# Pacific-Asian
# Education

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# Pacific-Asian Education

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# Education in Turbulent Times

## Editorial

This special issue is dedicated to exploring the different ways in which Covid-19 has exacerbated long standing issues in education, with a focus on Pacific and Asian education. Many children and young people in this part of the world continue to bear the brunt of systemic educational disadvantage, which is inextricable from the mutually constitutive effects of poverty, racism, coloniality, gender-based violence, and globalisation. Yet amidst these inequities, this issue's contributors collectively celebrate resistance, collaboration, adaptability, and joy. They offer hopeful visions of equitable futures. The issue opens with Andrew Thompson's provocative cartoon sequence, *Education in turbulent times*, which brings to life the difficulties teachers faced when trying to engage their students in on-line learning from their varying home contexts. With wry humour and unexpected detail, Thompson elicits sympathy for teachers as they did their best to teach under make-shift conditions. His drawings set the scene for this special issue as we explore the ways in which the world has adapted to education in these unprecedented times.

Le Thi Phuong Lien, Le Nguyet Anh, Le Pham Hue Xuan, Ngo Thi Thuy, Nguyen Que Ly, and Nguyen Dang Thuan's *A trioethnography approach to reflect Vietnamese education during COVID-19* explores how COVID-19 challenges established educational practices toward historically marginalised and vulnerable groups. They do so by uplifting the voices of administrators, teachers, and students as they unpack their experiences with online education. Their findings unearthed two key considerations, firstly, that intrinsic motivation is integral to supporting Vietnamese learners and professionals in online learning. Secondly, that some people unexpectedly found themselves marginalised by the pandemic, particularly when they lost social resources and economic security that had created varying illusions of safety and security before the pandemic.

In *Of coup and pandemic: the changing meanings of schooling in Myanmar*, Liyun Wendy Choo and Ma Mya Aye examine the contested politics underlying pandemic-responsive schooling in Myanmar. Navigating a political crisis, a military coup, a civil disobedience movement, a violent crackdown, in addition to the pandemic, has led to school re-openings and the act of attending school being reclaimed as an instrument of legitimacy for the military's overthrow of a democratically elected government. Students' refusal to return to school can, in turn, be interpreted as an act of resistance. Through thematic analysis of English-language news coverage about the divergent views junta officials and everyday citizens held about school re-openings, Choo and Aye advocate for an understanding of politics that centres the agency of citizens rather than the proclamations of those in power, especially when that power is of contested legitimacy.

*Beyond the pandemic: classroom dialogues about citizenship in turbulent times* explores the practical application of Zembaylas' notion of a 'pedagogy of discomfort'. The authors, Marta Estellés, Moema Gregorzewski, Peter O'Connor, and Holly Bodman study a school programme in Aotearoa New Zealand that uses arts-based curricula to engage with confronting social issues. This article examines how the hierarchy of the classroom can become disembedded when students learn remotely or return after a period of home isolation. The authors emphasise the importance of the teacher creating a 'no penalty zone' where students are encouraged to interact with challenging ideas in an environment that respects and legitimises varying perspectives and brings them to a place of empathy and compassion.

Next, is the issue's first poetry section with a suite of poems by Fetaui Iosefo: *No/ know*, *I can't breathe*, and *Turbulent times/Top heavy*. Read together, Iosefo's poems deftly weave José Rizal's famous quote "No history, no self. Know history, know self" through reflections on the indeterminacy and chaos of pandemic education and the murder of George Floyd. Iosefo's poems, in concert, encapsulate this issue's overarching goal: to call educators and researchers to action in acknowledgement of their perpetual responsibility to their communities.

In *Unusual education in turbulent times: COVID lockdowns, home educators and the unequal opening of education* Leah Moir and Rebecca English draw attention to home education, one of the fastest growing yet most misunderstood communities of learners in Australia. Moir and English examine various Covid-responsive policies and the disproportionate effects they had on home educating populations as compared to students enrolled in traditional schools. Finding that the home educated experienced between 100 and 200 longer days of restrictions than schoolchildren, the authors advance a complex argument for home-education policies in Australia that recognise the complex needs and vulnerabilities of that community.

In *Kuana'ike...The importance of an indigenous worldview to the educational well-being of the CBE student* K. 'Alohilani H.N. Okamura examines how Hawaiian culture-based education (HCBE) can guide education communities in their revisioning schools as site of cultural revalidation amidst the pandemic. Specifically, Okamura describes how centring *Kua'ana 'ike* (traditional Hawaiian knowledge) and the Hawaiian language helps support *Kanaka Maoli* (Native Hawaiian) as they re-enter schools by strengthening their cultural identities and developing their socio-political and critical consciousness.

Qifan Ding's article, *Migrant students' online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic in Shanghai, China*, highlights the plight of a vulnerable group in China, that of students whose parents have migrated to large urban cities from their homes in remote rural areas. These students do not have the same access to resources and support as other students in the schools in which they enrol. When the pandemic arrived and all students began online learning, the migrant students did not always have devices or parental support to enable them to engage successfully in online learning and their motivation and achievement decreased.

In the issue's second poetry section, there are poems by three separate authors. *Southside Alert Level Four* is a prose poem about the simplicity, modesty and beauty of ordinary spaces that transform into playgrounds of imagination. Claudia Rózas

Gomez explores how our domestic confinement inspires adventurous thought and creative play. *Waiting* by Julius Schwenke is a poem that captures the indeterminacy of home isolation. The poet explores the effects of the pandemic on teachers and students through the ideas of detachment and alienation. The desire to help and be helped are fragmented and continually interrupted by flights of imagination and mundane chores as we become suspended in time. Sophie Peung's contemplative poem, *A new world*, is a meditation on the unique mixture of boredom and anxiety that the pandemic has brought about. It evokes a sense of innocence amidst the challenges we have endured as we teeter between constancy and impatience.

*Pre-service teachers' perceptions of tutor feedback practice in times of COVID-19* explores the challenges of teacher training during a pandemic. Focusing on a training university in Vietnam, La Thanh Ha and Tran Thi Thanh Thuy examine how social distancing and home isolation have impacted teacher trainees. This article analyses how the pandemic has made engagement and self-regulation difficult for aspiring teachers whose learning is far removed from the school.

Joshua Sarpong's *A University that thrives in a pandemic era* investigates the precarity of tertiary public funding. In particular, Sarpong examines the economic mission of the University of Auckland as a case study in the successful balance of public and private funding. This article considers anti-marketeer critique of privatisation along with the beneficial effects of interdisciplinary collegiality that the private funding of tertiary research elicits.

The issue ends with the final page of Andrew Thompson's cartoon in which he takes Horst Zeinz's set of contemplative questions and integrates them into his final frame. *Questions for a post-pandemic future* leave us, as much academic research does, with more questions than answers but through this special issue we have been able to glimpse possibilities and imagine better futures arising from these turbulent times.

Noah Romero
Andrew Thompson
Carol Mutch
*Special Issue Editors*
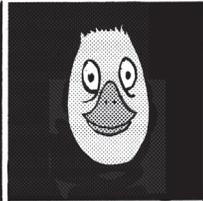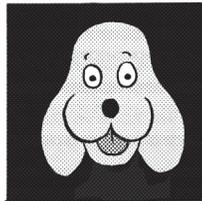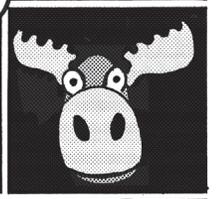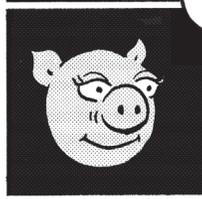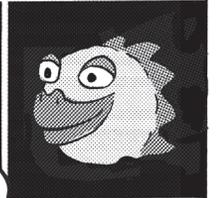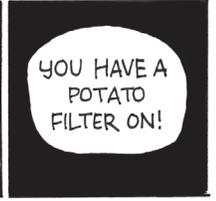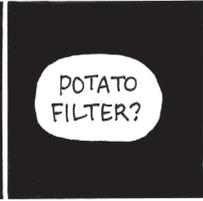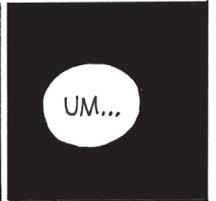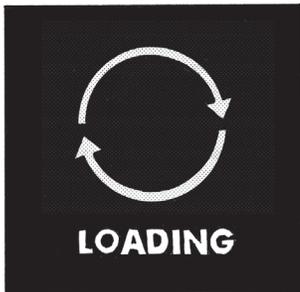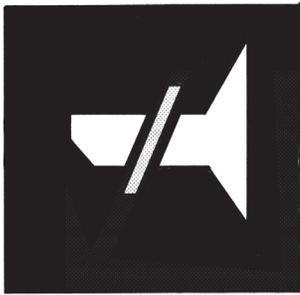
# A trioethnographic approach to reflect Vietnamese education during Covid-19

**Le Thi Phuong Lien, Le Nguyet Anh, Le Pham Hue Xuan, Ngo Thi Thuy, Nguyen Que Ly, Nguyen Dang Thuan**

## Abstract

The most recent wave of the coronavirus outbreak in Vietnam has exerted significant pressure on the local education system, necessitating a conversion in the mode of teaching to an online environment. Using trioethonography, as the combination of duoethnography and photography methodologies (Le et al., 2021), we sought to explore how Covid-19 challenges, and potentially changes, educational practices – especially as these practices pertain to vulnerable and disadvantaged communities. Central to our study are three voices of education, namely administrators, teachers, and students with online education experience during the Covid-19 pandemic and rooted within three key topics: teaching marginalized students, organising online teaching, and learning motivation. We found that intrinsic motivation is a variable of great importance. In addition to this, a central finding was that some people unexpectedly found themselves marginalised by the pandemic's impact. Our paper further contributes to the trioethnographic method with our innovative practice: the significance of trioethnography is the number of voices, not the number of researchers.

## Keywords

Trioethnography, marginalized students, learning motivation, Covid-19 challenges, photography

## Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic began in late 2019 then quickly broke out all over the world, including in Vietnam. Almost immediately, social distancing was implemented everywhere and had an almost immediate impact on Vietnamese education. Besides limited internet access, unprecedented difficulties were encountered as part of the implementation of online teaching and learning. Inspired by Le et al.'s work (2021) on trioethnographic approach, this study has examined the significant effects of Covid-19 on education, especially as they relate to vulnerable communities. Six Vietnamese researchers from diverse occupations and geographies exchanged narratives and formed multifaceted dialogues through the recall of experiences and personal images around certain pivotal events. We were free to react at any point of the conversation to embrace the concept of *currere* and a dialogical approach (Freire, 1970; Pinar, 1975).

*Currere*, as a concept, posits that a person's life is a curriculum, and participants use their philosophical viewpoints or others as the research sites (Pinar, 1975). Photography in this study is used to collect real-life artifacts, which are pictures shared among researchers, for the purpose of dialogues and discussions. Throughout our shared conversations, respect for privacy, trust, and transparency were the core values in making critical reflections, which were used for the joint process of sharing, analyzing, and creating meanings (Sawyer & Norris, 2013). In three sharing circles, multiple participants were involved in each dialogue, reaching beyond the common definition for duoethnography or trioethnography methods.

**Teaching marginalised students**

Marginalised or oppressed people represent a minority that maintains differences in their culture, race, class, gender, language, and ethnic composition (Freire & Macedo, 1995). They are threatened with exclusion from the social system (Simone, 2012). Peck and DeSawal (2021) defined the following:

> *Marginalized students are those whose identities face harassment, and are underserved, or are unable to succeed on college campuses. Marginalized students may come from low-income backgrounds, be LGBTQA+, disabled, or racially minoritized. (p. 30)*

Unequal social perceptions restrict the accessibility of resources and growth opportunities for marginalised students. Some students are labeled and placed in lower classes with poor academic achievement; their "intellectual, social, emotional and cultural growth" is hampered (Simone, 2012, p. 9).

Teaching marginalised groups of students requires thoughtful learning design, developing trusted relationships, and proper support. Learning design aligns various activities and course objectives, thus addressing both conceptual knowledge and the requisite emotional support (Kwok & Hodgson, 2020). Kwok and Hodgson (2020) have noted that teachers should anticipate the total workload and level of complexity for different learners in order that learning may take place effectively. In addition, teachers could provide positive attention and feedback, at the individual level, by developing personal connections with their students and nurturing teenagers' interest.

**Online teaching**

According to Carliner (2004), online learning refers to learning and other supportive resources available via a computer. Ally (2008) emphasises the role of the web and the internet in online teaching. He defined online teaching as the use of the internet to access materials, interact with the content, instructors, and other learners, obtain support during the learning process, acquire knowledge, construct personal meaning, and grow from the learning experiences.

There are numerous differences between online teaching and face-to-face teaching. Garrison (2011) has argued, "online learning integrates independence (asynchronous online communication) with interaction (connectivity) that overcomes time and space

constraints in a way that emulates the values of higher education" (p. 3). Nevertheless, the quality of online teaching depends on two main factors: content and instructions (Gustiani, 2020). Online courses need to stimulate learners' motivation with various interactive audio, video, animation, and simulation-driven content derived from the technology available over the internet. According to the host education institution's policy, this online content should be adjusted to pedagogical demands, interaction rules, and device availability. In Garrison's study (2011), learners' equipment was one of the most important contributors to inefficiency in the teaching of marginalised students.

In March 2020, the Vietnamese Ministry of Education (MOET) launched online teaching nationwide for the first time. Even so, as one of the low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), access to wireless internet technology is unevenly distributed across the country (World Bank, 2020). Vietnam faces many difficulties and challenges in implementing online teaching due to a lack of preparation, guidelines, and regulation. MOET has only recently issued a circular regulating the management and organisation of online teaching in educational institutions (MOET, 2021).

There are many definitions of motivation, but the most commonly used definition is motivation as a theoretical construct to explain the quality of goal-directed behaviour (Brophy, 2010). Learning motivation is believed to be the driving factor, or barrier, for individuals' cognitive and affective processes in terms of location interactions and interactions between learners and their learning environment (Schunk et al., 2014). Research by Ryan and Deci (2000) divided learning motivation into two types: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation in learning is associated with internal factors such as excitement, pleasure, or challenge that an individual develops while performing activities. Extrinsic motivation in learning involves external factors when performing activities – such as rewards or recognition from others (Hartnett, 2016).

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic forced the systems and learning processes to change to adapt to the new rhythm of life. The sudden change from traditional learning to virtual learning has the potential to greatly reduce student motivation. Therefore, it is essential to examine students' learning motivation in the context of this Covid-19 pandemic (Rahardjo & Pertiwi, 2020).

## Methodology

### *Duoethnography*

Duoethnography often includes at least two researchers working collaboratively through dialogue and discussion to build a "narrative unity" within a dialogic process (Sawyer & Norris, 2013). In duoethnography, self-reflection and peer exploration are crucial to investigate and re-conceptualise the hidden values, giving new meanings, interpretations, or understandings to past acts (Sawyer & Norris, 2013). Sawyer and Norris (2013) proposed that this dialogic process is how researchers approach and reconcile the findings we search for. Some major tenets of duoethnography are the dialogic nature, *currere* – personal life as a curriculum (Pinar, 1975) – the intent to acknowledge and adapt after conversing, and the manifestation of differences (Sawyer & Norris, 2015). Using duoethnography, researchers have the freedom to voice their

opinions, reflect on personal historical events and react upon their own or others' experiences in the format of written script, without worrying about clashes of ideas. The researchers present their ideas to the readers through a dialogue, in which readers are encouraged to join the discussion. Norris (2008) describes this whole multi-dialogic process as such: "stories" are continuously generated, interpreted, and enunciated in the team of researchers, ideas bounce back and forth, leading to the "third place" created for readers to insert their own stories. According to Norris and Sawyer (2017), a lived curriculum could result from the shaping process, made by factors like society, culture, politics, and material contexts, all of which might be scrutinised under the longitude of time. Duoethnography enables researchers to critically study the multifaceted life of their co-researchers and participants (Sawyer & Norris, 2013).

### Photography as a method to collect visual artifacts

As a relatively new form of qualitative research, photography has been increasingly and painstakingly pioneered across disciplines (O'Donoghue, 2019). Wang and Burris initially introduced photography in 1997 to promote the participatory research in the Yunnan Woman's Reproductive Health and Development Program. Through the photo exhibition and the critical dialogue, photography has evolved to encourage participants to self-reflect on their community's concerns and reach policymakers (Wang & Burris, 1997). It has been mostly used to yield insights into marginalised sectors of society (Hussey, 2006; McIntyre, 2003). Photographs taken by participants embody the emotional and subjective aspects of a key moment (O'Donoghue, 2019) and empower them to comment on their experiences during everyday events (Oosterbroek et al., 2020).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, numerous researchers have used photography as a methodology to signify problems relating to virtual learning and working. They have taken part in their daily routines during the pandemic by reacting in certain ways whilst simultaneously having interacted with colleagues in the events and situations that unfolded before them (Malka, 2021) using both tacit and explicit information in the ensuing analysis that allowed the data triangulation (Zahle, 2012). Combining the narrative approaches (White et al., 1990), photography takes part in the new reality experienced by each student separately, as a dominant story typically involving stress, uncertainty, and concerns about the future (Malka, 2021). Photographs as artifacts of our living, being, and learning promote aesthetic inquiry, enabling readers to contemplate, disrupt the narrative experiences, and cultivate imaginative thoughts (Le et al., 2021; O'Donoghue, 2019, p. 18). In this study, photography is used to record and mark an unfamiliar and unique time when social distancing due to Covid-19 compelled students and teachers to adopt emergency remote education measures without specific instructions or guidelines to accompany them.

### Trioethnography combines duoethnography and photography

Triothnography combines duoethnography and photography, enabling visual ethnographers to examine contemporary contexts and "generate multiple layers of meaning" (Le et al., 2021, p. 19). Le et al. (2021) indicated that three voices in

triothnographic discussions are interrogated, and findings could be emerging. These Indigenous sharing circles collect participants' lived experiences and provide spiritual space for researchers and participants to connect, reflect, transform, and enlighten (Lavallée, 2009).

Although significantly influenced by the innovative trioethnography of Le et al. (2021), our paper contributes to the trioethnographic method with our new practice: the importance of trioethnography is the number of *voices*, not the number of *researchers*. Voices as the medium of narratives, not subjects. Specifically, we are six Vietnamese researchers based in Vietnam and Taiwan, having represented amongst us three different voices (those of students, teachers, and education administrators) with diverse perspectives on Vietnamese education problems as they pertain to Covid-19. Three of the six researchers are new graduates with differing majors, having lived in different cities, and standing for one voice with different tones about their learning experiences. Two researchers represent teachers' voices about their teaching challenges, and the other is an education administrator with a manager's voice. We constructed our sharing circles via Google docs and Zoom teleconferencing with three themes: teaching groups of marginalized students; online teaching; and learning motivation. Through dialogical narratives, we gain in-depth understanding from other perspectives.

## A trioethnography of teaching marginalized groups of students, organising online teaching, and learning motivation in Covid-19

### Teaching marginalized groups of students in Covid-19

**A:** I teach marginalized students who have had to repeat the tenth grade or those who have not attained a high school credential and are currently studying towards a 9+program. My teaching motto is inspired by Zen Master Thich's letter to a young teacher (Thich & Weare, 2017):

> *Our mission as teachers is not just to transmit knowledge but to form*
> *human beings, construct a worthy, beautiful human race, and take care*
> *of our precious planet. (p. xvii)*

Sullivan et al. (2017) suggested that maintaining mindfulness of inner strengths could promote academic resilience during uncertainty. I always bring my favorite books, drawing cards, and green pen (Figure 1) to encourage my vulnerable students to share their ideas and try new things. However, during this semester, online classes favoured the merging of multiple student cohorts from different classes owing largely to the significant dropout and financial pressures brought about by the pandemic. In my mixed classes, some adolescents faced challenges with respect to online communication and means of employment, as they have been either underemployed or unemployed due to the government's present Covid-19 response and national lock-down. While middle-year students require study orientation to pass the online courses, final-year students expect career orientation to access work opportunities vital to their wellbeing. I am concerned with how to design the assignments and teaching methods in such a way that they are suitable for different competencies, learning behaviours, and expectations in the virtual classroom.
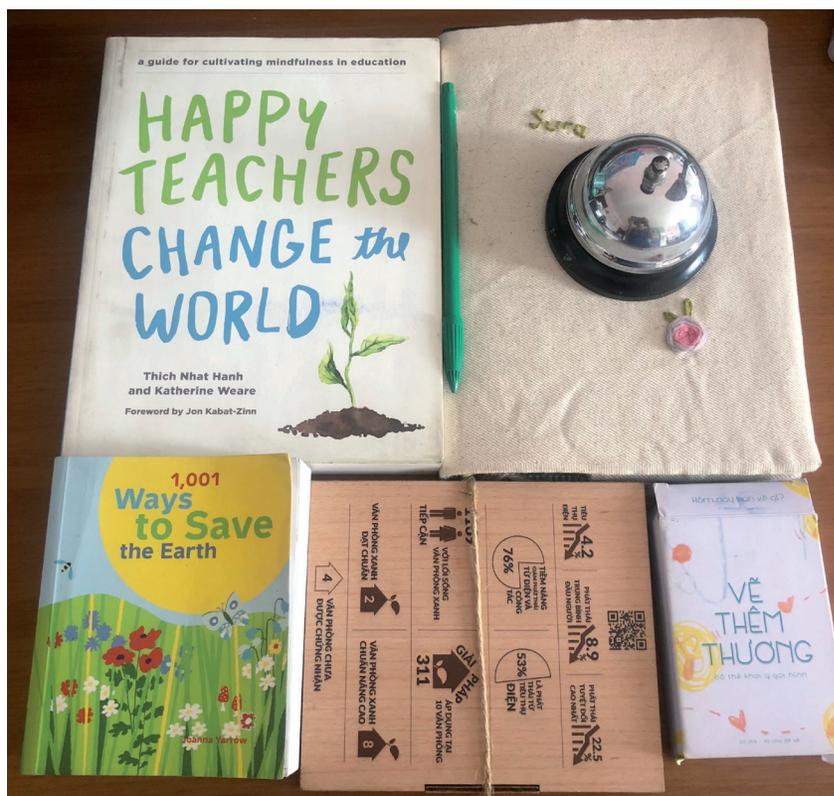
**Figure 1: My Teaching Tools**

**C:** I am certainly able to sympathize with A's sentiments. During my time as a teacher delivering courses on soft skills at vocational colleges, I had also hoped that my special students would engage with each other and do so in a way which fostered sound mental health. In my classes, I tried numerous interactive activities, case questions, and games. I also allowed students the freedom to express all of their thoughts, absent my judgements and corrections. Marcia D. Dixson (2010) indicates that one factor which makes students feel more committed to an online class is the variety of activities which are incorporated.

**B:** I find A's situation quite similar to that described by Yoshida et al. (2014) wherein students were influenced differently by extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. In the case of A's diverse groups of students, I feel they have different motivations. Teenagers' intrinsic motivation is diminished when they are not sure about their learning purpose, lack the vision of how this will translate into career success and face a dearth of available prospects. On the other hand, older students' extrinsic motivation has decreased because of stresses related to Covid-19's impact on the economy, shrinking family incomes and the overall reduction in the active labor force. In addition, organising diverse classrooms online is more challenging, especially in large-sized classrooms. All planned assignments and activities need to be flexibly modified to meet the learning outcomes.

**D:** Through A and B's experiences, it has occurred to me that a teacher's interpersonal skills are in high demand. When the Covid-19 pandemic struck, the learning process was forced to adapt for everyone: distance learning, restricted learning environments (at home), financial challenges, and so on. Loss of engagement is such an alarming problem for educators like A, B, and myself. We all tried to connect more with our students by engaging those students more frequently. The teacher–student relationship, including mentoring programmes, psychological counseling, and family engagement, would inhibit the dropout rate among students with disabilities, another kind of marginalised group (Wilkins et al., 2014).

**F:** A's concerns about how to help students find interest in the lessons is somewhat touching to me. I just wonder whether these problems are still emergent, such as a lack of motivation or an inclination leaning towards desperation, notwithstanding virtual learning and its impact? Based on identity-based motivation (Oyserman & Destin, 2010), when action feels identity-congruent, experienced difficulty highlights that the behaviour is important and meaningful. When action feels identity-incongruent, the same difficulty suggests that the behaviour is pointless and "not for people like me". Therefore, maybe clarifying how a student's motivation is linked to the course's outcome is what a teacher could do first to create an attractive lesson.

**E:** A's experience reminds me about multiculturalism in a classroom. Susanti et al. (2018) pointed out the importance of equality and togetherness in classroom management. To harmonize students from different backgrounds, the teacher must first encourage students to be a generation that respects differences, loves togetherness. The success of that educational model impressed me. It underscores, for me, the role of a teacher in A's favourite quote. The teacher is not simply a knowledge transmitter but an agent central to the forming of human beings.

### *Discussion summary*

Teaching marginalised groups of students with different profiles and expectations requires careful planning and execution. B and I have shared the same concern about designing learning activities that match learning outcomes and motivate diverse students in virtual classrooms. Feghali et al. (2021) suggested promoting the learner-centred approach, in which different students' profiles and needs are carefully investigated. In the conversation about extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (B), identity-based motivation (F), in-class activities (C), interpersonal skills (D), and the principle of equality and togetherness (E), we can clarify students' motivation and flexibly apply a variety of interactive activities. Buckling under the pressures of the digital transformation, teachers have likely focused on knowledge transmission in pursuit of intended learning outcomes and have been at pains to motivate students using different techniques. Through dialogical reflections and interrogations, multiple lenses of teaching marginalised students are constructed to be more understanding.

**Organising online teaching during Covid-19**

**B:** Under the massive impacts of Covid-19, my life was separated into two distinct halves: the physical and the virtual. Depicted in Figure 2, there lies the usual workspace equipped with my laptop as a medium to transcend me into the new-found virtual reality. Before, the internet was a platform of assistance – an option. Today, it becomes the air that I breathe. This abrupt, significant transition causes me – as an education manager – multiple, unprecedented difficulties in organising online teaching during Covid-19. The government inquiry for online teaching left the whole office for undergraduate affairs with no time for preparation and training. In the beginning, most of the time and effort was devoted to developing a functional, university-wide online teaching system. No guidelines were provided for lecturers to effectively conduct their online lessons. In the second semester of 2020, the university was forced to fire one elderly lecturer due to their unavailability for online classes. Most of the responsibility rests on my shoulders as well as others at the university. In the third semester of 2021, which started during the height of the government's social distancing measures, the number of students applying to withdraw from the course accounted for nearly 20% of the total registered student population. No scientific research was carried out to identify the underlying reasons; however, from personal viewpoints, the unprecedentedly high withdrawal rate concerns the quality of online teaching and learning sessions. Such concerns related to teaching quality regression have also affected the organisation of the final exam. Lecturers have been requested to reduce the difficulty of the test questions. This raises the dilemma of student retention in light of the high skill demands of the post Covid-19 labour market.
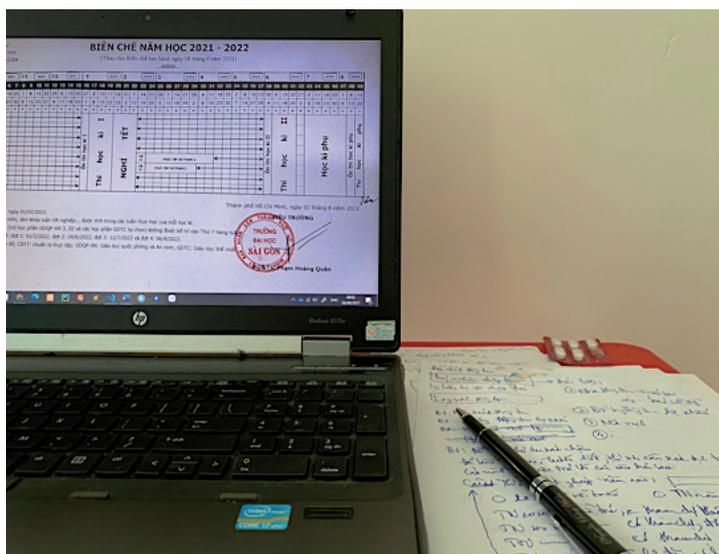


**Figure 2: Reality Versus Virtual World**

**A:** B, when you mentioned your responsibility for the elderly lecturer incident, I could feel your anxiety in making this tough decision. It is a conflict of heart and mind to choose between a younger lecturer with technology literacy and a "grandpa" lecturer with lifelong contributions. A recent survey states that most senior academics face significant challenges with online teaching tools (Saminathan & Hemalatha, 2021). In my college this year, opportunities have been offered for those willing to bridge gaps in their knowledge, while the rest will be left behind. I chatted with a middle-aged lecturer who has no classes this semester because of his unpreparedness for online teaching. He claims that teaching and sharing stories with students used to be his main source of joy, which he truly misses.

