



## Teaching in the Age of Covid-19—The New Normal

Petar Jandrić<sup>1,2</sup> , et al. [full author details at the end of the article]

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### Teaching in the Age of Covid-19—The New Normal

Petar Jandrić, Zagreb, Croatia, 20 June

[Updated biography.] Petar Jandrić is a Professor at the Zagreb University of Applied Sciences, Croatia, and Visiting Professor at the University of Wolverhampton, UK. He is founding editor-in-chief of Postdigital Science and Education journal and book series<sup>1</sup>. Petar is 45 years old and lives in Zagreb, Croatia.

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#### *The ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19’ Trilogy*

In 2020, *Postdigital Science and Education* published ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19’ (Jandrić et al. 2020) which is a collection of short testimonies and workspace photographs submitted in the first half of 2020.

In numbers, the collection consists of 81 textual testimonies and 80 workspace photographs submitted by 84 authors from 19 countries: USA (13), UK (11), China (9), India (7), Australia (7), New Zealand (7), Denmark (6), Sweden (6), Croatia (5), Canada (2), Spain (2), Nigeria (2), Finland (2), Ireland (2), Malta (1), Tanzania (1), Malaysia (1), Latvia (1) and South Africa (1). (Jandrić et al. 2020: 1070)

In 2021, *Postdigital Science and Education* published a sequel titled ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19—One Year Later’ (Jandrić et al. 2021a) which is a collection of short testimonies and workspace photographs submitted in the first half of 2021.

In numbers, the one-year-later collection consists of 74 textual testimonies and 74 workspace photographs submitted by 77 authors from 20 countries: USA (14), UK (7), China (3), India (7), Australia (6), New Zealand (8), Denmark (5), Sweden (6), Croatia (3), Canada (4), Spain (2), Nigeria (1), Finland (2), Ireland (2), Malta (1), Tanzania (2), Malaysia (1), Latvia (1), South Africa (1) and Germany (1). (Jandrić et al. 2021a: 1073)

This collection, titled ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19—The New Normal’, is a collection of short testimonies and workspace photographs submitted in the first

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.springer.com/series/16439>. Accessed 20 June 2022.

half of 2022. In numbers, the collection consists of 67 textual testimonies and 65 workspace photographs submitted by 69 authors from 19 countries: USA (13), New Zealand (8), India (7), Sweden (6), UK (6), Australia (5), Denmark (4), Canada (3), China (2), Croatia (2), Finland (2), Ireland (2), Nigeria (2), Tanzania (2), Brazil (1), Germany (1), Latvia (1), Spain (1) and South Africa (1). Some contributors have submitted unchanged biographies; others have experienced various life changes and sent us updates<sup>2</sup>. Some contributors have told us that their workspaces have remained the same; others submitted images of their new or upgraded workspaces.<sup>3</sup>

Taken together, ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19’ (Jandrić et al. 2020), ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19—One Year Later’ (Jandrić et al. 2021a) and ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19—The New Normal’ make a trilogy consisting of ca 140,000 words and 219 images presented in more than 500 pages.

In each year, the collection has suffered the loss of 6–7 testimonies. Fluctuating between 18 and 20, the number of covered countries has remained fairly constant. The inevitable loss of testimonies was caused predominantly by technical issues such as the loss of contact evidenced by auto-reply messages saying that email accounts are no longer active. Yet the collection is large enough to sustain such losses and allows a longitudinal tracking of 3 years of Covid experiences in about 82 percent of contributors.

### *Making Sense of the Trilogy*

Since the very beginning of our work on the trilogy, we tried to make sense of it. Early articles that discuss the collection directly include ‘Writing the History of the Present’ (Jandrić and Hayes 2020) and ‘The Postdigital Challenge of Pandemic Education’ (Jandrić 2020a). The collection is also explicitly addressed in two *Postdigital Science and Education* editorials: ‘The Day After Covid-19’ (Jandrić 2020b) and ‘The Voice of the Pandemic Generation’ (Jandrić 2021a). We mentioned the collection in many other works yet citing all those would be too abundant.

Probably the deepest attempt at making sense of this material is ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19—A Longitudinal Study’ (Jandrić et al. 2021b). This article arrives at a few important conclusions worth repeating. This trilogy is important because theory is a powerful anti-pandemic practice and a location for healing. The presented narratives can be read as personal positionality statements, as artwork and as data. Whilst the trilogy is an important historical document, the data-narratology methodology, developed for holistic reading of narratives in these and other ways, can be used for active shaping of our present and future ‘new normal’. Therefore, the trilogy is an important source of information that can be used for development of theories, practices, politics, and policies.

<sup>2</sup> Each biography is labelled as [Unchanged biography.] or [Updated biography.]. For updated biographies, readers are encouraged to refer to ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19’ (Jandrić et al. 2020) and ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19 – One Year Later’ (Jandrić et al. 2021a) for comparison.

