges.

The first video essay created a precedent which demonstrated to the students that they were capable of using online educational systems as a two-way communication channel. That did not, however, resolve the issue of enabling the sense of community that was critical for their emotional wellbeing. This was partly addressed by recorded team presentations.

## **TEAM VIDEO PRESENTATIONS**

During regular classes, the students normally create time for social and educational interactions with their peers. This helps them develop a variety of soft skills, facilitates topical discussions, and creates a social network within the class. With the lockdown, the students barely had a formal reason to interact. There was no habit of interaction outside of the classroom, because there had previously been no need for that. Therefore, this formal communication space had to be created and, to a certain extent, monitored. Additionally, one of the learning outcomes of the course specifically required students to work in teams and had to be assessed in both Assessments Two and Three.

One of the techniques used to create this communication space was a recorded team presentation that directly contributed to an assessment. Each team was required to identify a number of current issues affecting their selected industry proportionate to the number of students in the team. In other words, each team member had to choose a topic that they would individually present to the rest of the team. The students were then required to organise a group chat and record their presentations as a team meeting in which every team member was supposed to present. The students were then required to have a brief discussion of the relative importance of the presented industry issues. This activity was created to substitute a group report that had previously been required of teams in this course.

In the future, this technique will present a unique opportunity to create team assessments that can accurately track individual contribution and, when required, can be assessed on individual rubrics. It will allow each individual within the team to receive a personalised mark for the team assignment, therefore making it more difficult to pass without critically engaging with the course.

More importantly, in the situation of lockdown, this activity forced the students to have more personal interactions with their teammates, reducing the feeling of isolation. Feedback from the students in class and even the difference in facial expressions and

other social cues between the individual videos and team video was dramatic. Not only that, but the quality of presented material was significantly higher than what is normally observed in written reports, especially for students who were traditionally facing challenges with academic writing.

At this point it is important to ask ourselves—why do our assessments look the way they do? Unfortunately, if we are sincere with ourselves, we focus on written academic assessments in large part because it is more convenient for us, as educators, to use. Realistically, it is hard to imagine any person in an actual workplace having to write three to four reports a month. Therefore, we found that substituting written reports with team meeting videos and presentation materials which included handouts was an adequate way to assess the students' capabilities.

Bringing more interaction into activities and transitioning them to the online environment created an important space in which students needed to collaborate with peers and contribute to the team effort. The fact that the students were scaffolded into preparing their contribution for the team assignment and everyone had an equally important role took away some of the anxiety of the presentation. Confidence in the activity framework translated into higher confidence in their abilities and positive and meaningful cooperation with peers. That aligned well to the idea promoted by the L&TD team in the workshops—the need to create learning spaces that would guide the students effectively and give them confidence in their learning journey.

## **RECORDED TEAM BRAINSTORMING**

The third activity was used to inform the final individual assignment in the Strategic Management course. Each member of the team had to prepare a risk management matrix for their selected company. The team was then required to start a group video chat and record it. Each student presented the risk matrix and every one of their peers in the meeting was required to contribute critique to the identified risks and risk management strategies, specifically highlighting the potential pitfalls and recommending ways to improve the solutions and strategies. The presenting students were responsible for recording this feedback in a text file. This risk matrix, solutions, and notes from the brainstorming session were made part of the final individual submission.

Of course, there were the expected shortcomings in that students may not have taken the feedback seriously or may not have made sufficient effort to make meaningful recommendations. If that were to be the case, they still had the option of falling back on traditional writing techniques and could rely entirely on their own understanding of potential risk management strategies for their selected organisation. They would still have been engaged in a meaningful social interaction with their peers and developed

transferable skills to enhance the achievement of graduate profile outcomes. In the end, the students who genuinely participated in providing and receiving feedback created some of the best and most meaningful assignments in the course.

## **EMBRACING THE AVATAR: CONCLUSION**

Looking back over the experience of teaching during lockdown, we feel confident that, overall, we managed to achieve what we set out to do—move towards a facilitator model that allows for the creation of an interactive learning space, where students can connect and contribute to the learning process. This is not an easy thing to do and it requires a focused and deliberate effort on the part of the facilitator. To help facilitators, we recommend that extra training around learning design in the online or blended mode becomes a standard. It is important to include more detailed digital learning collaboration techniques into teaching development, particularly as part of future induction programmes. It is necessary, going forward, for facilitators to embrace technology, become comfortable with blending online and offline teaching practices, and create a culture of online teamwork.

For learning to be successful, facilitators need to show empathy, support and creativity in responding to the challenge of keeping students connected. Coaxing students out of the role of passive learners, through the use of video essays, online team presentations and group brainstorming meant that students got to participate in a variety of team roles, provided and received support from their teams, created more meaningful learning networks, and achieved the learning outcomes within shorter times. Not only does this help to equip students with the capabilities necessary for future employment, the use of technology also allows us to create assessments that eliminate the stresses of teamwork and provide a logical way to deal with learning. This is only possible if the facilitator redevelops the learning design.

Our current practice has historically been based on the assumption that the facilitator is central to the learning process. This is an assumption that has been held not only by some lecturers, but also by students. To survive lockdown, however, a new model was required, where the facilitator had to step away from the central space so that students could instead occupy it through their collaborations and teamwork. To maximise the benefits of this collaborative online learning space, we recommend that students are encouraged to begin collaborating as early in the course as possible. This sets the precedent as to how the learning will progress and it provides the students with a sense of community from early on. This in turn has a positive impact on the facilitator, requiring less time and effort to move the students into a collaborative mindset.

Perhaps it is time for a new set of assumptions to take shape.

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Blog Post

# Hopeful thoughts for the day

Richard Mitchell

As we went into lockdown and we were plunged into a very surreal and uncertain situation, I felt the need to write messages that brought some positivity. This was both a cathartic release and a way to reach out to my wider Facebook community to say 'Hey, this is ok. Life goes on.'

Daily posts for all of Level 4 and 3, started with "Today the sun came up and the birds sang..." (or some variation on this and closed with "... and tomorrow is another day." This was to ground the post in a sense of the here-and-now and the simple hope that tomorrow brings. For me this provided a form of mindful reflection that forced me to be present as I experienced the beauty in the things that surrounded me every day. Like others, I was struck by how removing the 'taken-for-grantedness' from the banal provided personal insights and observations that had not been there before.



Figure 1. Korimako's friend, tūi.  
Source: author

As time passed, more and more people sent me messages thanking for me for sharing my thoughts (and separate daily posts of photographs taken each day). Soon this became more than just about my own release and it slowly morphed into being messages of hope. What follows is a selection of three posts and photographs chosen from 48 daily posts.

## 26 MARCH

Today the sun came up (and shone brightly all day) and the birds sang (our korimako is becoming a wonderful friend)...

The first day of official lockdown was much like the last week or so for us but for one key thing. The low hum of traffic moving around the city was largely replaced by the sounds of kids and

parents playing in their back yard.

If I didn't know any better I'd have said it was a classic Dunedin 'snow day', but as I said, the sun shone brightly all day and warmed us all through.

... and tomorrow is another day.

## 25 APRIL – ANZAC DAY

Today I got up before the sun rose to mark ANZAC Day and we stood in silence at the end of the driveway like several of our neighbours and the Last Post played on someone's phone...

We were awoken by James, who'd set his alarm for 5:30 am so that he could attend dawn parade in his uniform as a proud Venturer (a senior scout). He rarely misses ANZAC commemorations and today was no exception. He stood at attention, silent and in deep contemplation. With all of the neighbours around, it was a very moving start to the day.

I've spent the day helping Carleen draw a diagram for the final draft of her Masters of Professional Practice. She has just sent it for a final once over to her supervisors and by the end of the week it should be submitted for examination.

Her final presentation is 18 May and it will be the culmination of 12 months of incredibly hard work and deep thought. I'm incredibly proud of her and know she has put her best foot forward. Level 3 takeaway meals will come just in time for a hand in celebration.

... and tomorrow is another day.



Figure 2. Standing at Dawn. Source: author

## 27 APRIL

Today the sun came up and the birds sang and over the last 33 days we learned that ...

... kindness is the glue that holds the world together.

... compassion and empathy (the root of true hospitality) are at the heart of caring communities.

... true leadership is full of compassion and empathy.

... humans are part of a complex set of interactions with ALL other living organisms.

... humans are not at the 'top' of some artificial evolutionary hierarchy.

... if we slow down and take the time to notice what is around as we see just how beautiful nature is.

... if we slow down nature heals herself in so many amazing ways.

... some of the least valued (and lowest paid) members of society (those responsible for providing us with food, primary health care, aged-care, rubbish collection and the like) can and should stand proudly ahead of many that we place on a pedestal when they contribute little in the way of real value to society.

... teachers do amazing things for our young people.

... we value hospitality as an essential element of our daily lives and that this is more than just food and drink; we miss the opportunity to meet and share with others in places that we grow to love.

... long-distance travel is a very recent privilege (really only existing since the 1970s) but it has become something that we take for granted. We should not take this for granted.

... unabated economic activity causes untold damage to our air quality and if we bring this activity under control, we can actually start to slow and potentially even reverse anthropogenic damage to the planet.

... daily exercise in the fresh air is easy, enjoyable and good for our mental and physical wellbeing.

... family is important.

... community is important.

... neighbourliness and neighbourhoods are important.

... we all need to learn how to cook, grow things, mend clothes, do basic repairs around the house.

... we need more robust local foodways, food sovereignty and food systems.

... all countries need to rely less on global production systems and market conditions for the essentials of life.

... we need to have a conversation about something like a universal basic income so that people have the security of being able to put a roof over their head, food on the table and clothes on their back (no questions asked and no strings attached).

... inequity is everywhere and we usually choose to ignore it.

... creativity is in all of us and can be expressed in so many beautiful, funny, joyous, awesome and inspirational ways.

... expressing yourself is good for your mind, body and soul.  
... New Zealand is an amazing place that we need to take more care of.  
... Kiwis (Māori, Pākehā, Pasifika and more recent arrivals from all over the world) are resilient, kind, hospitable, caring and just downright good buggers.  
BUT, you know what? We knew all of that already, it's just that a microscopic life form has brought all of this into sharp focus and we should never, ever let any of the above become taken for granted again  
and you know what else?  
... tomorrow is another day.



Figure 3. A time for reflection, Ross Creek during lockdown. Source: author

**Professor Richard Mitchell** has published more than 160 research outputs at the confluence of people, place and culture. His work can best be described as polymathic as he has explored consumer behaviour, experiential consumption, business networks, regional development, learning through play, food design, food performance and learning and teaching.



Poetry

# Worried Teeth

Hana Cadzow

Last night I dreamt that my teeth  
fell out of my mouth.

I caught them in my hands, coughed  
through the rubble and chalk,  
through the grit they left behind.

The stumps in my gums  
cut into my tongue  
when I tried to call out.

The internet tells me  
that if I'm dreaming about my teeth falling out  
I am:

Stressed  
Anxious  
Depressed  
Jealous  
Undergoing life changes  
Questioning the nature of God  
Mourning the end of my marriage  
Concerned about the mortality of my children  
Voiceless in the face of personal upheaval

or


Grinding my teeth at night.

Soon I will step back into buildings  
which were unsafe for two months  
because of a spreading, invisible death.  
How many door handles will I have to touch?  
Where will I wash my hands?  
Will everybody in the room  
remember we are vulnerable?

My children will be away from me  
for the first time in weeks.  
My children  
have stopped sleeping through the night, I  
have stopped sleeping through the night.

I have booked an appointment,  
with the dentist.

**Hana Cadzow** is a Principal Lecturer in the College of Engineering, Construction and Living Sciences at Otago Polytechnic. Her research focuses on innovative engineering education with specific interests in workplace learning as well as the experiences of women and communities. Her creative outputs are varied but usually say more about motherhood and life than engineering.