**F:** My lecturers also experienced difficulties, as mentioned earlier, in online teaching implementation. They were compelled to adopt emergency, remote education without specific instructions. Developing effective online-learning systems is no small feat and such a complex task requires commensurate resources such as guidelines, at minimum, and, ideally, support from experts for the training of lecturers (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020). A shortage of staff and shortened timelines were obvious hindrances to implementation in the local context. Guidelines should indeed be provided because virtual learning is the only way to keep studying while Covid-19 is still worrisome.

**D:** Those terms ("short-time," "no time," "unprepared") are indicators of the Vietnamese government's strategy in response to Covid-19: urgent, thorough, and unquestioning. The context is that B's university is located in Ho Chi Minh city – a complicated demographic background (large population, diverse backgrounds, congested transportation). In very few days or weeks, Vietnamese educators suddenly had to switch to full-time, online teaching when most followed traditional face-to-face methods. Current Vietnamese policy changes share similar traits with China, like national unison, health safety protocols, online management (Xue et al., 2020). Yet, technical and mental health support is not provided in national unity.

**E:** I agree with C that B's story gave me a more thorough insight into the education and training department in this turbulent time. Onyema et al. (2020) has shown that educational administrators suffer higher consequences than both teachers and students. On the one hand, they have to quickly change teaching methods. On the other hand, suitable methods to ensure quality need to be found. We all know that it is necessary to develop a separate curriculum and assessment for students who are forced to study online, but we don't know how to do it. That's the big question.

*Discussion summary*

In the final circle alluded to, the writers' views engage two distinct ideas: the unpreparedness of Vietnamese educators (through the education management lens) and the inclination to maintain teaching quality. Online teaching in Vietnam during the Covid-19 pandemic is beyond everyone's realm of possibilities. The immediacy of school closures has reshaped established curricula into strange new forms, despite the

capacity constraints of some countries lending themselves to schools with limited access to technologies that might not be ready for the complete implementation of countrywide online education (Sintema, 2020). In this process, lecturers, students, and the training management system of the school all face many difficulties – unprecedented dropout rates, unemployment, lack of time and manpower, etc. – resulting in frustrations and dissatisfaction. The words of Helen Keller are more profound than ever: "The highest result of education is tolerance" (Statham, 2003).

**Learning motivation**

**C:** I truly feel that elderly teachers are not equipped with the technology skills to fully transition to online teaching. I had an experience with a 60-year-old teacher who sent digital lectures and weekly homework assignments instead of teaching online. Merely doing such exercises made me depressed because all connections to the lecturer and classmates were lost. Like other students, my interests and meticulousness for the subject gradually decreased compared to the beginning of the semester. Later, the class supervisor contacted him and asked him to teach online using the Zoom application, and he agreed with the monitor's proposal to support him with everything. At the end of the semester, the lecturer confessed to getting tired of virtual teaching because when he asked a question, no one answered or had to wait a few minutes for the students to turn on the microphone. He also felt disconnected from his students.

**F:** I also relate to parts of C's stories. I had seen one lecturer who needed to take 10 minutes just to find out how to read students' questions on the box chat. Sometimes, due to the internet connection, we were forced to rejoin the class many times. This frustrated our lecturer. Well, it seems that virtual learning hindered our lecturer's inspiration for teaching, but most of them still try to overcome these obstacles (Coman et al., 2020). One of the best reasons for this effort is that we also had memorable moments when taking virtual lessons. Online classes enabled us to greet everyone warmly or enjoy a music video together, which was limited in a traditional classroom. Moreover, virtual learning made it easier to express ideas without being scared (Loades et al., 2020).

**E:** Online learning will also have some benefits, as shared by F and C, especially for those afraid of face-to-face communication like me. But things took a turn for the worse when I finished all the credits and just focused on writing my thesis. I was lost in the mess of the thesis, disoriented but could not find anyone to share it with during the nationwide lock-down. That dissipated my desire to study. The only person with me through the most difficult period in the middle of the epidemic is my cat named "Mai" (Figure 3). I realize that in the current pandemic situation, besides the health sector, countries need to pay more attention to the education sector which is also being severely affected. As UNESCO (2021) stated during its ministerial meeting, education should be a priority for countries in times of pandemics, especially for vulnerable and disadvantaged communities.

**Figure 3: My Feline Friend "Mai"**

**A:** To migrate to an online teaching environment, a lecturer has to get to grips with an online system that is developing, as B mentions, and sufficient training from experts has to be forthcoming, as F mentions. When compared with conventional teaching, online teaching is around twice as time-consuming to prepare and deliver (Kebritchi et al., 2017). Moreover, looking at the black screen (Figure 4) and hopelessly waiting for students' responses demotivated me, as D experienced in her classes. E's story reminds me that students, especially vulnerable and marginalized communities such as my 9+ students, might be experiencing hardship due to the significant impact of the pandemic on their family finances, physical health, and mental health.
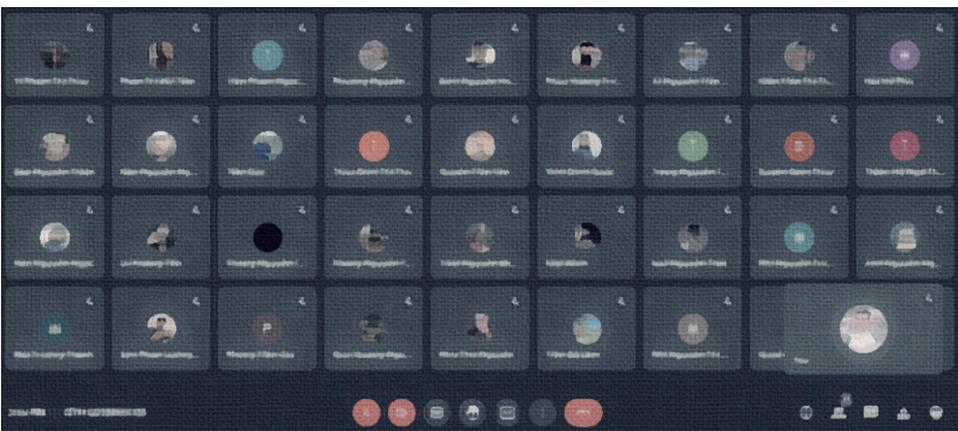


**Figure 4: Black Online Classroom**

**B:** Not every online lecturer is as lucky as C's lecturer. However, as in E and F's story, good-natured people are happy to help their lecturer with technical problems. What about the quality of online lectures? Lecturers do not know how to organise interactive activities with students in a lively way. What percentage of the online lectures that you attend are of inferior quality or far behind the face-to-face lectures? What percentage of students will sympathise with the lecturer in case the lecture is not of adequate quality? If [it were] not required, what percentage of students would voluntarily choose this mode of study? I think debating these questions illustrates the reality of online teaching in Vietnam which is that it is far from being equivalent to face-to-face teaching.

### *Discussion summary*

Students' loss of motivation and the increasingly distant teacher–student connection which the impacts of Covid-19 have given rise to represent two emerging issues from both national and global perspectives. This situation enforces the idea that the interpersonal relationship between teacher and student might strongly affect students' motivation. Other intriguing questions have been raised about the equivalence between online and face-to-face teaching in Vietnam. Without prejudice to the aforementioned matters, fond memories and positive experiences continue to be shared on virtual learning platforms, arguably leading to a less stressful and more private setting for studying to take place in.

### Conclusion

Bringing together the narrative and experiences of six Vietnamese individuals, we have built a trioethnography to discuss teaching and learning challenges in Covid-19. Through dialogues, we have come to trust each other and share information that has helped us better understand those key aspects of education which have been impacted upon since the pandemic's outbreak. We explored the ways in which online learning could encourage intrinsic motivation (Rovai et al., 2007) and prioritise intrinsic motivation to enhance students' engagement (Schiefele, 2017). Moreover, the context of the pandemic has pushed some people into the territory of the marginalised, leaving them with a sense that they have been left behind. For instance, senior lecturers who are not well prepared for online education and students studying abroad are stuck in foreign countries due to border closures. For an uninterrupted education, these lecturers, staff, and students, especially the vulnerable communities amongst them, need to receive appropriate attention from education policy-makers and community leaders. The negative emotional effects of Covid-19 quarantines are especially acute with the older or unprepared lecturers, vulnerable or sensitive students, and inexperienced training systems for organising online teaching.

Breault (2016) shows that, when composing a paper on duoethnography, authenticity and reliability are important. Therefore, for the application of trioethnography, in the beginning, we were challenged to build trust between people. But once we overcame the obstacles, we found absolute trust in each other. This has taken us beyond the intensity to consider different aspects of life, study, and research. Sharing a concern with Breault (2016) about the third voice in duo/trioethnography, we have perceived

the significance of voices. In trioethnography, voices must present individuals or subjects or ethnographers, not the other way around. This is an immense advantage as we have had the opportunity to receive more people's thoughts, representing and acknowledging the harmony of diverse interests in a single voice. Subsequently, as an important research implication, we see the possibility for future trioethnography studies to provide more varied perspectives on research to generate thick voices in the general and correspondence exchanges.

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# Of coup and pandemic: The changing meanings of schooling in Myanmar

**Liyun Wendy Choo, Ma Mya Aye**

## Abstract

In May 2021, the Myanmar junta announced that it planned to re-open public schools, which have been closed for almost a year since the pandemic hit the country. Drawing on a thematic analysis of selected English-medium news sources on the re-opening of schools in Myanmar in 2020 and 2021, we examine how the re-opening of schools has become entangled in the junta's quest for legitimacy and citizens' everyday acts of dissent. We argue that, after the February 1 coup, which saw the junta overthrowing the democratically elected government, the mundane acts of attending schools are increasingly read by supporters of the civil disobedience movement as acts of consent and endorsement of a brutal military regime rather than citizens simply exercising their right to education. We highlight the importance of an expanded understanding of politics, one that moves beyond the Big 'P' world of politicians to the small 'p' in the everyday life of citizens.

## Introduction

Schooling has always been entangled in the complex webs of ethnic, political and religious conflicts that have plagued Myanmar since independence. Different actors involved in the battle for legitimacy – including ethnic armed groups struggling for greater self-determination, pro-democracy actors resisting the military, and Buddhist nationalists attempting to "defend" Myanmar from a perceived Muslim takeover – had all drawn on schools to achieve their agenda. For instance, in 2016, Buddhist monks of the nationalist Ma Ba Tha movement opened a private high school in Yangon to teach students to "protect the race and religion" of Myanmar. Ethnic armed groups such as the Kachin Independence Organisation, the New Mon State Party and the Karen National Union all run parallel ethnic school systems in territories they control (South & Lall, 2016). In contrast to state schools where Burmese is the sole language of instruction and Myanmar history is taught as Burman conquest of ethnic minority kingdoms, these ethnic school systems engage in mother tongue-based education and stress the teaching of their ethnic identity, language, and history (Callahan, 2003; Lall & South, 2018; Salem-Gervais & Metro, 2012). These different systems of schooling socialise children into different attitudes towards the Myanmar state and thus different perceptions towards its legitimacy (Lall, 2021).

However, the limited literature on the politics of schooling in the country largely focuses on the influence of language of instruction, educational processes, curriculum,

and types of education providers on the construction of Myanmar citizens (for example, see Lall, 2021; Lall & South, 2018; Callahan, 2003; Salem-Gervais & Metro, 2012; South & Lall, 2016). While informative about how education can be a weapon in the struggle for hegemony and the school a vital agency in the process of state formation, these studies tend to portray citizens as conformist, passive recipients of top-down messages caught in the battles for legitimacy between different state and nonstate actors rather than active participants in the political life of the country. Indeed, citizenship surveys that were carried out under the democratically elected National League of Democracy (NLD) government also tended to report Myanmar citizens as uninterested in politics (People's Alliance for Credible Elections (PACE), 2018, 2019; The Asia Foundation, 2014), with little interest in following political news (Welsh & Huang, 2016).

However, Myanmar citizens, especially in its young people's responses to the re-opening of schools during the pandemic and after the 1 February coup, challenge these (mis)representations. On February 1, 2021, the junta deposed the newly re-elected NLD government and placed around 400 members of parliament, including State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and President U Win Myint, under house arrest. Its proxy party, the Union Solidarity and Development Part (USDP), had lost overwhelmingly at the 2020 general elections. Many members of the public took to the streets to challenge the legitimacy of the junta in the growing civil disobedience movement (CDM). Public employees, such as teachers, doctors and nurses, refused to report for work, while students refused to return to schools. Millions of civilians refused to pay taxes and boycotted military-related businesses and their products.

This paper reads the junta's attempt to re-open public schools and the refusal of parents, students, and teachers to return to schools in the context of Myanmar's political crisis. We draw on thematic analysis to analyze the English-medium state media reports and showcase how the junta laid out its school re-opening plans and framed its opponents (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). After contrasting independent news media's representation of the event with that of the state media, we argue that the junta sought to capitalize on the re-opening of schools to demonstrate public acquiescence to its political authority and thus enhance its legitimacy. Additionally, we track the shift in discourses, understood in this paper as written or spoken communication, to explore the experiences and attitudes, among Myanmar students, teachers, and parents surrounding the return to schools in 2020 and 2021 to make the argument that the mundane act of attending schools has taken on new political meanings for citizens after the coup. After the February 1 coup, the acts of parents sending their children to public schools, children attending schools and even teachers reporting to work at schools were increasingly read by supporters of the civil disobedience movement as acts of consent and endorsement of a brutal military regime rather than citizens simply exercising their right to education.

**Conceptual framework: state legitimacy in turbulent times**

State legitimacy is highly contested in Myanmar (Steinberg, 2007). The country has been plagued by a variety of ethnic, political, and religious subjects challenging the regime's moral right to rule over them since independence. Although these challenges to state

power are interrelated, this paper focuses on pro-democracy movements resisting the junta's oppressive practices. Myanmar was a representative parliamentary democracy from 1948 to 1962, when a military coup replaced the civilian regime with a socialist military dictatorship under Ne Win (Charney, 2009; Steinberg, 2013). Economic failures and political repression under the Ne Win regime contributed to widespread dissent and a popular uprising known as the 1988 People's Revolution, but another military coup deposed the previous military regime. The new military regime quelled the demonstrations and re-instated its control over the state. Though it promised to hold multiparty elections, when NLD won the elections in the 1990 general election, the junta refused to transfer power. In 2008, the military promulgated its "roadmap to democracy" with a new constitution that reserved a quarter of the seats in the country's new bicameral parliament for military appointees. By 2011, a sort of hybrid governance arrangement that saw civilian and military appointees sharing power, and greater political and economic liberalization had been put in place. However, in 2021, the junta went against this hybrid governance and overthrew the NLD government with which it had been sharing power.

Although legitimacy has many dimensions (Levitov, 2016; White, 2005). This paper understands state legitimacy as the moral right of a regime to rule over those it claims the authority to govern and entails obligations on the part of subjects to obey the law it sets (Levitov, 2016). A state only enjoys the moral right to rule if *only if* it is widely believed to enjoy such a right. Alagappa (cited in Steinberg, 2007) points out four critical criteria for legitimacy: ascension to power through established norms; adherence to established norms of governance; appropriate levels of performance in providing goods and services to the population and the assent of the governed. How the regime ascended to power, its governance behaviour, and its ability to provide public goods and services affect public perceptions of its rightfulness and, in turn, the assent of the governed. When a regime is legitimate and deemed to be rightful, its subjects support and acquiesce to its rule willingly, not through fear or favour.

However, different regimes may have different understandings of their moral right to rule over their subjects. While democratic regimes tend to see free and fair elections as constituting the assent of the governed and a mandate to govern, the various Myanmar military regimes in power since 1962 claim the ability to preserve national unity, albeit through force, as the basis of legitimacy. After the democratic challenge in 1988, the junta increasingly attempted to win the hearts and minds of its subjects through "Myanmafication", a cultural assimilationist project where the cultural practices and norms of the dominant ethnic group, the Burmans, are imposed on ethnic minorities to create a unitary national identity (Callahan, 2003; Houtman, 1999). The junta saw national disunity as the reason for the 1988 People's Revolution and sought to use Myanmafication to de-legitimize "foreign" influences such as ideas about democracy and democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi (whose husband was British) and to re-invent Burma as a historically "unified" and patriotic nation (Callahan, 2003; Houtman, 1999; Steinberg, 2007).

Despite their efforts, the legitimacy of the military regime remains contested. In June 1989, the military government decreed an Adaptation of Expressions Law, which

regulated what non-Burmese speakers would call the country and its public institutions. It dictated that Burma be referred to as Myanmar (in English). The junta claimed that the new term would make its ethnic minority citizens feel more included in the nation but in fact, both "Myanmar" and "Burma" are strongly associated with the Burmese language, the mother tongue of the Burman majority (Callahan, 2003). Opponents of the junta such as the NLD and external actors that supported the democracy activists, such as the UK, initially continued to call the country Burma to signal the illegitimacy of this unilateral act. Even though more than 20 years has passed, the name change continues to be disputed, as my interview with an ethnic minority youth in 2017 revealed:

> In the past, the country's name was Burma then they [referring to the military government] changed it to Myanmar, so in our mind, it is not a unity name. Our community doesn't want to accept that name. (Interview with a Mon youth, 2017)

For the participant, the name change was enacted without the consent of the people and is symbolic of the military regime's "naked assertions of the supremacy of the ethnic-majority Burmans with respect to the country's minorities" (Callahan, 2003, p. 170). Refusing to use the junta-preferred term was his way of denying the regime of its political legitimacy – the assertion that the ruling regime has the moral right to rule and be obeyed by its subjects (Cotterrell, 1995).

This example illustrates the fact that legitimacy requires subjects' acknowledgement of a regime's moral right to rule. Subjects express their recognition of the regime's right to hold political authority and their acceptance of the decisions that result through acts of consent, defined as "those positive actions which express society's willingness to be obligated or compelled to perform certain duties as members of the state" (Gilley, 2005, p. 34), such as tax payments, voter registration, and popular mobilization. Croissant (2013) argued that prompt public acquiescence to the new authorities after the rapid and illegal seizure of a government is critical to a military coup. In the case of Myanmar, the incumbent NLD government had strong regime legitimacy prior to the military coup, having won a clear landslide victory in the 2020 national elections. In contrast, the preceding military regimes in Myanmar have poor records of human rights violation, oppression, and atrocities against its citizens, especially in the ethnic minority regions. After the February coup, instead of prompt acquiescence to the new authorities, the military regime was slapped with a civil disobedience movement, widespread protests across the country and contestation of its legitimacy from the National Unity Government (NUG), a parallel government formed by elected NLD members of parliament. Amidst the pandemic, civil disobedience movement and a legitimation crisis, the junta re-opened schools on June 1, 2021.

In the next section, we describe the data sources and the analytical process undertaken to understand the political significance that the pandemic and legitimation crisis placed on school re-opening in Myanmar.

## Methodology

This study sought to understand the meanings the junta and Myanmar citizens attributed to the re-opening of schools in June 2021 and draws on electronic newspapers as the main source of data. Although newspapers can be one-sided, they typically include accurate dates and detailed summaries of certain events. Their biases can even be useful sources for finding out particular groups' reactions, opinions, and the prevailing attitudes around the time of an event (Lowry, 2018). In selecting which newspapers to use, we considered several factors, such as the credibility of the information in relation to the attitudes of the selected groups and whether the agency, topic, location, popularity and language of the news media met our research needs.

To provide contrasting views of the same event, we examined news articles from the junta-controlled state media, the Global New Light of Myanmar (GNLM), and internationally recognized independent media such as Radio Free Asia (RFA). GNLM is one of the few Myanmar-based, English-medium news sources that is still active and updated daily. It reflects the current military regime's voices. We were more cautious in selecting independent, English-medium news sources that might help us understand prevailing sentiments from the ground and cross-checked people's voices in these sources with each other. We drew on international, English-medium sources to represent the views of Myanmar citizens, many of whom are CDM supporters, because tight censorship and the threat of political punishment have led many prominent English-medium, Myanmar-based news agency, such as *The Myanmar Times*, to suspend their services. Our reliance on English-medium news articles is a limitation, though the second author ensured that the selected articles sufficiently reflected the prevailing sentiments among Myanmar citizens.

In order to retrieve relevant articles, we typed in key words such as "schools ordered to reopen 2021 Myanmar" in Google. "Covid-19", "the pandemic", "schools", "reopen", "remain closed", "military coup", "before", "after", "2020", "2021" and "Myanmar". We kept a list of possible relevant articles in an Excel sheet, along with the date of publication and name of the news agency. Then, we carefully made our final selection by scanning the initially chosen articles to identify if they contained useful supporting content and quotes that could represent the voices of the junta and voices of Myanmar citizens. After filing the selected news sources, we approached the data using thematic analysis to observe "the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). We chose thematic analysis because it is atheoretical and our research interest is not primarily oriented to the effects of language (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Thematic analysis better supported our focus on the macro patterns of meaning than the micro details of language practice common in discourse analysis and offered stronger practical guidance in terms of procedures (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

We read through the selected articles carefully to collect relevant information, such as direct quotes, facts and/or figures from each source. Reading was repeated where necessary to make sure that important data were not missed. Then, we re-examined the collected data and developed codes to group related data and discussed the potential themes. To support our analysis of what the re-opening of schools might mean to the

junta, we examined GNLM's reporting of actions taken by the junta to re-open schools during the pandemic and the state media's representation of public attitudes towards the event. Then, we drew on reports from independent media to compare public attitudes towards the re-opening of schools under the former NLD government in 2020 and under the current military regime in 2021 to examine the discursive shifts that have taken place. In the next section, we draw on the notion of acts of consent to interpret the findings.

### What the re-opening of schools in June 2021 meant to the junta

GNLM's reporting of actions taken by the junta to re-open schools during the pandemic suggests that the coup-plotters saw the re-opening of schools in June 2021 as an opportunity to exhibit their adherence to established norms of governance and to gain, if not strengthen, performance legitimacy.

The military regime began planning for the re-opening of schools slightly more than a month after their usurpation of power (GNLM, 2021a). The GNLM reported a school inspection tour by the Union Minister for Education where he urged staff "to work together to complete the teaching and management arrangements for the opening of basic education schools within the stipulated time" (GNLM, 2021a). A month later, the military regime announced plans to re-open schools for the 2021–-2022 academic year, noting that "CDM activity is a country-destroying movement" and the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), which comprised elected members of parliament who won the 2020 elections but were ousted in the February 1 coup, is "an unlawful association" (MNA, 2021a). Thereafter, state media reports on the re-opening of schools focused on the regime's preparation for the event and condemnations of alleged attacks by CDM supporters on public schools. Several reports highlighted high-level coordination meetings between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health and Sports to facilitate the safe re-opening of schools amidst the pandemic (MNA, 2021b) and effective actions the junta took to protect citizens' right to education and health. State media also took pains to emphasise that the regime would be providing "textbooks, one dozen note books, and four pencils each" to all students, as well as "two reusable masks and one face shield each" to all students and teachers (MNA, 2021c). GNLM reported that during enrolment week:

> [L]ocal authorities and dutiful people perform security measures for schools and students. Stationery, school textbooks and notebooks, as well as COVID-19 protective equipment, were presented to students. Service members of the local medical battalion sprayed for disinfection at the school buildings used as quarantine centres in providing treatment to COVID-19 patients. (MNA, 2021f)

Thus, the picture that state media painted of the military regime is that of a responsible government doing its utmost to provide good governance, as well as public goods, and services to its citizens, including health, education and security. In contrast, CDM supporters were presented as saboteurs of public interest. GNLM reports highlighted "acts of sabotage such as bomb attacks at education offices, basic education

high schools and universities that are preparing to provide annual education" (MNA, 2021d) and warned parents and students against potential "harassment by fraudsters" (MNA, 2021e). The junta accused CDM supporters as being responsible for "a total of 18 arson attacks, 115 times of bombings and attempted bombings" (GNLM, 2021b) at state schools and universities across the country the month before schools were scheduled to re-open. A press release from the military regime described CDM supporters as terrorists disrupting Myanmar children's right to safe and quality education, which the junta was trying to facilitate:

> *Preparations are underway in order to ensure students can study safely, distribute free textbooks, teaching aids and masks, face shields to protect COVID-19, and install handwashing facilities at schools. However, politically extreme terrorist groups, who wish to destroy national interests, instigate teachers and education staff to join CDM and threaten, with death, those who do not do so. Innocent young students are forced to drop out of school...they are becoming more and more like extremist terrorist organizations in order to destroy the educational aspirations of future youths. (GNLM, 2021b)*

This juxtaposition of the junta's efforts to support the safe re-opening of schools with the CDM supporters' alleged acts of disruption is clearly an attempt to de-legitimise the civil disobedience movement. It suggests that acts of disobedience by teachers who refused to return to work and by students who refused to return to school are the results of external threats and instigation, rather than voluntary actions which express their unwillingness to recognise the junta as a legitimate government. Rather than mere citizens challenging the junta's moral authority to rule over them, CDM supporters were labelled as "politically extreme terrorist groups" whose actions "destroy national interests" and "the educational aspirations of future youths" (GNLM, 2021a).

Khemani (2020) noted that Covid-19 conferred what he calls a "legitimacy windfall" on governments in many developing countries, because citizens share a widespread belief that most people are complying with public health regulations. These beliefs about how others are behaving in a particular game of life, society, or politics can confer legitimacy on the government and the rules it sets, even if citizens do not trust the regime. Pandemics thus provide governments with an opportunity for reputation management and have symbolic connotations (Christensen & Ma, 2021). Indeed, the Myanmar coup plotters seemed to be capitalising on the re-opening of schools after a year-long closure and parents' strong desire for their children to be educated to showcase their governance ability and create the impression that citizens assent to military governance.

The junta's attempt to benefit from the legitimacy windfall becomes more apparent when we look at GNLM reports on "public" responses to school re-opening in June 2021, which emphasized citizens' acts of consent to the junta's political authority and satisfaction with its performance. The reports highlighted high attendance and enrolment rates at schools (GNLM, 2021d, 2021f), as well as well-trained and prepared teachers (GNLM, 2021c, 2021f), which signalled citizens' willingness to return to normalcy and accept the new regime as the legitimate political authority. The reports also portrayed the

nationwide re-opening of schools as well-received by the public and highlighted satisfied students and parents (GNLM, 2021c; MNA, 2021g), the safe learning environment the junta provided (GNLM, 2021c, 2021f) as well as happy children attending schools (GNLM, 2021e). Citizens' evaluations of the junta's performance were conveyed in the form of interview quotes from students and parents, expressing their direct and indirect satisfaction with its performance. For instance:

> *I am so happy when I meet my friends at school as we haven't met for more than one year. (Student cited in MNA, 2021g)*

> *I don't let anything affect my daughter's education. Being a student's parent, I want my child to become an educated person. Education is the key. (Parent cited in MNA, 2021g)*

> *I am so happy that schools reopen, and I feel safe for children to see that reopening is being systematically implemented in line with the COVID-19 prevention and control system. (Parent cited in GNLM, 2021c)*

> *Myanmar Police Force is also providing security around the school. (Parent cited in GNLM, 2021c)*

These "public" evaluations of the junta's performance in the GNLM reports suggested that Myanmar citizens supported and endorsed the coup-plotters, who provided security, safety, and education. At the same time, the interview quotes also contained subtle subtexts, which insinuated that CDM supporters who did not enrol their children for the new academic year were bad parents denying children of their happiness, right to education and a good future. These "public" voices thus put moral pressure on Myanmar parents to return their children to "normal" school life, as though nothing has changed after the coup. What all these pieces of evidence suggest is that the military saw the re-opening of schools as crucial to their legitimation and thus, put in much effort to ensure its success, such as offering free bus services for primary school children (GNLM, 2021g), deploying soldiers around school facilities and buses to maintain security and order, and offering a temporary ceasefire with ethnic armed organisations from June 1–30 so that students can return to schools safely.