<sup>3</sup> Each figure is labelled as [Unchanged figure.] or [New figure.]. For new figures, readers are encouraged to refer to ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19’ (Jandrić et al. 2020) and ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19—One Year Later’ (Jandrić et al. 2021a) for comparison.

By now, the trilogy has already had a strong direct impact into the global research community. A brief citation analysis shows that currently published articles have been well cited in many different contexts and across all continents. Whilst it is hard to say what the trilogy has inspired in people we do not know, I will now briefly outline ways in which this collection has inspired my own work, the work of some of my closest friends and collaborators, and the work of the Postdigital Science and Education community.

As a graduate of Physics, I never gave much thought to biology. Yet when the early 2020 testimonies started arriving to my Inbox, I felt that we needed to explore it further. I connected with friends and colleagues who had a long-standing interest in these themes and started to explore various aspects of the relationships between biology, information and society (Jandrić 2021b).

With Michael Peters and Peter McLaren, we published ‘Viral modernity? epidemics, infodemics and the ‘bioinformational’ paradigm’ (Peters et al. 2020a) and ‘A Viral Theory of Post-Truth’ (Peters et al. 2020b). With Michael Peters and Sarah Hayes, we further published ‘Biodigital Philosophy, Technological Convergence, and New Knowledge Ecologies’ (Peters et al. 2021a), ‘Postdigital-Biodigital: An Emerging Configuration’ (Peters et al. 2021b), ‘Biodigital Technologies and the Bioeconomy: The Global New Green Deal?’ (Peters et al. 2021c), ‘Revisiting the Concept of the “Edited Collection”’: *Bioinformational Philosophy and Postdigital Knowledge Ecologies*’ (Peters et al. 2021d). With Derek Ford, we published ‘Post-digital Ecopedagogies: Genealogies, Contradictions, and Possible Futures’ (Jandrić and Ford 2020). Finally, we engaged the community and produced two edited books with over 30 chapters: *Bioinformational Philosophy and Postdigital Knowledge Ecologies* (Peters et al. 2022) and *Postdigital Ecopedagogies: Genealogies, Contradictions, and Possible Futures* (Jandrić and Ford 2022).

Of course, the community has published many more articles and chapters that can be represented in this already borderline self-indulgent list. We also held some dedicated events in places from O.P. Jindal Global University in India to the University of Wolverhampton in the UK. Yet this list is not aimed at providing a detailed account of our writings or activities; it is here to outline some direct and indirect bifurcations developed from the collection, as well and some ideas and personal connections, to show the extent of the collection’s wider impact.

### *What Is Next?*

The ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19’ trilogy is a testament of three specific historical moments. Written at the heat of the first wave of the pandemic, ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19’ (Jandrić et al. 2020) is marked by looming emotions such as uncertainty, fear and hope; workspaces are improvised dinner tables, bedrooms and closets. ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19—One Year Later’ (Jandrić et al. 2021a) shows the first signs of fatigue and normalization. Emotions are deeper; workspaces are tidier and more ergonomic. In ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19—The New Normal’ people are sick and tired of the pandemic; disappointed that the new normal is so surprisingly like the old one. New challenges emerge (such as the war in Ukraine); workspaces go back to pre-pandemic classrooms, airports and so on. The

main message from ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19—The New Normal’ is abundantly clear—the time to develop the new normal is now.

It was great to meet all the authors, it was great to produce this material, yet it is my feeling that the ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19’ trilogy has arrived at its inevitable end. I do take note of Thomas Ryberg’s warning that ‘from popular culture we know that trilogies suddenly expand with prequels, sequels etc.’, and I will not make a firm promise to stop here. However, I would need a very good reason to start another sequel. Unless the world suffers another large pandemic outbreak, perhaps of a new variant of the virus, I cannot see the need to continue in this format. However, that does not mean that our work has ended.

Reading the complete trilogy, I can finally see the materialization of my early-2020 vision. ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19’ is a historical document, a good read, a hub for making new connections, a brewery of new ideas. It is an important source for development of new theories, practices, politics, and policies—or, in one phrase, a ‘new normal’. Now that the third and final part is published, I give my warmest thanks to all contributors and invite the scholarly community to actively use the ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19’ trilogy in shaping our present and future.

### **Call for Testimonies: Teaching in the Age of Covid-19—The New Normal**

This is a verbatim transcript of the Call for Testimonies sent out on 29 March 2022 to all authors of ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19’ (Jandrić et al. 2020) and ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19—One Year Later’ (Jandrić et al. 2021a).

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On 17 March 2020, *Postdigital Science and Education* launched a call for testimonies about teaching and learning during very first Covid-19 lockdowns. The resulting article, ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19’ (attached), presents 81 written testimonies and 80 workspace photographs submitted by 84 authors from 19 countries.