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# **The capabilities of COVID-19: how Learner Capabilities shone through lockdown**

Amber Paterson

The COVID-19 lockdown experience was something that all of New Zealand experienced together and while some may have seen it as an annoyance, others may have relished the opportunity to stop and take stock. Without realising it, we used many capabilities throughout this time, from resilience, to working independently, to displaying leadership. Through this reflection, I delve deeper into how each of us potentially displayed some of the Learner Capabilities simply by carrying on with our new normal daily life. For some, this was a time to shine, for others a time to discover, and for some a time in which they realised where they are and where they are heading to.

While we all worked away at home while also attempting to balance potentially being a parent, supermarket shopper, counsellor, home-school teacher, child negotiator, TikTok video creator, and Zoom extraordinaire, we realised that maybe this was a wakeup call that some of us needed to try and get a **Work-Life Balance** once we were released back into the big wide world. Many people throughout the world have continued to prioritise their personal and whānau wellbeing by continuing to work from home or perhaps a balance of working at home and at the office.

For many people globally, suddenly having to work completely online was a shift they were not used to, or for some, one that they were not prepared for. For the Learner Capability team, the main pivot was the moving of the usual face-to-face student sessions to all being online. This was not hugely different to what we had been doing anyway, but for many of our 'I am Capable' users and our Otago Polytechnic (OP) colleagues, this online move was a new concept. **Demonstrates Digital Competence** was certainly displayed several times a day, whether it was Zoom calls, Moodle forums, creating videos, Microsoft Teams chats and video calls, testing online, or checking the validity of information that we were receiving online.

For our team, it was a relief to meet each morning for the first two weeks so that we knew that everyone was ok and had what they needed.

No one can deny that **Leadership** was on display throughout lockdown. Whether it was the Critical Incident Management Team, lecturers, the wider OP staff, business owners, or the famous Jacinda and Ashley 1 p.m. announcements, we all saw that the qualities of leadership were helping to guide our nation, our businesses and our learners. Individually, we displayed a form of leadership, whether it be in our own homes or as part of a street, or part of OP. Perhaps some people checked in on neighbours, or ran a street social media group, or contributed to the work-from-home (Microsoft) Teams channel.

As constant handwashing, physical distancing and potential mask wearing became part of what we do, we can all say that we were **Practising Health and Safety**. We all saw the need to keep ourselves and others physically safe. For the Learner Capability team, we started to see some of the health science students uploading certificates to prove they had had 'COVID-19 safety training' as part of their online teaching.

For many of us, we were balancing numerous commitments and the capability of **Organises Effectively** began to shine. Many people are organised normally but so many had to plan and prioritise to achieve work commitments as well as manage physical environments. From the many Zoom, Skype and Teams calls I was on, I was privileged to see inside many of my colleagues' and other New Zealanders' kitchens, home offices, spare bedrooms, sleep-outs and decks. For some of our colleagues, this meant structuring their day so that they started well before dawn—and before the family rose, so that they could finish earlier and spend time with family. Some of being organised effectively was because there was a lot of device sharing happening in households.


During lockdown there were many opportunities for people to **Solve Problems**—from computer gear issues, to how to encourage learners to move online, to how to connect learners in different international time zones. Rather than seeing the initial part of lockdown as a problem, we saw that this was an opportunity—just consider the number of Kiwis that have lost their jobs and have now decided to retrain, or be **Enterprising** by being creative with how their businesses operate, for example food suppliers delivering to homes instead of just businesses, or cafés selling off raw materials via a delivery service. We **Worked in Teams** to work through solutions; as the proverb goes, “a problem shared is a problem halved.”

Undoubtedly, the number one capability being demonstrated worldwide is **Resilience**, from persevering and maintaining personal wellness, to attempting to maintain optimism under adversity. In one way or another, we have all responded differently to the COVID-19 lockdown and perhaps New Zealand's 'Number 8 wire' attitude has helped us to get through as a team of five million.

While some may see the COVID-19 lockdown as a negative or hard time emotionally, spiritually or mentally, we can say that the COVID-19 lockdown was a capability rich time for all of Aotearoa. This is a significant part of being alive in 2020 and something that will live with our young people as a show of strength, unity and recovery.

The Learner Capability team salute our essential workers, and our team of five million. Kia kaha Aotearoa.

**Amber Paterson** is the Learner Capability Operations Coordinator at Otago Polytechnic. Amber completed her Master of Education in 2017 and her research focus was on educational assessment. Amber was a primary school teacher for nineteen years, with the last twelve years as a Deputy Principal based on the Taieri Plains.

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# Reflections on virtual teaching experience in Construction, English and Information Technology classes

Don Samarasinghe, Vera Nistor and Hymie Abd-Latif

## ABSTRACT

The recent COVID-19 lockdown in New Zealand has pushed tertiary education providers to shift quickly to virtual teaching. This shift happened very abruptly, with only enough time to do some basic preparation work. This study reflects on the learning and teaching experience of three lecturers at Otago Polytechnic (OP) across three disciplines, Construction, English, and Information Technology (IT), under these exceptional circumstances. We found out that our virtual teaching approaches were situated at different stages on a continuum between synchronous and asynchronous online learning, depending on the subject. Construction classes practised synchronous online learning with the aid of chat rooms that enabled a high degree of teacher-learner interaction. In contrast, the IT classes worked mostly as asynchronous, where the lecturer produced class resources for students to use independently, without being constrained by any time limitations. The English classes followed a middle ground approach, with each lesson starting with a synchronous component, followed by an asynchronous part where the students were performing class activities independently. Our reflection shows that teaching online does not necessarily need to fall into only one category. Lecturers need to find out what works for them and their students, according to the teaching content, their capabilities and availability of resources. Overall, our students enjoyed these teaching methods, took on the challenge very well, and became more autonomous learners who are comfortable with virtual learning. This entire experience proved that we are capable of adjusting to critical conditions and finding effective ways to promote and encourage learning.

**Keywords:** virtual teaching, online teaching, synchronous learning, asynchronous learning, reflective practice

## INTRODUCTION

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, educational providers in New Zealand have experienced a pressing need to transform their learning and teaching environment to one that takes place online. There was a temporary shift in teaching delivery to an emergency remote teaching (ERT) mode,<sup>1</sup> which is different from the well-planned online teaching delivery.<sup>2</sup> During the H1N1 influenza pandemic in 2009, contingency teaching and learning plans were effectively implemented using online classes.<sup>3</sup> In general, online learning is used to refer to web-based training, e-learning, distributed learning, internet-based learning, web-based instruction, cyber learning, virtual learning, or net-based learning.<sup>4</sup> Moving classes online is a significant change to the learning and teaching environment, and the teaching methods need to be adapted to the new learning environment.<sup>5</sup> The success of the online learning environment is determined by the degree of interactions between students and teachers.<sup>6</sup> It supports Bruner's 1986 theory, which discusses the importance of student-teacher interactions that enable students to build upon what they already know.<sup>7</sup> A study conducted by van Rensburg<sup>8</sup> identified that high student satisfaction and motivation, assisting students with problem solving skills, increasing flexibility for learning, facilitating collaborative learning, enhancing student participation, integrating the theory-practice, and enhancing students' computer literacy skills can all increase the effectiveness of online learning.

New Zealand moved to COVID-19 Alert Level 3 on 23 March, 2020, and then to Alert Level 4 lockdown 48 hours later. Both lecturers and learners had to move into virtual classrooms to continue their learning and teaching in Week 6 of the 16-week semester at OP's Dunedin campus. At the same time, Study Block 2 at Otago Polytechnic Auckland International Campus (OPAIC) resorted to online classes for eight weeks. The aim of this study is to reflect on the learning and teaching experience of three lecturers at OP across three disciplines, Construction, English, and Information Technology (IT). This article will outline the three lecturers' experiences during this virtual teaching period, by using reflection to describe and analyse the experiences and to incorporate outcomes of the ERT experience to make recommendations for the future.

## REFLECTION ON OUR VIRTUAL TEACHING EXPERIENCE

### ***Don Samarasinghe – Bachelor of Construction***

I teach the Bachelor of Construction programme delivered in an eight-week study block system at OPAIC. Prior to the lockdown being announced, I did some preparations for virtual teaching as guided by the Learning and Teaching Development (L&TD) team. The L&TD team introduced the Microsoft (MS) Teams platform as the key communication medium for virtual teaching. We received lesson plans specifically designed for the COVID-19 ERT to be incorporated into our virtual teaching sessions. The virtual classes were completely new for me and my students. I had many email conversations and telephone calls between the student enrolment team, student success team, academic

administration team and my team leader to get all my students added into Moodle and MS Teams. I trialled a virtual class with three students and my co-teacher prior to the actual class sessions. This experience gave us more confidence on how MS Teams should be used with higher student engagement.

The virtual teaching style I used was different from traditional online classes in which the class resources are available for students to do self-study. I named my classes “face-to-face virtual classes” where teacher-learner interaction is the key. In my face-to-face virtual classes, students were actively engaged in the learning process through interactive online discussions. The random classroom questioning helped me to keep the students engaged in class. In return, students also regularly asked questions and contributed to class discussions during the session. My students actively discussed what specific topics they wanted to study given the limitation of conducting construction site visits during the lockdown. In my construction technology classes, MS Whiteboard was used to share my sketches with the students. The OneNote Class Notebook was very useful for collaborative learning activities. I felt that these tools helped them to work in teams and reflect on their previous learning, just like in the face-to-face classes. Online forums and questionnaires on Moodle were used to check students’ understanding of particular topics covered.

I sometimes conducted one-on-one virtual classes for those who needed it. I found this worked particularly well for the construction research students as they worked on individual research projects. I went the extra mile to help students who enrolled one week later in the programme by conducting individual after-class discussions. The students who needed more academic support and pastoral care during this difficult time were referred to the student success team through the Student Referral app used at OPAIC. I observed that students thoroughly enjoyed flexible virtual classes, which enabled them to watch the class recordings anytime they wanted. Overall, I found that my virtual classes worked just as well as my face-to-face classes. The student feedback, assessment results and overall student achievement validated the success of my virtual classes. This experience helped me to learn so much about effective virtual class deliveries. Therefore, I look at COVID-19 as a challenging yet unparalleled opportunity to grow as an effective education professional.

### **Vera Nistor – New Zealand Certificate in English Language (NZCEL)**

When the COVID-19 lockdown started, online classes seemed like a slightly daunting new experience for lecturers and were approached more as an experiment to see whether this delivery mode was going to work for both students and lecturers. Overall, I could say that the online delivery of NZCEL gave students a fantastic opportunity to practise and become experienced in student autonomy.

I never got to meet my class before the lockdown. I met them online for the first time in the first week of Block 2. I had a class of nine students and nobody knew each other. On the first day nobody knew how to use MS Teams either, as it was a new software for them, as well as for me, but within one week they got used to this system.

In a normal face-to-face class, the schedule would have been four hours of non-stop tuition in one day, with the teacher being available for the students at all times. However, as this had become an online class, this kind of schedule would not have been realistic or even possible. Instead, we devised a plan to meet every day at the beginning of class to set the activities/plan for the day. I would give them instructions to do something and set a time limit for the activity. In the meantime, they could either work alone or together with a partner or group (depending on the type of activity), and then they would join the main class meeting on MS Teams again and we would check the answers together when the time was up. Therefore, we ended up with a mixed delivery of both synchronous and asynchronous online learning.

They were not so comfortable with this in the first week, as they were not used to this style of learning, especially the asynchronous part, which required more autonomy on their behalf. However, by practising it daily, they gradually became better at it. They got used to not having the teacher with them all the time and needing personalised one-to-one attention. With time, they got used to working on tasks independently, or sometimes with their peers. We created groups for them to join with others from their class so that they could work together on different tasks, check their answers together and give each other feedback. This way they got used to being more autonomous learners, and eight weeks into the course, they were better at doing class activities and understanding instructions more easily without asking so many questions and without being so dependent on the teacher. Overall, I noticed that during this ERT period the students grasped different concepts and could successfully complete class activities faster than previous groups of students in normal face-to-face classes.