Safety and security of the children from Covid-19 and armed conflicts were some of the key reasons why parents and families kept their children at home in the Yangon, Mandalay and Sagaing regions and in Chin and Kayah (Karenni) states. However, another factor was the new political meanings that public schools had taken after the military coup of February 1, 2021. In line with the civil disobedience movement, protestors had encouraged citizens around the country to support the campaign against school enrolment and to boycott the junta's education system. For CDM supporters, the annual, mundane routine of starting the new school year now offered a public and visible opportunity for citizens to deny the junta of the legitimacy they seek.

In the next section, we present independent news media reports on public responses to the re-opening of schools in Myanmar in 2021 and contrast these reports with what

was presented in GNLM and what was reported by independent news media when schools re-opened in 2020 under the NLD regime to illustrate the contradictions and discursive shifts that have taken place.

**What the re-opening of schools in June 2021 meant to Myanmar citizens**

While state media reported positive attendance figures and public responses towards the re-opening of schools in June 2021, independent media reported contradictory information and voices. For instance, *Myanmar Now* (2021) reported that "many schools opened to empty classrooms on the first day of the academic year" and "only 10 percent of the country's estimated 900,000 students opted to enrol". It also reported that some enrolled students did not appear in class due to safety concerns. RFA (2021b) quoted a teacher who reported that "only one or two students" appeared to have enrolled at some schools and "a few dozen" at others in Yangon, the country's largest commercial capital. *The Irrawaddy* (2021b) reported that "more than 90 percent of students didn't turn up to attend classes despite the junta's calls for full classrooms". Overall, these reports from independent news media challenged the high attendance and enrolment rates GNLM reported.

Additionally, in contrast to the positive "public" evaluation of the junta's performance, interview quotes reported in independent news media suggested that students were reluctant to attend public schools in June 2021 and saw attendance as political endorsement of a brutal and illegitimate military regime. For example, The Irrawaddy (2021a) reported a student noting that "we will go to school only when Grandma Suu [State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi who was put under detention at the time of the Feb. 1 coup] is released". Another student questioned the morality of attending schools managed by a military regime that had killed many of its own citizens: "we don't want to go to schools opened by the military government which killed students and hundreds of people" (*The Irrawaddy*, 2021b). Instead of the secure and joyful learning environment GNLM suggested that the military provided, *The Irrawaddy* (2021b) reported a parent expressing her concerns about how children might be treated behind the closed doors of schools:

> *Even for us, we are anxious about potential violence when we go outside as the regime forces continue brutal actions against civilians. How could we send our child to a place where we couldn't see if anything happened to them?*

Teachers too questioned what students can learn from an education system managed by a military regime. A teacher RFA (2021a) interviewed asked, "[the military leaders are] doing what they want to do as in authoritarian countries. They only care about holding onto power but nothing else. Can the students going get a real education like this?" Like the students, some teachers also read the re-opening of schools in June 2021 as a political manoeuvre to showcase people's acquiescence to the new authorities through school attendance. For example, a teacher quoted in *The Irrawaddy* (2021a) posited that "the reopening of the schools is just to show the country is well under the control of the military rather than concern for disrupted education".

Such scepticism towards the junta's sudden interest in Myanmar people's education is not unfounded. Historically, the military regimes that had been in power in Myanmar have never regarded public education highly. In fact, only 1.3% of the national budget was allocated to education prior to 2011 (Tanaka & Myat Myat Khine, 2020). Even though the education budget increased after Thein Sein took office in 2011, the proportion of education budget in relation to the national budget remains one of the lowest in Southeast Asia. Additionally, many scholars and Myanmar citizens argue that the preceding military regimes had deliberately allowed the quality of public education to deteriorate over time to prevent political opposition from educated students (Tanaka & Myat Myat Khine, 2020). Yet, barely a month into the coup, the junta had seemed particularly keen to have children return to schools and went to great lengths to encourage its citizens to do so.

The discourses among students, teachers and parents around the return to schools in June 2021 also seemed to have shifted when compared to 2020. Myanmar had its first community outbreak of Covid-19 reported in early 2020. The former NLD government had to revise school re-opening plans for the upcoming 2020–2021 academic year. At that time, discourses among key education stakeholders revolved around safety measures related to the pandemic and the efficacy of online learning vis-à-vis face-to-face learning. For instance,

> It is impossible to keep kindergarten students apart in a classroom. They are playful and it will be more difficult to control them if they are kept apart. They only care to play and don't know about infection. It is impossible to keep the students from kindergarten through first grade levels apart. (Primary school teacher cited in Thiha Lwin, 2020)

> I would prefer online teaching more than [normal classes]. The middle schools could be reopened by August. I hope infection rates go down by then. (Parent cited in Ye Mon, 2020)

> It's not that I don't like online learning; I just prefer the traditional methods. (Student cited in Ye Mon, 2020)

> The students have many years ahead for studying. Taking precautions against the virus is much more important for all of us. (Parent cited in Zaw Naing Oo, 2020)

In 2021, such concerns about the pandemic and the efficacy of online learning had disappeared from education stakeholders' discourses on the re-opening of schools, even as the pandemic continued to ravage the country. Rather, their discourses focused on children's safety in relation to the military's brutality and the value of learning under such a regime. We argue that this is because after the February 1 coup, the mundane acts of parents sending their children to public schools, children attending schools and even teachers reporting to work at schools were now read as acts of consent and political endorsement of a brutal military regime rather than citizens simply exercising their right to quality education and a safe learning and work environment.

**Conclusion**

This paper highlights the complexities of schooling during turbulent times and reminds educationalists that schooling is often entangled in larger power struggles. In times of political crises, it is not just the curriculum, language of instruction, educational processes, or the types of schools (i.e., private, or public) one chooses to attend that is political (Giroux & Purpel, 1983), but even the very act of attending schools. The pandemic has made the mundane routine of starting the new school year more onerous in many countries around the world, but in Myanmar, the re-opening of schools in June 2021 has taken on added political significance. Often, seemingly similar, mundane actions that take place all around the world, such as the schools re-opening for the new academic year, can be invested with very different meanings. These meanings can only be better understood when read in relation to the shifts in large socio-political contexts. In the case of Myanmar, for the junta, the re-opening of schools during the pandemic offered the opportunity to showcase its governance ability and create the impression that Myanmar citizens assent to its rule, thus allowing it to reap a legitimacy windfall. For many CDM supporters, the event provided a public and visible opportunity for people to deny the military of the very legitimacy it seeks.

Unfortunately, their everyday act of dissent after the coup comes at a very high price. For many Myanmar citizens who cannot afford private education but are reluctant to endorse the military's "slave education system" (Frontier Myanmar, 2021a), discussions about the tradeoffs between online and face-to-face learning and social distancing measures in schools that are common during the pandemic have become a luxury. And for those Myanmar citizens caught between the fault lines of the junta and CDM supporters, the choice between going and not going to school is not merely a political decision; it is highly consequential, even fatal. A teacher pointed out that "[b]oth sides are just as dangerous" (Frontier Myanmar, 2021b). She feared arrest by the junta if she joined the CDM and retribution by radical CDM supporters if she went to work. Her concerns are not unfounded. A primary school assistant teacher and principal were stabbed in Pantanaw Township, possibly by radical CDM supporters (Frontier Myanmar, 2021b).

Overall, this examination of the politics of schooling in Myanmar in these turbulent times contributes to reflection on the value of everyday citizenship (Wood, 2016). It highlights how attempts to understand democratic citizenship in Myanmar through engagement with formal notions of rights and civic knowledge miss the point and misrepresent Myanmar citizens as passive and apolitical. This paper demonstrates that Myanmar citizens are active participants in the political life of the country, even if they express little interest in following political news and claim to be disinterested in politics. Myanmar citizens are in fact, very political when we seek to understand their actions with an expanded understanding of politics, one that moves beyond the formal, Big 'P' world of politicians to the informal, small 'p' everyday life of citizens.

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# Beyond the pandemic: Classroom dialogues about citizenship in turbulent times

**Marta Estellés, Moema Gregorzewski, Peter O'Connor, Holly Bodman**

## Beyond a health crisis

Pre-existing social fault lines such as poverty, racism and sexism that underpin the inequalities of New Zealand society were exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. This worsening of social inequalities has fuelled criticism and protests across the globe (Pleyers, 2020; Wang et al., 2020), highlighting the complex nature of the Covid-19 crisis, which is not only confined to health matters. For many, the impact of these turbulent times has gone beyond lockdowns, masks and social distancing restrictions. It has also been an opportunity to make sense of converging crises and to raise social awareness and resistance (Doornbos, 2020; Estellés et al., 2022). However, these expressions of citizenship and the role played by educators in such experiences have rarely been part of the educational debates arising from Covid-19. They have mostly centred on school closures and digital learning (UNESCO, 2020a, 2020b; Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). The ways in which educators have dealt with the social fractures and unrest revealed by Covid-19 remain largely unknown.

In this article, we present a case study of teachers and students engaging in difficult conversations about racism during the Covid-19 pandemic. The case study is part of a larger research project on how schools and young people dealt with the Covid-19 crisis in Aotearoa New Zealand (see Mutch & Estellés, 2021; O'Connor & Estellés, 2021a, 2021b). The case provides an opportunity to reflect upon the complexities of dealing with *troubled knowledges* in turbulent times and the potentiality of using pedagogies of discomfort and critical empathy.

## Teaching in turbulent times

The Covid-19 pandemic and its pervasive intersection with ongoing social issues such as poverty, racism and sexism has not only generated collective feelings of uncertainty, confusion and disorder but also increasing social awareness, division and polarisation (Bieber, 2020; Mason, 2021; Mutch & Estellés, 2021; Wang et al., 2020). In educational terms, the Covid-19 crisis should not be seen as a mere disruption that can be solved through physical distancing restrictions and digital learning models (see Estellés & Fischman, 2020). In turbulent times, the affairs that are debated and disputed in social and political life always permeate school walls with young people bringing these issues into the classroom. The Covid-19 crisis is not an exception (e.g., Doornbos, 2020; O'Connor & Estellés, 2021b). An extensive body of research has widely explored the democratic potential of including controversial issues in the classroom (Avery et al.,

2013; Hess, 2009; Torney-Purta et al., 1999). As these issues evoke conflict and dissent, the option of avoiding them in the classroom is often taken by teachers of all levels (Estellés et al., 2021; Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Ho et al., 2017).

This option, however, is highly problematic because, as Davies (2014) notes, "to break up rigidities embedded in conflict and inequity, turbulence is needed" (pp. 451–452) and, therefore, dialogue in the classroom "should aim to disturb, to challenge—to create turbulence" (p. 453). Creating turbulence in the classroom, however, presents challenges, particularly in the emotional domain. When teachers expose their students to controversial debates that generate resistance and opposition, they can further consolidate binary positions (e.g., us/they, oppressor/oppressed, black/white) (Jansen, 2009; Zembylas, 2013). To avoid such combative positioning and embrace the complexity of difficult emotional knowledge, Zembylas (2013) advocates for a "pedagogy of discomfort" based on the pedagogical principle of mutual vulnerability and the values of compassion and strategic empathy. A pedagogy of discomfort invites educators and students to engage in a critical inquiry about taken-for-granted values and ideas that produce differences, recognising the deeply embedded emotional dimensions that shape these beliefs (Boler, 1999). As its name suggests, a pedagogy of discomfort highlights the need for both educators and students "to move outside of their comfort zones" (Boler & Zembylas, 2003, p. 108). The pedagogy of discomfort embraces a Foucauldian "ethic of discomfort" (Foucault, 1994) that understands discomfort as a necessary starting point for individual and collective transformation. This can be understood as the critique of deeply held assumptions that contribute to the reproduction of the dynamics of power. Research has shown the transformative possibilities of using this pedagogy in social justice, anti-racist and citizenship education (e.g., Boler, 1999, 2004; Boler & Zembylas, 2003; Cahill, 2020; Zembylas & McGlynn, 2012), although its value should not be overstated or assumed to be always transformative (Jansen, 2009; Zembylas & McGlynn, 2012).

The pedagogy of discomfort recognises that teachers and students bring into the classroom their "troubled knowledges" (Zembylas, 2013), which often provokes strong emotional reactions and, therefore, requires careful listening, emotional effort and explicit discussion of the potential harm of these knowledges (Zembylas, 2013). For Zembylas (2013), everyone should be viewed as vulnerable and portrayers of troubled knowledges and this should be at the core of a pedagogy of discomfort. The recognition of mutual vulnerability[1] has important pedagogical implications because "the denial of such vulnerability unleashes violence against others, whereas its acknowledgment creates openings for an ethical encounter with others" (p. 184). Mutual vulnerability requires an affective space that disrupts the emotional reactions elicited by troubled knowledges. Zembylas (2013) suggests the use of the pedagogical tools of compassion and strategic empathy that builds trusting relationships between teachers and students.

Several scholars from the field of arts education have explored the potentiality of arts-based and -mediated learning to create affective spaces based on compassion and trust in turbulent times. As they argue, arts-based and -mediated learning are uniquely situated to engage people in critical yet affective investigations into uncomfortable issues by provoking participation in creative explorations of fiction (Chinyowa, 2015;

Gregorzewski, 2021; O'Connor et al., 2006). Such engagement can create no penalty zones, which allow teachers and students to collaboratively test out and explore the impulses, ideas, and utterances that constitute troubled knowledges, without fearing the consequences that would ensue in real life (Heathcote, 1991). No penalty zones can also enable teachers to engage in strategic empathy, allowing them to render themselves "strategically sceptical in order to empathize with the troubled knowledge students carry with them, even when this troubled knowledge is disturbing to other students or to the teacher" (Zembylas, 2015, p. 10). This form of engagement protects students *into* emotion (Bolton, 1979), no matter how uncomfortable they may seem, rather than shielding learners from difficult, affect-laden conversations. For instance, process drama, which engages students in dramatic improvisation through provocations such as a fictional story, can engage students in moments of metaxis (or ephemeral states of double awareness), in which students consciously experience themselves concurrently occupying the roles of self and character. By reflecting on the unfolding drama and their experiences of metaxis, students explore pivotal real-world social issues (Boal, 1995). These reflections can elicit moments of *aporia* (i.e., feelings of bewildering confusion and uncomfortable but astonishing puzzlement) that provoke estranging explorations of troubled knowledges while challenging combative positionings.

In turbulent times such as post-traumatic contexts, however, therapeutic approaches introduced under concern about students' wellbeing have dominated educational debates over critical pedagogies (Eccleston & Hayes, 2009; O'Connor, 2015). The preoccupation of these approaches with the students' emotional fragility and safety usually leads to the avoidance of any discomforting learning (Zembylas, 2015). These therapeutic approaches have encouraged a "pedagogy of comfort" (Amsler, 2010) based on gratification in the name of students' safety. Warrington and Larkins (2019) have critiqued the paternalistic assumptions that underlie the discourses of child safety and the false juxtaposition between children's protection and citizenship rights that these discourses implicitly create. As they argue, this juxtaposition prevents teachers from recognising children's participation as a necessary component of protection. The tensions between children's safety and their engagement with social justice issues have also been explored by Zembylas (2015), who argued that, although a pedagogy of discomfort cannot be understood as the absence of safety, safety cannot be construed as the absence of discomfort (Zembylas, 2015). Much educational research conducted with children in post-disaster contexts have advocated for going beyond views of children as passive victims, as this portrayal contributes, among other things, to their further isolation from the realities of life (e.g., Gibbs et al., 2013, 2017; Mutch, 2013; Peek et al., 2016).

In this article, we explore one case study in a school where issues around citizenship arose during the Covid-19 pandemic and how teachers dealt with the emotional challenges associated with these issues.

**Methodology and methods**

The data reported on in this article are drawn from a larger participatory qualitative research project aimed at exploring schools and young people's experiences of Covid-19. For this project, we collaborated with teachers and students from 12 schools across

Aotearoa New Zealand in the co-construction of a detailed case study (Stake, 1995) of each school's experience. In this article, we focus on the experience of one of these schools located in a middle-class suburb in Auckland.

Underpinned by a constructivist theoretical framework (Burr, 2015), this study used a range of qualitative and open-ended methods for data collection to allow participants to construct the narratives of their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). These methods were negotiated with the participants. With the teachers, the main data-gathering method was semi-structured interviews. With the students, individual interviews, focus groups and artefact analysis of their productions were used. The questions for the interviews and focus groups were negotiated with the participants and revolved around their educational experiences during the Covid-19 lockdowns and when in-person classes resumed after school closures. The interviews and focus groups were transcribed in full and participants were asked for feedback on the transcriptions. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis of each case study and across cases by the constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2014). This process was conducted with the help of NVivo software.

Ethical considerations in this research were carefully contemplated before the fieldwork began. It was a priority for the research team that all participants understood that their participation was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time from the research project. No real names are used to ensure their anonymity. This research has the ethical approval of The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (Ref. UAHPEC 2816).

## Case study

### Background

The first community transmissions of Covid-19 in Aotearoa New Zealand occurred in March 2020, months after the initial outbreaks in other parts of the world. Aotearoa New Zealand moved quickly into strict national lockdown and as a result there were comparatively few deaths and infections. The country reopened to enjoy over a year of relatively high freedoms as the virus was essentially eliminated until the arrival of the Delta variant in August 2021 (Mutch, 2021).

A common phrase used by public health teams during the pandemic, was the Māori proverb, "He waka eke noa: we are all in the same canoe". Designed to coalesce the population behind the national elimination strategy, the proverb glosses over the fact that, within a deeply divided country, New Zealanders were certainly in the same storm, but it was experienced very differently, across ethnicity, geography, age, gender and class. In a country with the 5th highest rate of domestic violence in the OECD, high rates of childhood poverty, underfunded and under-resourced mental health services that contribute to the highest rate of youth suicide in the world (Rashbrooke, 2021), Covid-19 created waves that exacerbated the divide. People of colour were disproportionately represented in the Covid infection statistics, in large part due to their pre-existing health comorbidities; these in turn derived from issues of poverty and overcrowding (Ministry of Health, 2021). In South Auckland where Pacific peoples

and Māori make up the majority of the population, their proximity to Auckland airport, the country's largest airport, also made them more vulnerable to the disease (Ministry of Health, 2021). Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that the international spotlight on racial inequality and injustice that the Black Lives Matters protests occasioned in 2020 saw young people in Aotearoa New Zealand join those protests and draw links to their experience of Covid-19.

This case study focuses on the pedagogical experiences of two primary teachers when they returned to school after the eight-week Covid-19 lockdown in 2020. The co-educational school has a majority of Pākehā students. The teachers taught different classes at the same year level, Year 7, and collaborated to use Te Rito Toi on their return to school. Te Rito Toi is a set of arts-based educational resources developed to help primary teachers and students reconnect after school closures (O'Connor & Estellés, 2021b; van Lieshout, 2020). The teachers used the Green Children process drama written by Professor Julie Dunn, based on the story of two green children who unexpectedly turn up in a small town with their different cultural practices and religious beliefs. The drama consists of a whole-class improvisation process where the teacher and students take on roles within the story. Rather than enacting the story, they use process drama conventions including hot seating, role on the wall, writing in role, and collective mapping (Neelands & Goode, 2009) to explore the story to understand the issues at the heart of difference. Even though this drama does not explicitly mention words such as racism or discrimination, the fictions that it creates appeal to the power of metaphor to relate back to both individual and collective experiences. As these educators explained, the students were the ones making the connections with racism and, in particular, with the Black Lives Matter protests[2] that were taking place at that moment:

> It was a child in both classes, actually. So when, in the Green Children, they write the letters, they have to write a letter saying why the children should be allowed to stay [in the community] or shouldn't be allowed to stay, in both classes separately, a child said: "Actually, hang on, this is like this [racism]". So they were able to… they were reading news reports and reading, obviously, they're 11 and 12, they were watching lots about what was going on. So they were having philosophical discussions around things like racism and protest and reading all this stuff about Black Lives Matter and talking about it. So all the stuff they were hearing and talking about from Black Lives Matter, they just switched green to black. But, yeah, it came from the children, both times, which is really interesting.

As the educators explained, this connection with the Black Lives Matter movement changed the course of the lesson plan. As part of the drama process, a small group of students sympathised with the two green children founding the *Green* Lives Matter movement, while others, the majority, remained against the inclusion of the green children, scared of the changes they might introduce in the community. The teachers understood the emotional complexities of both positions, as students from both sides were passionately defending them. As one of the teachers said regarding the founders of the Green Lives Matter movement:

*I think it was at the point where there was a town meeting. And I think the Mayor or some kind of significant character in the town was speaking and a group of students who very much believed that these children should be saved, and that we should include them and that everyone was being horrible and mean. They were the only group at that point, everyone else was against the green children. They made signs to bring to the meeting and then it kind of just went from there. Yeah, they were so fired up that everyone was being so awful.*
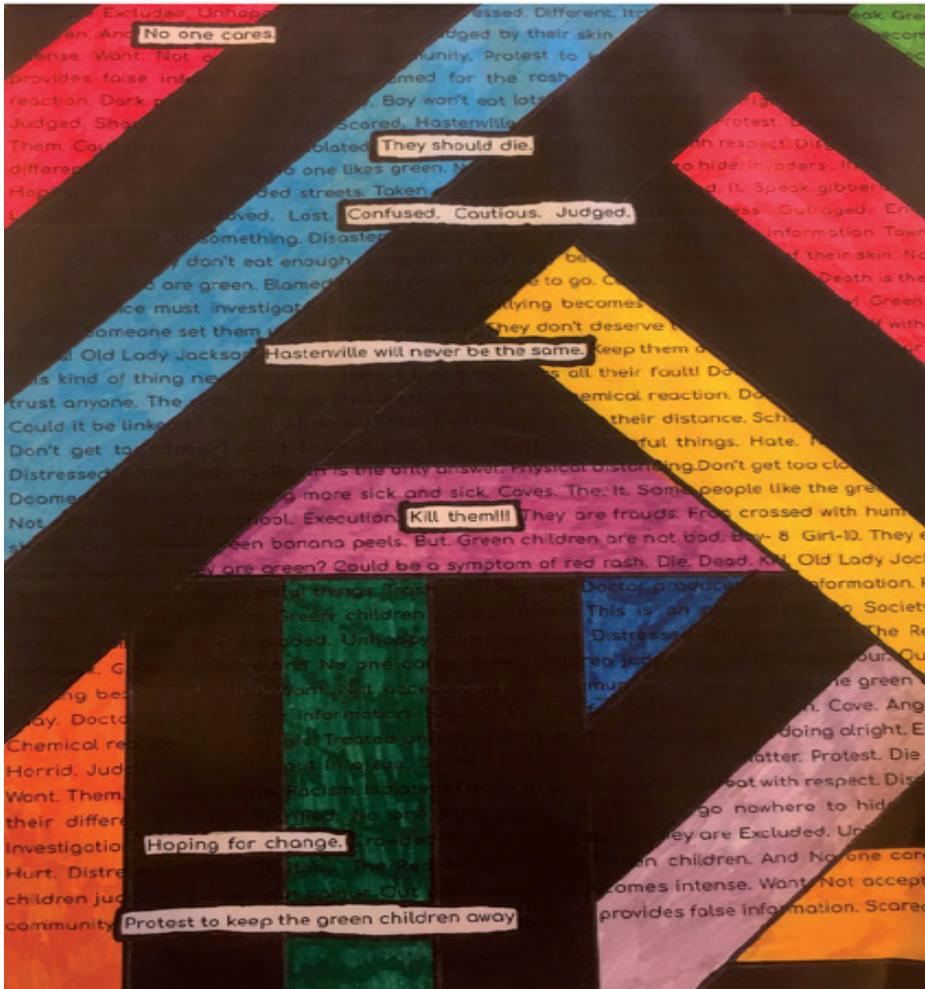


**Figure 1: Class 1 Blackout Poetry**

While this elicited rich conversations about both racism and fear of the other, the teachers were concerned about the reinforcement of combative positionings. One of the teachers proposed to the class writing down phrases used to describe the green children, both positive and negative. At the end of the drama, the teacher suggested the students

write a blackout poem out of these expressions (see Figure 1). Blackout poetry consists of redacting words from pre-existing text to create a poem. As the teacher describes, this activity confronted the students with an exercise in empathy:

> We had like a big piece of paper on the board and each time that somebody says something cruel about the green children or abused them in some way or described them nicely or whatever, we added those words to the piece of paper. By the end of the unit, we had a whole lot of different words to describe the green children and a lot of them were not very nice. So we typed all those up and did some blackout poetry. And it was so cool. Some of the poems that came out of that about it [showed] how it wasn't easy being green.



**Figure 2: Class 2 Blackout Poetry**

In the class of the other teacher, the drama played out differently with the green children accused of being the source of a pandemic and being forced to self-isolate. Evoking the phrases and expressions used by the media during Covid-19, the students collectively wrote a newspaper article reporting the arrival of the green children in the community and its connection with the spread of an infectious disease. This article represented the views of the community. As the teacher described in the interview:

> *They had to create an actual newspaper article. It was written exactly like a journalist would have written a newspaper article about the children and who was blaming who and where they were and what some families felt should be happening to the green children and what other people felt should be happening. It was like a news article and then in another piece of writing it was from the side of the green children.*

After writing the newspaper article and changing the course of the lesson plan, the teacher asked the students to write another piece from the view of the green children. This teacher also used the blackout poetry technique to encourage empathy and compassion. As seen in Figure 2, this poem powerfully reflected the feelings of despair, frustration and loneliness of the green children.

## Discussion

The process drama engaged both teachers and students in a pedagogy of discomfort as put forth by Zembylas (2013). It acknowledged that teachers and students bring into the classroom their own, or unconsciously adopted, troubled knowledges. These are understood as contested ideas about current social issues that are likely to evoke strong emotional responses, which, in turn, threaten to contribute to the creation of societal divisions. As an egalitarian ensemble of learner-educators, the teachers and children collaborated on a par with each other: the teacher provoked student learning and vice versa. This ensemble of teachers and students acknowledged their own, and each other's, troubled knowledges as worthy of free expression and critical discussion. As argued by Zembylas (2013), engagement in process drama catalysed careful listening, emotional effort in acknowledging and encountering vulnerabilities, and explicit discussion of the potential harm of troubled knowledges. It created no-penalty zones in which the teacher could engage in strategic empathy, which, in turn, catalysed children's critical empathy. A pedagogy grounded in affect, embodiment, and estrangement, process drama can transform an ethos of taboo into mutual vulnerability. The Green Children elicited moments of *aporia*, or bewildering puzzlement, that challenged combative positionings. It disrupted the potentiality of children's insistence on binary positions regarding the social issue at hand, a persistent ubiquity in everyday social discourse anchored in *us vs. them* narratives to simplify the multiple and complex dimensions at play and negate the asymmetries of power and privilege in which they are embedded.