On 17 March 2021, *Postdigital Science and Education* launched a call for a sequel article of testimonies about teaching and learning during very first Covid-19 lockdowns. The resulting article, ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19—1 Year Later’ (attached), consists of 74 textual testimonies and 76 workspace photographs submitted by 77 authors from 20 countries.

These two articles have been downloaded almost 100,000 times and have been cited more than 100 times. This shows their value as historical documents. Recent analyses, such as ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19—A Longitudinal Study’ (attached), also indicate their strong potential for educational research.

As the Covid-19 pandemic seems to wind down, pandemic experiences have entered the mainstream. They shape all educational research of today and arguably do not require special treatment. Yet, our unique series of pandemic testimonies provides a unique opportunity to longitudinally trace what happens to the same people over the years—and this opportunity should not be missed.

Today, we launch a call for final sequel: Teaching in the Age of Covid-19—The New Normal. In this sequel, we would like to hear about ways in which you—contributors to the previous articles—have established your own new normal. We hope that this will be the last iteration in this series of testimony articles. Unless the world faces another strong pandemic outburst, we would like to end the series with this last article. Your 500-word contributions should contain roughly the following:

Before you begin:

- On top of your submission, please write your name, location and date of writing your submission in the following format: *Petar Jandrić, Zagreb, Croatia, 1 June*.
- Please update your biography published in the original article. If you do not update your biography, we will reproduce last year's one.

Then, please cover the following themes:

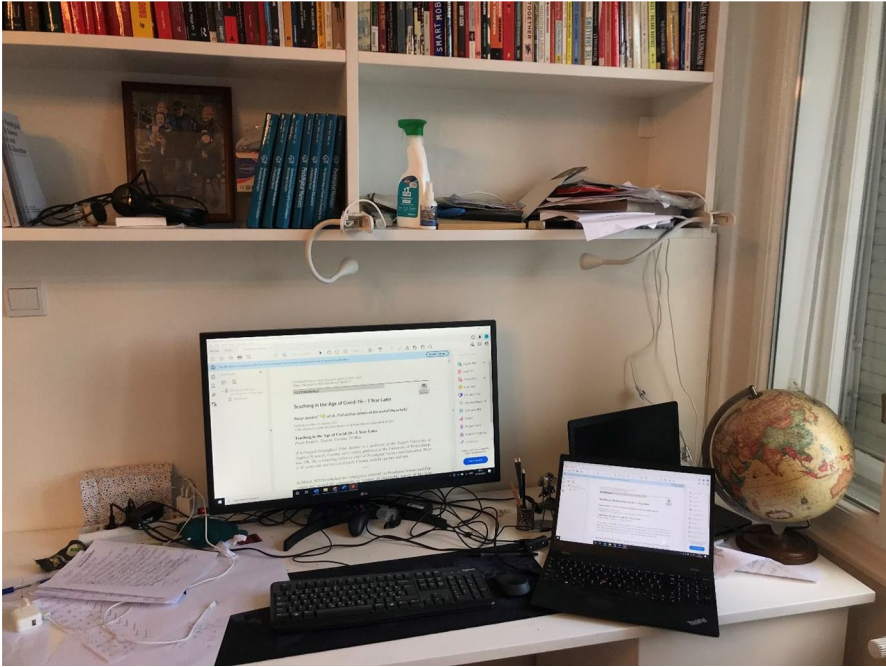
- What is your experience of the return to your physical workplace/establishment of a new, blended work format?
- Which main lessons did you (and your employer) draw from the pandemic experience?
- Which main transformations have happened in your work and private life?
- Which major challenges (professional, private, personal, family...) are you finding along the way?
- What are your main feelings at the moment (stress, anxiety, excitement, happiness, calm...)? How are you coping with those feelings?
- How has your thinking about the Covid-19 pandemic developed during the past year?
- And, of course, anything else you would like to tell the world about your experience.

Last but not least, please send us a photo of your current workspace!

This Call is aimed only at co-authors of Teaching in the Age of Covid-19 and Teaching in the Age of Covid-19—1 Year Later articles! Please do not share this Call or invite new co-authors. Those of you who wrote collective replies, please try and replicate your original author setup.

Please write your ca 500-word response and return it, together with a photo of your current workspace, to Petar Jandrić, [pjandric@tvz.hr](mailto:pjandric@tvz.hr). Responses will be collated into a collectively authored article and prepared for publication in *Postdigital Science and Education*, 4(3), October.

Deadline for submitting your responses is 5 May 2022. Please contact Petar Jandrić for any questions.



**Fig. 1** [New figure] My home workspace, where I wrote the Call for Testimonies. The university is open; I was at home because it was raining, and I didn't feel like getting wet

### **Party in the Hermit Kingdom**

*Ana Fuentes-Martínez, Lund, Sweden, 29 March*

[Unchanged biography.] Ana Fuentes-Martínez was born in A Coruña, Spain, in 1975. She is a mathematics and computer programming teacher at Katedralskolan in Lund and a researcher at University West, Sweden. Her investigations concern integrating mathematics and programming from the perspective of teacher professional development.