### **Hymie Abd-Latif – Bachelor of Information Technology**

Bachelor of Information Technology lecturers had different methods of delivery that suited their courses and learners' circumstances. The courses I was teaching needed heavy coding and hands-on activities. Pre-COVID-19, a typical classroom session was 30 minutes, highlighting tasks for the day and Q&A. This was followed by learners working in the lab or on a project while I went around the classroom to meet them one-on-one to reinforce learning, clarify or solve problems. During lockdown, classes worked mostly asynchronously, where lecturers produced class resources like videos, lab manuals, self-paced learning, and online quizzes for learners to use autonomously, without being constrained by any time limitations.

I felt that the ERT was consistent with our pre-COVID-19 delivery, hence I could move into virtual classrooms smoothly while guiding my learners to adopt the new delivery method with the least difficulty. It took everyone about two weeks to understand and get into the new routine. Learners felt motivated to gain from and contribute to discussions so they read resources or watched the videos provided. During class time, learners would either text chat or video chat with any lecturers or among themselves. Pre-COVID-19, I was constrained by class time to meet my learners but during lockdown the time boundaries were blurred. Learners and I were still able to share codes they created by

using the screen share function and helping them out remotely with debugging errors. There were learners adversely impacted by COVID-19, either because of technology (like unavailability of reliable internet connection or device) or unsuitable living conditions. However, most managed to continue learning throughout the lockdown.

I am happy that despite the lockdown I still got the opportunity to share my knowledge and guide my learners to achieve the respective course learning outcomes. These feelings were validated by a high completion rate of the courses and very good feedback from learners at the end of the semester. Although various strategies were in place to avoid cheating and collaboration, some degree of these was detected. These strategies included projects, problem solving and presentations. If I were to do this differently, I would assess more frequently and use bite-size ungraded assessment to keep track of each learner's progress. I would schedule more frequent and regular screen sharing and one-to-one online discussions to learn and establish deeper relationships. I would also get more training of online delivery of courses to upskill my online teaching. This new model of learning paved a way to a new normal for me and my learners. I will continue to have videos and self-paced resources and screen sharing online discussions with my learners, not restricted to class time, therefore giving them more autonomy. The only setback is that this unbounded time can eat into my personal time, hence would sometimes be inefficient, but that is something for me to work on.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

We all had different approaches to our virtual lessons and found ourselves at different points on the continuum between synchronous and asynchronous online learning, depending on the subject. Construction classes were more synchronous, whereas IT classes were asynchronous, with English being a mix between the two.<sup>9</sup> We all found effective ways to promote and encourage learning during this and future ERT situations. The continuum of virtual teaching and learning between synchronous and asynchronous approaches provided different models for different courses and learner needs, which all resulted in their own positive outcomes and student progress with the help of online tools.<sup>10</sup>

One common finding across all three courses was that through this virtual delivery, the students gained more self-management and reflection in their learning, indicating a higher degree of autonomy.<sup>11</sup> This increased autonomy, in turn, increased the students' motivation and engagement in class activities. Reeve<sup>12</sup> mentions the difference between 'autonomy-supportive teaching' and 'controlling instructional behaviours,' the latter of which is typical of more traditional teachers in more traditional face-to-face classrooms. Due to the temporary COVID-19 situation, the students had no choice but to continue their studies online, and, in this way, they became more autonomous as their teachers could not be physically with them all the time. We were also encouraged to use more 'autonomy-supportive teaching,' prompted by the online delivery medium.

Because of the synchronous delivery, Construction students showed the same level of autonomy in face-to-face classes, as in the online delivery imitating this method. The results here were as good as they were in classes taking place on campus. In English classes, student autonomy was higher than in Construction, due to the mixed synchronous and asynchronous delivery method. A faster grasping of new knowledge could be noticed in these classes, as well as better performance in class activities and formative assessment. On the other end of the continuum, IT learners demonstrated the highest level of autonomy amongst all three programmes,<sup>13</sup> as well as an improvement in end-of-course results.

Given the success of this online delivery trial, this could be an incredible opportunity for tertiary educators to reconsider learning and teaching and to try to find out what would encourage more student autonomy in the classroom and better student motivation together with high quality participation.<sup>14</sup> A higher degree of student autonomy seems to have a strong link to learners' performance and results. Going back to a normal post-COVID-19 situation, it would be useful to retain some of these online learning practices alongside normal face-to-face delivery. This would resemble a blended classroom learning model that would combine physical resources and hands-on practice with online facilitation of class material and more tasks or projects supporting autonomy that students can complete online in their own time.<sup>15</sup>


This entire experience proved that, as teachers, we can adjust to critical conditions and find effective ways to promote and encourage learning. It also proved that learners are very versatile, and in the right conditions, are quite happy to be more autonomous.

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Poetry

# Ode to Microsoft Teams

Michael Goodliffe

A victim of COVID nineteen  
Was muttering something obscene  
When asked "What's the trouble?"  
He replied from his bubble  
"It's not the virus it's Microsoft Teams!"

**Michael Goodliffe** has been teaching English language for over 20 years, in Switzerland, China and now in the English Language Programme at Otago Polytechnic. He likes activities such as tramping, travelling, reading, cycling, but mostly he likes words like bamboozle, imbecilic and wüerstli (it's a small Swiss sausage). He would like to write like the late A. A. Gill, but has to make do with not writing like A. A. Gill and instead trying to tame the imbecilic bamboozling wüerstli that is his brain.

# Empathy for the faceless

Bing Dai, Rajeev Chawla and Yury Zhukov

The unique situation of the COVID-19 lockdown was a massive shift from the modus operandi not just because of the fact that everyone had to become an online meeting guru, but because it instantly severed all the traditional communication and social support channels that we were taking for granted. The invasive nature of this change, the inability to transition at a comfortable pace made the shift to online classes an emergency, whereas under different circumstances it could have been a conscious and planned transition. Now that the novelty is gone and the world is resetting the priorities, many people, who were initially concerned and resistant to the changes in the educational process, have embraced the online engagement paradigm and appreciate it for the convenience and ease of access to resources. In hindsight, higher digitalisation and transition to asynchronous engagement were logical, but the extreme speed with which we had to change our processes was disruptive at the time of the lockdown. It also resulted in some noticeable differences to classes.

The first difference, obviously, was that the classes were to happen completely online without a single meeting to set up the system of engagement and communication channels with the students. Secondly, student numbers were higher in each class as internships and industry projects were disrupted and substituted with class work. And thirdly, the international business environment was changing very rapidly, and the students would have had excellent cases to contemplate. Despite the tragedy of a pandemic, economic hardship and rising uncertainty, a silver lining was that the students would have to rely entirely on their own analysis and thoughts to create any meaningful strategic recommendations for COVID-19 because there had not been any materials created to discuss it.

This article explores the changes that a team of educators had to make to their methods, adapting their resources, dealing with technological challenges, exploring a variety of communication channels to facilitate the classes in lockdown, and dealing with meeting screens full of faceless profile pictures.

## TECHNOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

Though the lecturers had been given the initial training in Microsoft (MS) Teams as a platform to engage with the learners, the learners did not have this opportunity but had

to rely entirely on their own knowledge of digital platforms. Our initial sessions were focused on teaching and learning how to use MS Teams effectively to engage with each other and communicate in a controlled environment. Another issue had been the bandwidth limitations and inconsistent internet connection, which affected the quality of online sessions with the voice and video breaking up. This forced the lecturers to repeat parts of the sessions. Issues with connections translated in challenges with uploading recorded videos. For some students, the data caps were a significant consideration, some used mobile data to upload video essays made with their phones. Each online learning session was recorded; the learners had access to these recorded sessions, but they would have probably avoided taxing their bandwidth further when possible. MS Teams could not realistically compete with Netflix in the fight for household data. These technological challenges were considered when the resources were being prepared.

## **RESOURCES ON THE GO**

Over the years, the lecturers had designed and developed many experiential activities and resources. Many of these resources, like group discussions, activities and site visits, had become essential parts of the learning design and had been effectively integrated with the course content and assessments. The method of engagement had never been in question because of strict institutional methodological expectations, however in the absence of face-to-face sessions, the rules could not be applied regardless of institutional policies. A high level of focus on reporting, attendance monitoring, and guided synchronous delivery in the guidelines for vocational institutions meant that even trying to repurpose the materials for a well understood methodology, such as online delivery, sent shockwaves of cognitive shifts through both staff and students.

The recommendation for online sessions was to keep them no longer than one hour whereas the system was geared to three or four hours of in-class sessions. This posed challenges: many resources needed to be redesigned, and new asynchronous activities were developed to fit the online learning design. The learners were given asynchronous activities on Moodle and MS Teams to explore the concepts, followed by synchronous discussions during the online sessions. These were the challenges from urgently shifting to different communication channels, channels that were presumably more familiar to the students (as digital natives) than the lecturers.

## **COMMUNICATION CHANNELS**

As was to be expected, the first two classes of emergency online delivery ended up being mostly focused on establishing ways to communicate, enrolling the students in MS Teams, setting up class timetables, and making sure that everyone could access the course and was in no way disadvantaged. We decided to communicate frequently

and openly with our learners about this new experience. The lockdown made the switch to online studies stressful and unexpected for both the students and educators. Open and straightforward communication was key to effective adaptation and helped create a sense of security and community. It was also intended to help establish a more appropriate and meaningful learner journey in collaboration with the students.

To minimise communication disruption, we established additional avenues for learners to connect with the lecturers. These included the now common MS Teams and social groups using WhatsApp and WeChat. The latter gave learners familiar channels to ask questions and receive communications and clarifications they needed in the absence of face-to-face sessions. The lecturers needed to approach the transition to online sessions with maximum empathy to help reduce the anxiety and stress in the learners locked out of their normal lives.

The additional communication avenues allowed the learners to post queries as and when they came up, and the response could be posted by peers and lecturers in real time, which contributed to the perception of community and engagement. The open and honest communication helped drive the engagement of the learners. The lecturers provided additional support reviewing drafts and giving written feedback to help the learners stay on track with formative and summative assessments. Regular feedback about the effectiveness of individual components of the online sessions helped the lecturers to adapt effectively to the unfamiliar environment. This multidirectional approach helped to bridge the gap left by the lack of physical human presence in the educational process and to leverage popular text-based communication channels to create a sense of familiarity and engagement. Reliance on convenient and familiar platforms like WhatsApp and WeChat helped transition the students to formalised online classes in COVID-19 lockdown.

## **FACELESS SESSIONS**

Once all the communication channels, activities, class materials, lists and plans were ready, it was time for the actual lessons. Every lecturer opened the class meeting link in MS Teams, and turned on their camera and microphone to see the screen gradually get flooded with student avatars. While some of them did not mind turning on their microphones to greet the lecturer and classmates, to the very end of the course, none of the students volunteered to turn on their cameras during class.

Though the learners were encouraged to keep their cameras on during the online learning sessions, not all the learners seemed comfortable with that. Some of the reasons included consciousness and anxiety about the background, family members hovering around during their online learning sessions, concerns about the dress code and public attention during their learning sessions. It took a while to get used to teaching faceless

classes on an emotionless computer screen. This was coupled with the issue that the learners were muting their microphones and the silence during the sessions became a challenging exercise in maintaining focus for the lecturer. One example stood out as a diversion in a list of initials and occasional selfies that the lecturers got to see in the meeting window was the photo of Dwayne Johnson in a student's profile picture. Over the next eight weeks, we spent a lot of time talking to the Rock. That was, clearly, a challenge, but luckily nothing unexpected.

In a large class, inflated to accommodate the students cut off from their internship projects and stuck overseas, even on a day when many people felt particularly chatty, you would probably not get everyone talking or participating in the big class discussion. During breakout activities and team discussions, people would still be highly unlikely to turn on their video. This took away a very important element of human interaction and contributed significantly to the stress of lockdown. During face-to-face sessions, the lecturers rely on non-verbal visual cues to check engagement or understanding. This was not possible during the faceless sessions and hence the lecturers adapted by asking open-ended questions to the group and individuals. One of the strategies was to make attendance conditional on engagement with the resources and online participation during the online sessions.