The classroom transformed into a no-penalty zone that invited genuine encounters between diverse troubled knowledges. The no-penalty zone created by the dramatic frame of the fictional story allowed the ensemble to test out and explore impulses, ideas, and utterances without fearing the consequences that would entail in real life

(Heathcote, 1991). This no-penalty zone was simultaneously characterised by *negotiated turbulence* within the fiction and non-negotiable respect in the real world. When students expressed exclusionary rhetoric, they did so in-role towards the fictional Green Children, never as themselves towards their peers or people outside the dramatic frame. Students did not express racist anti-Black or -Chinese sentiment and rhetoric within the fiction. Yet, engagement in the drama became a series of "shared journeys in imaginary gardens, with real toads" (Booth, 1985, p. 198). These social realities clearly resonated within children's utterances in-role. Students found themselves, at times consciously, at others unconsciously, in liminal states of metaxis. In these "state[s] of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different, autonomous worlds: the image of reality and the reality of the image" (Boal, 1995, p. 43), "the fictional world overlaps or collides with lived experience" (Chinyowa, 2015, p. 170). In this way, the no-penalty zone of intermittent, immersive identification in story and critical distance to the fiction engaged the ensemble in embodied explorations of *dangerous* real-world attitudes and utterances. This focus on embodiment acknowledged the affective realm of troubled knowledges. The distance interspersed into dramatic immersion enabled teachers to provoke children to critically, yet non-judgmentally, examine the troubled knowledges from children's real-world social realities.

The fictional frame provoked the teacher to engage in strategic empathy. Zembylas (2015) defines strategic empathy as "the willingness of the teacher to make herself strategically sceptical in order to empathize with the troubled knowledge students carry with them, even when this troubled knowledge is disturbing to other students or to the teacher" (p. 10). To create a non-penalty zone of negotiated turbulence, the teacher had to allow rhetoric uttered by characters, embodied by the children, that she or other children might find disturbing. By encouraging herself to be strategically sceptical of the normalised regime of censoring safety that prescribes what is deemed politically correct enough to be uttered in the classroom, she grappled with her own vulnerability as a risk-taking teacher. Resisting the rhetoric of "risk as danger", her engagement in strategic empathy engendered the prerequisite for the ensemble's critical reflections on the dehumanising effects of exclusionary rhetoric, which finds fertile ground to grow not only in imaginary gardens, but also our very own backyards. The teachers' strategic empathy actuated students' critical empathy.

If teachers are unable to engage in strategic empathy, they cannot provoke their students to engage in sustained acts of critical empathy. Lobb (2017) suggested that, analogous to the dialogic pedagogy proposed by Freire (1970), critical empathy acknowledges, questions, and undermines existent unequal power relations that create social privilege, negative social experience (human suffering), and injustice. Critical empathy can contribute to counteracting the magnification and exacerbation of asymmetrical social relations; it alienates ideologies and rhetoric from familiarity by troubling representations and discourses taken for granted (Lobb, 2017). Critical empathy resonates with the pedagogy of discomfort as proposed by Zembylas (2013). Both concepts embrace Foucault's (1994) ethic of discomfort that understands individual and collective transformation as the critique of deeply held assumptions that contribute to the reproduction of established regimes of "truth" and unjust dynamics of power.

Critical empathy does not catalyse the estrangement described above via "discourse of communicative rationality" (Lobb, 2017, p. 602). Rather, "listening with the third ear" (p. 597) sits at its heart, understood here as the subconscious and the non-rational. It describes acts of listening to the non-verbal (non-verbalisable even), affective, and embodied communications of social suffering. Critical empathy focuses on perceiving and responding to embodied experience to throw light on the unsaid layer of human suffering. Otherwise, due to asymmetrical power relations limiting possibilities for conscientisation, expression, and debate, they "remain unarticulated as a distinct claim about injustice, even though their pathological effects may be widespread" (McNay, 2014, p. 20).

The children empathised critically in a "vertical relation" (Lobb, 2017, p. 597). They were privileged empathisers benefitting from the unequal power relation, confronted with suffering, disenfranchised, fictional Others. Yet, at several points their critical empathy worked in a manner usually at play "in a horizontal relation of solidarity between disadvantaged peers" (Lobb, 2017, p. 601), as students:

> [R]etrieve[d] the traces of moral harms that register on the level of negative affect (as suffering), but which may be blocked—as an effect of power—from being articulated or known as products of injustice by the one who suffers them. (Lobb, 2017, p. 597)

In the drama, the fictional Others had no words for their suffering. They were rendered voiceless. Representations of, and alleged truths about, them were created exclusively by those in a dominant majority position: students in role as *non-green citizens* in their fictional home country. Engaging in blackout poetry making catalysed the beginnings of critical empathy, producing "a channel for the communication of non-verbal, affective, and bodily states of distress that arise from conditions of injustice but for which the sufferer herself may have no words" (Lobb, 2017, p. 597). As an affective-imaginative inquiry, the creation of blackout poetry as part of the process drama work created, in a Derridean sense, moments of *aporia*. Literally translated as "a state of being at a loss", *aporia* is understood here as feelings of confusion and discomfort elicited by the estranging puzzlement that the deconstruction of text and the discovery of disjunctions within it evoke. By making the familiar strange, the arts-based processes involved in The Green Children refracted *ressentiments* problematically normalised within the fiction. They catalysed student awareness of how fear-generated utterances (troubled knowledges) turn into far-reaching exclusionary rhetoric and embodied *truths* felt as real sentiments (hate and disgust towards the Green Children) and, consequently, human action causing social suffering (the active exclusion of the Green Children).

The potency of participation was its resistance to stimulating analyses on individual children's internal psychologies, or even characters' psychologies, to pathologise and purportedly *fix* them. The lens of art-making did not reflect children's personal, troubled knowledges about racism but refracted their in-role utterances of exclusion previously expressed within the dramatic frame. These scatterings were no longer about individual children in role as individual characters, but the very workings of representation through language within a tight-knit fictional community, entangled in

a metastasising ideology that threatens to make critical empathy impossible. A double framing, the artistic frame of blackout poetry creation placed within the intermittently disrupted dramatic frame of the fictional story, protected the ensemble *into* emotion (Bolton, 1979) by "provid[ing] a double protection but, paradoxically, a double opening for young people to feel the issue[s]" (O'Connor et al., 2006, p. 239) at hand and, in the case of the teachers, sustain their courageous acts of strategic empathy. In the unfurling process drama, fear could be acknowledged as an integral dimension of what makes us human. Children explored the dehumanising effects that ensue if fear never meets face to face with critical empathy.

Lobb (2017) emphasises that "critical empathy is not just a process of feeling one's way into suffering or identifying with suffering in general" (p. 597). Rather, it "comes infused with a moral imperative that derives from the knowledge that this particular sample of human suffering is contingent, unnecessary" (Lobb, 2017, p. 597). Critical empathy is at play when people are willing to give up their authority as arbiters of representations, meanings, and knowledges. They acknowledge the need for, and advocate for, supporting and strengthening the agency of the Other, regarding it as the primary concern arising from the empathic relation. It is at the point of agreed loss of authority where critical empathy becomes emancipatory (Lobb, 2017). Mutual vulnerability constituted the prerequisite for emancipation. As Zembylas (2013) asserted, a pedagogy of discomfort recognises that both teachers and learners are vulnerable portrayers of troubled knowledges. The entire ensemble, including those uttering exclusionary rhetoric in-role, were accepted as vulnerable, be it scared for the national identity of their fictional home country or concerned about their fictional community's collective and individual health. By acknowledging that all human beings are vulnerable to varying degrees due to the specific locus within the existent socio-political context and power matrix in which they are currently positioned, an affective space was created that disrupted habitual, emotional reactions elicited by troubled knowledges. The process resisted discourses implying the equalisation of vulnerabilities, which assumes all humans suffer in the same way and to the same extent. Instead, it opened up a space of mutual vulnerability. Feeling heard, seen, and accepted as part of both the fictional community and the real-life whānau of the classroom, despite the troubled knowledges expressed in character, children seemed to recognise the interdependence between humans and their varying degrees of suffering when the drama came to an end. When reflecting on their blackout poetry, they recognised the impact their privileged power to signify and represent the Green Children as Other, dangerous, and inferior had on the fictional Green Children's social experience. Their power rendered the Green Children's social experience into suffering. These traces of conscientisation point to possibilities of students assuming responsibility towards their own lives and the lives of those in their real-world communities and beyond, even if it is the social responsibility to strategically empathise with people uttering exclusionary rhetoric to respectfully provoke such people to engage in critical empathy towards themselves and those they ostracise. Students discovered that the Green Children's suffering was contingent and unnecessary, and agreed to surrender their own epistemic authority. In this process of emancipation, combative positioning revealed itself not only as contingent and unnecessary, it became

the ensemble's undeniable social responsibility to overcome it.

From this case study, we might ask a series of questions. How does education serve our young people and entire societies if we pretend vulnerability, chaos, contradiction, and complexity do not exist as undeniable dimensions that penetrate every aspect of life in the turbulent times in which we live? And what roles do our current pedagogical principles play in stifling, sterilising acts of dis-membering our learning from the contexts that constrain it, and that may be transformed by it into more equitable, humanising pillars of society?

These questions point towards the urgency to build classrooms as contained, anchored places of belonging and solidarity, grounded homes that hold space for our troubled knowledges and mutual vulnerabilities; that invite us to empathise strategically and critically not only with Others but also ourselves, so we may estrange our normalised assumptions in bold acts of communal *aporia*. This article proposes that arts-based and -mediated pedagogies can build classroom cultures that dare to provoke negotiated turbulence that can protect us *into* emotion and affective engagement. Such pedagogies respond to Warrington and Larkins' (2019) call for us to recognise that children's affective participation in grappling with pivotal social issues is a prerequisite for protecting them. As Zembylas (2013) reminded us, a pedagogy of discomfort is not the absence of safety; safety is not the absence of discomfort. Only when aphasia becomes *aporia* may we push our Selves, as if we were Others, to make new, *different* sense of our realities, in the intrepid recognition that the world could be better than it is.

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**Endnotes**

1   The recognition of mutual vulnerability differs from the equalisation of vulnerability, which refers to the assumption that everyone is equally vulnerable.

2   Black Lives Matter is a social movement protesting against violence towards black people which began in 2013. The killing of George Floyd in the United States in May 2020 fueled this movement, triggering a series of protests against racism all over the world including Aotearoa New Zealand

# Poetry section 1

**Fetaui Iosefo**

## No/Know

No critical race theory taught in schools
Know critical race theory taught in schools
No cultural responsive pedagogy taught in schools
Know cultural responsive pedagogy taught in schools
No equality in education
Know equality in education
No equity in education
Know equity in education
No know
Know no!

# I can't breathe….

It has been a season of
'I can't breathe'
Wipe away our past we knew it wouldn't last…
'I can't breathe'
From season to treason
Often without reason
'I can't breathe'
Trump is dumped
I can breathe
The tyranny of covid
The harsh reality
I can't breathe.
Gasping for theory
To help reduce my weary
I can't breathe
Will research help me?
Will church help me?
Both perched from afar
Both holding a cigar
I'm left to wish on a star
Alone with my scars
'I can't breathe'

# Turbulent times – *Top heavy*

Turbulent times -Top heavy
Tumbling out of bed
Will they see me?
Will I see them?
How much of me will they see?
How much of me will I let them see?

*Turbulent times-top heavy*
*Awaiting zoom connection*
*Awaiting audio connection*
*Awaiting a face to face reunion*
*Will they see me?*
*Will I see them?*
*How much of me will they truly see?*

Turbulent times-Top heavy
Hair and face done; check
Scarf warming neck; check
Glasses on; check
Power-point ready; check
Camera; check
To background or not to background?
check

*Turbulent times -Top heavy check*
*Begin the zoom*
*No faces to connect with*
*All boxes muted*
*Black background*
*Names on screen,*
*I want to scream*
*Show me your face*
*Let me feel embraced*

Turbulent times-Top heavy
Alone with my power-point
Speaking into the abyss
They see me top heavy

*Turbulent times*
*The heart is heavy*
*Buried with envy*
*Deeper with each memory*
*Of times gone-by where covid was once denied.*
*Alas we are in turbulent times-top heavy.*

# Unusual education in turbulent times: Covid lockdowns, home educators and the unequal opening of education in Australia

**Leah Moir, Rebecca English**

## Abstract

Home educators are one of the fastest growing educational movements in Australia, and one of the most misunderstood. In this paper, we examine policies affecting the school and home education populations to see if Covid health policy mandating the closure of public life during the 2020 outbreak was borne by both groups equitably. We find, rather than equitably affecting all young people, restrictions disproportionally fell onto the home educated who experienced between 100 and 200 longer days of restrictions than their schooled peers. We argue that, for educational equity to be experienced by all students in Australia, consideration needs to be given to the home educated who are a growing cohort and may experience more vulnerabilities due to their complex needs.

## Keywords

Educational equity, home education, Covid-19, lockdowns

## Introduction

Covid was accompanied, in many countries, by lockdowns, school closures and the mothballing of many of the services young people take for granted, including sports, music, and tutoring. While much has been written about the impact of Covid on limiting young people's access to schooling through closures (Kuhfeld et al., 2020), the exacerbation of poverty in socio-economically disadvantaged communities (Hassan & Daniel, 2020), racism (Combe, 2020), childism (Adami & Dineen, 2021) and the effect on students with complex needs (Stenhoff et al., 2020), little thought has been given to the fastest growing educational community in the world, home educators (see Ray, 2021). Research did not examine how the lockdowns affected services such as sports, music, and formal and informal gatherings which are important to young people, even more so for the home educated. Studies that explored the impact of lockdowns on home education typically focused on the rush to home education as a result of school closures (e.g., Musaddiq et al., 2021).

The failure to properly understand the needs and experiences of home educators (see Krogh & Liberto, 2021) has led to major deficits in their experience. It is noted that there are many reasons to home educate, but many of these reasons are due to limited access to schooling, such as in situations where schooling is withdrawn (Crowe, 2016) or where students are truant (McIntyre-Bhatty, 2008), where students present with

complex needs (Chase, 2019; Winstanley, 2009), or where issues include racism (Fields-Smith, 2020, 2016) and sexism (Riley, 2018). The home education community faces a compounded problem in the wake of the Covid educational interruptions. Rather than being able to access "school" when they were allowed to reopen, this community relied on public mandates around community gathering. As such, home educators relied on being able to meet again when other, non-school-based activities reopened. We postulate the experience of Covid lockdowns has had a negative effect on the equitable access of the home educated to learning experiences; their needs appear to not have figured in wider conversations about the educational and mental health needs of young people during Covid. It may be that governments do not view the home educated meeting and attending public spaces as learning, however.

In this paper, we explore the impact of Covid lockdowns on the home education community. While research has looked at the increase in home educator numbers because of the Covid school closures (see Musaddiq et al., 2021), we are more interested in the impacts of the Covid shutdowns, outside of school closures, on the existing home education community. It may be that the failure to account for the needs of this community is related to their disengagement from regulatory bodies (Krogh & Liberto, 2021), and stereotypes that abound about this community (Morton, 2010). There are around 26,000 home educated students in Australia or approximately six in every thousand schooled students (English & Gribble, 2021). Therefore, failure to consider the needs of this specific community has an impact on the mental and physical health (Hoffman & Miller, 2020) of a large segment of the population. Our paper begins with a review of literature on the effect of Covid on education broadly before defining home education and specifically looking at home education in Australia. We examine the numbers of home educators and the possible reasons home education is increasing rapidly in this country. We then outline the data we collected: government policies related to education and other gatherings for young people based in two jurisdictions (the two in which the authors live), Queensland and New South Wales. Our data were generated using a timeline methodology (see Bagnoli, 2009) as a means of grounding the hand-sort (Holton & Walsh, 2017) of policies we found governing young people's movements and experiences during Covid.

As we write, New South Wales remains in a protracted lockdown that was supposed to last only a week when instituted in June while Queensland is enjoying a relatively pre-Covid existence with few restrictions outside of a hard border with most of the rest of the country and the mandated use of facemasks. The different experiences of the two authors suggests that the Covid pandemic is not yet endemic in Australia and there may still be further restrictions to come. We argue the failure of all states but, in particular, the two states in which the authors reside, to consider the needs of home educators renders home educators second-class citizens whose access to education is heavily dependent on the largess of their governments, the after-thoughts of health and education policy and the timelines they implemented to open up non-school-based educational opportunities.

We argue that, for education systems to be truly inclusive, the needs of all young people should be considered. As increasing numbers of young people are no longer accessing education in a traditional or mainstream school, their needs should be

considered more fully by governments in ways that reflect their increased percentage of the population. The failure to consider the needs of the home educated during lockdowns exacerbated their disadvantages, which are frequently multi-factorial and related to a number of educational traumas that have been experienced (English, 2021; Hartnett, 2004; Morse & Bell, 2018; Morton, 2010; Neuman & Guterman, 2017).

**Literature**

In Australia, where the researchers are based, research into the impacts of Covid on education was relegated to research on schools (e.g., Flack et al., 2020). Schools around the country closed to in-person teaching and moved online (Leask & Hooker, 2020), or relied on workbooks and phone calls (Drane et al., 2020). Citing a recent Irish report (Burke & Dempsy, 2020), Drane and colleagues (2020) argued parents were said to believe online school was inferior to in-person learning due to the educational and social challenges and changes wrought by school closures. There was a push at a policy level (Flack et al., 2020) and privately (Brown et al., 2020) to advance private tutoring as an attempt to overcome perceived disadvantages to online school. Parents were said to be stressed (Evans et al., 2020), in particular, mothers (Sweet et al., 2021), to be doing more with less time and, unlike in pre-Covid times, were afforded no down-time or breaks from their children (Evans et al., 2020; Sweet et al., 2021). These families were said to joke that they better appreciated their children's teachers (Heffernan et al., 2021) as a result of trying to help the children during the Covid school closures. It is noted, however, that a large minority of families decided to continue home educating after the period of school closures (Musaddiq et al., 2021). For some families, home education was seen as preferable to a return to school because their child had health concerns, or they found their child was experiencing academic or mental-health improvements (English & Gribble, 2021) with the absence from the classroom.

Before we begin, it is important to define what we mean by *home education*. The term was frequently misused during the pandemic (e.g., Brom et al., 2020; Roe et al., 2021) rather than the policy terms *remote learning* (Education and Training (Victorian State Government, n.d.), *learning@home* (Education (Queensland Government), 2021) or *learning from home* (New South Wales Government, 2021). We define home education as a form of private education in which a family maintains full responsibility for the provision of their child's education (see Drabsch, 2013; Jacob et al., 1991). Thus, the *home* in home education refers to the locus of responsibility (Kunzman, 2016) rather than the locus of place. Further, we use the nomenclature *home education* rather than *homeschool* because we are describing a practice in which parents and child/ren take full responsibility for education.

Home education takes place in a variety of settings using diverse ideologies, approaches, and resources (Cheng & Donnelly, 2019). This combination of characteristics allows for an extremely individualised private education, tailored to the needs of the child, and managed within an environment of potential educational experiences and opportunities. Home educators also use both the home educating and wider communities as an integral part of the child's education (Dioso-Lopez, 2021). Home educators avail themselves of many services external to the home as families including museums, libraries, national and community parks, youth groups, and other

community-based learning activities and classes (Allan & Jackson, 2010; Barratt-Peacock, 1997; Carpenter & Gann, 2016; Hanna, 2012; Johnson, 1991; Thomas, 2016). These services were interrupted during the pandemic as governments sought to shut down the community, and many did not return to normal operations until many months after their initial closure. As such, contrary to beliefs in the general community, the lockdowns and restrictions on movement disproportionately impacted home educators.

Through legislation, Australian states are required to provide access to good quality education for the compulsory school years (*Education Act 1990 (NSW) s. 4; Education Act 2004 (ACT) s. 7; Education Act 2015 (NT) s. 4; Education Act 2016 (Tas) s. 4; Education and Children's Services 2019 (SA) s. 7; Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic) pt 1.2; Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 (QLD) s. 7; School Education Act 1999 (WA) s. 3*). Further, although expressed differently, each state recognises the important role parents play in choosing an appropriate education. Parents can choose from the state's public system and an array of private education options such as religious schools, independent schools, democratic schools, distance education schools, and home education.

Home educators in Australia are heterogenous. They are ethnically diverse, ascribe to a wide variety of belief systems (Jackson & Allan, 2010), and are socio-economically diverse, although many families live on a single income while home educating (Harding, 2011; Slater et al., 2020). They live in city, urban, and rural environments (Jackson, 2009). Their reasons for choosing home education, while varied, generally stem from discontent with the school system (Mitchell, 2020; Morton, 2010; Neuman, 2019). Some deliberately choose to home educate, while *accidental* (English, 2021) home educators do so from *a posteriori* school experiences.

Home education is the fastest growing educational choice in Australia, as Figure 1 shows. These numbers imply that approximately 2,000 home-educated students graduate to further education, training, and work every year. It also highlights the size of the population affected by non-school-based health orders during Covid.

**Figure 1: Student Numbers by School Type (Affiliation) and Growth Rate**

|  | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | % change |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Government | 2,483,802 | 2,524,865 | 2,558,169 | 2,594,830 | 2,629,143 | 5.9 |
| Catholic | 767,050 | 766,870 | 765,735 | 769,719 | 778,605 | 1.5 |
| Independent | 547,374 | 557,490 | 569,930 | 584,262 | 599,226 | 9.5 |
| Registered HE | 16,939 | 18,962 | 20,690 | 21,966 | 25,983 | 53.4 |
| TOTAL | 3,815,165 | 3,868,187 | 3,914,524 | 3,970,777 | 4,032,957 | 5.7 |

**Note:** Data collected from Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021); Tasmanian Government Department of Education (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020); ACT Government Education Directorate (2021); English & Gribble (2021); New South Wales Education Standards Authority (2021); Victorian Registrations & Qualifications Authority (2021); Queensland Education Department (2020); Department of Education Western Australia (2017, 2020).

Home educated students frequently present with complex needs. Studies suggest that many families come to home education after a period of schooling (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007), where the child presents as having special education needs (SENs) (cf. Cook et al., 2013; Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Morse & Bell, 2018). Common among those studies is children who are identified as having an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) which appears to be increasingly correlated with home education choice in Australia (Slater et al., 2020). These studies suggest the reason those children leave school may be that the school does not provide the learning environment that best suits the needs of these young people (Dolan, 2017).

However, what these studies suggest is that the types of children who are being home educated are likely to be the types of children for whom lockdowns were of most concern for researchers of education (e.g., Hassan & Daniel, 2020; Stenhoff et al., 2020). However, the needs of the home educating appeared to be absent from Covid policy. It is in this space we locate our paper. Overall, we noted a distinct lack of equity in that there was significant concern for students who attend schools alongside a clear lack of discussion around the needs of a group likely to be experiencing a number of disadvantages during the pandemic. The combination of significant educational challenges (Lawson & Sibla, 2016) and the precariousness of income during lockdowns with only one parent working while the other home educates (Slater et al., 2020) reveals a group more at risk of disadvantage and inequality during an unstable and difficult time.

## Method

Our data is drawn from government statements and legislation on restrictions implemented during 2020. The data include restrictions for schools as well as gatherings for communities outside of schools in Queensland and New South Wales (NSW). We used timeline methodology (see Holton & Walsh, 2017) to visualise the impacts of policy impacting home-educated cohorts in Queensland and NSW during the Covid school and community lockdowns. While it is a method that is frequently used with interviews as a triangulation tool, we used it as a method to represent the flow of policy that closed down and then reopened the community during Covid. We posit that timeline methodology places representations of experiences in chronological order to produce a data set that can explore and examine the impact of events on communities (see Bagnoli, 2009). As such, we are using it as a means of postulating the impact of the shutdown on the home educating community. We used it as a means of considering the failure of government policy to take into account the impact these closures would have on home educators, a vulnerable cohort relying on outside services. It is an emerging methodology that can be used with marginalised communities (see Kolar et al., 2015).

This method suited our needs to research communities known to be vulnerable (Harding, 2011; Slater et al., 2020) and unable to access many services on which they rely (Allan & Jackson, 2010; Barratt-Peacock, 1997; Carpenter & Gann, 2016; Hanna, 2012; Johnson, 1991; Thomas, 2016) many of which were reopened much later than schools. We were interested in whether policies showed any evidence of considering the home-educated cohort, and, failing that, how long home educators would be without services in comparison to the schooled population. As such, we developed a timeline of the policies to see if any considered the specific needs of this community.

The coverage of these pronouncements, and the seemingly random nature of their application to the communities they were covering, had the effect of closing or removing the support services relied on by home educators including sports, music, and formal and informal gatherings (see Allan & Jackson, 2010; Barratt-Peacock, 1997; Carpenter & Gann, 2016; Hanna, 2012; Johnson, 1991; Thomas, 2016) and, even when schools were returned to normal operation, these services remained closed.

Significantly, home education was not mentioned in any policy pronouncements we were able to find. We did a hand-sort (see Holton & Walsh, 2017) to uncover the major policies and, while home education was a key term in our sort, we were unable to find any policy pronouncements related to young people in Queensland or NSW specific to home educators. In line with the hand-sorting approach, we completed our policy search on reaching saturation; we reached saturation at zero (see Holton & Walsh, 2017). We found no policies relating to the home education community. We were then driven to explore the policies that impacted young people such as those governing public and private gatherings and those governing public services (such as museums and libraries). In addition, a further data point was to collect information from the peak body representing home educators. We asked, via email, if they had any information on the policies that related to the home-education community which we may have missed and their response, that there were none, suggested we had reached saturation at zero. We posit there were no policies, outside of general policies on community gatherings, that were relevant to our study.

## Findings

### Queensland

Between mid-March and early April 2020, Queensland authorities progressively shut down all but essential services in the state. All other businesses were required to close and/or move to online services only. From 21 March, no mass gatherings were allowed, except for schools. On 26 March, schools moved to online learning (except essential workers' children). Formal out-of-school care was also allowed to continue. The first service to open after the initial shutdown period was schools. Staggered returns took place between 11–25 May. School students were locked down for approximately two months. On their return to school, students were not required to socially distance, but extra hygiene measures were required.

The home-educated student's experience was substantially different. Home-educating families were locked down from 21 March, earlier than the 26 March closure for school students. When school students returned in May, home-educating families were limited to gatherings of 10, roughly two to three families, and the places they usually met were not permitted to have group gatherings. Further, restrictions were in place on home-educating students that were not in place for school students until 3 June when they were allowed to meet in groups of up to 100 but still subject to social distancing measures not required of school students. For example, schools were allowed to continue swimming lessons and carnivals, with no limits on attendees, whereas home-educating families were classified under the community and not school, so were restricted to up to 10 people at a public pool. Additionally, libraries and museums were

restricted to the 4-square-metre-rule, impacting the numbers of home educators they could house. Restrictions returned to the home educated, but not school students, when limits on gatherings returned on 22 August, making group meetings impossible. The gathering limit was raised to 40 on 16 October, and 50 on 16 November, while school students remained at school and unrestricted. In summary, school students were restricted for 60 days compared with home educators who were restricted for 74 days (initial lockdown) plus 86 days (second restrictions were in place), a total of 160 days or 100 more days than school students.

### New South Wales (NSW)

The New South Wales (NSW) experience was more protracted due to larger outbreaks. All non-essential services were shut down between 15–30 March, including indoor and outdoor public spaces, on which home-educating families rely. On 23 March, parents were encouraged to keep their children home from school, although schools would remain open. On 14 May, parks were opened and groups of 10 were allowed to meet in these open, public places. Five visitors were allowed in homes. By 25 May, all school students returned to school as normal except for assemblies, excursions, work experience and inter-school liaisons. Further, like Queensland, students were not required to socially distance from each other, but were required to socially distance from adults in the school. On 15 June, assemblies, excursions, choirs, performing arts and external service providers returned to schools. On 7 September formals and graduations were allowed for schools, and 28 September all school sports and interschool activities were permitted. Effectively, it was business as usual.