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Back in the old normal, Swedish universities were already struggling in their efforts to have more teaching staff working at their offices rather than from home. The flexible hours and the lack of supervision made the choice easy for those who had other concerns to reconcile—childcare, doctors' appointments, a company on the side. This arrangement put a strain on the remaining staff

on campus, who found their time scattered catering to students other than their own, taking in assignments and solving floor-shop problems. To mitigate this problem, some departments went as far as granting presence-bonus for teachers who were at their offices a minimum of 2 days a week, which was compensated with reduced teaching duties. Working from home was not discussed overtly but it was nevertheless a reality that reverberated in the walls of many empty campus offices.

When the Covid-19 hit pandemic levels, working from home was the first option for all of us who were able to do so. Two years later, the old question of who is at campus and who is not has proved to be still highly relevant and problematic. The departments are luring with cake and celebrations to attract employees back to their desks, but they are still hosting online or blended meetings to promote attendance. The necessary technology is now commonplace and it seems petty to restrain its use for the sake of interaction in the physical workplace.

The threshold for participating in physical gatherings is in many ways higher than it was before. We have less tolerance for colleagues or students turning in with even the mildest of symptoms. Commuting is dire, with gas prices hitting new records and public transportation still holding back some of the old lines. In many cases, working from home has become the default and there needs to be a good reason to attend campus. This has exacerbated the problem of empty offices and forced flexible solutions: work landscapes without designated desks, functional spaces to accommodate collaborative work, and technical equipment to allow for physical meetings with online participants.

This new workplace setting has also had repercussions on the ways that students interact with campus staff. We have gotten used to sending emails rather than popping by which makes questions and suggestions better prepared but possibly scarcer (Fuentes Martinez 2022). At the same time, the boundaries between the private sphere and the working place have become blurred, particularly in an information-intensive field such as teaching and research. Being out-of-office is no longer a valid excuse for delaying a prompt answer since the office has ceased to be the place where answers reside.

As the workplace and its workers are reinventing their mutual necessity, social gatherings are gaining importance to catalyse fruitful meetings and spontaneous work collaborations. We need also to reinvent the sense of belonging that the physical workplace once enacted and replace it with activities and participants, with common goals and shared responsibilities.



**Fig. 2** [New figure] My home workplace in the former walk-in closet is a little bit tidier now as paper heaps are replaced with digital documents, and a little bit cosier with new blinds. My desk at campus has vanished as such, and I am welcome to plug my computer to any free dock station when I work there

### **Dialectic of Renewal and Resignation**

*Charles Reitz, Kansas City, MO, USA, 29 March*

[Unchanged biography.] Emeritus Professor of philosophy, Kansas City Kansas Community College, with four recent books: *Crisis & Commonwealth: Marcuse, Marx McLaren* (2015), *Philosophy & Critical Pedagogy* (2016), *Ecology & Revolution: Herbert Marcuse and the Challenge of a New World System Today* (2019), and *The Revolutionary Ecological Legacy of Herbert Marcuse* (2022).

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#### *Renewal*

March 2022 is the anniversary of my 30-day hospital stay with Covid-19. I have recovered. The federal government picked up all my costs. Retired from teaching



when Covid-19 hit, I have been writing and publishing. I continue this work (Reitz 2021) post-Covid from home: in an easy chair in our living room where I sit with my laptop near my wife, also a retired professor who is constantly reading. We have a study where most of our books are kept and where we connect remotely to colleagues or attend events via Zoom and/or print downloaded documents.

### *Resignation*

Our daughter is an upper-level administrator at an R1 research university in another state. She has been under great stress because she and her team have been in charge of helping her university's professors across all disciplines gear-up for remote teaching. The duress has caused her to consider leaving administration and to return to her tenured position in a humanities department where her workload would be more manageable.

### *Renewal*

On a recent visit to our daughter's home, I picked up an academic journal she was reading, *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture* (October 2021, Volume 21, Issue 3)<sup>4</sup>. Two articles on the new powers of postdigital undergraduate teaching struck me in particular. One supported writing skill development through online annotational exchanges amongst the students in the class and the instructor. This is a method entirely postdigital and fully suited to pandemic precautions. The second article reported on coupling student curiosity to an informal browsing of an actual digital research archive. The students used digital finding-aids to access digitized primary source materials and do authentic informal research.

### *The Great Resignation (See Thompson 2021)*

The Covid-19 crisis unveiled the essential role of labour in society. Truck drivers, grocery stockers, cashiers, medical professionals and teachers are crucial. The growth in income of society's upper *echelons of privilege* however has been dramatically out of proportion to the reductions in income experienced by nearly everyone else. Over-accumulation has sapped labour, perhaps more than Covid-19. Economic expectations are continually being leveled down, and workers are increasingly being treated with oligarchic disdain as expendable in teaching and elsewhere. This has brought a Legitimation Crisis with regard to the meaning of work and our teaching. It is also occurring at the expense of planet earth: wealth extraction and profitable waste doing damage to air, water, and soil quality.