This strategy helped with participation in activities and ensured high attendance and completion rates, but it did not sufficiently contribute to the challenge of humanising class interactions, which was still one of the key challenges and goals for the term spent in lockdown.

The reason for this challenge potentially comes back to the clear conceptual differentiation between the purposes of different types of communication. For many students, video chats would have been primarily reserved for calls with their family and friends. Class environments were more formalised and less personal. Even though social media are likely to improve class engagement and achievement,<sup>1</sup> accepting the reality of the new online normal could have felt as an invasion of the student's personal space. At the same time, the situation was forcing us to redefine our personal spaces and become familiar with the new methods of interaction. In a way, clinging to old categories contributed significantly to lockdown stress, because they were part of a different system and could not support the social needs of people confined to their apartments.

## **REFLECTION ON LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE AND THE PATH FORWARD**

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only led to the transformative changes on teaching and learning modes adopted by educators and learners during the lockdown period, but has also inspired educators to be more open, innovative, inclusive, and sustainable with their learning design than ever before. The key practical implications from our experiences in

delivering online courses during the lockdown period include thorough considerations of influential factors of learning design, a high level of agility and adaptability of the facilitation of learning activities, and constructive feedback on learners' work.

The influential factors to be considered during the learning design stage include learner profiles, existing resources, technologies, and available equipment. The learner profile is still very important in this case as it is what drives the design of learning activities and the adoption of learning methods. In particular, the learners' geographic locations, their abilities in mastering online learning system/platform (for example, MS Teams), and their familiarity with the learning management system (for example, Moodle) are essential for the design. The learning materials used for face-to-face teaching should be reused for online learning with allowances made for asynchronous delivery whenever possible. Otherwise, redesign and adaptations of the learning materials will be necessary. Technologies should at least enable some essential functions such as online sessions, learning activities, and video/audio recording. Technologies with apps to run on different electronic devices such as laptops, tablets, and mobile phones would be an advantage. Training on the technologies must be provided to teaching staff and learners effectively and efficiently.

As the contexts for teaching online were highly uncertain during the COVID-19 pandemic, the facilitation of the learning activities needs to be more flexible than that in a face-to-face teaching environment. The increased flexibility can be found in the methods of conducting learning activities, the ways of evaluating the learners' formative assessments, and the channels of facilitator-learner communication. The communication between the facilitators and students relied on internet-based communication tools, which reduced the satisfaction of the learners' social needs to a certain extent. The isolated situation has caused varying degrees of anxiety and stress to the learners. As such, increased flexibility in learning activities and enhanced accessibility to facilitators were used to ease the learners' anxiety and stress with the learning online. Regular reflections on each session delivered and feedback from the learners also helped when adapting planned learning activities. The reflection and feedback processes have strengthened both the learners' and facilitators' abilities to use the functionalities and build-in apps of MS Teams. Another benefit of being flexible was that the facilitators struggled less in facilitating the learning activities in a faceless environment.


It is crucial for learners' online experiences to provide constructive feedback to learners on time. As a part of the feedback process, facilitators need to review learners' formative assessments, which is one of the main ways to assess the learners' performance. The review of learners' work helped facilitators to have fewer concerns about the learners' engagement in online learning, and have better opportunities to identify at-risk students. From the learners' perspective, getting constructive feedback helped them to reduce their stress and feel less disconnected with their teachers. In

addition, the frequency of feedback for online learning should be increased compared to a face-to-face learning environment.


The online teaching during the COVID-19 lockdown provided a great opportunity for educators to experience new ways of facilitating learning and to rethink the future of education. Should facilitation of learning be fully online, or blended, or mainly face-to-face after the COVID-19 pandemic? If blended learning is the way for future education, how would online and face-to-face mix?

**Bing Dai** has been teaching business courses at different tertiary educational organisations in New Zealand for more than 10 years. Her PhD research is focused on the learning and working experience of Chinese international students, and she is currently a PhD candidate at Auckland University of Technology.

**Rajeev Chawla** has been associated with Otago Polytechnic Auckland International Campus for over four years as a Senior Lecturer teaching Hospitality and Management courses for undergraduate programmes. The experience of being an entrepreneur and working with some very well-known companies in hospitality and business enables him to connect the concepts to the real environment for his learners. He has qualifications in Hotel Management and MBA from Auckland University of Technology and is working towards his Doctorate in Professional Practice.

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**Yury Zhukov's** journey in Aotearoa started when he decided to pursue of his research interests in deliberative democracy and e-government at the University of Auckland. He has been working in tertiary education alongside other jobs for over fifteen years. Yury has a research Master's degree and is working on his PhD at the moment.

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- 1 See R.Guo, Y.Shen, and L. Li, "Using Social Media to Improve Student-Instructor Communication in an Online Learning Environment," *International Journal of Information and Communication Technology Education* 14 no. 1, (2018): 33–43. <https://doi.org/10.4018/IJICTE.2018010103>; and G. Zachos, E.-A. Paraskevopoulou-Kollia, and I. Anagnostopoulos, "Social Media Use in Higher Education: A Review," *Education Sciences* 8 no. 4 (2018): 194, <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci8040194>.



Poetry

# Gentle, gentle, gentle

Hana Cadzow

Friends, can I just quietly say, that it's ok  
if you're sad right now.

It's ok if nothing very terrible has happened directly to you  
and you still find yourself struggling.

It's ok if this week has been the same as last week, and the week before  
but it's hitting you harder.

It's ok if you know it's temporary  
but it's still tough in this moment.

It's ok if it's better where you are  
and you still wish it was different.

It's ok if you're grieving things you didn't know you needed  
and can't really give voice to.

It's ok if you're not filling your time productively.  
It's ok if you are.

It's also ok if you're alright.

It's ok if you're more than one thing.

Gentle, gentle, gentle  
We're almost there.

**Hana Cadzow** is a Principal Lecturer in the College of Engineering, Construction and Living Sciences at Otago Polytechnic. Her research focuses on innovative engineering education with specific interests in workplace learning as well as the experiences of women and communities. Her creative outputs are varied but usually say more about motherhood and life than engineering.

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Poetry

# **COVID-19 --- a global social experience**

## **An epic digital prose poem**

Vaneeta D'Andrea

### **INTRODUCTION**

Following the spread of COVID-19 globally, I have been getting messages from my friends around the world about how it is affecting their day-to-day lives. I have collected these messages into an Epic digital narrative prose poem focused on what people are experiencing in different countries at this time. These messages are from 20 countries in Africa, Asia, Australasia, Europe, North and South America and the Middle East; and major world cities: Amsterdam, London, New York, and Wuhan, China. They are all from digital communications: email, WhatsApp, WeChat, I-Messenger, texts. They include: urls, research, photos, YouTube videos and songs all on the virus. The experiences of people in all these places are both similar and different, as would be expected. The common message is one of hope and kindness at a time of great stress and anxiety.

The messages are presented in alphabetical order by country, region and state. In their own words...

### **BRAZIL**

#### **I-message**

**From:** Monica Guimaraes Campiteli (Sorocaba)

**Sent:** 23 April 2020

Hi Neets

How are you? Around here, things are more or less the same, for me and my family, I mean. We are among those who have discovered that we have been living in quarantine for many years he-he-he.

But I have been increasingly involved with the community, trying to help in many ways. So I guess, I'm gonna tell you a little about how poor Brazilian people have been (trying to) deal with the situation.

For starters, we already had a huge problem with the precarization of jobs. Now, this situation has blown in our faces... a huge number of families suddenly with no jobs at all and with nowhere to turn. Well, then, after a while, our governments finally decided to do something about it and started to launch aid programs for those families. Then, a second problem has become evident. Most families have no access to the internet at all. The information is confusing, it's difficult to gather, then the aids are very difficult to access because people

have to download apps and have to figure out how to open accounts and most of these families never even had a bank account... In the meantime, they literally have nothing to eat and no means to survive. I have been receiving messages from single parents asking (a complete stranger) for food donation... I have been trying to help people access those aids I mentioned and even for me, it's frustrating because there are lots of details (that they don't disclose on the general media) that prevent people from getting the money (or food)...

So... I'm sorry for my depressing text... It probably reflects what I'm feeling right now...

You probably have seen news about our pathetic government in this moment...

There are some times I just wanna disappear...

### **COVID-19 --- a global social experience**

#### **CANADA**

**From:** John Spinks

**Sent:** 16 March 2020 04:55

**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea vmdandrea@hotmail.com

Hi...yes, everything is being cancelled here, universities closed, supermarkets raided of loo rolls and meat -- and difficult to see any end. Indeed, I think the opposite...we are just at the beginning of this one.

I was due to fly to London this week, but will cancel. No point if the football is off (which of course it is). London seems to be in a not good shape. But, when people jump on the underground every day, what do you expect? They won't wear masks, so the community infection levels will continue to be high. What is the news from your friends and colleagues in Wuhan? I don't keep in contact with anyone there now, so I'd be interested if you have any direct contact in what they are saying now. Seems like the tables are turned anyway -- Europe is the epicenter, but soon it will be the US. Keep the evil foreigners out of our China! The U.S. leadership is so stupid and useless, it defies belief.

Interestingly, if you look at infection rates rather than numbers, Hong Kong is the safest place in the world to be right now. But Korea is also doing well. And, I guess DPRK!

L, J.

### **COVID-19 --- a global social experience**

#### **CHILE**

**From:** Laurence P. Lehman (Santiago)

**Sent:** Fri 17/04/2020 18:05

**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <vmdandrea@hotmail.com>

So, as to COVID-19 here:

We've had 9,250 cases in the country, with 116 deaths and 5,500 cases still active. The country is under a general shelter-in-place order, with some few municipalities under total quarantine, though some of those have been released. The army patrols the borders between municipalities to enforce the regulations, though it is possible to get safe-conduct to go to work, a funeral or what-have-you.

A particular situation involves some hundreds of Bolivians and Peruvians trapped in Chile when those countries sealed their borders. They are largely without food, shelter, or medical care, though their consulates at least attempt to feed them. They sleep in tents (its coming on Winter here) and in some cases have been given food and blankets by local citizens.

The Region Metropolitana (ie, Greater Santiago) has almost 5,000 of the total cases with 31 deaths. At one time, 10 municipalities were under total quarantine, though that is now down to three. It is only today, 17 April, that the supermarket has resumed deliveries to our address. Because of its concentration of the elderly, La Reina (our Illustrious Municipality) is considered a potential "hot spot"; we are fortunate in that a young adult nephew lives with us and has gone out to run sundry resupply errands.

There is yet no information as to where Chile stands in the evolution of the pandemia; the Health Minister said yesterday that we probably haven't seen the peak yet, that one cannot see "light at the end of the tunnel", so I imagine that Chile will stagger along for a while yet.

On a different/related note, the economy is going to the dogs, as it is almost everywhere.

Stay calm and wash your hands

Larry

### **COVID-19 --- a global social experience**

#### **CHINA**

**From:** WeChat Yuming (Wuhan)

**Sent:** 4 March and 19 March

4 March 2020

Sorry. Too busy for reading information about the situation from everywhere everyday.

Also have to cook by myself....

<https://youtu.be/dQQnH-A0fug>

19 March 2020

.... yes. Poor people in UK. We already have two days with only one newly affected case. We are almost there.

**From:** WeChat Amy (Wuhan)

**Sent:** 4 March, 22 March, 13 April, 25 April and 26 April

4 March 2020

Dear Neets, we are all fine, don't worry.

The situation in China is getting much better. Maybe next month Wuhan will be released.

I heard that the situation in Britain is getting nervous, please take good care of yourself. [Hug emoji]

I personally don't think it is a right time to be back in China in May, the infection will not completely disappear by May. I prefer you stay in safety.

22 March 2020

Dear Neets, the communities in Wuhan are released gradually, factories and companies start to return to the normal. I think it will take at least another one month to be back to the normal situation.

I am upset that Britain and other Western counties are under the outbreak. Please take good care of yourself.

Please remind that wearing mask is useful and essential. Don't mind other people's view, wear your mask whenever you go to the public occasions. Wuhan has a bloody lesson from it.