Home-educating parents were limited to gathering in groups of 10 outdoors, or three families. Although libraries and museums opened on 29 May, groups were not allowed to attend. On 12 June, 20 people were allowed to meet publicly, and some non-contact activities in the community were allowed, limited to groups of 10. It was not until 23 October that gatherings of 30 were allowed in outdoor, public places, allowing home-educating families to gather again. In summary, school students were locked down for approximately 63 days compared to home-educating families being unable to pursue their regular learning schedules for 214 days.

The Home Education Association (HEA), the national home education advocacy group, appealed to both Queensland and NSW governments for consideration of the needs of the home-educating community. Neither government felt that any action was required, and home-educating students remained under the restrictions for households rather than restrictions that applied to school students in both states. Further, the HEA noted that home education was excluded from consultation regarding restrictions, unlike all other forms of education.

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the equitable treatment of two educational communities, schooled and home educated groups, in Australia during lockdowns in 2020. It is evident both groups experienced lockdowns differently depending on their state, but that the restrictions were applied differently to school settings from those in

the general community. The restrictions affecting the general community were harsher and more restrictive and were likely to have impacted the home educating more so than the schooled.

It is also clear that in each jurisdiction, the considerations made for school-attending students were not considered for home-educating students. It is widely acknowledged that governments felt it was safe for students to be in schools, supported by reports of children either not suffering from Covid as adversely as adults, and not spreading the illness as easily (National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance, 2020; Macartney et al., 2020). However, students outside mainstream schools, despite their similar risk from the virus, were not considered. If schools were able to function almost completely normally during lockdowns, because of the lower risk of Covid to school-aged students, while the adult community were restricted from gathering, it is plausible that home-educated students could do likewise, providing parents abided by the same restrictions as teachers. This situation demonstrates a lack of equity between various educational cohorts. We suggest that in future, more consideration needs to be given to the home educated.

An implication of this study is the possibility that government policy contributed to further social stratification of education cohorts during the pandemic by not considering all cohorts' needs. An issue that emerges from these findings is the lack of understanding of the changes Australian education is experiencing. Government has a responsibility to understand all citizens' needs when creating policy. The fact that ministers were unwilling to consider all their home-educated constituents and their needs was evidenced by the lack of consultation with the community.

Another consideration is the growth of home education in recent years. The home-educating cohort will be a major force in the future. Perhaps state governments, which manage the home education legislation have not realised the impact this growth may have on education policy. In any event, more consideration is needed as this community now represents the largest growth cohort in education.

While the use of a timeline methodology proved an effective method for visualising the data, we propose more research into this topic, perhaps involving interviews with home educators and, where available, policy bureaucrats. Restricting the data to two jurisdictions was also a significant limitation. It would have been useful to examine the Victorian situation where they experienced the world's longest lockdowns. Their experiences would have provided another perspective into how restrictions affected students over a longer term. A triangulation study with countries in the Asia-Pacific who had fewer lockdowns, or more onerous restrictions on the home educating, would also provide a valuable examination of the experience of these students.

We suggest that true educational inclusivity will only be achieved when the needs of all young people are considered. As increasing numbers of young people are educating outside of traditional or mainstream schools, home educators' needs should be considered more fully by governments, in ways that reflect their increasing numbers. The failure to consider the needs of the home educated, in the lockdowns in particular, exacerbated their disadvantages, which are frequently multi-factorial and related to a number of educational traumas that have been experienced (English, 2021; Hartnett, 2004; Morse & Bell, 2018; Morton, 2010; Neuman & Guterman, 2017).

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# Kuanaʻike...The importance of an indigenous worldview to the educational well being of the CBE student

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## Abstract

The purpose of this article is to describe a Hawaiian Culture-based Education (HCBE) setting as an example of culturally relevant pedagogy and to identify how Hawaiian CBE can guide education communities in their re-entry into schools in the post Covid-19 pandemic era. This article proposes that transitions back to school post-Covid use HCBE pedagogical approaches for two reasons: first, to address the needs of Native Hawaiian students who have been poorly served by our schools; and, second, to counter vulnerabilities exacerbated by Covid-19. Three elements of CBE are proposed as a means to make this transition: a) cultivating curriculum that reflects cultural and linguistic knowledge; (b) including *Kuaʻanaʻike* (traditional knowledge) to nurture the development of cultural competence; and (c) using Hawaiian language to promote students' cultural identity. In this way, CBE pedagogical approaches in a framework of culturally relevant practices may lead us forward to a more impactful and equitable educational system.

## Introduction

The more than 2.2 billion children in the world comprise approximately 28% of the world's population. Nearly 16% of this population are children aged 10–19 (UNICEF, 2020). Nationwide closures of schools and colleges have negatively impacted over 91% of the world's student population (UNICEF, 2020). The impact of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic on the mental health of children includes: chronic and acute stress, worries about family health, unexpected bereavement, developmental disruption, school disruption, sudden separation from friends, increased internet and social media use, economic worries for family and country (Guessom et al., 2020).

Covid-19 disproportionately affected minoritized youth among lower-income families. Structural racism, poverty, and barriers to care have inordinately affected this population. Campbell (2020) stated economically disadvantaged children face nutritional deprivation and an overall lack of protection with increased risk for exploitation, especially among female children. Economically disadvantaged children are at risk for greater violence, increasing risk for depression, anxiety and suicidality worsened by school closures. Additionally, lack of digital platforms among economically disadvantaged youth contribute to educational disparities (Campbell, 2020).

According to the United Nations (UNICEF, 2020), Indigenous peoples across the world are disproportionately impacted by Covid-19 due to underlying health inequities

and social determinants of health. The *Hawaiʻi Journal of Health and Social Welfare* (HJHSW) reported that, as of May 2020, 52% of all Covid-19 related fatalities in Hawaiʻi were Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders.  Behavioral health concerns in this population are exacerbated by the inequity of psychosocial and financial stressors on these communities (HJHSW, 2020).

## Context and background

The education system in Hawaiʻi has not been exempt from the impact of Covid-19 on underserved students. Native Hawaiian students were disproportionately impacted because of underlying health inequities and social determinants of health (e.g., crowded living conditions and poor access to healthcare) that place them at a greater risk for infection and severe symptoms if infected (Kaholokula et al., 2020).  Inequities brought on by Covid-19 further compounded things for Native Hawaiian (NH) students who have historically not fared well in an educational system where persistent learning gaps exist between Native Hawaiian students and other racial and ethnic groups (Education Commission of the State, 2010).

Despite the impact of Covid-19 on the Native Hawaiian community, it is important to recognize the resiliency and cultural assets of the community that can be leveraged to reduce the adverse impacts of Covid-19. Cultural values and practices have continued despite over two hundred years of colonization and exploitation by Western influences. Kaholokula et al. (2020) cite Native Hawaiian values and practices of *aloha* (compassion), *mālama* (caring) and *lōkahi* (unity) as guiding principles to overcome challenges. They also reported on the importance of the ability of Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander (NHPI) communities engaging in their cultural practices while abiding by sheltering in place and social distancing orders. Despite this flexibility in the modes of cultural practices, NHPI are culturally impacted by this crisis because of their strong connection to ʻāina (land) and the natural elements. Indigenous wisdom and perspectives continue to lead these communities to overcome adversity and to thrive.

Hawaiian culture-based education (HCBE) serves as a conduit of Indigenous values and practices. Pedagogy of HCBE is grounded in culture-based education (CBE) theory and Hawaiian values and practices (Kanaʻiaupuni, 2007). HCBE serves to address the disparity in educational practices and opportunities and may also be a solution to help mitigate disparities in education for Native Hawaiian (NH) students and their communities.

Covid-19 has challenged teachers to think differently about teaching. Students and teachers are facing existential uncertainty and a future that is unlike their pre-Covid experience. Ladson-Billings (2021) argued that, "School stoppage has forced us to acknowledge we were not serving all students well before COVID-19 school closures. The idea that we should go back to normal' is abhorrent to many students. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 'normal' for some students was failure in a non-responsive educational system. These students failed in academic work and were subject to regular disciplinary sanctions" (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 353. This article will explore how to use HBCE pedagogical approaches to do things differently and to address NH students who have been poorly served by our schools; and counter vulnerabilities exacerbated by Covid-19.

This article presents a study of HCBE pedagogical approaches in a framework of culturally relevant practices.  In the advent of the pandemic, findings from this study will show how HCBE more broadly addresses systemic disparities in underserved communities and how culturally relevant practices may guide systemic change and counter vulnerabilities magnified by Covid-19.This article presents a study of HCBE pedagogical approaches in a framework of culturally relevant practices.  In the advent of the pandemic, findings from this study will show how HCBE more broadly addresses systemic disparities in underserved communities and how culturally relevant practices could guide systemic change and counter vulnerabilities magnified by Covid-19.

A qualitative study was conducted to gather information about HCBE members' understanding of HCBE in the institutional, personal and instructional dimensions. Participants were eight teachers, three administrators, three school board members and three community members. The interviews were based on the question: "How does culture-based education seek to increase cultural identity, language vitality, and positive outcomes for students?"

## Literature Review

### Culture-based education (CBE)

Culture-based education (CBE) intentionally supports the preservation and revitalization of traditional languages and cultures and employs culturally responsive practices (Kawaiʻaeʻa, 2012). CBE advocates also assert that efforts to promote high academic standards for all students include a process of mediating academic content with students' cultural experiences to make content accessible, meaningful, and relevant for diverse students as a culturally responsive pedagogy (Lee & Fradd, 1998).

### Hawaiian culture-based education

According to Kawaiʻaeʻa and Kanaʻiaupuni (2008), the term *Hawaiian culture-based education* (HCBE) refers to the grounding of instruction and student learning in the values, norms, knowledge, beliefs, practices, experiences, places, and language that are the foundation of the Hawaiian Indigenous people. Culture-based education includes teaching the traditions and practices of a particular culture, for example, the Hawaiian culture, and refers to teaching and learning that are grounded in a cultural worldview, from whose lens are taught the skills, knowledge, content, and values that students need in our modern, global society (Kanaʻiaupuni & Kawaiʻaeʻa, 2008).

### Hawaiian epistemology

Meyer (1998) contends that Hawaiian epistemology, as a form of cultural epistemology, challenges mainstream philosophical assumptions and universal principles. Hawaiian epistemology is a theory of cultural values and knowledge systems. Meyer (1998) asserts that Hawaiian knowledge is grounded in the voices of cultural elders and practitioners. Meyer proposes a framework with six main themes: spirituality and knowledge; cultural nature of the senses; relationship and knowledge; utility and knowledge, words and knowledge; and the body/mind question. Kawaiʻaeʻa (2012) refers to Hawaiian epistemology as *kuanaʻike Hawaiʻi*.

### Teacher ideology

A teacher's ideology can provide a framework for reconstruction of a language and culture (Bartolomé & Trueba, 2000). Reconstruction provides the foundation in reclaiming the knowledge and skills to create social, cultural, and economic equity for non-dominant groups (Bartolomé & Trueba, 2000). Bartolomé and Trueba (2000) offer the idea of political clarity for teachers to deepen their awareness of socio-political and economic realities that shape themselves and their students and the capacity to transform them. Teacher ideology then influences pedagogy and the link between macro-political, economics and social variables and the micro-classroom instruction (Bartolomé & Trueba, 2000). Teacher beliefs and attitudes influence the educational climate and suggest knowledge and learning that influences their students' learning experience.

### Methodology

A case study approach was conducted using a hybrid of Indigenous methods and qualitative research. The units of analysis were the individual members of the HCBE community representing the following role groups: administrators, board members, community partners and teachers. The Indigenous research framework provided perspectives and understanding of culture-based education, Hawaiian language and culture and *Maʻawe Pono* (Kahakalau, 2019) Hawaiian research design framework. The researcher was engaged in the eight phases of *Maʻawe Pono* which include: (a). *ʻImi Naʻauao* (search for wisdom); (b) *Hoʻoliuliu* (preparation of project); (c) *Hailona* (pilot testing through action research); (d) *Hoʻoluʻu* (immersion); (e) *Hoʻomōhala* (incubation); (f). *Haʻiloaʻa* (articulation of solutions); (g) *Hōʻike* (demonstration of knowledge); (h) *Kūkulu Kumuhana* (pooling of strengths).

### Data collection instruments

As this was a qualitative case study, my role as the researcher included that I was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009). Given the criteria for the sampling, it was imperative for me to be mindful of one of the most critical aspects of Indigenous research – community accountability to the process and the content of the research (Battiste et al., 2009). My approach was consistent with an Indigenous research method which tailors to the person and situation, as respondents had expectations of informality (Meyer, 2003).

The interviews followed a semi-structured interview format, where a set of issues guided the types of questions that I asked during the interviews (Merriam, 2009). I interviewed 17 of the 22 available members of the HCBE community. I chose to collect data through interviews conducted in both English and Hawaiian because, as Kovach (2009) states, there is an  interrelationship between Indigenous language and structure and worldview in an Indigenous research framework as language shapes thought and culture, and knowledge construction. Interview questions, however, were asked in English for consistency as Hawaiian words have multiple meanings for single words. Interviewees chose to respond in English or Hawaiian depending on their fluency level and comfort to answer in Hawaiian.

*Data collection analysis*

The data for this qualitative case study included transcripts from HCBE community member interviews. The conceptual framework guided my analysis as I looked across the data to compare answers to each other. The following themes emerged: Hawaiian learner; *'ike Hawai'i*; *'ōlelo Hawai'i*; cultural goals; dual world; achievement; being Hawaiian; commitment; community; kumu; cultural assessment; cultural values; and self-esteem.

**Theoretical framework**

The more deeply grounded an individual is in Hawaiian epistemology, the more the ideas expressed in Hawaiian epistemology are reflected in the individual's ideology and his/her beliefs about what a culture-based education school must do to foster student learning and achievement. Someone who is deeply grounded in Hawaiian epistemology demonstrates the belief that it is critical to strengthen and honor students' cultural and linguistic heritage by creating conditions that support students to claim their cultural world (Olsen & Kirtman, 2002).

**Findings**

The findings indicated members of the HCBE school intentionally supported the preservation and revitalization of traditional languages and cultures while employing culturally responsive practices. HCBE members' responses to the research question on the role of culture-based education to increase cultural identity, language vitality, and positive outcomes for students were consistent with Ladson-Billings' (1995) formulation of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Results from the study indicated that CBE members believed that culture-based education (a) increases academic achievement and student learning by cultivating curriculum that was reflective of cultural and linguistic knowledge; (b) *Kua'ana'ike* (Hawaiian epistemological framework) developed in this CBE was an effective approach to nurture the development of cultural competence; (c) use of the Hawaiian language in creating cultural identity promoted actions and policies that increased socio-political and critical consciousness.

*Academic achievement*

There was general agreement among HCBE members that it was their responsibility to increase academic achievement and student learning by cultivating a curriculum that was reflective of cultural and linguistic knowledge. The data showed that culturally relevant pedagogy was demonstrated in student learning that was grounded in *'ike Hawai'i* (Hawaiian educational framework of *ola pono* (balanced life), *pili 'uhane* (spiritual connection) and *lawena* (culturally appropriate behavior). Kumu A responded here, "It's important to be healthy in all different shapes and forms, *'uhane, no'ono'o, kino, nā mea a pau.*" Kumu A described a balanced life as one that is healthy spiritually, mentally and physically. Kumu E spoke to the development of the *'uhane*:

O he mea nui kēlā. ʻOiai o nā ʻano moʻomeheu like ʻole, ʻaʻole nō pokepoke
ʻia ke ʻano. Eia ka ʻōlelo, eia ka ʻaoʻao he pule, eia ka ʻaoʻao hana mea ʻai,
nā ʻano o ka hui pū ʻia nā mea a pau no pōʻai, no leila he mea nui no kēlā
ke kai komo ʻana no leila. Pehea e kaʻawale ai i ka ʻaoʻao haipule me ka
moʻomeheu?  ʻO ia ka manaʻo haole, ea hoʻokaʻawale mai ke aupuni me
ka haipule, he aha la. ʻO ia ka pilikia o kēia manawa ka hoʻokaʻawale ʻia
eia ka hopena. ʻAno like paha me kekahi kumu lāʻau, me ʻoe ʻoki i kekahi
māhele i kona ʻaʻa paha, kona lālā paha. ʻAʻole nō ia ka mea piha, pehea lā
i wehewehe kēlā he ʻapana nui kēlā o ke kiʻi holoʻokoʻa?

This [development of the ʻuhane] is of utmost importance. While there
are various components of the culture, it cannot be taught in isolation.
There is the language, the elements of prayer, sides of food preparation,
and of gathering, therefore it is of utmost importance that these things
are all included. How can we detach the components of prayer from the
culture? There is a foreign way of looking at it [the culture] the separation
of church and state. That is the problem of these times, the separation of
our spirituality, that is the consequence. This is similar to a tree when the
roots are cut off from the branches. If it [the tree] is not seen in its entirety,
how can we explain the importance of the individual part out of context
of the whole picture?

Academic learning was seen in the context of the student learning in the domains
of spiritual, mental and physical development, rather than focusing on the cognitive
domain only.

Kumu E contextualized a holistic approach to curriculum development, based on
ʻike Hawaiʻi,

No laila, hoʻāʻo wau e hoʻomākaukau iā lākou no ke kula nui me ka
hoʻomanaʻo mau ʻana e kūkulu i ke kahua ma mua i ka ʻike Hawaiʻi a
me ke ʻano o ka hoihoi.  No leila, nui koʻu hōʻike ʻana iā lākou i nā ʻano
iʻa like ʻole, nā ʻano lāʻau like ʻole a me nā mea hoihoi, ʻo ia mau mea ola,
i mea e ulu ai i ka hoihoi o lākou.  A kekahi o nā ʻike Hawaiʻi kekahi no
nā mahina hōkū a nā ʻepekema Hawaiʻi ke ʻano o kekahi ʻano holoholo,
kekahi ʻano lawaiʻa.  He aha hou aku… ka makaʻala o ka loli ʻana o ka
mālama a me nā kau.

Therefore, I attempt to prepare them [students] for post-secondary
education by always remembering to first build a foundation of a
Hawaiian way of thinking in interesting ways. Then, their assessments
are grounded in content that teaches traditional knowledge of marine
life, forest life and the things that are interesting that are currently in the
habitat that surrounds us to grow their interest in learning.
And other Hawaiian ways of knowing that deal with the stars and
Hawaiian scientific principles that relate to traditional fishing practices.
This includes being aware of the changes of the moon phases and seasons.

Kumu E spoke here of a curriculum based on traditional Hawaiian scientific approaches to biology. Academic achievement was seen in student learning demonstrated in understanding the environment that surrounded them within a traditional cultural context.

### Cultural competence

Cultural competence was developed in the HCBE framework of *Kuaʻanaʻike* (Hawaiian epistemological framework), an effective approach for students to secure their knowledge and understanding of their own culture – language, traditions, histories, culture, and so forth – and also develop fluency and facility in the Hawaiian culture (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

HCBE members saw their responsibility to cultivate students' ability to speak the Hawaiian language, foster their students' desire to perpetuate the Hawaiian language, and develop *kuanaʻike Hawaiʻi,* Hawaiian worldview (Kawaiʻaeʻa, 2012). *Kuanaʻike Hawaiʻi* was developed through cultivating and developing students' cultural identity focused on developing *ʻike Hawaiʻi* (Hawaiian epistemological framework), *kuanaʻike* (traditional knowledge), *ʻōlelo makuahine* (the mother tongue of Hawaii), *loina* (values) and *lawena* (behavioral expectations).

HCBE members exhibited agreement that they were responsible for the cultivation and development of the Hawaiian language. Additionally, they agreed they were responsible for cultivating and developing students' understanding of their *kuanaʻike Hawaiʻi* expressed through promoting and speaking the language. HCBE members also believed they were responsible for fostering the desire in their students to perpetuate the Hawaiian language. Kumu A says this about the Hawaiian language:

> *Through the language – wanting our children to grow and become successful while learning the language. Just everything – getting our children to grow in the Hawaiian way and perpetuating the Hawaiian way through language and culture, so that they can continue to teach, and cultivate the next generation, their generation, the next generation to perpetuate the language and culture.*

In addition, Kumu I says about language and culture,

> *Language and culture goals that I think should be happening at the school? To know the language – to be used at all times at school. Students learn their curriculum is based on this island, yeah you learn about your place first. That's the foundation that drives the curriculum – students are learning the culture as well as the language.*

Kumu O argues that a re-centering of curriculum from a Hawaiian perspective is necessary at a HCBE,

> *This is Hawaiʻi and Hawaiian language belongs here and we belong here. So to me, that's how we have to look at it, from inside...we can never look at it from the outside looking in and saying, well, how do we fit this stuff into your culture. We shouldn't look at the Common Core and see how we*

> can put that into our culture. We look from our culture and pull what fit
> in to our Common Core, we could make any reading and writing fit in.
> We have to look at it from inside. And what there is out there that can
> help us do our job and take care of our responsibility better.

The general agreement exhibited between the three quotations was that HCBE members believed they needed to develop *ʻike Hawaiʻi* through *kuanaʻike, ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi, loina* and *lawena*. Cultural identity is constructed when students are educated in language and cultural knowledge, including that of place.

HCBE members identified the example of culture acquired through the development of protocols attributed to increasing cultural competence in the form of creating a deep understanding of place. Kumu U said:

> If we only sit in a class here in the middle of town you're never going to
> know. How can you expect to love this place and want to  come back if all
> you did was come to school? There is no pull, and so we rely on our keiki
> *and our* kumu *going out and working in communities and forming these*
> partnerships. So you know in kindergarten, first and second grade you
> learn about the one moku [land division] and you go out and work in  the
> moku. *You learn the places, you learn to to work with the* kupuna *and*
> *the people and so throughout the  program you worked in all of the* moku.

The data showed that cultural competence was developed in the HCBE framework of *Kuaʻanaʻike* (Hawaiian epistemological framework) for students to increase their knowledge and understanding of their culture – language, traditions, histories, culture in developing fluency and facility in Hawaiian culture.

### Socio-political /critical consciousness

The data demonstrated that HCBE members believed their work extended beyond culturally relevant pedagogy consistent with what Freire (2005) describes as teaching students how to read both the word and the world. HCBE members understood the extent of their work also extended beyond  Ladson-Billings' (1995) description of culturally relevant teachers who know how to weave the elements of the curriculum into these concerns – taking a problem-centered approach to learning and avoiding assigning disconnected busy work. HCBE members spoke about the development of socio-political/critical consciousness in the context of *ʻauamo ke kuleana* (carrying the responsibility), culturally responsive pedagogy as a response to traditional hegemonic approach to education (Kawaiʻaeʻa, 2012).

Ladson-Billings (2021) refers to the development of the socio-political/critical consciousness as the "so what" factor or the connection to the word and the world. The data spoke to cultural competence in the form of *lawena*, cultural behavior. Kumu A spoke to this in terms of *oli*, chanting:

> I took the 3rd and 4th graders to the mala [garden] the other day to clean
> the wauke and I asked them what do we do when we enter the mala
> because they've never been to that. [They replied] "Ho Kumu, pono oli"

> *[Teacher, we have to chant]. [I asked]* "No ke aha? *[Why] How come you gotta oli?" [They said]* "You have to ask permission. You cannot just go in." *[I said]* "Yeah, what if I went to your hale *[house] and just walked inside your* hale? *[They replied]* "Hoʻokano a ʻaʻole maikai" *[That would be rude and not good].*

The example given by Kumu A highlights the protocol of offering an *oli* (chant) to enter spaces. Students as young as 3rd graders had become accustomed to the appropriateness of recognizing the need to *oli* before entering the mala. In another example of developing socio-political/ critical consciousness through cultural competence in the form of *lawena*, cultural behavior, Kumu U said,

> *Things like piko [ceremony to start the school day]. Grounding themselves, asking permission to enter a place, and if it's the school in the beginning of the day or if it's* mala *[garden] when we go up to the* mala *and we have to ask permission. Even on* huakaʻi *[field trips], when they go on* huakaʻi *when they go to visit a place. The kumu bring* makana *[gift/offering] for that place. And those kinds of things, those are the things that help towards our vision of making that culture instinctive in the keiki, it is that they just know that that's what you're supposed to do, that when you go someplace you never go empty handed, even if it's you don't bring a thing, you bring your* leo *[voice] and acknowledge people.*

Cultural protocol here extends beyond *oli* to acknowledging place on a *huakaʻi* by bringing *makana* either in the form of a physical item (e.g., lei or plant) or in your voice through song or chant.

Kumu H spoke to the development of socio-political/critical consciousness in the context of *ʻauamo ke kuleana* (carrying the responsibility), culturally responsive pedagogy as a response to traditional hegemonic approach to education (Kawaiʻaeʻa, 2012) in the following statement:

> *Culture-based education, the education part comes from the point of view of the culture – that everyone is valued, there's a place for everyone. Student achievement is that idea of appreciation of the identity and that oneness that kind of holds all of us together. You have the opportunity in the educational experiences to bring in all the different learning styles – not just auditory people, the* keiki *who do well sitting there listening to* kumu, *but the ones who do real good hands-on and the ones who can really whip that wheel-barrow, as well as the ones who are more kind of the thinkers.*

The *kuleana* of HCBE that Kumu H spoke of is an educational framework that explicitly seeks to develop cultural identity. Value is given to developing and nurturing a community of diverse learners that connect to the environment and each other. Student achievement is seen in the application of cultural knowledge and practices in the context of real world problems and extending to the learning environment of the greater community.

## Discussion and Implications

The findings from participants' responses demonstrate culturally responsive pedagogy that can guide post-Covid-19 re-entry into schools. Ladson-Billings (2020) challenges us to the "hard-reset" of our education system to meet the needs of marginalized communities.

Results from the study indicated that respondents believed that culture-based education: (a) increased academic achievement and student learning by cultivating curriculum that was reflective of cultural and linguistic knowledge; (b) *Kuaʻanaʻike* (Hawaiian epistemological framework) developed in this CBE was an effective approach to nurture the development of cultural competence; (c) use of the Hawaiian language in creating cultural identity promoted actions and policies that increased socio-political and critical consciousness.

Members of this HCBE intentionally support the preservation and revitalization of traditional languages and cultures while employing culturally responsive practices. Cultivating *ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi* is important to establishing the *Kuaʻanaʻike Hawaiʻi*. The teaching of *ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi* in the context of culture-based education includes teaching the traditions and practices of a particular culture and refers to teaching and learning that are grounded in a cultural worldview, from whose lens are taught the skills, knowledge, content, and values that students need in our modern, global society (Kawaiʻaeʻa & Kanaʻiaupuni, 2008). The promotion of *ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi* is a revitalizing goal that requires novel approaches to second language learning, here with a focus on local knowledge and cultural practices that allow HCBE to "reassert who has a right to define what schools are for, whose knowledge has most legitimacy, and how the next generation should think about the social order and their place within" (Sleeter & Stillman, 2005, p. 1).

### *Cultural identity*

Participants believed that cultural identity was developed by increasing *ʻike Hawaiʻi* (Hawaiian epistemological framework), *ʻike kuʻuna* (traditional knowledge), *ʻōlelo makuahine* (the mother tongue of Hawaii), *loina* (values) and *lawena* (behavioral expectations). Cultural identity is cultivated in the context of community-based accountability that focuses on respect, reciprocity, responsibility, and the importance of caring relationships (Brayboy et al., 2012). In the context of community-based accountability, revitalization efforts that are also considered acts of Culturally Sustaining and Revitalizing Pedagogy (CSRP) is reflective of locally defined needs, goals, and available material and human resource that serves the needs of Indigenous communities as defined by those communities (McCarty & Lee, 2014).