The demise of the system is occurring, including the melting away of the veneer of democracy in the heat of a new neofascist white nationalism. War in Ukraine portends even worse. Our dilemmas of alienation, ecological challenge and peace have their political economic foundations. So does our collective power.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://read.dukeupress.edu/pedagogy>. Accessed 11 May 2022.



**Fig. 3** [New figure] Retired professors Charles Reitz and Roena Haynie have been working from their apartment's eighth floor sitting room for the past 10 years

### **Weary from the Past, Hong Kong**

*Liz Jackson, Hong Kong, China, 30 March*

[Updated biography.] Liz Jackson is Professor and Head of Department of International Education at the Education University of Hong Kong. She is the former Director of the Comparative Education Research Centre and a Fellow and Past President of the Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia. Her recent books include *Contesting Education and Identity in Hong Kong* (2021), *Beyond Virtue: The Politics of Educating Emotions* (2020), and *Questioning Allegiance: Resituating Civic Education* (2019).

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Two years ago, Petar Jandrić invited me to write about teaching during Covid-19. I titled my piece, 'Weary from the Future, Hong Kong' (Jackson 2020). Here, we had been experiencing a protest movement (over extradition and national security bills) for the last year. It boiled over in December 2019, whilst I was planning for an ill-fated Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia Annual Conference. We were already locking down and teaching online. By April and May that year, it was shocking to see weak western responses to Covid-19, oblivious to the situation in Asia, where success was tied to masking, isolating and tracing.

A year ago, I was invited to reflect again. My response was hopeful. I had changed jobs, gotten promoted, moved flats, adopted kittens. I missed travelling; Hong Kong is about the size of New York City, so government mandates discouraging flying with 21-day (self-funded) hotel quarantines upon arrival. Forced hospital stays for those returning positive were vexing. However, I was, all things considered, facing each day happily, and settling into routines, including intermittent lockdowns, still working mostly from home, teaching online.

Now Hong Kong has been amongst the first to face Covid-19 and may be amongst the last. Whilst the rest of the world shifts gears, our lockdown worsens. I have been to campus or a restaurant five times in the last 6 months. For months, I did not leave the flat, except to run, after the government needlessly killed 2000 hamsters and rabbits after a (human) outbreak tied to a pet shop (Leung 2022). The government locks down buildings with any cases or contacts, moving people (positive or not) into quarantine camps for weeks. I have worried about our cats since then, considering events in the mainland (Yan 2022).

The National Security Police have taken over the Covid response. They arrest or fine anyone who dares to remove their mask whilst jogging in the forest, to associate with more than one other person in public or to resist going to hospital or quarantine (positive or not). It would be better if it worked. Officials still have unmasked parties of hundreds (Chau 2022). Elderly deaths skyrocketed, whilst asymptomatic patients were handcuffed in queues outside jam-packed hospitals during cold nights (Romero and Lai 2022). Yesterday, an official promised us a merry Christmas if we could follow the rules (Hong Kong Economic Times 2022). Meanwhile, the government thanks the mainland for tens of thousands of camps which are ready for a sixth wave, with mainland-style electrical sockets and squat toilets (Lee 2022), paid for by Hong Kong.

Most of my friends have left for good last month, when the government announced a universal testing plan, whilst children are separated from their parents if positive (Sun 2022). As February was declared summer holiday and school was cancelled, apparently to make way for more quarantine facilities, our student teachers now make videos for their school practicums. When I meet with students on Zoom, I remind them to be cautious around contact tracing, and never tell any police about their pets. As the student population dwindles, so does my department, which has seen several resignations since I became its head 2 months ago. At the same time, university democracy walls and other symbols and student unions have been uprooted and banned across the region (Leung 2021).

For 3 years, Hong Kong has been suffering. I remain in the eye of the storm, at home with my partner and two exceptionally spoiled cats.



**Fig. 4** [New figure] Enjoying a partial sea view from the office with Geng, one of my two Covid boys, who is almost 2 years old

### **Crisis**

*Dennis Grauslund, Aalborg, Denmark, 30 March*

[Updated biography.] Dennis Grauslund is now a Senior Lecturer at University College of Northern Denmark, Denmark. Dennis is 32 years old and still lives in Aalborg, Denmark, with his partner and two children. In the past year, his family has had Covid-19 once.