13 April 2020

Dear Neets, I feel sorry that you can't buy some qualified masks in Britain. Do you want me to mail you some? We can buy the masks in China right now. Cloth mask is better than none, but still it can't cover you face very closely.

25 April 2020

Fighting against this pandemic made us realize how we connect with each other globally. I do think we human beings should learn a lesson from it. Hope this disaster will never happen again.

26 April 2020

Today, a video in our WeChat group roused a big argument about the prevention measures, freedom and rights.

Letting people be starved to die or infected to die, that is always a dilemma situation for the governments. Neither of the two options is perfect. It is wise that most governments are trying to keep it in a cautious balance. Any extreme solution will put the country in a higher risk. People in different situations certainly will have difference preferences. Some prefer to take higher risk of being infected by keeping their jobs, while some prefer to take higher risk of losing jobs by quarantining at home. Both are understandable because different options might mean a big difference for a specific individual. The challenge is, for governments and individuals, how to guarantee that one option will not increase the risk of another option. I think that is a common issue that all countries are facing together right now.

Still, we are far enough to know the whole real picture of Coronavirus. It is wiser that every country and every person take more cautious steps. My personal view.

Keep calm to think about how I can survive from the starving and the infection. If you are not worrying too much about it right now, then you are the happiest person in the whole world [Grin] because I am sure many people especially in Africa and India will have no options at all. (prayer emoji)

<https://youtu.be/1g3jmtmx5kU>

**From:** WeChat Kate (Wuhan)

**Sent:** 15 April 2020

We don't need quarantine now. With Health Code we can go out freely. Of course, we need to wear a mask and measure our body temperature when we go out. But we try to avoid going out too much. Hope everything is OK as soon as possible.

Wish you and your family good health! Wish you and your family best!

**COVID-19 --- this pandemic made us realize how we connect with each other globally**

**DENMARK**

**From:** Henrik Olsen

**Sent:** 15 March 2020

**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea vmdandrea@hotmail.com

How about you? Have you managed to stay clear of cold or worse?

On Facebook you mentioned some traveling. I guess most is cancelled? Are you now in London?

Kirsten and I have had cold on and off since January, but Kirsten is now finally ok. She even mowed the lawn last week. I'm now on 10 days of penicillin due to light pneumonia.

Aarhus Universitet closed Thursday for at least two weeks. I have set up my home office in the cellar and are prepared for online teaching next week. The university quickly upgraded to Zoom with meetings up to 300 students. My class is only 88.

**I-Message**

**From:** Henrik Olson

**Sent:** 6 April

The drug I mention yesterday is explained here:  
<http://tiny.cc/1ru3tz>

These drugs don't target the coronavirus they target us.

**From:** Henrik Olsen

**Sent:** 13 April 2020 14:15

**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea

Nice with a second opinion on our status (*grin emoji*)

But let's wait a couple of weeks to see the results of the planned reopening (*shocked emoji*)

Nurseries and kindergarten and schools up to 5th grade are opening during this week. There are lots of worried parents these days.

Marlene and Rasmus keep William home from nursery this week as Marlene has holiday next week where he also will be home. If they were to let William into nursery we couldn't come to visit them for long time. Kirsten's parents are both 80+ and still living in their own home. We have to be able to help them.

BUT if everything goes as predicted in the article we would love to adopt you (*grin emoji*)

And Denmark is not as expensive as Norway.

Med venlig hilsen / Best Regards

Henrik Olsen

**COVID-19 --- a global social experience**

**EGYPT**

**I-Message**

**From:** Dr Abeer Zaharia

**Sent:** 7 April 2020

<http://tiny.cc/6ru3tz>

*Why COVID-19 Kills some Young & Healthy people* Dr Abeer Zaharia

Dear Vaneeta

Hope you are fine

Dr Abeer Zaharia

**COVID-19 --- a global social experience**

## HONG KONG

**From:** John Spinks <spinks@hku.hk>

**Sent:** Sun 19/04/2020 23:49

**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <vmdandrea@hotmail.com>

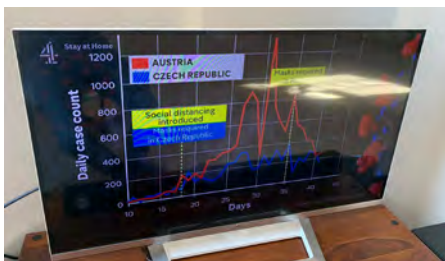
Hi Vaneeta... when I was in the middle of SARS in 2003, and was in charge of teaching and learning in HKU at that time, we had many difficult decisions to make, but we had task forces overseeing different aspects of the University, consulting all the time with the infectious diseases experts of HKU. As the epidemic grew, we decided to move all of our education online. The more difficult decision later was about when to resume face-to-face teaching, and how to ensure there was no rebound spike of infections. So, I compare a lot of what I see in the current pandemic with what happened in 2003 and what we learnt from that. And, in all honesty, what I see now suggests to me to be a failure of governments of monumental proportions.

One area in particular is very worrying, even now. I consider the "information" and recommendations about face masks propagated by senior individuals in governments in a few countries as very misleading, and, I think, dangerous in the longer term. I can understand how governments want to make up for their lack of planning in having stockpiles of masks available, by limiting them to front line personnel. So, you prioritise them. But, to say that "they are NOT effective in preventing general public from catching coronavirus" (U.S. Surgeon-General, mid-March 2020) is a disgraceful distortion of what the evidence suggests, and makes any subsequent mandatory edict at best confusing and at worst ineffective. I would call it shambolic messaging. When I issued the decision to resume teaching after SARS in 2003 at HKU, wearing of masks was mandatory (we also had hand sanitizer stations everywhere on campus). We had no subsequent infections on campus. SARS-CoV-2 is different, but there are many lines of evidence, some perhaps rather informal, but not all, to support the widespread use of masks.

First, it was clear from SARS in 2003 that masks were effective in preventing an infected person shedding the virus from infecting others. That is even more important now that we know that people can be asymptomatic carriers of the virus, for obvious reasons.

Second, ask yourself why Asian territories have much lower rates of infections compared with Europe and the U.S. Hong Kong is the best example -- right next to Mainland China, thousands of people crossing the border every day, their levels of infection should be amongst the worst in the world, but the actual rates are amongst the best in the world. Sure, good testing and tracing is part of that. But the people nearly all wear masks.

Third, check out the following graphic:



And, fourth, look at the recent evidence coming out of the labs in HKU

(from <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41591-020-0843-2>).

And, of course, when the Surgeon General in the U.S. tweeted the above comment about masks not being effective, I am sure he was still advocating the use of masks for all medical personnel!

When I compare what happened in Hong Kong during SARS in 2003 with what is happening now, almost no country outside Asia seems to have learnt any lessons from that time. Actually, it is worse than that. In one country in particular, the levels of incompetence in the administration, the astonishing lack of leadership, the failure to have systems or stockpiles in place, and the lack of central planning going forward and the almost complete lack of central coordination, even now, is unbelievably poor.

L, J.

**COVID-19 --- a global social experience**

## JAPAN

**From:** Noriko Williams

**Sent:** Fri 17/04/2020 14:33

**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <vmdandrea@hotmail.com>:

Hi Vaneeta

Glad to hear that you are safe!

Although today our PM Abe announced "lockdown" for the whole country it's not like the one in the UK or in Europe. It's just a strong recommendation. We have been told to stay home as much as possible.

We have been repeatedly told to avoid especially the following 3 things:

- being in a closed place (i.e. clubs, meeting rooms)
- being in a crowded place (i.e. clubs, concerts)
- speaking/sitting/standing too close to each other (no hugging!)

Although "they are required" there is no penalty for not doing so. It's not strict enough. In big cities like Tokyo and Osaka the number of infected people is increasing every day.

We have been repeatedly told the followings too and most people are doing:

- wear masks
- use disinfectant spirit
- wash hands when you come home/indoors
- do not return to one's hometowns to avoid spreading coronavirus
- do not travel to big cities like Tokyo and Osaka
- stay within your prefecture

In Tokyo, some public places have been closed and the employees of major companies are working from home. In Fukushima prefecture schools are closed. The gyms and shops/restaurants are still open, but they are almost empty. I think the public places here will be closed soon.

That's all for now.

Stay safe!

Noriko

**From:** Noriko Williams

**Sent:** Fri 24/04/2020 13:26

**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <vmdandrea@hotmail.com>:

Vaneeta

Since Monday here in our town, the public places have been closed. What we can do now is food shopping and walking. We are lucky to be living in a rural town as we have more space and it's empty everywhere.

The number of infected people and death is going up every day. So, the authorities are screaming to the public to stay home repeatedly. In early May we're having a week-long national holiday so the number will be shot up. I won't be surprised. People will be going out to the beach, travelling to their hometowns and so on. They just can't stay put! People here can't take in that this virus is seriously dangerous.

I thought about one thing that might be helping (a little bit) the statistics to be low in Japan. We take off our shoes at the entrance of our house, so we don't spread the virus inside home so much. This can be looked into?! But inside some hospitals the infection is spreading and getting worse, so we are in a crucial situation. I think the government action is so slow and indecisive and only thinking about financial damage.

The idea of sheltering the over 70s?! NO! I hope it goes to the bin!!! I miss swimming!

Stay safe!

Noriko (and George)

**COVID-19 --- this pandemic made us realize how we connect with each other globally**

## NEW ZEALAND

### Facebook Post

**From:** 100% Pure New Zealand

**Sent:** 3 April 2020

### Facebook Post

**From:** Wild Women Retreats

**Sent:** 9 April 2020

**Forwarded To:** 30 April 2020 by Tamar Hirschfeld to Vaneeta D'Andrea <vmdandrea@hotmail.com>:

[Note: This poem was spoken by Jacinda Ardern, the Prime Minister of New Zealand, on the announcement of the lockdown.]

Rest now, e Papatūānuku  
Breathe easy and settle  
Right here where you are  
We'll not move upon you  
For awhile

We'll stop, we'll cease  
We'll slow down and stay home  
Draw each other close and be kind  
Kinder than we've ever been.  
I wish we could say we were doing it for  
you  
as much as ourselves

But hei aha

We're doing it anyway

It's right. It's time.  
Time to return  
Time to remember  
Time to listen and forgive  
Time to withhold judgment  
Time to cry  
Time to think

About others



**100% Pure New Zealand** Sponsored · 🌐

Kia ora, our friends all over the world. As we collectively face enormous changes to our everyday lives we wanted to check in and say we are thinking of you. ❤️ There's a beautiful Māori proverb, 'He waka eke noa' which means we are all in this together. We hope you are taking care of yourself and your family too. Eventually, we'll be reunited again. Kia kaha (stay strong). #NewZealand #Stayhome #SeeYousoon

📷: IG@nathanaelbillings



Remove our shoes  
Press hands to soil  
Sift grains between fingers

Gentle palms

Time to plant  
Time to wait  
Time to notice  
To whom we belong

For now it's just you  
And the wind  
And the forests and the oceans and the  
Sky full of rain

Finally, it's raining!

Ka turuturu te wai kamo o Rangi ki runga i a koe

Embrace it

This sacrifice of solitude we have carved out for you

He iti noaiho - a small offering  
People always said it wasn't possible  
To ground flights and stay home and stop our habits of consumption

But it was  
It always was.

We were just afraid of how much it was going to hurt  
- and it IS hurting and it will hurt and continue to hurt  
But not as much as you have been hurt.

So be still now

Wrap your hills around our absence  
Loosen the concrete belt cinched tight at  
your waist

Rest.  
Breathe.  
Recover.  
Heal –

And we will do the same.

Nadine Anne Hura, Poet

————— (*leaf emoji*) (*heart emoji*) Edited to add: thank you for the amazing response to this poem! I never expected it to travel so far and wide. Many people have asked who the author is so I wanted to clarify that I wrote this poem on the train home after the announcement of total lockdown was made here in Aotearoa, New Zealand. I felt like I could hear Papatūānuku exhaling in relief as we all began our journeys home. In truth, one month of lockdown is not enough. Even six months would not be enough! We need a total and sustained change of habit, globally and within our own communities. I hope so much we take our time to reflect on the fact that if we can do it to save ourselves for a month, we ought to be able to make similar habit changes for

Mother Earth for the long term. The most telling thing for me was how empty our veggie plant aisles were after lockdown was announced - in a crisis, we will turn back to our mother to provide (and of course she will!).