Findings also concluded that culturally responsive pedagogy is evident in student-centered approaches to teaching in which the students' unique cultural strengths are identified and nurtured to promote student achievement and a sense of well-being about the students' cultural place in the world. HCBE members reported that, as an institution, the school was responsible for cultivating students' cultural identity. Cultural factors affecting the organization of schools, school policies, and procedures (including allocation of funds and resources), and community involvement centered around an operating system centered in a "Hawaiian Way".

The personal dimension of culturally responsive pedagogy, or the process which teachers learn to become culturally responsive (Wages, 2015) is dependent on HCBE members' *'ike Hawai'i* (Hawaiian epistemological framework), *'ike ku'una* (traditional knowledge), *'ōlelo makuahine* (the mother tongue of Hawaii), *loina* (values) and *lawena* (behavioral expectations). HCBE members' responses indicated a centering of this cultural identity with local knowledge and the relationship to place. The instructional dimension refers to practices and challenges associated with implementing cultural responsiveness in the classroom. HCBE members' report that cultural identity is cultivated in the context of community-based accountability that focuses on respect, reciprocity, responsibility, and the importance of caring relationships (Brayboy et al., 2012).

*Kua'ana'ike Hawai'i* includes *loina* such as *kuleana* (responsibility). HCBE describes this *kuleana* in the *loina* of *'Auamo Kuleana* – to carry or shoulder the responsibility. This is *loina* calls for commitment. Developing cultural identity informs the use of culturally relevant pedagogy to reach Native Hawaiian students, making them feel valued. This, in turn, provides the positive relationship that schools need to foster to, not only bolster student achievement and build trust, but to also have trust and *hilina'i* (faith) so that they can gain more information and navigate systems that already put them at a disadvantage both academically and in health crises like the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Conclusion and recommendations

This study showed that CBE members believed that culture-based education cultivates dispositions reflective of cultural and linguistic pedagogy that is culturally responsive. The *kua'ana'ike* of this HCBE is an effective approach to navigate the further inequities and inequalities in education for Native Hawaiian students brought on by Covid-19. The use of the Hawaiian language in creating cultural identity promotes actions and policies that benefit the community while maintaining the interests of individual HCBE members.

As HCBE communities continue to explore pedagogical approaches to address the impact of Covid-19 and its impact on their school communities, HCBE communities may continue to contend with challenges that hinder their ability to act with cultural responsiveness. The following recommendations are made to assist educational communities that work with Native Hawaiian and other underserved and minority populations:

- Strengthen relationships of educational communities by focusing on Covid-19 decisions that are culturally responsive and are grounded in respect, reciprocity, responsibility, and the importance of caring relationships (Brayboy et al., 2012), post-pandemic also supports academics with safety.
- Strengthen the role of language and cultural values to assist in decision making at  school and state levels.
- Implement professional development for teachers and administrators in culturally responsive practices that use culturally sustaining and revitalizing pedagogy.

The study highlighted the importance of culture-based education communities and its application of *kuanaʻike Hawaiʻi* in cultivating linguistic proficiency and cultural identity. Findings from this study offer a culturally relevant way to do the hard reset Ladson-Billings (2020) calls for and to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on our communities. This article adds to other studies that have corroborated the positive outcomes of culturally relevant pedagogy on culture-based education communities.

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# Migrant students' online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Shanghai, China

**Qifan Ding**

## Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has seriously affected people's everyday life in China, especially in the field of education. Online learning as an alternative study approach to traditional teaching has been widely promoted to maintain students' learning while at home. This research focuses on the challenges and support encountered and received by migrant children in Shanghai and investigates how parents and schoolteachers can help them solve problems or support them during the online learning period. This study interviewed 30 migrant children ranging from Grade Six to Grade Nine. It included 11 parents of migrant children, 11 teachers and the school principal of Hua Middle School in Shanghai. Migrant children encounter challenges and obstacles such as the lack of appropriate learning devices and varying levels of parental input as well as different study progression and length of lessons compared with local children. Adults use various methods to alleviate those challenges. Some are productive, while others are counterproductive. In addition to helping with challenges and obstacles, parents and teachers also provide physical and mental health support, but improvement is still needed. This paper concludes with implications for policymakers, and schools and families.

## Keywords

Migrant children, the role of adults, online learning, Covid-19 pandemic

## Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the Covid-19 pandemic an international public health emergency in 2020. In this context, almost every country in the world has taken action to deal with Covid-19, such as imposing travel bans, lockdowns and closing public facilities. In the face of Covid-19, schools and universities around the world have closed their campuses to adopt social distancing measures (Catalano et al., 2021; Toquero, 2020). The Chinese government implemented strict domestic quarantine regulations. Under the doctrine of "School suspended but learning continues", the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (2020) stipulated that, in response to the Covid-19 outbreak, schools across the country must be closed and that teaching–learning activity should continue online. All schools and universities were required to use online platforms instead of face-to-face teaching to ensure that

teaching progressed. According to estimates by the Ministry of Education, more than 220 million children and adolescents were confined at home, which included 180 million primary and secondary school students (Wang et al., 2020). During this period of remote learning, inequalities have been exposed – from access to broadband and computers to the lack of supportive environments and the availability of experienced teachers during online learning (Sahlberg, 2020). These inequalities have been exacerbated for the children of migrant workers. In addition, the successful transition from a traditional education environment to online teaching and learning does not happen immediately. Students and teachers faced various obstacles and challenges during this period (Crawford et al., 2020).

## The context

In general, disaster can cause mass death or displacement, negatively affecting people's access to food, water, shelter and medical care (Brock, 2013; Mutch, 2018). Disasters occur around the world in different ways, and some countries may be more affected than others. The Covid-19 pandemic is a disaster that combines a biological threat with various wider vulnerabilities.

In China, the term *migrant workers* refers to rural residents living in cities for at least six months without a local household registration. The Ministry of Education of China (2016) defines children of migrants as those who move to cities with their migrant parents and receive compulsory education in the city while maintaining their rural household registration. In 2019, migrant children within the ages required for compulsory education numbered 14.24 million (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2019). Some studies claim that migrant children's experience inequality in the Chinese educational system, especially in megacities such as Beijing and Shanghai (Ma et al., 2018; Wang, 2008). As a vulnerable group, more attention should be paid to migrant children during the Covid-19 pandemic, but the public's attention has mainly focused on the health of the overall population. While there are some studies focusing on online learning of higher education and social care during the period of Covid-19, there are few studies specifically on middle schools in China (Coman et al., 2020; Crawford et al., 2020; Marinoni et al., 2020; Mishra et al., 2020; Toquero, 2020). This study aims to investigate the challenges encountered by Chinese migrant children in transitioning to online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic and explore the role of parents and teachers in supporting the online education of migrant children in this disaster.

## Literature review

### Pros and cons of online learning

Online learning refers to any learning experience through the internet, where students and teachers can freely communicate with each other at a convenient time and place (Singh & Thurman, 2019). In practice, the advantages of online learning are obvious. First, internet technology has developed rapidly, allowing greater flexibility in terms of location and time. Also, online learning can easily obtain more extensive information

with lower capital costs (Kim, 2020; Yilmaz, 2019). Second, online learning can provide students and teachers with asynchronous and synchronous tools as an alternative to traditional learning. These include email, chat platforms, and video conferences (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Dhawan, 2020; Marinoni et al., 2020). Because of this, students and teachers do not have to meet in person. During the Covid-19 period, online learning became an important way to maintain teaching and learning activities in schools.

Online learning also has disadvantages. First, some children have limited self-control, and they are easily distracted or lose concentration (Coman et al., 2020). Therefore, online learning requires the participation and supervision of adults (Youn et al., 2012). Second, online learning may not provide enough time and opportunities for children who need more interaction and activities to help them learn (Kim, 2020). Third, the quality of online platforms are important in the development of online learning, since inappropriate online learning tools will not promote children's learning. For example, some online platforms do not provide important functions that aid learning and interaction, such as online chat, the sharing of learning material, and screen sharing. Additionally, students can only communicate with classmates through online platforms, so they have no opportunity to share knowledge and information in real time. Access to a reliable internet connection is also an issue that cannot be ignored in online learning. Frequent disconnections may prevent children from attending classes or submitting work in a timely way (Abuhammad, 2020). Finally, online learning may also affect physical health. Sitting in front of the screen for long periods of time without outdoor activities may make teachers and students feel stressed and cause eyesight problems (Coman et al., 2020).

### *The impact of online learning at home during the Covid-19 pandemic*

#### The role of parents

Online learning from home during periods of remote learning and teaching is challenging for both children and parents. In addition to remote learning, physical distancing rules often denied children access to regular community support and engagement as outdoor activities, organised sports, and social events were suspended. Children often required help from adults during these stressful and isolating periods (Brown et al., 2020). Parents were required to engage in some activities that were usually the responsibility of teachers. While it was important for parents to be involved in their children's education to facilitate emotional and intellectual development during this time, parents' capacities to fill these roles varied. In addition, the time, material resources, and support, children's learning differs according to their ages and learning needs. Some parents can accommodate the learning needs of their children; however, this is especially difficult for parents with limited education themselves (Abuhammad, 2020).

In addition, to parents' levels of education, the emotions of parents could directly influence the mental health of their children. The widespread reporting about the transmission of the coronavirus in mainstream and social media led to anxiety and stress for many parents. Children also were exposed to a great deal of information on

social media, which could led to their anxiety. However, parents' excessive concerns about Covid-19 – its transmission and efforts to mitigate it – could influence children's emotions because they notice and absorb the anxieties and emotions of adults (Dalton et al., 2020). In short, parents were asked to take on roles that may have been ill-prepared for, did not have the resources to fulfil, and this could heighten children's anxieties.

**The roles of school teachers**

During remote learning, many schools, worldwide, responded to the limited resources available to students at home. Many families, especially those with multiple children at school, did not have sufficient or suitable online learning devices to meet the demands of schoolwork. Many schools were able to provide learning resources to students, such as computers, internet access and other facilities. This kind of support had limited reach for those families who did not have access to the infrastructure that would allow them to take advantage of them. This lack of access is a worldwide issue. In Australia, for example, some local communities provided satellite connections or internet services for families without such facilities.

In addition to online support, some schools sent out packages to their students, which included items such as basic stationery, some outdoor activities equipment (i.e., skipping rope or a ball) and painting materials. Schools also set up routines, timetables and practices that supported students' learning. In China, academic staff, technicians and students worked together to continue the teaching and learning activities at universities (Zhang et al., 2020).

Teachers, where able, contacted struggling students to help them overcome difficulties. Such support is especially critical for vulnerable students. Australian schools contacted students and parents in the form of text messages, phone calls or Skype calls to identify the needs of students and to keep track of their learning situation (Brown et al., 2020).

Teachers and students utilised Zoom, Google Meet and Facebook to communicate with each other at first (Mishra et al., 2020) However, as the lockdown period was extended, teachers were trained to use some new instructional strategies for their teaching. Mishra et al. (2020) argued that free online learning resources should be provided to students so that they can spend their time more effectively during the lockdown. Online learning was a difficult experience for both teachers and students if they did not understand the basic features and functions of online learning resources in advance.

Brown et al. (2020) found that when schools returned to teaching and learning at school, teachers had greater responsibilities than they had prior to remote learning. Teachers not only resumed education but supported children's mental health. Some vulnerable children with psycho-social disorders needed a longer time to settle back into school routines. In China, one group of children that experienced inequality in education (and this is still the case) were migrant children. This article reports on the challenges and obstacles of online learning for migrant children and their families during remote learning in China.

## Theoretical framework

To understand the factors that affect migrant children's online learning and supportive measures that adults use to help migrant children, this paper uses various dimensions of capital theory – from Bourdieu and Coleman – to provide a comprehensive theoretical framework. Economic capital refers to an individual's wealth, physical resources and production instruments that can be transformed into money or institutionalised as property rights, as well as other capital forms (Bourdieu, 1996). Bourdieu (1986) categorised cultural capital into three types, namely *embodied* cultural capital; *objectified* cultural capital; and *institutionalised* cultural capital. Embodied cultural capital includes actions, behaviours, and operational skills that can be expressed through family education and school education. Objectified cultural capital is transmissible and refers to material objects and media, such as books, paintings, monuments and machines. Institutionalised cultural capital includes educational qualifications recognised by the state and labour market such as degrees. Coleman's (1988, 1990) and Bourdieu's concepts of social capital are integrated here because they involve complementary definitions of social capital (Rogošić & Baranović, 2016). Bourdieu paid close attention to social capital outside the family such as relationships or networks involving friends, acquaintances and schools, whereas Coleman emphasises the quality of the relationship within and beyond the family.

## Methodology

In China, even though migrant children have been able to access compulsory education (from Grade One to Grade Nine) in recent years, it is still difficult for them to receive senior high school education. For example, some migrant students in Shanghai can access compulsory education in public schools but struggle when taking the senior high school entrance examination. This exclusionary policy deprives many migrant children of the opportunity to pursue higher education. This policy provides an educational ceiling effect for migrant children (Xiong, 2015). To identify the challenges and obstacles of online learning for migrant children as well as the role of adults in coping with migrant children during this special period, this paper utilized a qualitative research approach. A specific case study was adopted in this research to gather qualitative data. Bryman (2016) explains that a case study needs a detailed and in-depth analysis of a single case and should focus on the complexity and specificity of the case, such as a single community, a single school, or a single family. The case study can tell a story about a bounded system which allows us to discover the complexities existing within this system (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

In qualitative research, a sample is chosen to gain rich, in-depth information. This research was conducted by using purposive sampling and maximum variation sampling. In the former, the researcher specifies the characteristics of the interested population and finds individuals with those characteristics. In the latter a wide range of cases (individuals or groups) is selected to make sure all types of cases along one or more dimensions are included (Bryman, 2016). A total of 52 semi-structured interviews were transcribed and combined with other data based on observations and school documents.

A total of 30 migrant children ranging from Grade 6 to Grade 9, 11 parents of migrant children, 11 teachers and the school principal were enrolled in this study. The names of all interviewees have been kept confidential.

Thematic analysis was selected as the method of data analysis. This is defined as "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting themes within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). This study followed Braun and Clarke's six phases of thematic analysis (2006). A theme means a category identified by the author, associated with the researcher's questions, building on information found in transcripts or field notes, which can provide a theoretical understanding of collected data.

### The context

Shanghai is a global financial centre and megacity in China that attracts a large number of migrant workers and migrant children. In 2016, 873,000 migrant children aged 0–14 and 340,000 aged 15–19 stayed in Shanghai for living and schooling (Yang, 2017). Owing to the stricter entry barriers to senior high school and rigorous population control, Shanghai was selected as a target city for research. This research was conducted in a public school named Hua which has a large number of migrant students. The school is located on the rural–urban continuum. After the construction of the new urban area, the number of local Shanghai residents has in this area dropped annually, while the number of migrant children has gradually increased.

### Findings

The following themes focussed on the experiences of migrant children at Hua School in Shanghai. Although migrant children faced a range of challenges and obstacles, they also experienced some benefits during remote schooling. Adults around them helped mediate these challenges and benefits.

### Challenges and obstacles of migrant children, their parents, and teachers

#### The lack of appropriate learning devices

When the outbreak of Covid-19 occurred during the Chinese New Year, most of the students chose to stay in Shanghai, while some other students and their families returned to their hometowns. The online learning platform *Kong Zhong Ke Tang* allowed primary and secondary school students in Shanghai to participate in online learning and to continue their studies into the upcoming semester. Recorded video lessons for each subject were designed and approved by the Shanghai Ministry of Education. Students of each grade in Shanghai followed the same timetable in their academic studies. The recorded video lessons were played on television and various online platforms according to their class schedule. There were eight classes each day, and each class lasted 40 minutes. The students could watch the recorded lessons together in the first 20 minutes. Teachers and students in Hua School could log in to the Tencent Meeting app to explore the content and answer the questions raised by the students for the remaining 20 minutes. Some students reported struggling to stare at a tiny screen on their phone from 8 am to 4 pm.

Before online learning started, Hua school surveyed students to collect information about the availability of learning devices in each family and found that 36.23% of families did not have online learning devices. Therefore, the school acquired tablets for students to borrow. One migrant child said: "The tablet helped us a lot during online learning, as there was no need to spend money on equipment, which relieved my family's financial pressure."

However, not all migrant children's families had computers, televisions, or tablets. Migrant children who returned to their hometowns still lacked learning devices. One class teacher commented:

> One migrant student went back to Qinghai Province. She never handed in her homework. Sometimes I cannot get in touch with her. Later, her father told me that another younger sister shared one mobile phone with her. Since she has good academic results, she should give the learning opportunity to the younger sister.

### Online classes, supervision and surveillance

In the absence of parental supervision, some migrant children demonstrated poor self-control skills and difficulty concentrating on the screen for a long time. In addition, children who used computers and mobile phones were easily distracted by games or online social networking applications. Two migrant children recalled:

> The efficiency of online classes was very low. It felt refreshing to take an online course the first time. But as time went by, my mind has already "flown out".
>
> I logged into my account on Tencent Meeting and pretended that I was in class. I split my screen to play the game King of Glory or chat with my friends on QQ [a Chinese instant messaging program]. When the teacher asked me to answer a question, I would pretend that the internet connection has a problem, and I did not answer.

Teachers and parents gradually became aware of this problem of low efficiency. One teacher remarked:

> I knew they were playing games. But time is limited in each class. We can't meet each other, and I can't control the behaviour of my students through the internet. To proceed with teaching without delay, I chose other students to answer the question.

To guide students and support them to concentrate on learning, the teacher mentioned this matter with the parents in their WeChat group, asking parents to cooperate with the teacher to supervise children's studies at home. Because of this, some parents installed cameras in their children's study rooms to monitor their behaviour. This made many children feel uncomfortable and resist the actions of their parents. One parent shared her story:

> *I saw other parents sharing pictures of children's learning taken by the camera [monitor] in WeChat Moments. I told my child: "We are not at home during the day and no one will supervise you. Can I install a monitor?" My daughter strongly disagreed with my idea. I said the camera just monitors her desk. She still disagreed. Despite her disagreement, I installed the camera in her room. It was not expensive, no more than 140 RMB. When I was not busy at work, I watched her through the camera. Sometimes when I saw her playing games on the mobile phone, I called her name through the camera "What are you doing?" She was startled and immediately put the phone aside. A few days later, she moved the camera to another place and said: "You are so annoying."*

Migrant children felt very nervous and uncomfortable about their parents' surveillance. One migrant child recalled:

> *My learning environment is quiet, but someone is monitoring me… it's a camera. My home has 4 cameras. Previously, my room was not monitored, and I motived myself to study, but they still set up one during the Covid-19 period. They did this because they were afraid that I would get lost in class. I felt nervous and uncomfortable.*

**Different study progress and time management**

The Grade Nine migrant students who are going to take the high school entrance exam were most affected the pandemic. Migrant children are separated from local children in the school and those without a Shanghai household registration (Hukou) or with residence permit points less than 120 have no choice but to study in vocational schools (Shanghai Education Commission, 2019, 2020). Unlike migrant children, local students had learned all the new lessons of physics and chemistry before the outbreak of Covid-19, and they had longer class times. One migrant child complained:

> *… especially in chemistry class, I cannot catch up and understand the recorded video lesson…my classmates are constantly absent from these courses. I think my chemistry score has dropped drastically after attending an online course. I gave up completely.*
> *Teachers added extra lessons for local children in the evenings and weekends… the local students have longer class hours than us.*

Migrant children's teachers of important subjects such as Chinese, Mathematics and English, were also aware of this issue. With their limited time and energy, they could not arrange more lessons for migrant children. Physics and chemistry teachers felt helpless in this situation. One chemistry teacher commented:

> *It is difficult to teach migrant children during the online learning period. Their progress is different from local students, and we have to separate them from local students. We are dedicated to teaching them, but they don't listen… the "people at the top" [educational policy makers] do not pay attention to it, and migrant children certainly don't hold these two courses in high regard.*

### Benefits and support to migrant children

**Extracurricular activities from family and school**

As well as the challenges migrant children experienced with online classes, they also reported receiving benefits and support from their parents and teachers. During the pandemic, some parents had more time to be with their children at home. Children were often tired after looking at the screen all day. Parents at home helped the children to relieve stress through indoor exercises. One migrant child said:

> *I felt tired after sitting on a chair for the whole day. My parents bought a lot of equipment for sports such as badminton, table tennis, roller skates, hula hoop, skipping rope, shuttlecock and so forth. Because we can't go out to meet our friends, the space was quite empty.*

One PE teacher also designed a special video for the class:

> *It is unhealthy for students to sit and study at home for a long time. I designed a special PE lesson by utilizing equipment found at home, such as plastic bottles to exercise on the sponge mat. These exercises can help students develop strength, flexibility, and coordination. In so doing, they can enjoy physical and mental pleasure.*

Students did not have access to the equipment they would usually use at school when they were learning in schools in art, manual, and technological courses. To alleviate the stress and boredom, online classes introduced manual and technological aspects into cooking classes. Students not only learned new skills but also learned life skills and had enhanced home–school interactions. Migrant children's families felt that they were closer to the teachers. One teacher shared his experience:

> *The teacher in the recorded video lesson taught children how to cook. Our students showed their new skills to their parents at weekends. Some parents took photos and share them on our class WeChat Group. Children were happy to share the cooking experience and their dishes with parents and teachers. You know…children are always busy with study, and parents usually don't let them participate in housework such as cooking. Some parents told me that they are happy to see their children have learned to cook.*

**Mental health support from teachers**

While students could not return to school and resume normal learning, the rising number of confirmed Covid-19 cases and the lack of understanding about the virus affected students' psychological conditions. To help students alleviate negative emotions, the school organised mental health seminars and online psychological counselling services. One teacher mentioned:

> *Our psychology teacher has given a children's mental health lecture online about the Covid-19 pandemic. The students can also make appointments with the psychology teacher for counselling.*

However, one migrant child recalled:

> *We do have psychology lectures. But I think it was useless. Parents and teachers focus on our academic performance, rather than mental health.*

Worse still, some middle school students committed suicide due to huge pressure from their families about academic performance. The school principal mentioned:

> *We should stop putting so much pressure on students for exams. Over the last few days, a student who committed suicide by jumping off a building was criticized by his parents for spending much time on mobile phones and declining academic results…Some parents of migrant children have a low education level and often beat their children... I think frustration management education is necessary, and it can help students when they graduate. I think we should think about how to better develop a reasonable training and incentive mechanism for the cooperation between schools and parents for both local and migrant children. The parents are willing to participate in such an activity. Currently, our school can only provide mental health lectures.*

## Discussion

This discussion has five themes. Firstly, some students were unable to take online classes because their families lacked the economic capital and/or social capital to allow them to buy or use electronic devices. This is an example of *resource dilution*, a concept proposed by Coleman (1988) who argued that where there is a greater number of siblings, the attention paid to individual children and the resources possessed by them will decrease. Nevertheless, teachers played a supportive role in migrant children's study experience. Secondly, migrant children discovered that they were easily distracted from online learning and were attracted by the entertainment functions of computers or mobile phones. These findings support the arguments from Coman et al. (2020) and Youn et al. (2012). The less significant impact of family social capital (parental supervision) could result from the fact that migrant children's parents are occupied with their work and have less time to devote to the supervision of their children's daily lives and studies. Parents tackled this challenge by monitoring children's behaviour. Surveillance made children feel uncomfortable and even offended. Children want privacy, trust. and respect. Parents and teachers intended to help their children to solve problems, but their actions sometimes had a counterproductive effect. It can be difficult when parents have limited time to supervise children and they can struggle to find a solution (Abuhammad, 2020; Brown et al., 2020). A finding in this study reveals that surveillance as a solution presents a unique dilemma for migrant children who must attend online learning.

Thirdly, the low level of cultural capital and the occupations of migrant parents meant they could not satisfy the requirements needed for a Shanghai residence permit. Migrant children in Hua Middle School showed different learning progression and lengths of study when compared with local children in the same school. This often meant migrant that children were ineligible to sit senior high school entrance examinations. Teachers in Hua middle school realized that some migrant children wanted an equal education

and they recognised this inequity but teachers also felt powerless to change the status quo. Fourthly, migrant children benefitted from extra-curricular activities from both family and school. While teachers in places like Australia sent children outdoor activity equipment and painting materials (Brown et al., 2020), the situation was different in Shanghai. Parents of migrant children with sufficient economic capital  were able to purchase equipment so that their children could get proper exercise. Other students relied on new physical education classes designed by teachers that used common household objects. The cooking course, in particular, was found to have increased the interaction among teachers, students, and parents. Migrant children shared the skills they learned in WeChat groups, thereby mitigating the effects of their physical distance from their teachers.

Finally, the relationship between children and parents sometimes became difficult during the lockdowns of the epidemic, affecting the social capital of the children's family. Some parents believed that their children were avoiding studying by watching computers or phones for long periods, and this led to quarrels and, in some cases, led to tragic suicides. To address this issue, Hua Middle School provided several mental health lectures to support migrant children during the lockdown period. Nevertheless, some teachers and migrant children regarded the lectures as useless and formalistic, especially after the suicide incidents. This study found that families and schools pay more attention to academic results than mental health. Although the school recognised the situation, it paid insufficient attention to it. The school principal mentioned that Hua Middle School still needs to do more to encourage the parents to care about their children's mental health.

## Conclusion

This research examined the interactions between children, parents, and teachers using Bourdieu's theoretical framework regarding economic, cultural and social capital to explore the challenges children encountered and the support they received during the Covid-19 pandemic. While some supports were productive, others were counterproductive. To help migrant children to focus on their online courses, some parents, as "educators at home", installed cameras to monitor the action and behaviour of their children, making them uncomfortable and even repulsed. Moreover, some migrant children felt depressed about their slow study progress and the smaller amount of study time they had compared to local children. Teachers who act as "powerless educators" can only try their best to help migrant children prepare for the senior high school entrance exam. This research used economic and cultural capital frameworks from Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman's social capital theories (1988, 1990) by incorporating three dimensions of capital from a holistic perspective. It also advances these theories by testing their validity with a disadvantaged group in a non-Western socio-cultural context.

This approach allows us to provide some recommendations in line with the above findings. In terms of policy, the scores of Physics and Chemistry should be considered to count towards scores in the senior high school entrance examination. This will not only reduce the burden on the teachers but also give migrant children more opportunities

to study. The parents of migrant children often have problems in assisting with the education of their children. Because of this, schools should establish a "parenting school" to train the parents to help children and establish incentive mechanisms to encourage parents to treat mental health issues seriously. Finally, at the family level, parents can provide accurate and meaningful information to ensure that the children are not unnecessarily anxious about Covid-19. Finally, children should not be monitored by their parents through cameras, as such action tends to escalate tensions between parents and children.

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## Poetry section 2: Reflections on lockdown

**Julius Schwenke; Claudia Rozas Gomez; Sophie Peung**

## Waiting

Tapping nervously on the wooden table
one leg shorter than the other - not very stable
tapping out a code, I learnt in class the other day
dash dash dash dot dot dot...or is it the other way?
I know it's a plea for help, I really should get it right
I've such a vivid imagination, I see people in their plight
off I go to the rescue, I've learnt some CPR
I knew it would come in handy, as I peer beneath a car
Oh, it's just a cat but it doesn't belong to me
I adjust my rescue harness, as he scampers up a tree
I peer around again, to see who else is need of aid
I decide my job is done here, and call the fire brigade
This darn table is getting on my nerves
It's sometimes used for ping pong, no wonder I dropped my serves
I hope I've tidied up everything as I peer around the room
My teacher's face appears, it's time again to Zoom.

*Julius Schwencke*

## Southside, Alert Level 4

Across from our house, on the other side of our street, children jump and play on their trampoline. The trampoline is their school and playground. It is their friend's house. It is a park, and the movies. It is birthday parties. And Rainbow's End.

Crossed-legged, they play clapping games. Under the bam bushes, under the sea. Or while jumping up and down. Boom, boom, boom. To make it harder. And sillier. On some days the trampoline is a wrestling arena, soft toys participate in battle. Mano a mano, to the death. Yesterday it was a rugby field. The World Cup was won with seconds to spare, it was probably the haka that done it. Today, it is a treehouse. Small bodies hold a war council. Or convene a secret society. Members only.