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As I write this testimonial, I am sitting at my desk in my campus office. Society is fully open and has been so for months. In the office with five desks, three are occupied. When looking outside the window, the sky is blue, and spring has arrived. It has been good to return to our physical workplace; it has been a positive experience to see colleagues and students again and discuss different matters in person rather than online. It is something that is appreciated, especially

by my students. We have drastically scaled back on virtual meetings and lectures because we found it important to ‘reconnect’ in person. That said, we tend to have one or two colleagues attending meetings virtually that they otherwise would have declined to participate in due to time constraints, etc. Also, we have seen a decrease in class attendance, the reasons given often being worries or symptoms of Covid-19.

However, have we indeed reconnected as colleagues? I am not sure. It takes time, and we all have to make an effort to get to know one another again. That is a challenge, as one of the significant transformations is a shift in how people work; much more is done from home. Today, out of 16 people, only 8 are present. Four of these are teaching or having exams, so we are 4 people in 2 different offices.

One of the major challenges I find is coping with feeling disconnected. Not only from colleagues and what exciting projects might be underway but also from the industry. One of the ways I stay connected is by attending practitioner conferences to network and learn more about the challenges they face and understand how we can make a positive difference in the industry. This has been immensely difficult as most conferences have been cancelled. Another major challenge is the feeling that my professional development has hit a stagnation point, not because I wanted to stagnate, but because the main focus has been on ‘surviving through a pandemic’ and ‘managing students’ feelings and their feeling of disconnection’.

I am both excited and nervous about the future. I see some great changes in how we work, i.e. increased flexibility; however, the same flexibility poses challenges, as it can contribute to the feeling of disconnection. We have been back in the office more or less since August 2021, but my feelings of disconnect have not changed considerably. Will they ever change? Luckily, I can always count on the support of my partner; she has been supportive, especially during the past few months where I have had a less than positive period; perhaps some winter blues?

My thoughts on Covid-19 have changed in the past year. I have been worried and anxious from the beginning of the pandemic. However, the evolution of Covid-19 to more gentle variants has toned down my worries and the fact that most Danes have been vaccinated multiple times now. I am still concerned about the long-term effects of Covid-19 as studies suggest a significant number of people continue to struggle with the after-effects of the virus.

If this is the ‘new normal’, I hope to see another new normal soon, in which we will all be connected once again.



**Fig. 5** [New figure] My desk at my campus office, with all the handwritten notes and articles that I need for the day. The picture is taken in the morning

### **Volunteering and Covid-19, the New Normal?**

*David Hayes, Further Education, Worcester, UK, 30 March*

[Unchanged biography.] David Hayes felt privileged to teach for over 30 years. He found those he taught, and taught with, more interesting than his subject. That subject was often mathematics. Originally from Scotland, Dave enjoys life in Worcester, UK, with an all-too-observant partner, two sons, and a disrespectful cat called Jasmine.

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I have stated previously, that as a retired Maths teacher, I enjoyed the experience of providing some volunteer support for students. The support given at local schools and colleges was generally face-to-face and it was provided to either individuals or to small groups. It tended to be low-tech support, often paper based,

and it usually complemented other provision. Perhaps the key thing about that period of volunteering was that it was all *pre-Covid-19*.

I had assumed that at some point I might return to such volunteering. After all, it is an intrinsically rewarding activity and I believed, with good reason, that there would be a need for experienced volunteers. There had been something of a hiatus in children's Maths education and the Government had promised funding for tuition: funding indeed that I would neither need nor would wish for.

Armed with a fairly positive attitude, a printer, and a supply of stamps, I sent out letters to ten local schools and colleges, stating my position. That position was of being a retired teacher, who wished to give some hours of volunteering each week. If I had anticipated that I would get few replies, then I was not to be disappointed. I received just one that commended me for *my public spirit*.

Shortly afterwards, I travelled to the particular school, where we had a genial discussion about what I could offer. I stated that I would be happy to commit to any whole day each week, of their choosing, provided I could be informed about which weekday it would be in advance. This would permit me to factor in certain caring responsibilities. Whilst awaiting details about the appropriate Disclosure and Barring Services (DBS) check for such volunteering, I received a further email stating that they would not be able to use me because 'I was not flexible enough'. I have made overtures to other places but with less persistence. I have decided to leave matters there, since it seems unwise to run after those who may not want me around.

What lesson, if any, have I learned? From my own experience, I know that teachers work hard and that they tend to be a dedicated bunch. I am in no doubt that there is a *post-Covid-19* need to harness experience, just as there is an expressed will from the Government to do so. Despite all such good and proper feelings, there is a persistent doubt within me as to whether such public bodies are set up properly to use volunteers effectively. One may argue that it is not their job to do so, that volunteering should be the preserve of the Charitable Sector. I see no reason why this should be so, particularly when the last 2 years furnishes us with such obvious needs. If there is to be a *New Normal*, then let us make sure that it is inclusive and that it works for the benefit of those learning.