Lots of people have asked for translations...

**Papatūānuku** - Mother Earth (the addition of the "e" in front signals the words are addressed or spoken directly to her.)

**Ka turuturu te wai kamo o Rangī ki runga i a koe** - means something like, "tears from the eyes of Ranginui drip down on you" (Ranginui is our sky father, it is common to refer to rain as the tears of Rangī for his beloved, from whom he was separated at the beginning of time in order that there could be light in the world). Not long after the announcement we were moving to level 3, it poured with rain in Porirua after many months of hot and dry weather. I could feel my garden rejoicing.

**Hei aha** - This can be translated in many ways, but I meant it like the English "oh well, whatever" **He iti noaiho** - "something small". Because our sacrifice feels enormous but in reality I think it is not sufficient to truly see Papatūānuku recover. However, in Māori, we often talk about the significance of small actions or gestures. We say "ahakoa he iti, he pounamu." Although it is small, it is a treasure.

Thank you so much for the support (*raised hands emoji*) (*leaf emoji*)

<http://newstoryhub.com/2020/04/for-papatuanuku-mother-earth-by-nadine-anne-hura-via-jacinda-ardern/>

## COVID-19 --- a global social experience

### NORWAY

**From:** Bjørn

**Sent:** Tue 17/03/2020 09:46

**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <[vmdandrea@hotmail.com](mailto:vmdandrea@hotmail.com)>

Norway has pretty much closed down after you left, but Siv is going to work as she is part of the national governance infrastructure. Kids are all at home, but trying to attend school on various digital platforms. I try to assist the uni in transforming into digital teaching - which is a BIG disruption for many. For the Open University (OU) things are pretty much "business as usual" I expect.

I am waiting further tests, but I am not optimistic with being invited at the moment. I expect further delays due to the situation. Thanks so much for the card! Encouraging. Interesting to see the British strategy responding to Corona. Bold but high-risk strategy I would say...

Take care and eat good food!

Best  
Bjørn

**From:** Bjørn

**Sent:** Sun 12/04/2020 16:37

**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <[vmdandrea@hotmail.com](mailto:vmdandrea@hotmail.com)>

Hello!

Good to hear from you. This morning we were more concerned hearing from the director of the Wellcome Trust that the UK may be hit quite badly by Covid-19 - even worse Spain and Italy. We hope he is wrong, but trust that you guys stay indoor and focus on making good food.

We continue to stay home, but the society is slowly opening up again after Easter. Kindergarden and primary school will re-open end of March, but most people will continue to work from home.

They also say hospitals will start regular operation after Easter. Haven't heard from them yet. Most likely it will take some time.

Best  
Siv and Bjørn

**From:** Bjørn  
**Sent:** Sun 19/04/2020 12:50  
**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <vmdandrea@hotmail.com>:

Dear both,

Thanks for the update. I think we have similar experiences in Norway that health services not related to Corona actually have good capacity, and that they experience that less people take contact that before Corona.

... Woke up early today (Sunday) as we drove Eiril to the airport. She is travelling back to Denmark to continue her studies. Denmark has signalled that they will reopen higher ed early May, and because she has to go into two weeks of isolation after arrival, she decided to departure today. VERY quiet airport I must say...

Kindergarten reopen in Norway tomorrow, and primary schools the week after - together with hairdressers, and a range of other services where close personal contact is a key characteristic. Strict restrictions will apply though, but we are slowly getting there. Restaurants and bars will likely be opened afterwards - again with restrictions. At the 17th of May - a date of special importance to some.. - the big celebrations in Oslo has been cancelled, although the marching bands will be allowed to play in the streets. No one will be allowed to join them though, so the day will be one for observation, not participation.

We have been following the developments in the UK and registered the relatively high numbers of infected and deaths. Hope the curve is flattening now...!

Stay healthy!

Best

Siv and Bjørn

### **COVID-19 --- a global social experience**

#### **THE NETHERLANDS**

**From:** Ella Kruzinga  
**Sent:** Thu 23/04/2020 16:31  
**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <vmdandrea@hotmail.com>:

Ha Vanessa,

A message was long overdue from me as well. I had your name written down on a piece of paper and then corona slipped in and I got busy with other things. So I am glad you mailed. We are well, stuck in our boat. As we both are in the vulnerable age group we are asked to stay indoors, but we are still allowed to go shopping or make walks. As long as we keep a distance of 1 1/2 metres it should be ok. The trouble is that other people, especially the young ones, not always think about keeping their distance, as you mention as well. I do the shopping. we also have a specific shopping time allotted for the elderly, but that is at 7 in the morning. Too

early for me and it is voluntary, so I do it later in the day and buy stuff for two or three days, so that I do not have to go into a shop every day. It is rather relaxed here, people move around, sit in the sunshine across our boat on the platform there. Most of the times they sit at either end of the benches, but I bet it is not 1 1/2 meter, but rather a meter if not less. In a way everyone keeps to the rules, but in an Amsterdam way: loosely, not too strict, with a 'it cannot happen to me attitude'. Food shops are open, as is the market, but only with food stalls, but in the main street here, most of the shops are open but they only allow a certain amount of people in. Restaurants and cafe's are officially closed, but restaurants deliver meals now and cafes serve coffee to go. It means there is definitely less traffic, but I think it often too crowded, to go out. I must say that I enjoy the relative quiet in the streets, you can hear birds again and people greet each other. It is not so rushed. Our neighbours, who are younger, offered to do our shopping for us and we received a few cards from people, we do not know, to let us know they are there when needed, but as we do not know them it is difficult to get in touch, but the thought is very kind indeed. We obviously are old and therefore need looking after apparently.

On the other hand, we were not the very social type, with coffee or dinners with friends or neighbours. In that way our lives have not changed much. Peter reads a lot, we now and again lay a puzzle and in the evening watch television. I am a bit more active, I mail, app and zoom and do a lot of work on the website of our last neighbourhood area (<http://www.stadsdorpbuurt7.nl/buurt7>). I made a special corona webpage with all kinds of tips and things to do and watch while sitting at home. We are now organising a zoomed coffee get together. See if we can do something about the loneliness people face.

So all in all. life is not too bad as long as we can keep corona at bay and as long as people are not getting too impatient to start their lives and businesses up again. Government wants to do it step by step, but the economy for most of the business is so bad, that they hardly can wait to be back in business again. They see that the amount of people in hospital and the death rate is reducing, so why stay confined as they lose jobs and money.

Here we hardly have tests for us common people, so it would be difficult to be tested here. Is that the same in the UK? We also lack mouth masks, so we are not encouraged to wear them. I also wonder what it adds as long as you are healthy. Of course, you should wear it, if you are ill of coughing, but then you should stay at home.

I think indeed that it will take a while that you will be able to travel again, which is a pity. Amsterdam has to wait a bit, but as soon as you can, you are most welcome.

Well you know now what we are up to, not much! But indeed, let's keep in touch.

Love Ella

### **COVID-19 --- a global social experience**

#### **SOUTH AFRICA**

**From:** Suellen Shay

**Sent:** Mon 13/04/2020 08:32

**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <[vmdandrea@hotmail.com](mailto:vmdandrea@hotmail.com)>

Dear Neets,

I've been thinking of you and wondering where in the world you are ... in London?

We are all well here. Working remotely though I must say this has its challenges – not enjoying it very much. It's one thing to work at home as a treat, another thing to do it by law. But given the state of the world we cannot complain, and the shutdown has apparently made a significant different in our stats... we'll see. All so uncertain, eh?

What is keeping you occupied?

Visit your lovely neighbourhood cathedral for me – that's where I would be (smile emoji) Watched Andre Bocelli in Cathedral in Milan last night. So lovely.

Lots of love to you during this time.

Suellen

**Suellen Shay, Professor**

Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED)

**From:** Suellen Shay

**Sent:** Mon 20/04/2020 15:39

**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <vmdandrea@hotmail.com>:

...I'm off to ride the exercise bicycle – not something I particularly 'enjoy' but seems to help.

Lots of love,

Suellen

**COVID-19 --- this pandemic made us realize how we connect with each other globally**

**TAIWAN**

**From:** Macfarlane麥Bruce博思

**Sent:** Wed 22/04/2020 07:28

**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <vmdandrea@hotmail.com>:

[In Taiwan] They currently have just 6 deaths out of a population of 18 million. On that basis we ought to have around 25 deaths not 17k and rising! They stopped flights from China immediately the outbreak occurred. In Taiwan there has been no lock down but they social distance and wear masks. They are going to work and schools are open. They also test people. If you have the virus and are in hospital there they won't let you out unless you have been tested negative three times. Sensible. Here we only test people once and then let them out.

**COVID-19 --- a global social experience**

**UNITED KINGDOM**

**England**

London

**From:** Don Beelby

**Sent:** Wed 08/04/2020 20:05

**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <vmdandrea@hotmail.com>:

Hey! What a coincidence, I was just thinking about you this morning and meant to write!

Such a shame what's going on - the world has really changed, very hard for us on-the-go people...we have had to cancel a few minor trips (luckily have not been put too much out of pocket, more depressed about being trapped in South London) but we were just about to book a trip to Uzbekistan before all the travel restrictions were implemented across the globe - glad we didn't go through with that!

But on the home front, all is OK....aside from me going stir crazy with the most exciting thing week by week is a Friday night food delivery and a Saturday morning grocery shop

Working from home, kind of miss my routine as everything is just blending together but, trying to have perspective, still fully employed and not furloughed (yet). All the Vodafone stores are closed so kind of glad I'm doing what I'm doing now as staying at home doing nothing is not for me!

Hopefully, we start to come through this soon and things return to normalcy within 6 months...and you can **get** back to China and NZ and elsewhere, and I can get a big trip in. In a way it's good that you didn't get to NZ, would not want to be so far away when all the lockdowns went down.

Hope you guys are doing well - stay in and stay safe! Miss you!

xo  
Don

**From:** Don Beelby <dbeelby@gmail.com>

**Sent:** Mon 20/04/2020 15:39

**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <vmdandrea@hotmail.com>:

Hello!

...I'm going a bit stir crazy and very nervous about places potentially not opening their borders for some time. What a crazy world we are living in.

Be safe!!

xo  
Don

**From:** Majja Roberts

**Sent:** Sat 11/04/2020 18:42

**To:** Noriko Williams and Vaneeta D'Andrea

Dear Noriko,

It is strange I was thinking of you today and was going to send you an email, but you got there first. I am well, Kentish Town is deserted, with long queues outside the food shops, everyone is at a safe distance. The library and sports Centre are closed, so I do my yoga at home, at the same time, it is important to stay healthy, there is no opera, theatre or concerts. But I am lucky, I have my car and allotment, so am doing lots of gardening, planting garlic, beans and spinach among other edible food. It is wonderful up there in Highgate, I can hear the birds singing. I was lucky to get back from Sydney, on my family visit, just before all this happened.

Because life is not so hectic everybody is much nicer to each other, and more polite, and because of less traffic the air is a lot cleaner.

I am sure we will come out of this in time, perhaps to a slightly different way of life.

Hope you well, keep in touch,

Love

Majja

**From:** Majja Roberts  
**Sent:** Fri 17/04/2020 09:38  
**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <vmdandrea@hotmail.com>:

Dear Vaneeta,

I was wondering where you were at this time, and I hope you are well. Yes, the Sports Centre is closed and I am doing my yoga classes at home, the same time and same length of class, but alone. I hope to be flexible when Laura is back again to take this class.

A report of the various international experiences during this strange time is an excellent idea, so please use words.

We will definitely meet when all is safe once more.