For thirty-three days. Children jump and play. Under the bam bushes, under the sea. For thirty-three days. Boom, boom, boom. They swim towards the light from their underwater cave. True love for you my darling, true love for me. And kiss each day, anyway.

## Southside, Alerta Nivel 4

Frente de nuestra casa, al otro lado de nuestra calle, niños saltan y juegan en su trampolín. El trampolín es su escuela y patio de juegos. Es la casa de su amigos. Es un parque, y un cine. Es un cumpleaños. Y Rainbows End.

Piernas cruzadas, juegan applaudiendo. Bajos los arbustos del Bam, bajo del mar. O mientras saltan. Bum, bum, bum. Para hacerlo más difícil. Y más para la riza.

En algunos días el trampolín es una arena de lucha, peluches participan en la batalla. Mano a mano, hasta la muerte. Ayer fue un campo de rugby. La Copa Mundial fue ganada con segundos de sobra, probalemente fue el haka que aseguro la victoria. Hoy es una casa de árbol, cuerpos pequeños tienen un consejo de Guerra. O convocan un Sociedad secreta. Solo miembros.

Durante treinta tres días. Niños saltan y juegan. Bajo los arbustos de Bam, bajo del mar. Durante treinte tres días. Bum, bum, bum. Nadan hacia la luz desde su cueva submarina. Y besan cada día de todas maneras.

*April 27, 2020*
*Claudia Rozas Gómez*



Image: C. Rozas Gómez

# A new world

Lockdown, lockdown, lockdown
Alert, alert, alert
Ding, ping, ring
Drifting, racing, flying
Woah, let's stop and breathe
For a moment to grieve

Heartaches and headaches
Stressed and depressed
What will come next?

A turbulence of worries and woes
Kids to feed, kids to teach, kids everywhere
With no power, no connection, no home

Oh no, where will they go?
No, never fear, teachers are here
Here you go, books, laptops, internet access
For everyone!

Exploring, discovering, and uncovering
Where could it be in the air, the sea or the stream?
No fishing, no sailing, no socializing
only social distancing

Woah, what a new world.
Mask up!
Shoes on
Let's get walking
Heart rates up, hearts pumping
Blood flowing
Ah, a breath of fresh air
But not quiet freedom

Laptops, computers, and meetings already set
But wait what's my password?
Oh, that's right
Named after my favourite food

Cups of tea and coffees
With chocolate bickies
Teddy bears, cuddly bears came to the rescue
Ah, what a sigh of relief

Volume up, tv on, it's 1pm, let's go
Who's right, who's wrong, who really cares?
Let's just go hard and go early.

But Mum when will this fight end?

*Sophie Peung*

# Pre-service teachers' perceptions of tutor feedback practice in times of Covid-19

**Le Thanh Ha, Tran Thi Thanh Thuy**

## Abstract

Feedback, which has long been documented as an area of concern for teachers across global contexts and disciplines, has become even more challenging during the Covid-19 pandemic because of an unprecedented emergency shift to massive online instruction. While there has been an abundance of studies exploring teacher feedback, little is known about on how teachers provided feedback from students' perspectives under the huge pressure from the pandemic. This study looks into how tutors' feedback was perceived by their student teachers during online learning periods in the last two years at a major teacher training university in Vietnam. Using a mixed method (questionnaire $n = 274$; and in-depth interviews = 12), the study reveals that what is perceived as important in feedback provision in conventional learning contexts is also thought important in online education by pre-service teachers. Findings from interviews with the students suggest that the feedback they received from their tutors still left some room to be desired as to the amount and the quality of feedback. Feedback aided by digital tools was perceived to be important but not as important as timely, regular, specific and personalized feedback. The study informs teachers of what is helpful for student learning when it comes to feedback provision in Covid and post-Covid online education.

## Keywords

Student perception, teacher feedback, pandemic, higher education

## Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has had serious impacts on education, particularly teacher education, in various aspects. Many schools and universities were found unprepared to shift rapidly to distance teaching with a reported lack of planning, preparation, and resources in place to deliver remote instruction (Carrillo & Flores, 2020). Meeting the new challenges in the pandemic and post-pandemic realities should therefore require understanding the pandemic-induced adaptations in teachers' pedagogical practices (Carrillo & Flores, 2020). Among key areas of concern is teacher feedback in teacher education given that teacher trainers should be good models for the feedback-giving practices they would like to promote – regardless of the unprecedented classroom conditions they were, and might still be, struggling with.

Although the importance of useful feedback for student learning is well established

(Hattie & Timperley, 2007), the usefulness of teacher feedback largely depends on how their students perceive it (Gamlem & Smith, 2013; Vattøy & Smith, 2019). Research into how teacher feedback is perceived by students has been extensively conducted in different settings and disciplines (e.g., Ferguson, 2011; Vattøy & Smith, 2019). These studies, however, may not reflect students' feedback-receiving experiences during the pandemic time when their teachers were, and possibly are still, challenged by new teaching infrastructure with multiple digital tools and technologies (Lei & Medwell, 2021) as "a novel feedback environment" (Jiang & Yu, 2021, p. 509) for most teachers. An examination into pre-service teachers' perceptions of their tutors' Covid-19 pandemic-induced feedback practices is therefore of significance.

The present study endeavours to understand how students perceive what tutor feedback practices may be of great help to their learning during the Covid-19-induced online instruction. The study is contextualized in Vietnam where existing literature points to both teachers' and students' inexperience with new course platforms, information and technology gaps for marginalized students, difficulties associated with online tools and formats, and the complex environment at home (Dinh & Nguyen, 2020). Pre-existing issues including inequities in students' access to wireless technology and devices, high student–teacher ratios, feedback as formative assessment not being yet a common practice, teachers' lack of incentive due to pay rates and excessive workloads (Dang, 2011; Dao, 2015; Harman & Bich, 2010) posed more challenges to pandemic-related complications. Additionally, tutors' feedback in conventional teacher training courses which would normally involve direct teacher–student interaction, field teaching practice, and tutors' provision of immediate feedback on their students' teaching plans, classroom observations, on-site teaching performances, and re-teaching sessions has been adapted to online formats since the outbreak of the pandemic. Understanding tutors' adopted feedback practices from their students' perspectives is therefore essential for teacher educators to go beyond emergency online feedback practices and develop informed quality online feedback practices for post-Covid-19 online teaching pedagogy. The study was guided by the following research question: "How are tutors' Covid-19-induced feedback practices perceived by their students?"

## Literature review

There has been a large body of research into how teacher feedback should be provided to promote student learning. Hattie and Timperley (2007) suggest that how feedback works to advance learning depends on the four levels at which it operates: the task; the processes; self-regulation; and the self (students themselves). Feedback at the task level or corrective feedback provides the learner with information about how well a task is being understood or performed. Feedback at the process level (which is concerned with how learning is processed by the learner) is claimed to be more effective than at the task level in terms of building strategies to better perform the task and promote deeper learning. Feedback at the self-regulation level facilitates the learner's self-regulation processes or skills of self-evaluation. Feedback at the self level contains affective personal remarks about the learner rather than the task specifics. Effective feedback must be focused on the task and on the learning processes while, at the same time, attending to the students'

self-regulation processes.

Research has found consistency in identifying criteria of teachers' effective feedback. Key criteria include timely, detailed, and personalized feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Wisniewski et al., 2020). Feedback on students' work should be provided in a timely manner while students still remember accurately what they are trying to do in their efforts (Brown, 2015). In addition, offering precise, specific, and individualized feedback to the learner will help improve their comprehension and performance of the task (Brown & Race, 2012) and address their personal needs (Pérez-Segura et al., 2020). Good feedback should indicate the learner's current level of performance, the gap between the current and the expected level, and the information about future performance to advise students how to obtain their learning outcomes (Arts et al., 2016). Feedback should also come in while students are producing their work to enable them to try out their learning and reflect upon their own mistakes before summative assessments are made (Brown, 2015).

Giving open feedback in group discussions is also known to support student learning. Existing literature points to several advantages of open feedback (Sambell et al., 2013) for both teachers and students. Teachers especially those who are teaching large classes can save time providing open feedback on shared areas for improvement, making feedback a shared learning experience for the students (Brown & Race, 2012). Students can learn from listening to the feedback on the areas of strength and weakness of other students' work (Race, 2010). While offering open feedback, teachers should also encourage peer feedback. Peer feedback is a source of developing students' essential skills for life-long learning, such as self-evaluation and taking control and responsibility for their own learning (Brown, 2015).

Teacher online feedback practices have also been well-documented in teaching research and practice. Research has examined the impact of teacher feedback delivered in online environments in particular disciplines on student learning gains (Goldsmith, 2014), extending inquiry in search of established online feedback practices. Meta-analysis of research into online feedback practices shows that there is an alignment between what makes good feedback in a conventional classroom and in online avenues (Leibold & Schwarz, 2015). Systematic review of scholarship on online teaching pedagogy by Bailey and Card (2009) identified one of the key seven principles of effective pedagogical practices for online teaching as teachers providing appropriate and timely feedback on their students' performance. There is also a proven positive correlation between automated feedback aided by varied technology tools and student learning gains (Zhu et al., 2020). Past studies indicate that teachers can provide feedback in alternative formats (emails, google docs, track changes, audio files with oral feedback, etc.), because the more diverse ways of offering feedback to their students, the more likely their students are to receive the feedback in ways that suit their preferred learning styles (Brown, 2015).

Generally research has provided comprehensive knowledge into what makes effective feedback to promote student learning in both conventional and online classroom. The recency of the Covid pandemic accompanied by a worldwide emergency switch to online instruction has led to evidenced changes in teacher feedback practice from their own

perspectives (Jiang & Yu, 2021). However, how teachers' feedback practice is perceived by students themselves during Covid-induced times remains under-researched. The present study attempts to explore what teacher feedback practices are of importance to facilitate student learning from their own perspectives given the distinctive platform of learning, feedback tools and technologies available to their educators and the myriad of additional challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Research design

The study adopted a mixed-method approach to achieve its objective (Creswell, 2009). It employed an online questionnaire for student participants to indicate their perceived levels of importance to a set of tutors' given feedback practices. This was followed by semi-structured interviews in order to undertake in-depth investigation of how and why some particular feedback practices helped improve their learning in virtual education.

## Data collection and data analysis

The participants for this study were selected randomly from a major public teacher education university in Vietnam. The questionnaire included 10 items, three of which collected students' personal information, seven of which were about feedback practices. The first six items out of the seven feedback practices were based on extensive document analysis of previous studies on how to provide feedback to encourage student learning. While the seventh item – praise students for their efforts – is generally claimed to be of little value for students' achievement (Hattie, 2007), the authors found this item motivating for students' efforts and their mental wellbeing in this challenging Covid-19 pandemic.

Data collection was conducted after the participants had experienced a complete semester of online learning and receiving feedback. The students ($n = 274$) were asked about how important they perceived each of the tutors' online feedback practices. The study used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *Not important at all* (1) to *Very important* (5). Descriptive statistics and reliability tests were completed using SPSS 22. The findings from these analyses informed the major findings of the study.

To gain deeper insights to address the research question, 12 students were also interviewed during the study. These students were selected using purposive sampling. The criteria used for choosing these interview participants included: a) those who already completed the questionnaire; b) mindfulness of equal numbers of students regarding their seniority; c) experience in online education; and d) academic performance. Recordings of the individual interviews were only made once permission from the interviewees was obtained.  All interviews were analysed systematically and comprehensively by using pattern matching, and analytic generalisation techniques (Yin, 2014). Each identified theme was recounted and later integrated with the findings from the quantitative data analysis.

Detailed information of participants is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Participants of the Study**

| Participants from quantitative phase (N = 274) | | Number | Percentage | Participants from interviews (N = 12) Number |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Seniority of students | 1st year student | 86 | 31.4 | 2 |
| | 2nd year student | 94 | 34.3 | 4 |
| | 3rd year student | 82 | 29.9 | 5 |
| | 4th year student | 12 | 4.4 | 1 |
| Experience of online education | Learned online before | 148 | 54.0 | 8 |
| | Not yet to learn online before | 126 | 46.0 | 4 |
| Academic performance | GPA (3.6-4.0) | 41 | 15.0 | 4 |
| | GPA (3.2-3.59) | 111 | 40.5 | 6 |
| | GPA (2.5-3.19) | 107 | 39.1 | 2 |
| | GPA (2.0-2.49) | 15 | 5.5 | 0 |

**Table 2: Reliability and descriptive analyses of feedback practices**

| Teachers' online feedback practices | N | Mean | SD | Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 Provide timely feedback so that students have enough time to reflect and make revision before submitting their assignment (timely feedback) | 274 | 4.44 | 0.62 | 0.80 |
| 2 Advise students to obtain learning objectives (LO) step by step (feedback to obtain LO) | 274 | 4.29 | 0.71 | 0.81 |
| 3 Provide regular feedback (regular feedback) | 274 | 4.28 | 0.63 | 0.71 |
| 4 Integrate automated answers into quizzes and multiple-choice tests like google forms (automated feedback) | 274 | 4.18 | 0.73 | 0.73 |
| 5 When giving students feedback at open discussions, teacher should encourage discussions and student thinking (open feedback) | 274 | 4.10 | 1.30 | 0.76 |
| 6 Provide feedback for students by a variety of technological channels (TC) such as emails, google docs, track changes, audio files with oral feedback (feedback using TC) | 274 | 4.04 | 0.79 | 0.72 |
| 7 Praise students for their efforts (praise) | 274 | 3.87 | 0.80 | 0.74 |

## Results

### *Findings from survey questionnaire analyses*

This section presents descriptive and reliability analyses of seven items relating to teacher feedback practices to explore if these seven items are reliable scales, and how important the students thought of tutors' given feedback practices. Seven items of feedback are written for short as: Timely feedback, Feedback to obtain LO, Regular feedback, Automated feedback, Open feedback, Feedback using TC, and Praise. Findings from reliability and descriptive analyses of these seven items are presented below.

Concerning reliabilities of items, as can be seen from Table 2, two out of seven items had high reliabilities as their Cronbach's alphas were above 0.80: Timely feedback ($\alpha$ = 0.80), and Feedback to obtain LO ($\alpha$ = 0.81). Four out of seven items had their alpha values at a lower level but this level was still acceptable: Regular feedback ($\alpha$ = 0.71), Automated feedback ($\alpha$ = 0.73), Open feedback ($\alpha$ = 0.76), Feedback using TC ($\alpha$ = 0.72) and Praise ($\alpha$ = 0.74). These statistics indicated that the items were reliable ones.

The table shows the order of importance of feedback practices that students rated in the questionnaire. Descriptive analysis shows that students thought timely feedback was the most important when they switched to online learning platform (M = 4.4). Students thought that timely feedback would enable them to have sufficient time to reflect and then revise their work before submitting their last version of their assignment. Since students in Vietnam are 'examination-driven', they are really concerned about the outcomes of their assignments, these data are not surprising.

Following timely feedback, students also perceived teacher feedback that facilitated them to obtain learning objectives step by step as highly important (M = 4.29) while the mean score rated by students for regular feedback is almost the same as this feedback (M = 4.28). Overall, these top three feedback practices of highest importance are interrelated, all indicating that students were more concerned about the time and the frequency as well as the quality of feedback rather than trendy feedback practices aided by technological tools. As far as online education is concerned, it is generally thought that technological tools would play essential roles in tutor feedback practice. Yet, in this study, students did not rate technology-aided feedback as of the highest importance. They ranked two technology-aided feedback practices "Integrate automated answers into quizzes and multiple-choice tests like google forms" the fourth (M = 4.18) and "Provide feedback for students by a variety of technological channels" the sixth (M = 4.04) out of the seven given feedback practices. This finding is surprising since the feedback practices aided by those digital tools most frequently employed by teachers in online courses were both perceived at lower levels of importance and were overtaken by good feedback practices well established in conventional classrooms.

Regarding how teachers provide feedback in public mode such as in whole-class discussion in which teachers opened discussion for students to reflect and share their thoughts on their work, this approach to feedback was rated the fifth, followed by "praising students for their efforts". While the study expected to have some significant findings regarding "praising" given there have been more mental wellbeing problems induced by the difficult Covid pandemic conditions, the students were less interested in those affective aspects of feedback. Rather, they seemed to be more concerned about

practical aspects of feedback that enable them either to achieve higher scores for their assignments or to obtain their learning goals.

In summary, it was expected that what emerged from the questionnaire analysis would favour digitally based feedback practices since students had to rapidly shift from face-to-face mode to online classes due to unplanned school closure and social distancing. While students perceived those practices important in maintaining their engagement in learning, they were not considered the most important feedback practices to facilitate their learning online. Rather, the student participants thought that conventional feedback, including quality and regular feedback, would fundamentally help their learning. This finding may surprise teachers who were endeavouring to explore alternative feedback practices aided by digital tools for online learning.

### Findings from interviews

Semi-structured interviews with the participating students suggested that they all perceived their tutors' feedback as of crucial importance for their learning. They shared the view that their tutors' feedback provided them with information about the areas of strength and the areas they need to work on in both teaching theory and practice courses. They felt that they were learning from their tutors' feedback regardless of whether the feedback was directed to themselves or to other peers, and whether the feedback was positive or negative. They showed their considerable respect and appreciation of their tutors' efforts, enthusiasm, and dedication in making feedback possible to them given their newly added responsibilities and workload during periods of online learning.

> *I appreciate my teacher's negative feedback via email because it helped when we were doing reviews. (ST2)*

> *I learned a lot from my teacher's feedback about my lesson plans and my teaching practice though I couldn't meet her in person due to the uni. shut. (ST7)*

Teacher feedback was perceived by the students to operate at all the four levels, namely: the level of task; of process; of self-regulation; and the level of self. Focusing on the level of task, tutor feedback was found to target their students' productive skills of speaking and writing, their lesson planning, and their micro-teaching performances. Operating at the process level, tutor feedback was delivered to engage students in strategies and possibilities to better adapt teaching materials, develop lesson plans, and deliver the lesson and those skills needed to prepare students for their exams. Functioning at the level of self-regulation, teacher feedback was found to focus on students' critical thinking and their ability to self-reflect to become more aware of their own areas of strength and weakness.

> *She gave clear and detailed feedback on our lesson plans so we managed to carry out the teaching activity online though there was no real classroom context with no real students and no real teaching aids, no real interaction. (ST4)*

> *She introduced some examples of possible situations in our teaching practice, which made me think considerably how to respond to those situations. (ST6)*

Regarding the students' affective responses to feedback, they believed that they experienced positive changes in their attitude and motivation toward learning thanks to their tutors' feedback, which made them become more confident of their own abilities and more conscious of their own limitations. Teacher feedback was perceived to have an important mediating effect on their motivation.

> *My classroom atmosphere became more engaging, more exciting when the teacher held a feedback session. (ST6)*

> *I become more confident of my own abilities and more conscious of my own limitations. (ST2)*

However, teacher feedback to address the self-regulation level was perceived the least by the students (only two commented) compared to the other three levels (14 commented). More comments (9 out of 16) were made on their tutors' feedback at the task and process level than at any other level. This finding is consistent with that from the questionnaire, which suggests that the students were exam-oriented and therefore paid most attention to the feedback directly targeted to help them perform better in examinations.

Tutor feedback was found to be aided by technology via a variety of channels and platforms such as email services, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom, Google Meet, Facebook, and Zalo. This platforms allowed for real-time and/or delayed feedback, which made the feedback itself more accessible and more adaptive to the realities during the Covid pandemic. The use of digital assessment tools also made tutor feedback combined with formative tests possible for students. Review tests followed by teachers' feedback was conducted on regular basis on Fitel – the university e-learning platform and on other popular communication platforms.

> *At home I could read my teacher's comments on my teaching demos and talk to her at the same time on Zoom and Google Document app. (ST8)*

> *It was good that our group was altogether reading my teacher's comment on Google Classroom to revise our lesson plans though we were far away from each other. (ST5)*

Tutor feedback was delivered to the students in oral form (online and or recorded messages), written form (shared documents) and integrated form. The Google Document function made it easier for both of teachers and students to work and make changes on the same text and more accessible to students to "see teachers' corrective feedback right at the parts of the writing where it was needed, which is very much like working on a print version (ST1). A key advantage of tutor feedback directed online in these modes is that the feedback itself could be recorded and archived by teachers and/ or students for future reference if needed.

> *I can listen to my tutor's recorded message about my lesson plan again if the wifi receiver is too bad then. (S6)*

> *We put our teachers' feedback sent to us via email into archives and the emails are marked with "starred" function so that it would be easier for us to search for these mails and we can read the feedback again later. (ST9)*

In terms of the quantity of feedback, teacher feedback left something to be desired. There was a shared view held by the students that the amount of feedback they received was not satisfactory and the students would like to obtain more feedback. They expressed their feelings of discouragement when they were not provided with enough feedback or when the feedback was not given in a timely and frequent way. The tutors' tight teaching schedule and the large class size resulted in students having unequal access to feedback.

> *Most of us did not receive any feedback about our writing this term. My teacher was too busy to answer our emails and messages. (ST1)*

Regarding the frequency of feedback, all the students were of the opinion that feedback should be given on regular basis, although their ideas about frequency varied. The frequency level was satisfactory to some students while others suggested that the feedback they received was not frequent enough.

Concerning the quality of feedback, the tutors' perceived feedback left some areas for consideration. While the students expected their teachers to highlight common mistakes made by the majority of their class members, they would have liked their teacher feedback to be personalised. Feedback should be made to accommodate students with special needs or those of lower levels. It would be hard to "absorb all the teachers' feedback and catch up with other students at the time when the online feedback was being delivered" (ST2). They would therefore prefer to be personally inboxed with more tailor-made feedback later. Feedback should also be detailed if addressed to individuals for them to be informed of their areas of strength and areas needing improvement.

> *When I received my score for my oral presentation in class, I did not know what part I was good at and what part I was bad at, and how to improve the score. I did not know how to resolve my problems. (ST7)*

> *I could not get the gist of the overall aim and what to do to achieve the aim because the teacher's feedback was too general. (ST5)*

Feedback would be more effective if teachers were able to acquire mastery of ICT tools to employ in their feedback giving practices. Tutors' lack of ICT skills to utilize feedback tools and technologies, as revealed by the students, could be another barrier to the accessibility of their feedback to their students.

> *My teacher did not know how to make use of "share sound" function to play recordings of oral feedback for us. (ST6)*

In addition, they would like their teachers to anonymize the students' work so their peers cannot identify personal information to avoid any potential face-threatening acts which may result from low-quality work or poor performance. They would prefer feedback to be directed to them both during the course and at the end of the course. The students also expressed their likes when their tutors coordinated different sources of feedback including teacher feedback and peer feedback, offering "open discussions for peer feedback exchanges" (ST2). This affirms the students' role as active learners by not treating their tutors as the only source of feedback provision but also seeking feedback from other sources such as group chats and forums. However, students perceived their teacher's feedback as a more reliable source of information than their partners because "my partners may not be well-informed enough to give me reliable information" (ST11).

The findings from the interview analysis show consistency with findings from the questionnaire analysis. Feedback was generally perceived as an important source of information for students to support their learning. The students, however, attached higher levels of importance to effective feedback well established in a conventional classroom than feedback aided by tools and technologies.

## Discussion

Set in the context of a teacher-training university in Vietnam, the study attempts to gain insights into tutors' feedback practices as perceived by pre-service teachers in times of the Covid pandemic. In general, all the interviewed students attached a vitally important role to teachers' feedback in helping them make better changes in their skills, performances, and understanding. Both qualitative and quantitative data reveal that all students held the view that teachers' feedback was treated as a vital source of knowledge to inform their learning. Teachers' comments in both spoken and written form were respectfully appreciated by the students. While some evidence from previous studies suggest that students could be grade-focused and had little incentive to pay attention to their teachers' feedback and reflect on their tutors' opinions (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), our study shows proven appreciation expressed by the students for the tutors' corrective feedback to their work. This finding is in line with studies situated in the same context where there is an "unquestioning respect" for teachers' authority and their wisdom in the traditional pedagogy of Vietnam as a country culturally influenced by Confucian doctrines and beliefs (Nguyen & Hall, 2017; Tran, 2021).

While the students attached crucial importance to tutors' feedback for their learning, they recognized their peers' feedback as a referential source of information for discussion and opinion exchanges in their learning. This signifies a positive shift in their learning as a trainee and a future teacher. What students perceived in their role as trainees can shape and inform what they do in their future role as a teacher. This positive shift could potentially lead to further opportunities for effective feedback exchanges with students being an active agent in the feedback process and co-constructors of new knowledge and understanding with their teachers (Small & Attree, 2016).

When the students were asked to share their perceptions of their teachers' feedback practice during the online learning periods, they primarily focused on the quality of feedback they would expect from their teachers. What they perceived to be useful feedback matched with the criteria of effective feedback supported by past literature

(Arts et al., 2016; Ferguson, 2011; Ha et al., 2021; Winstone & Carless, 2019). Their prior attention was paid to the quality, the amount, and the frequency of feedback rather than the digital tools and platforms employed by their tutors. In their shared opinions, the most important factors to them are the individualization, the specification, the punctuality, and the frequency of their tutors' feedback. This finding once again confirmed and consolidated current scholarship about key qualities of good feedback found well established in both face-to-face and virtual classrooms.

Teacher feedback operating at the self-regulation level to promote the students' autonomy, self-control, self-direction, and self-discipline was uncommon in their perceptions. The finding suggests that the students themselves had minimal self-regulation strategies, i.e., the way they monitor, direct, and regulate actions toward their own learning goals. The way they perceive their tutors' feedback can help promote self-regulation. It is recommended that tutors' orientation towards promoting their students' self-regulation strategies should be clearly articulated in their feedback practice and communication with their students. Giving feedback to students about how to give feedback to themselves as self-assessment and self-management of their own learning should be tutors' major pedagogical considerations. Instructions about strategies in giving feedback could be explicitly provided to students prior to times of feedback in order to develop their meta-awareness about learning how to give feedback to themselves and to others. This is of particular importance since the students are prospective teachers who themselves will be providing feedback in the future. As far as students are concerned, they need to be conscious of seeking their tutor feedback in ways that will direct and improve their future learning and self-regulation strategies. Students should develop their metacognitive skills of self-evaluation rather than depend on external factors such as their tutor feedback. After all, feedback processes should be the shared responsibilities of both tutors and students who are both involved in the co-construction of knowledge (Carless & Winstone, 2020; Small & Attree, 2016).

The students were aware of their tutors' ability to make use of digital tools and technologies as mediating factors which could enhance or affect the quality of feedback. Tutors' adoption of varying tools and channels of communication made their feedback available in different modes of delivery offering their students first-hand experience of digital feedback, motivating learning, and making the virtual classroom an engaging e-learning place to be. The students' experiences with online feedback also revealed that teachers' lack of ICT tools and skills actually impeded the accessibility of feedback to students. This was especially true for those students who felt they were marginalized because they had technical issues with their devices or did not have access to quality internet connection and quality software applications for their learning. This study would therefore propose implications for teachers acquiring digital mastery as part of online feedback pedagogy in preparation for varied forms of online instruction.

## Conclusion

The present study seeks to explore what tutor feedback practice may be perceived to support student learning from their own perspectives during online education. The study shows that although the students recognized the significance of technology aided feedback, they perceived that timely, detailed, frequent and personalized feedback was

more important. Key qualities of effective feedback, well-established in conventional classrooms, were still perceived to be the most important in technology-based learning environments where feedback is aided and delivered via technology tools. In this regard, the findings of the study provide empirical evidence to consolidate and extend current scholarship about key qualities of good feedback practices in both face-to-face and online learning.