**Fig. 6** [New figure] Past and present

### **The New Normal Education System**

*Happiness Onesmo Lukoko, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 30 March*

[Unchanged biography.] Happiness Onesmo Lukoko is a part time Assistant Lecturer in the Institute of Development Studies at University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM). Happiness is 27 years old and lives in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

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The pandemic affected every aspect of our lives, including our plans and daily routines. Because we were not under lockdown in Tanzania, we are continuing to work at our physical workplaces as usual. Since the outbreak, we have all been advised



to take precautions like wearing masks, keeping a safe distance and washing our hands frequently. Our new work approach is to continually encourage our children and the community to take measures, with the government emphasizing the importance of immunizations. The most significant lesson we learned from the pandemic, in my opinion, is the importance of practicing preventive measures against any infectious disease. Wearing masks and washing hands help prevent the spread of the virus.

The epidemic ushered in a new era of online and hybrid learning across a variety of platforms. The emphasis on the use of information communication technology (ICT) has been a major transformation in my work. The use of ICT has been promoted by the university so that in case of another outbreak we will be ready to switch to hybrid learning. Workers are given masks and sanitizer and there are washing stations in each class.

Most of my activities, such as meetings, require me to be online the majority of the time. One of the most significant professional issues, in my opinion, is the loss of personal touch with students and colleges as a result of social distance measures. The most difficult personal task is figuring out how to spend time alone.

At the present, I am happy and tranquil because I am following all recommendations of health experts. I eagerly await the opportunity to reconnect with my international friends. I miss the days when you could simply fly to another country without limits, go on field trips with your pals, chat about life and have fun.

I think it is still possible to go back to a new normal by taking precautions and being optimistic. It is important to take care of ourselves, especially our minds and our attitudes, because everything begins with ourselves. The mind is a very powerful tool that can build or destroy people. Since the emergence of Covid-19, numerous frightening news have been broadcast to the public, causing stress and affecting people's mental health. Negativity can ruin our thinking and I think it is important to feed our minds with positive ideas. Because we learn how to live every day, I believe it is crucial to keep calm and follow all measures recommended by specialists.



**Fig. 7** [New figure] This is my workspace in my apartment where I conduct my online meetings and other online activities

## **The New Normal—Making the Most of It**

*Michael Hogan, Galway, Ireland, 30 March*

[Unchanged biography.] Michael Hogan is a Lecturer at the National University of Ireland, Galway, where he teaches Social Psychology, Positive Psychology, Critical and Collaborative Thinking and Applied Systems Science Design Methods. Michael is 48 years old, and lives in Moycullen, Galway, with his wife, Vicky, also a Lecturer at NUI, Galway, and three children, Siona, Oisín and Freya.

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The day after tomorrow will see the arrival of 1 April 2022, and yet 12 March 2020, when we were first forced online by the Covid-19 pandemic, seems like only yesterday. Time perception seems to have changed for many people, including myself, and yet so much has happened during these past 2 years. Reflecting on the experience and lessons learnt is valuable, not only because it qualitatively expands and deepens one's time perception but, more importantly, because it allows the transformation and development derived from life experience to be perceived and properly appreciated. In this way, I'm grateful for this opportunity to reflect again and contribute to this collective paper.

In relation to our return to the physical workplace and face-to-face in-person teaching, the initial experience last September reminded me of an experience I once had meditating, many years ago, when I was deep into the practice of martial arts. Upon returning from a deep meditative state, where I had 'vanished' and experienced myself only as white light, I recall to this day the very first 'intention' I experienced. The 'intention', in that swift returning from no-mind to mind and body, had immense power and it revealed to me the essential power of intentions as they arise in consciousness and manifest in action.

Upon returning to our School of Psychology building that first day in early September, I experienced a similar feeling and associated sentiment in relation to the raw power of physical connection with others and the shared spaces we occupy. Whilst it was optional to return to campus and teach in person last September, and whilst we still connected with many students online whilst simultaneously teaching other students in person, I did not hesitate to return 'to the room' and share the space with students. We all struggled a little with facemasks and breathing and talking, and we all had to get used to only seeing one another's eyes, with no mouth on display; but on balance, it was by far the preferred option for me and many students at the time.

We all experienced this 'new normal' differently, but it was notable and deeply valuable to recognise again—as if we had somehow forgotten—the essential, raw power of physical connection. Many of us thrive on this physical connection as teachers, we need it and we appreciate it, and students need it and appreciate it, too.

More generally, it was a collective appreciation of togetherness that was the dominant feeling in the classroom, certainly as I experienced it; and this was coupled with a new appreciation of learning together. Indeed, I was surprised and delighted to see so many students turn up to class—we were like magnets drawn to one another and our shared learning experience, and student performance and

engagement, was truly excellent this year. Perhaps the main lessons that many people, including myself, have drawn from the pandemic centre around the fundamental truths of being human, including our need to connect and learn from one another, both of which are foundational for the very existence and purpose of Universities.