Love

Majja

**From:** Miriam E. David  
**Sent:** 19 April 2020  
**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <vmdandrea@hotmail.com>:

How are you? Long time but I have been feeling anxious (anxious emoji) and confused (shrug emoji) (female symbol)

**Text**

**From:** Ross Evans  
**Sent:** 1 April 2020  
**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea

I feel like I've lost my mind (shocked emoji) Georgina was informed by her office that she needed to self-isolate as a speaker at a meeting she attended was positive. That was over 3 weeks ago and as we are all home together then what to do? Anyhow we have been def under par and Georgina has no sense of smell or taste. We've been aching, sniffing and odd symptoms for over a week. So tired? Who knows as it's all so crazy. Only contact with June is via email and we had the conversation with the home last week that if any of the residents contract it then there would be palliative care only as the local hospitals are focussed on those likely to survive. Georgina and I off for our daily 'exercise' and when we return I'm going to pour a large glass (thumbs up emoji)

**Scotland**

**WhatsApp**

**From:** Sunny Jingyang  
**Sent:** 22 January, 9 March and 25 March 2020

Ha ha thank you Neets, it's 25th, will be the year of mouse, hope you do not have any schedule to China recently, cuz there is a really terrible virus there. (mask emoji)

22 January 2020

Hi Neets, hope everything is going well with you, the virus is getting severe in UK, please take good care. (prayer emoji)

9 March 2020

Hi Neets, hope you are well and safe. Please take good care and stay at home. Best wishes. (prayer emoji)

I'm in Scotland now, yes I bought enough food online, and they can deliver to me directly, which is good. Best wishes. (smile emoji)

25 March 2020

### WhatsApp

**From:** Paul

**Sent:** 13 March, 17 March, 19 March, 20 March, 24 March, 30 March, 1 April, 12 April, 16 April, and 17 April

Apparently our uni has just closed for foreseeable future

Clarification: just for students. A student has tested positive...

13 March 2020

Sainsbury's NO delivery slots - that's in the maximum of three weeks. Meanwhile our university still prevaricating. Union going ape saying legally we can refuse to go to work if employers can't guarantee safety.

SOCIETAL MELTDOWN

How long before army on the streets??

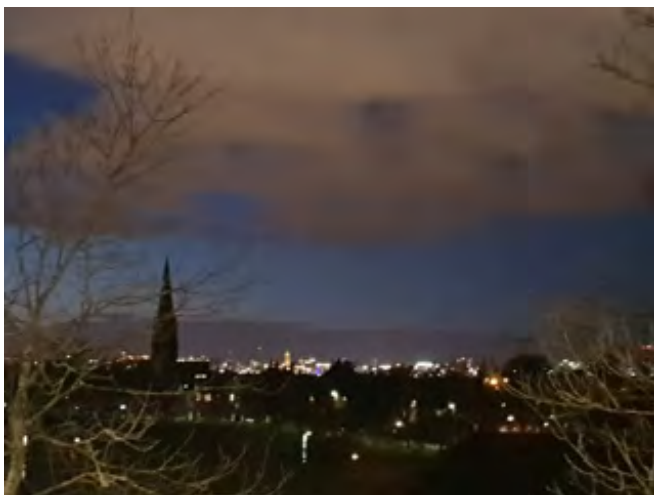
The British are restrained when it comes to protest. However, there are tipping points and I remember the Poll Tax riots now looking back - by our standards they were unbelievably violent. But they destroyed Thatcher.

So, the question becomes where and what will be the tipping point...

Just heard from booking.com hotel in New York has cancelled my booking at no cost. Saves me cash but sad. So, BA and Met next...?

17 March 2020

I've never had so many Zoomers onto me as I have since Monday



19 March 2020

At least Glasgow looks splendid tonight (heart eyes emoji)

20 March 2020

How's this for a memorable week: student I helped supervise gets PhD without changes, country goes into lockdown, later this week she has planned delivery of twins. She'll never forget this week... (laughing emojis)

24 March 2020



This is what isolation does to gay men.  
(shocked emojis) (thinking emojis)

28 March 2020

I've been exchanging emails with Brian. They 'only' have 4000 cases in Tennessee. Meanwhile he has driven up to see family in Chicago for sister's 60th and Easter. He's a Dr: so much for US lockdown...

12 April 2020

It's my birthday next Thursday so I'm thinking of having some video WhatsApp virtual

cocktail party conversations. Let me know if you fancy it: 'bring' a cocktail du jour the only requirement. I may be drunk... (laughing emojis) (cocktail emojis)

16 April 2020

No. I did see the Michigan 'protest'.

But he certainly seems in complete meltdown

What interested me was the USS Roosevelt thing. He certainly doesn't want to make enemies of the military. Now they would take him out. There are all sorts of possible 'accidents' esp in a golf trip in Airforce One...

17 April 2020

## WALES

**From:** Tamar Hirschfeld

**Sent:** 26 April 2020

**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <vmdandrea@hotmail.com>:

Wow, Vaneeta, What a beautiful email!!! [thanking her for Zoom Tai Chi classes]

I love what you say at the end, when you describe our meetings as an 'opportunity for a meditative physical and emotional healing'. This was exactly what was on my mind when I tried to get these meetings in place as soon as possible; I saw so many of my pupils falling quickly into a lost-bewildered-anxious state of mind, many called and emailed me in a state of confusion and despair, so I felt that our practice was more necessary than ever.

I am so touched that you are thinking of mentioning our community in a voice that will be heard on the other side of the globe. The funny thing is that today, after 6 months of not being in touch with my (one of many ex) sister-in-law, who is a New Zealander and went back home just a few months ago, I had a long Skype conversation with her. She asked me to give her the details of my classes so she might be able to join us. Until this morning, New Zealand has not been on my mind much, apart from this amazing poem Prime minister Jacinda shared on her Facebook (I will send it in a separate email. They are so so lucky to have such a wonderful prime minister!) All of a sudden New Zealand pops up from every corner!!! I must tell my sister-in-law about your interview. "

So just for your information, and to make it even more interesting, in our Zoom classes we have not only people from England but from Israel (my aunt), from Norway (Ivan's relatives) and soon maybe from New Zealand too.

Much love to you, and even more gratitude for your lovely words

x  
Tamar

**From:** Martha McCafferty  
**Sent:** Thu 16/04/2020 11:15  
**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <vmdandrea@hotmail.com>:

Thanks for the update, Vaneeta. Sorry about the lost income but I know you were not real fond of the travel. So great that you can stop and rest.

We did one Sainsbury's over 70 shop and that was awful. Everyone in Swansea is over 70. So now we go at a regular time and get right in ! Seems safer also.

Birgit continues to turn my garden into something spectacular. Also walks Gracie so I get a break all this time. Lockdown means very few people out, and we have had beautiful weather - wonderful. My only complaint is that I want to do some painting but can't get any paint. I finally caved in and got broadband and a new laptop, just before the major restrictions. That was lucky and I guess it is rather convenient.

I am pleased to be able to justify doing nearly nothing. Some running, walking, gardening, TV and reading...

Glad you are well.

All the best

Martha

### **COVID-19 --- a global social experience**

#### **USA California**

**From:** Sam Roberts  
**Sent:** Fri 28/02/2020 04:50  
**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <vmdandrea@hotmail.com>:

Vaneeta -- I am sending you this e-mail so that you may consider what I believe strongly is a basically correct assessment. I am doing this in view of our many years of friendship, and I hope you will accord it fair consideration.

I believe, based upon countless things I have read, and upon the inferences that I have drawn, that this virus is far more dangerous than the Spanish flu of 1918, which killed 40 million people. In fact, this may well be an ELE -- Extinction Level Event.

What you must understand with a very powerful virus like this -- and one which is OUT OF CONTROL -- is that it spreads GEOMETRICALLY, not arithmetically.

Obviously, the failure to contain the virus will produce a severe and deadly pandemic. There are things you can do to mitigate risk: DO NOT set foot on an airplane or cruise ship, unless you have a very strong DEATH WISH. The recirculation of air on an airplane guarantees that if a single passenger is infected, EVERY PASSENGER will be infected by the time it lands. Cruise ship risk I do not need to elucidate.

You should also avoid crowded areas and have as little contact with people as possible. We are stockpiling canned food and bottled water; I suggest you do the same.

These are my conclusions. It is impossible to be careful enough.

sam

**From:** Sam Roberts  
**Sent:** Fri 28/02/2020 17:51  
**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <vmdandrea@hotmail.com>:

Vaneeta -- I can't tell you how much we have been looking forward to your visit.

However, I am so worried and so scared for my family, that I have no choice, and with the greatest reluctance, that we are unable to have you stay in our house. It is your China trips which scare the hell out of me.

I fear we must, for the time being, confine our contacts to telephone and e-mail. You cannot imagine how much this hurts me, but I simply cannot risk transmitting the virus to my grandchildren.

California appears to be the hub of the virus in the US. We have a number of cases of confirmed virus in San Diego, due to the mishandling of the Americans flown to Miramar airbase here. There are also confirmed cases in northern California. One county up north has declared a state of emergency. 10,000 possibly infected Californians are being "monitored" by the state: the idiot politicians have not ordered them to be tested.

Every country is denying or downplaying the gravity of the situation, but this has zero effect except to enable people to follow their wishful thinking rather than face the facts. I reiterate my warning about not flying or cruising, as well as stockpiling the necessities of life.

Hope situation will improve and we will be able to see you soon. I am, however, very pessimistic, and this pessimism is based NOT on emotion but on a very rational analysis of the facts, such as I understand them.

Love, Sam

#### **I-Message**

**From:** Curt Bennett  
**Sent:** 22 March 2020

Thanks! I need it right now. I didn't expect this level of chaos as a dean.

Thanks. Overall, I feel good about my leadership, but it has been non-stop work since everything has been changing daily.

I make a set of decisions one day, and the next day, I need to make new decisions on each topic as the ground has changed. Jon is still living with me. Sam is too, except he is at his mom's (probably for the duration of the state "safer at home" order. We are now (mostly) telecommuting, which saves me time. On the other hand, I'm feeling exhausted most of the time...

Please take care of yourself and be well

#### **I-Message**

**From:** Curt Bennett  
**Sent:** 29 April 2020

Hi Neets, Glad to hear that you are doing well. Things here are still pretty chaotic, and I am getting tired of being in the home... Lots of pre-tenure reviews to get done around all the rest.

I also have submitted a vignette of the life of a dean in this time to a collection that will appear in the MAA Focus magazine. Other than that, just trying to stay sane.

Stay safe yourself. Always good to hear from you!

**From:** Randi Miller  
**Sent:** Mon 13/04/2020 06:02  
**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <vmdandrea@hotmail.com>:

We have settled into our coronavirus routine very nicely. We walk just about every morning and eat a late breakfast/lunch and then get on with the day. We have commented many times how quickly the day actually goes by. In many respects we are glad to be back up here in Northern California. The weather has been beautiful which helps with our walking schedule. In Palm Desert it's at least 100 degrees every day and often even hotter. It's hard to get a serious walk in with such high temperatures and I don't like to get up at 5 in the morning to try and beat the heat.

**From:** Randi Miller  
**Sent:** Mon 27/04/2020 06:02  
**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <vmdandrea@hotmail.com>:

Neets: Tomorrow we have to pick up some homemade face masks - made by a person here in the neighborhood. We also have to do some food shopping which has been made extremely stressful under the current conditions. Not only does one have to watch out for those not paying attention to social distancing, but lots of items have disappeared from the shelves. I am mastering the art of Whole Foods online ordering. Interestingly enough, as of last Sunday in Riverside County, face masks are required for everyone going out in public. So far, not the case up here. What can you expect from a Republican County? The Republicans have been behind the curve in relationship to every policy decision related to the virus. From the White House to the Republican governors, their response, or lack thereof, has been deplorable.

## Indiana

**From:** Judith Kearney  
**Sent:** Thu 16/04/2020 23:12  
**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <vmdandrea@hotmail.com>:

Things here are pretty normal under the circumstances. Julie and Mike are busy with IU stuff and the kids are doing their home learning. So far, things are fairly easy to get. It just takes a little planning. I'm still taking aerobics classes everyday on line and walking a lot. How are things going with you? Are you getting out? I hope all is well.