Although the generalizability of the study is limited, the student feedback receiving experiences offers opportunities for the pre-service teachers to observe and reflect upon the feedback practices in order to perform their own feedback practices in the future preparing for a move to digital education in response to unforeseen circumstances. The experiences they had when they acted as feedback recipients would help them understand the experiences their own students would have being in the same role later.

Teacher-training programs may consider providing feedback-giving strategies, especially at the self-regulation level, as a teaching experience at the teaching practice stage to help transform student teachers' self-understanding of feedback processes from that of a trainee to that of a teacher. This encourages teacher educators to reconsider how to integrate different levels of feedback in both conventional and virtual classrooms in post-Covid teacher training. Students' engagement in the feedback processes for effective co-construction of knowledge has been an ongoing, major issue in higher education and this engagement should not be neglected in post-Covid-19 online feedback pedagogy.

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# A university that withstands financial uncertainties in complex times

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## Abstract

This paper seeks to make practical recommendations on how universities can thrive when expected to merely survive. Once, higher education was considered a public good, and so it seemed appropriate that the state remain its sole funder. However, now that states are withdrawing their investment in higher education because they deem other socio-economic responsibilities (like Covid-19 relief measures) more pressing, it is difficult for universities to receive adequate public funding for teaching and research. In order to compensate for such decreased funding, universities are being driven to find other sources of income, for example, by seeking to collaborate with industry. While pro-marketeers argue in favour of such an economic mission, anti-marketeers argue against it. Using the University of Auckland (UoA) as a case study, I analyse how, if the economic mission is done well, it can reduce universities' resource dependence on public funding – a tool to thrive despite funding cuts.

## Keywords

Covid-19, funding diversification, public funding, society, teaching and research, university

## Introduction

Under the spectre of the Covid-19 global pandemic, some countries, including New Zealand (NZ), have implemented lockdowns to avoid spreading the virus. NZ universities have also been affected in diverse ways: they were all closed, in-person courses/papers were cancelled and put online, and academic conferences have been called off. Due to the restrictive measures of the nationwide lockdown, it was impressive that NZ universities shifted all of their courses online to deliver core education services. However, effective online teaching and learning take time and support (Altbach & de Wit, 2020). Thus, making these changes quickly may lead to low quality. The worst part is when students lack sufficient facilities at home, such as secure internet (University of Auckland [UoA], n.d-d). Also, when academics have low knowledge of running online courses this can impact academic autonomy (Pruvot & Estermann, 2017).

NZ universities may be doing their best in this Covid-19 global pandemic era (Cameron et al., 2021). However, learning longer-term strategic management may be the way forward to steer an increasingly uncertain future. Key among these strategies is

the avoidance of an over-reliance on a few sources of funding, which is likely to impact a university's core mission of teaching and research. The UoA in 2020 put a freeze on staff hiring. The Vice-Chancellor (VC) indicated that:

> *[the] crisis will have a significant impact on the University's revenues, with over $30 million (NZD) of revenue at risk in the first semester. Accordingly, it will be necessary for us to do everything we can to limit expenditures. Our main expenditure item is staff. I am therefore instituting an immediate freeze on the hiring of staff to make sure that we can maintain the financial stability of the University.*

(D. Freshwater, in Gerritsen, 2020, para. 4)

Funding is influencing UoA's ability to hire new staff and possible reductions in current staffing. The importance of ensuring sufficient staff numbers to both support students and the institution during these challenging times, in which everyone is doing their best to adapt to new realities, cannot be overemphasised (Thatcher et al., 2020). Resource dependence theorists argue that the environment should not be viewed as a set of uncontrollable constraints (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). University management is not obliged to adhere to the dictates of the environment. Instead, they can influence it to fit their goals and objectives by actively seeking diversified funding sources (Clark, 1998).

As in many other countries, university education in NZ has traditionally been recognised as a public good that deserves the support of society (Larner & Le Heron, 2005). It is a public good because it is expected to benefit society and not just the individual. However, with the constant, if not shrinking, public funding in NZ, the universities have had to find other funding sources to sustain their teaching and research activities (Crawford, 2016; Salmi, 2007). That has led to a growing emphasis on the economic mission in higher education (Shore & Taitz, 2012). The UoA seems to be making strides in the economic mission of diversifying funding sources. Its financial forecast for 2021 shows a surplus of $43m, up from the $10m it anticipated (D. Freshwater, staff communication, August 13, 2021). According to the VC, the success story resulted from "the unprecedented increase of around 2,000 student enrolments this year, this being 6 percent above budget and 4 percent higher than the previous two years." I focus in this paper on UoA among the eight public universities in NZ because it is the flagship university of NZ and has demonstrated a flourishing outlook in a global pandemic. Guided by the literature and documents such as the strategic plans and policies of UoA, I seek to explore the question: "What are the features of a thriving university in complex times?"

## The economic mission as a global phenomenon

The addition of the economic mission of raising funding to universities' core mission of teaching and research is a global trend. Thus, many higher education systems, including those that receive significant public funding, have started to respond to the global pressure to diversify funding sources (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002). Generally, how close a higher education system is to the market may be directly linked with how much

public funding it receives. Table 1 shows the percentage of public spending on tertiary education in some selected OECD countries.

**Table 1: Country Public Spending on Tertiary Education in 2016**

| Country | % of education spending |
|---|---|
| Australia | 37.8 |
| Finland | 93.1 |
| Germany | 82.7 |
| Iceland | 89.3 |
| New Zealand | 51.6 |
| Norway | 96.0 |
| Sweden | 84.7 |
| United Kingdom | 25.0 |
| United States | 35.2 |

Source: Figures from OECD (2020)

Table 1 shows public spending in tertiary education is higher in the Nordic countries (Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) than in the Anglophone nations of Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom and the United States. Understandably, Norway, which invests 96% in tertiary education, can make education free for everyone, including international students. In contrast, universities in the Anglophone countries cannot rely on their relatively low public funding.

Notwithstanding the high public investment in the Nordic countries, the pressures of globalisation are compelling the universities to also diversify funding sources. In 2006, Denmark introduced tuition fees for international students outside the European Union and European Economic Area (EEA), followed by Sweden in 2011 (Välimaa, 2015) and Finland in 2017 (International Consultants for Education and Fairs [ICEF], 2016). According to the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, "The goal of the government proposal is to both advance these institutions' opportunities for education export and also expand their funding base" (ICEF, 2016). This global pressure has led to the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research's attempts to introduce tuition fees for students from outside the EEA (Myklebust, 2017). These developments in the Nordic region are consistent with the glonacal agency assumption that, although higher education institutions operate in their national settings, an increasingly global dimension connects the national systems (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002).

It may be reasonable for higher education systems that receive less public funding to seek additional income sources. Two key reasons for this shift are the rise of knowledge economies, where universities are expected to contribute to the economic development of their countries (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) and the increasingly competitive

government funding for universities (Salmi, 2007). In response to these pressures, universities are left with little option but to compete for external funding sources. Thus, universities did not choose to be profit-driven commercial enterprises. Instead, the current global conditions and financial pressures compel them to act in this capacity to ensure their financial stability (Martin, 2012).

Apart from being underfunded, some higher education systems are facing public funding cuts (Salmi, 2007). In Germany, for instance, the government announced in 2019 that for the first time in 16 years, the universities would suffer a reduction in their research funding until 2022 (Matthews, 2019). This seems to imply one message to universities: obtain funding from other sources. Unlike many OECD countries, the NZ government continuously increases university funding (Tertiary Education Commission [TEC], 2017). That confirms the glonacal agency assumption that, although a phenomenon may increasingly be global, the actual level of response varies between countries (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002). However, the funding allocation system in NZ, where university research funding depends on its academics' research performance, could lead to financial insecurity. Also, the about 50% public investment in the universities, as shown in Table 1, is not enough to enhance their teaching and research activities; therefore, there is a need to seek alternative funding sources.

Higher education scholars are divided on the need for universities to pursue the diversification of funding sources. Some support this move in the market direction, whom I call *pro-marketeers*, and those against it, whom I call *anti-marketeers*. Generally, while the anti-marketeers regard the move as leading to an erosion of university autonomy, the pro-marketeers think that the economic mission can instead increase university autonomy.

## Anti-marketeers

The anti-marketeers (e.g., Aronowitz & Giroux, 2000; Shore & Wright, 2017) believe that universities may lose focus on their core mission if they intensively pursue the economic mission of raising private funding. The consequences may include the university losing its soul and academics putting private interests over public interests.

### University losing its soul

Aronowitz and Giroux (2000) argued that as corporate culture and values are being brought into the domain of the university, corporate planning might replace social planning, and management becomes a substitute for leadership. That echoes what Gumport (2000) discussed as the move from higher education as a social institution to higher education as an industry, where managerialism is increasingly becoming a norm. When this happens, universities become adjuncts of the corporation, and their autonomous function may be eroded (Aronowitz & Giroux, 2000). Shore and Wright (2017) outline seven features of reforms that have taken place in higher education. These are: state disinvestment in universities; new regimes for promoting competitiveness; the rise of audit culture: performance and output measures; administrative bloat, academic decline; institutional capture: the power of the "administeriat"; new income streams and the rise of the "Entrepreneurial University"; higher education as a private investment

versus public good. With these reforms came the title of their book, *Death of the Public University?* The authors argued that, although the public university is now moving in the "wrong direction," it may not be "dead." To revive the university, the authors call for universities that are built on trust and whose primary goal is to serve society and not money-making.

### Private over the public interest

Aronowitz and Giroux (2000) argued that as the university pursues marketisation policies, private interests replace public and social responsibility. Similarly, Ford (2007) observed that, unlike the civic university, which was devoted to serving the interests of the state, and the research university, which was devoted to research, the entrepreneurial university exists to serve the economic interests of individuals and, indirectly, the corporations that employ them. Undoubtedly, the purpose of the entrepreneurial university is also to maintain financial sustainability. However, Ford argued that too much focus on pursuing marketisation/economic mission is likely to cause social disruption in the future.

### Pro-marketeers

While the pro-marketeers (e.g., Clark, 2001; Etzkowitz et al., 2000; Kerr, 2001) acknowledge the issues raised by the anti-marketeers, they argue that the university did not choose to be entrepreneurial. Instead, certain factors such as a reduction in public funding and a changing relationship with the university's environment have caused the university to transform itself to thrive.

### Reduction in state funding

Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) observed that, because of the decline in state funding, higher education institutions are forced to seek external funding sources. They do this by pursuing market and market-like activities. This view is supported by Jongbloed (2003), who argued that through marketisation policies, universities have more room to manoeuvre in the discharge of their functions. To Jongbloed, marketisation policies have been introduced in sectors previously characterised by high governmental control. The author, however, admits that a real market for higher education does not exist because government policies prevent such markets from forming.

### A new relationship with the external environment

The pro-marketeers believe that the market is a necessary tool for universities to be able to respond to pressure from their environment. Clark (1998), who has written extensively on the "entrepreneurial university," argues that if universities do not transform themselves, there will be a discrepancy between the demands made upon them by society and their capacity to respond. The more complex a society becomes, such as having to deal with the Covid-19 global pandemic, the more universities are required to solve complex problems. Clark believes that if entrepreneurialism in the universities is done well, it can strengthen university autonomy because, with increased

funding and diversification, universities can have more freedom to pursue their core mission. To counter the arguments by the opponents of the economic mission, Clark (2001, p. 10) explained that:

> *Entrepreneurial character in universities does not stifle the collegial spirit, it does not make universities handmaidens of industries, and it does not commercialise universities and turn them into all-purpose shopping malls. On all three accounts, it moves in the opposite direction.*

Thus, entrepreneurialism according to Clark sense should be seen as a "collegial entrepreneurism" and a step to strengthen university autonomy. To guide universities on their pathway to become entrepreneurial, Clark (1998) outlined five elements of an entrepreneurial university: a strengthened steering core; an expanded developmental periphery; a diversified funding base; a stimulated academic heartland; and an integrated entrepreneurial culture. In the next section, I discuss how the entrepreneurial outlook of NZ's flagship university allows it to grow irrespective of turbulent economic times.

## UoA's attitude towards the economic mission

It is commonly agreed that we currently live in challenging times because of the Covid-19 global pandemic. Professor Dawn Freshwater acknowledges that leading a university in times like these is challenging and calls for robust action. In her own words:

> *In this context the role and contribution that universities such as ours make is ever more crucial. A healthy and sustainable future requires thriving universities. They represent the opening and exploration of worlds of new possibilities – for individuals and for societies. Building bridges: between universities, governments and industry; and between universities and the broader community, at a city, regional, national and international level is the hallmark of a future focused global civic institution. As are the lived experience of our values and culture. (D. Freshwater, staff communication, March 17, 2020)*

Thus, by taking steps to build bridges with the external environment, universities can withstand turbulent economic times because it provides the resources they need. Otherwise, some academics are likely to lose their jobs when university leaders are being forced by funding pressures to make difficult decisions. For instance, in 2018, the UoA had to restructure academic staff in both the Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Education and Social Work due to the declining student numbers in those faculties, which directly impacted the university's finances (UoA, 2018). The reduction in staff may lead to an inability to teach the potential growing numbers of domestic students (due to travel restrictions). Also, increased teaching loads may affect research output, which could lead to a fall in university rankings and the consequence of becoming less attractive for international funding. The adverse effects of cutting down staff due to financial challenges are many (Thatcher et al., 2020).

To guard against the fear of receiving less funding – and for many reasons such as reputation/prestige, target areas of research and contributing to a relevant body

of knowledge – the university seeks diversified funding sources, which mostly come from industry, philanthropic organisations and individuals. The *University of Auckland Strategic Plan 2013 – 2020* outlines the estimated revenue (inclusive of inflation) from these sources that the university expected to have by 2020, as shown in Table 2.

Though the focus here is not to evaluate the success or failure of the UoA's strategic plan, doing so for some revenue sources might be helpful. The university's estimated Performance-Based Research Funding (PBRF) figure for 2020 was $78million (NZD). However, it had already met that goal (about $83million NZD) by 2014 (TEC, 2016). While the PBRF constituted about 8% of the university's income in 2011, it estimated the value to drop to 6% in 2020. Table 2 also shows that the university expected to have its government teaching grants in 2011 reduced by 3% of total funding sources in 2020. Among the reasons for this action was that it preferred "revenue sources whose growth is not constrained by the public policy environment in which [they] operate" (UoA, 2012, p. 15). The university expected more of its total revenue to come from sources such as international tuition fees (8% in 2011 to 11% in 2020) and domestic commercial research (6% in 2011 to 8% in 2020). The *University of Auckland 2019-2020 Profile* shows that, in 2018, it signed $169million (NZD) new research contracts and raised $148 million (NZD) through its "spin-out companies in the past five years" (UoA, n.d-a). Though these figures do not indicate how much percentage of its total revenue they represent, it is a sign of the university actively seeking diversified revenue sources.

**Table 2: UoA's Revenue Targets from 2011 to 2020**

| Revenue | 2011 $m (NZD) | 2011 % | 2020 $m (NZD) | 2020 % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Government grants (teaching) | 279 | 30 | 367 | 27 |
| Performance Based Research Fund | 77 | 8 | 78 | 6 |
| Domestic tuition fees | 135 | 14 | 191 | 14 |
| Domestic public good research | 162 | 17 | 284 | 21 |
| International tuition fees | 71 | 8 | 150 | 11 |
| Domestic commercial research | 60 | 6 | 114 | 8 |
| International research | 18 | 2 | 35 | 3 |
| Revenue from philanthropy | 11 | 1 | 15 | 1 |
| Service income | 92 | 10 | 100 | 8 |
| Other revenue | 28 | 3 | 13 | 1 |
| Total Revenue | 933 | 100 | 1,347 | 100 |

Source: Adapted from UoA (2012, p. 15)

If the economic mission is done well, it can enhance university autonomy because, with increased funding, universities can pursue their curiosity-driven research (and teaching). The challenge might be how universities can manage both their core mission and their economic mission. What is needed is a quite radical change in universities' value system, where at least equal value is given to both missions (Sarpong et al., 2020). According to the literature, universities take strategic measures to respond to the changes in demand imposed on them by society (Clark, 1998; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). Some of these measures are market-driven, causing universities to change their identity as social institutions to resemble corporations.

### Internal structure and practices of UoA

When faced with divided views from the anti-marketeers and the pro-marketeers, there is a temptation to choose one side over the other. Choosing between them may not solve the problem of tensions between the core and economic missions. Universities, therefore, may have to find ways to integrate both. To do so, I discuss four likely impacts of the economic mission on the internal structure and practices of universities: multiversity; interdisciplinarity; opposing interests; and university identity. Under each impact, I provide possible solutions through the lens of the literature.

#### *Multiversity*

Universities succeed by managing the core mission of teaching and research and the economic mission of diversifying funding sources. As the anti-marketeers argue, the growing influence of corporate culture on university operations undermines the distinction between universities and corporations. However, just as it would be unwise for corporations to operate like universities, so it would be unwise for universities to operate like corporations (Metcalfe, 2010). The challenge with universities adding the economic mission is that, in the course of meeting the short-term needs of society, they may lose sight of their core mission. Because "[a]s the boundaries between public values and commercial interests become blurred, many academics appear less as disinterested truth seekers than operatives for business interests" (Giroux, 2002, p. 433). Thus, as universities and academics increasingly become interested in funding, industry is more than willing to provide it, but usually at a cost – loss of autonomy.

To resolve this issue, Clark's entrepreneurial university model suggests that universities set up developmental periphery as the medium to reach out to the outside world. While these peripheries can focus on society's short-term needs, university faculties can also focus on the core academic mission of the university such as teaching people to be global citizens and searching and transferring new knowledge. Clark (2004) argued that, if a university's interaction with government and industry is to continue to develop, its infrastructure must keep pace. Thus, universities set up an entire new periphery of non-traditional units. UniServices, as the research commercialisation unit of UoA, symbolises a developmental periphery suggested by Clark. Thus, having this unit in place could ensure that the university can live both inside the *ivory tower* – where they focus on their core mission without disturbances – and outside the *ivory tower* –

where they become responsive to societal needs. Ideally, universities need to identify which societal needs they can respond to effectively. However, increasing academic stratification may cause universities specialising in the Arts, for instance, to receive less external funding than if they add the Sciences or Business in order to meet the need to be comprehensive. The increasingly complex nature of work in society and universities has created interdisciplinary programmes and units within universities.

### Interdisciplinarity

As part of building the developmental periphery, faculties are now focusing on building interdisciplinary units to make it easier to connect students' academic learning and academics' research with the outside world. Interdisciplinary research and teaching are fast becoming a common trend, with university leaders and funding bodies emphasising that the world's most pressing problems will best be solved this way (Clark, 1998). For instance, the School of Nursing at the UoA aims to enable students to work with other health professionals:

> *Interdisciplinary education had proven successful in many top universities across the world. It seemed logical to educate medical, pharmacy and nursing students alongside each other since they would be working together as health professionals in the future. This interdisciplinary approach gave students the opportunity to gain new perspectives and an understanding of how each professional contributes to patient care.* (UoA, n.d-b)

Similarly, due to the benefits that come with interdisciplinary units, many staff at the Faculty of Creative Arts and Industries in UoA strive to do the same:

> *Many of our staff and postgraduate students work collaboratively on interdisciplinary research projects. They also network with external experts and professionals in New Zealand and abroad, and present their research in settings including art galleries, professional conventions, dance stages and concert platforms.* (UoA, n.d-c)

Thus, establishing interdisciplinary research and teaching centres where disciplines are integrated is crucial in solving complex societal problems because interdisciplinarity could provide a broader view and sharper insights from the intersection between many academics with disciplinary differences (Irani, 2018).

Universities should not yield to the financial need of making significant internal changes in order to pursue funding. Given that universities have historically been organised around disciplines (Clark, 1983), academics often cling to their disciplines as a sense of identity (Irani, 2018). Thus, one can anticipate that interdisciplinarity would not internally get funded as much as it should. It may be argued that every funding that gets spent in a university supporting interdisciplinary units is research funding that is not available to support disciplines (Bothwell, 2020). Interdisciplinarity, therefore, forms the bridge to reach out to the external bodies, who then provide funding to these units.

While the anti-marketeers may perceive the interdisciplinary units as a means

of chasing government and industry funding, it should also be considered a useful platform for academics to contribute to the big debates of our time. The fact that both government and industry continue to turn to universities for solutions to their problems indicates trust in the academic system. Academics who are affiliated with the interdisciplinary centres also have faculties, and their work is accountable to both the centre and their faculty. If academics are asked to leave either the discipline or the centre, they will likely leave the centre. The reason being that, unlike businesses, universities do not have strongly interdependent parts (Musseline, 2007). Thus, there could be possible resistance to this interdisciplinarity that comes with the entrepreneurial university.

### *Opposing interests*

The academic setting is different from that of corporations. The academic system works with "materials" (knowledge) that are increasingly specialised, broad and highly autonomous. Faculty autonomy tends to be high, and academics are essentially in direct control of their own work environment (Clark, 1983). While the knowledge base is loosely coupled, disciplines are financially interconnected and entangled through university policies and practices. This could create tensions between the central management and the faculties. Also, while the commercial units of universities usually have traits like corporations, the general organisational culture and behaviour is quite different – and sometimes opposing. For instance, academics may want to publish, but the commercialisation units might want a patent first. That ultimately may lead to delays in publications. Moreover, if commercial units are not controlled, universities and faculties could become more business-focused with commercial interests becoming the primary goal. Clear scope exists for adverse effects on academic activities (Gillings & Williamson, 2015).

Resolving opposing interests requires collaborative efforts between the centre and the faculties and sometimes within the centre and the faculties (Zechlin, 2010). Bringing together academics with varying disciplinary backgrounds and expecting them to agree on changes may be more challenging. Thus, opposing priorities will always be part of the academic setting. What matters most is using healthy negotiation/facilitation tools to handle such situations (Clark, 1998). To resolve opposing interests in the academic system, universities should first be flexible since different challenges may require different solutions. The management should identify the source(s) of conflict and gather the kind of information and evidence that will lead to resolution. Steps towards resolution requires effective communication, which considers appropriate timing, leading to sensemaking and sensegiving – in which university management create an understanding of their policy aims and gain the support of faculties and units by providing a viable interpretation of changes in the academic system (Kezar, 2013). Without the support of faculties, universities will exhaust themselves dealing with internal conflicts. Perhaps the faculties and university management may view the university differently.

*University identity*

In response to the growing demand from society, universities adopt strategies to thrive – strategies that may raise questions regarding their identity. According to the anti-marketeers, universities are moving from being social institutions and becoming more like industry. However, this is a feature of an entrepreneurial university, where universities become agile (Clark, 1998). From a review of the inaugural Reuters Top 75: Asia's Most Innovative Universities rankings in 2016 (Bothwell, 2016), the UoA was ranked as the most innovative University in NZ and Australia. According to the then acting UoA Vice-Chancellor, Professor Jim Metson, the University is encouraging innovative and entrepreneurial culture: "We are committed to fostering this entrepreneurial culture within the University, driving the growth of new high-value business, and strengthening our traditional industries through innovation" (UoA, 2016). Again, the UoA was named Entrepreneurial University of the Year 2019 at the Asia-Pacific Triple E (Entrepreneurship and Engagement Excellence) Awards in Higher Education (UoA, 2019). The awards show how the university is comprehensively embracing the revenue growth in partnership with industry.

> *The University of Auckland's award came in recognition of the quality and scale of entrepreneurial initiatives generated through UniServices and the Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship. These include the establishment of a world-class innovation hub and makerspace, an inventor's fund and investment committees, a global presence with new off-shore spaces including the Innovation Institute of China in Hangzhou, extra-curricular programmes and integration of entrepreneurship within curricula.* (UoA, 2019, para. 6)

Partnership with industry is a key feature of an entrepreneurial university (Clark, 1998). As commented by the immediate past Vice Chancellor, Professor Stuart McCutcheon, "Innovation and entrepreneurship have for many years been a feature of the University of Auckland" (UoA, 2019). Thus, being entrepreneurial could connote an innovative spirit to support academic and research pursuits while ensuring institutional financial sustainability. Like the UoA, higher education institutions ought to have a strong connection to industry to ensure that students, for instance, understand organisational cultures and be prepared to enter industry once they graduate (relevance to their future careers).

**Conclusion**

This paper argued the necessity of the economic mission of funding diversification, especially in higher education systems that receive low public funding. It showed that teaching and research as universities' core mission could effectively co-exist with the economic mission. Society is dynamic, and universities, too, must be agile to respond proactively to changes in their environment. Universities must have well-defined and streamlined processes for handling relationships with external funders to overcome the fears of the anti-marketeers. The mutual benefit of this relationship has been significant.

For instance, in fighting the novel coronavirus (Covid-19), universities, pharmaceutical companies and government worked, and are still working, together to find vaccines for the virus. While industry gains greater access to cutting-edge research and scientific talents through research collaboration with universities, the latter also gain access to financial support and partners in research at a time when public funding is shrinking.

Unless government significantly increases universities' public funding, they should not be over-reliant on public funding, as the UoA does. The Covid-19 global pandemic, for instance, has had a significant impact on government finances and priorities. In this case, universities that rely mainly on public funding may suffer the most. To guard against these unforeseen contingencies is why universities should be proactive and diversify their funding sources; they should cautiously take steps to draw resources from industry as well (though industry funding is also more likely to be affected in an economic crisis).

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## The Pacific Circle Consortium for Education

The Pacific Circle Consortium is an organization dedicated to the improvement of teaching about peoples and nations within and around the Pacific Ocean, and in Asia. From 1997 to 2004, the Consortium was an official program of the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD/CERI). Currently, the Consortium is an independent organization.

The purposes of the Pacific Circle Consortium are to:
- Share ideas, resources, information, material and personnel among Pacific and
- Asian countries and educational institutions;
- Promote internationally co-operative research and development in education; and
- Undertake co-operative development of curriculum materials and educational support services.

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The membership of the Consortium is made up of individuals from many institutions. Recent membership is drawn from countries as diverse as New Zealand, Australia, Samoa, Fiji, Japan, Malaysia, Vietnam, South Korea, China, Hong Kong SAR, Taiwan, Thailand, the United States, Canada, Mexico, Ecuador, Latvia, and the United Kingdom.

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*Pacific-Asian Education* is an international, refereed journal that addresses issues of curriculum and education within the Pacific Circle region and throughout Asia. The journal is interdisciplinary in approach and publishes recent research, reports of curriculum and education initiatives within the region, analyses of seminal literature, historical surveys, and discussions of conceptual issues and problems relevant to countries and communities within the Pacific Circle and Asia. Papers with a comparative or cross-cultural perspective are particularly welcome.

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Manuscripts: should be 3000 – 6000 words and proceeded by an abstract of 100 – 150 words. Intending contributors should submit **an electronic copy** of the manuscript to the Editor. Manuscripts should be formatted in 12 pt font, left aligned and double-spaced. A brief (2-3 line) biographical note about each author should be provided on a separate page and should include full contact details (i.e. postal address, phone, and email address).

Manuscripts should meet high academic standards and be written in clear English.

Intending contributors should consult the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.) to ensure that articles conform to the guidelines including the use of up to three levels of headings, citations, references, tables, figures, etc.

For books in print: Northouse, P. G. (2015). Introduction to leadership: Concepts and practice (3rd ed.). Sage.

For electronic books: O'Sullivan, T. (1999). *Decision making in social work.*

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For articles: Salesa, T. D. (2014). Emma and Phebe: "Weavers of the border". *Journal of the Polynesian Society, 123*(2), 145-168. https://doi.org/10.15286/jps.123.2.145-167

For chapters: Maughan, P. D. (2003). Focus groups. In E. A. Dupuis (Ed.), *Developing web-based instruction: Planning, designing, managing, and evaluating for results* (pp. 107-127). Neal-Schuman.

In addition to consulting the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.) authors should note the following **conventions** must be used in preparing a manuscript for submission:

- Either British English or American English spelling should be used consistently throughout the text.
- Footnotes should not be used. Endnotes should be kept to a minimum.
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