**From:** Judith Kearney  
**Sent:** Sat 18/04/2020 23:27  
**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <vmdandrea@hotmail.com>:

I bet the pools here will be closed all summer. I'll really miss that. We don't have any queue problems here so far, but I'm sure the politicians will screw that up too. Let's talk soon.

## New York

**From:** Nancy D'Antonio  
**Sent:** Wed 15/04/2020 17:52  
**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <vmdandrea@hotmail.com>:

Hi Vaneeta,

So nice to hear from you and that you are all OK. I bet you did get the big C. We think we had it as well, but of course no testing for us plebeians.

We are all safe in our apartment here in West 98th. Yes it truly is a horror with nearly 800 dead every day for over a week now at that rate. We are fortunate that our neighborhood has a low infection rate and we can still get food although the lines are long and patience is required. We are not supposed to be going outside either - Gary is 73 and I am 64.

For the past 4-5 yrs I have been working part time for a non-profit retreat center in New Rochelle. That work has dried up and who knows how they will survive now. Gary was still working part time for a few clients in addition to his SS but that has dwindled. His clients are out of business too. I was scheduled to be in Sedona for my energy healing training program in April but that has been postponed til Sept. Gary was on a singing tour down to Florida when this whole thing started but he made it back safely a few days after the lockdown. I was already sick, he got sick. We had the tight chest difficulty breathing. He never got a cough. I had a sore throat and swollen glands for over a month, extreme exhaustion and endless chills but not a steady fever. We are both finally on the mend just taking tons of vit C and herbs. We can't even get through to our doctor offices. We know pple who have been sick and recovered. Gary's cousin died (age 73) - in OH, he had other health issues but mostly just did not get any care.

We have lost a significant amount of income but we are not starving and not spending much besides living expenses. The NYC economy is as bad as it's ever gotten. We watch Cuomo's daily press conference and wonder how the heck things will recover but I am sure that it will.

Luckily we have our roof garden to take care of. We go up there every few days when the weather is warm. We are allowed to walk in the park with masks/gloves on but that is not always pleasant due to awareness of distancing and sensing the overall gloom. We have trouble getting home delivery on food because items are out of stock, and delivery windows are not available. They cannot keep up with demand. So, we venture to the big stores walking distance - Whole Foods and Trader Joes - and wait in lines and hope we can get what we want once inside. We do that about every 7-10 days. At our local corner store one can wait in line for 45 mins just to get bananas or milk!

Enough rambling.... I have begun sorting through my old photography files and throwing out so much.... I honestly don't mind this sheltering in place with the exception of what's going on outside.

Sending love,  
Nancy

**From:** Nancy D'Antonio  
**Sent:** Tue 21/04/2020 14:31  
**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <vmdandrea@hotmail.com>:

Hi Vaneeta,

I am so glad you were able to reach my dad and have a nice chat. We are sooo grateful they never went to assisted living (we had considered it before Laura got the job in DC.) The situation in nursing homes is so bad right now, it is a terrible reflection on this society.

I started joining their Sunday church service on zoom so I can see them, and Carla has been organizing zoom birthdays. I am not sure there are any bdays in May but we will think of something. They enjoy seeing all our faces.

The NYC death toll is coming down a bit but lack of large-scale testing is still a problem here -- getting the materials is problematic. Cuomo is supposed to be visiting Trump today in DC to discuss Federal support. Cuomo has been doing a great job and I hope he is effective with DT.

How can pple reopen the economy when such a small portion of the population has been tested?

We remain content enough at home with our little projects trying not to freak out over our finances. And we have not received our \$1200 checks yet!!

XXOO

## North Carolina

### I-Message

**From:** Derek ZekeCee Caldwell

**Sent:** 22 March 2020

Stay Safe Pr(heart emoji)f!!!

### I-Message

**From:** Tom Arcaro

**Sent:** 25 March 2020

Neets, how are you fairing in a this madness??

Shelter in place is the rule of the day, yes?

just checking in. All OK there?

yikes. you stay safe, OK?

## Tennessee

**From:** BJM

**Sent:** 28 Mar 2020, at 22:19

**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <vmdandrea@hotmail.com>:

Hey Vaneeta,

Glad to hear that you are OK. Sorry to hear about your trip to NZ being cancelled, but I'm glad you didn't take off and then get stuck somewhere. That would have been really difficult.

Yeah, it is really hard to maintain mental health with gyms and pools closed. I had given away my bike before I moved to Nashville, but now all the stores are closed and I can't buy another one at least for a while. I drove up to Chicago to spend some time with my mom and my sister. They were getting pretty frantic about things, and it seemed like the right step to take.

I have even thought about going back and doing Internal Medicine again part-time. I have a phone interview with someone at Vanderbilt on Monday, so we will see where that goes. It is not anything that I ever wanted to do again, but desperate times call for desperate measures. We'll see.

Be well, stay safe.

Best, BJM

**From:** BJM

**Sent:** Sat 11/04/2020 23:12

**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <vmdandrea@hotmail.com>:

Hey Vaneeta,

I am glad that you are safe and sheltering in place. It is tough to do, but like you said - it would be really risky given your asthma. I agree - systems should be in place and activated, but when your whole political philosophy is to shoot from the hip - this is the kind of chaos that you get. We are cursed to live in interesting times.....

My clinics are closed until the end of April, so I don't have a lot to do. I did speak to someone at Vanderbilt. There are not so many cases in TN as in other parts of the country, so the need is not so great. They are going

to credential me and keep me in reserve in case they need me. I would probably go back and do hospital work if it came down to that. We'll see - still very up in the air.

I am very lucky that I am still able to travel across state lines. I drove back up to Chicago this weekend. My sister turned 60 yesterday and so I wanted to be here for that. I will head back to TN on Monday. The good news is that it is getting warmer in TN now, and Spring has definitely arrived. I managed to buy a bike before everything got locked down, so I am able to get out and ride, which is nice and definitely helps my mental health.

Stay safe.

BJM

**From:** BJM

**Sent:** Sun 19/04/2020 18:17

**To:** Vaneeta D'Andrea <vmdandrea@hotmail.com>:

Hi Vaneeta,

Thanks. Yes, I do hope that things get up and running again soon - for both of us.

Yes, you can use my message in a compilation. You are in a unique and fascinating position to be able to do this given your connections all over the world. I look forward to seeing what you come up with.

I don't know if I mentioned this or not, but you were the first person who told me about COVID in our talk back in January. I have a vague recollection of maybe a headline or something that I saw about it before then, but you were the first to talk about it specifically that I can remember. It was because you had been in touch with people from China. So interesting that you are now providing this compilation of COVID experiences from all of your friends across the globe.

Be well and stay safe.

Best, BJM

**I-Message**

**From:** Ben Judkins

**Sent:** Sun 03/05/2020 11:53

I really enjoyed your interview and especially some of the stories from people around the globe. Thought I would update you on what is happening here. The Republican governor of Tennessee has decided to open the state back up. Medical doctors have protested but to no avail. We are in day 2 of the great (or not so great) experiment. I have decided to wait another three weeks before I venture past the grocery store. I figure that will give me a better indication of whether this was a good idea or not. In our county, the numbers have doubled in the last week or so. The next county over has a Life Care Center nursing home that has over 100 infections. And another county over has a prison with several hundred staff and inmates infected. My looking at the statistics suggests that we are not in a decline. The good news is that I have had time to finish a first draft of the book. I am taking it in a somewhat different direction than the intro that you read. The current title is *Loving Our Neighbor in the 21st Century: Toward a more Sociologically Informed Faith*. It is not a textbook but aimed at progressive Christians and the "nones," those that have left the church. It is still autobiographical but I have incorporated a lot of sociological research and ideas throughout. I even added a chapter on the corona virus. Not sure a publisher will want it or if anyone would read it, but it seemed to be a good use of my time sheltering at home.

I was impressed with things that you have done to keep sane, especially your exercise routine. I ride my bike and Karen and I walk every night, but the intensive exercise I use to do can only be done in the gym.

Hopefully, it will open soon. I was reading an article in Mother Jones by a guy in prison who has spent the last 27 years in solitary confinement. He said that all of a sudden you're confronted with yourself, and if you haven't really put anything into yourself, it can be difficult. But you realize you are more equipped than you realized. Being in isolation gives you an opportunity to seek out who you truly are, not who you have been necessarily before the seclusion. So that is what I am trying to do - find my true identity in preparation for the new normal, whatever that is.

Karen and I (for the first time in our lives) have dinner together every night, while we listen to Trump's press conferences. Sometimes the discussion does not end well. We will survive. Glad to hear that you are OK. Look forward to reading some of the comments people shared with you from around the world.

Ben

## **COVID-19 --- this pandemic made us realize how we connect with each other globally**

### **VIETNAM**

#### **I-Message**

**From:** Dominic Newbould

**Sent:** 22 April 2020

Living in Vietnam over the last two years has been a constant round of surprises, and the Vietnamese government has certainly surprised me by its exemplary response to coronavirus. They have been outstanding in every way and all of us are truly grateful for their protection. Of course, the country is corrupt, a little more so, perhaps than most European countries (it's hard to say), and the Communist Party rules firmly, regularly jailing dissenters, even people who criticise the govt on Facebook. But in this instance, their communications strategy has been first rate. Most important, they have put people before profit, people's lives matter more than businesses, even business survival, in some cases. This is the reverse of what appears to have happened in the UK, and USA, where business interests seems to have delayed necessary measures and restrictions that would have saved people's lives.

Life has been a bit difficult and there are restrictions, but people don't complain. They understand. We all get text messages, direct from the government, giving us plain, unvarnished and unconflicting advice and updates. The streets have been unnaturally quiet, and the air quality perhaps a little improved, but the coal-fired power stations are the biggest culprits in that respect.

No one knows how long this will go on, whether there will be an effective vaccine, or some sort of life saving treatment, or whether the virus will mutate, like flu does every year, and keeps coming back to commit terrible havoc.

But in Vietnam, we have a long border with China, a lot of toing and froing across the border, and we had hundreds of workers in Wuhan, which is a massive industrial city. But they all came home. The border was closed. Schools, colleges and universities closed from the Tet holiday, back in January. No one has died. Not one single person.

There have only been 268 cases, and the majority of those have recovered.

Here, they track and trace every case, they quarantine or isolate contacts, and they have closed businesses, which harms the economy of Vietnam, which is the fastest growing economy in Asia. But tomorrow, guess what? We are beginning to lift restrictions and some businesses can reopen, internal flights can resume.

But here, we will never trust China again... and, to make matters worse, the Chinese have been bullying Vietnamese fishing boats in the disputed islands in the East Sea - the Chinese call it the South China Sea and against all international agreed maritime law, claim sovereignty over vast swathes of the Ocean. Last

week they rammed a VN boat and extracted confessions from the crew members, forcing them to admit they were in Chinese territory. Sickening. China is becoming a pariah state, while the US and other countries are distracted.

Life in Hanoi is good and we are hoping the restaurants and cafes will open soon. At the end of April, we celebrate reunification day, when the American war ended, and I think the government is targeting the 1st May as "return to some normality".

But a lot can still happen, of course...

Dominic Newbould

**COVID-19 --- a global social experience**

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**Professor Vaneeta D'Andrea** has held academic posts in the USA and the UK for over fifty years. She writes and publishes in a variety of formats. Since childhood she has written poems. COVID-19 --- a global social experience is her most recent poem.

Karakia

# Whakamutuka / Completion

**Unuhia, unuhia**

**Unuhia ki te uru tapu nui**

**Kia wātea, kia māmā, te ngākau, te tinana, te wairua i te ara takatā Koia rā e**

**Rongo, whakairia ake ki runga**

**Kia tina! TINA! Hui e! TĀIKI E!**

*Draw on, draw on,*

*Draw on the supreme sacredness*

*To clear, to free the heart, the body and the spirit of mankind*

*Rongo, suspended high above us*

*Draw together! Affirm!*