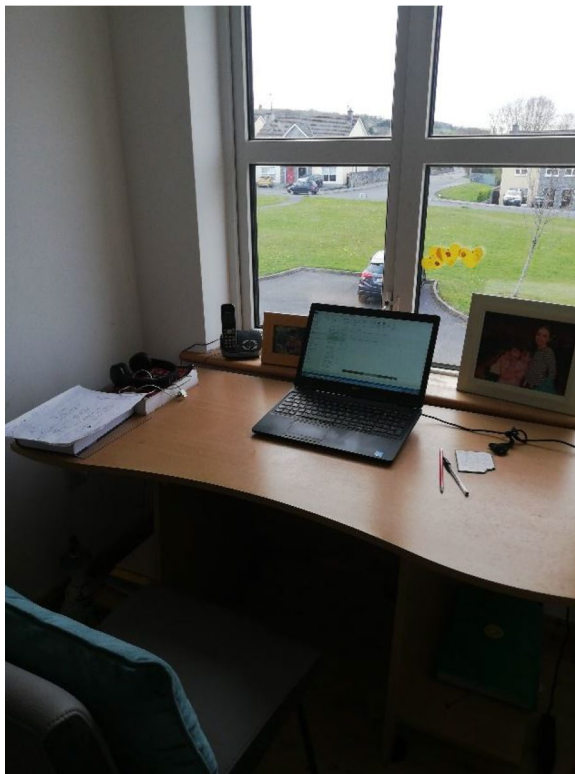
At the same time, things have changed, our practice of connecting with one another has changed. Now that we are back ‘in the building’, teaching, doing research and supporting ongoing administration and management of our units, we now connect in a variety of different ways and, of course, we see the value of sustaining many of our new online skills—meeting, teaching, facilitating online as needed, supporting those who cannot be physically present when the rest of us are. We have many new tools we can use, new ways of cooperating and coordinating our actions, and we’ve got better at connecting with one another online, even if this ‘getting better’ often simply means just ‘being ourselves’—the good, the bad, the tired, the inspired, the stressed, the over-excited and not altogether-working-so-well in the audio-visual digital space. All the great variation of human behaviour and experience that plays out.

Perhaps my sense personally is that I’ve become more comfortable with ‘being myself’ online and I expect nothing else from everyone else, only that they are free to be themselves. This perhaps reflects a deeper feeling that is shared by many—we have all been through, and we continue to live through, a very difficult time and we need to go easy on one another, accommodate and be flexible and do the best we can.

My main feelings at the moment are a mixture of reflective and appreciative and particularly tired, as we approach the end of teaching this week. I look forward to our in-person presentations in class tomorrow, where our system design students will get a chance to showcase the products of 12 weeks of intensive work together. The dominant reflective stance at this point also derives from awareness of the uncertainty of our current work status. We may well experience another wave and new strains the virus that break through our booster vaccines and force us to work again completely online. My hope is we will continue to adapt and perhaps better master the flexibility required, and further our fundamental bonds of solidarity, friendship and learning which have sustained us and which will serve us well if another radical behavioural shift is required.

I am very proud of my students, and year on year it grows. I think they know it. Perhaps I should say it more often, but then again, they know me and I know them; we focus on the work—we focus on learning together and getting out alive. I find it an increasingly humbling experience to serve them, particularly now as I get older and recognise that my time in this role is limited. This appreciative feeling also derived from a deeper realisation that I may not live much longer, and I accept that. This abiding sense of my own mortality provides perspective. I am here to serve, and I have few other concerns in life.

I am deeply proud of my three children and the way they have adapted through all the phases and stages of change, learning online and learning more about what it means to be a family, with their Mum and Dad, and learning to appreciate their community and all the good things that a good community brings. Again, much like last year and the year before, I close by saying we are still very much *in medias res*, in the middle of things: doing, adapting, working to get ‘over the line’. And yet again, I am not sure where that line is exactly. I just focus on the job at hand and I continue, in my own quiet way, to appreciate all the wonderful compassion, cooperation, creativity, solidarity and collective strength I see all around us every day. We will continue to teach, and we will continue to work hard—there is much to learn and much to do.



**Fig. 8** [New figure] This is my workspace in the upstairs box room. It has not changed since last year. Vicky is in the new room downstairs. We are sometimes here and sometimes ‘in the building’ on campus. The kids are now back at school

## The New Normal—Keeping the Best Practices Initiated by the Pandemic

*Peter Mozelius, Stockholm, Sweden, 31 March*

[Updated biography.] Peter Mozelius is an Associate Professor and Senior Lecturer at the Mid Sweden University in Östersund, Sweden. After that the pandemic broke loose in March 2020, Peter has worked by distance, from his home office in Stockholm for more than 2 years now.

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In my new normality, I have not returned to the physical workspace at the university campus in Östersund. I still carry out the vast majority of my work from my home office in Stockholm, but for staff gatherings and department conferences I take the train up to Östersund for face-to-face activities. The main reason for continuing to work by distance is the excellent results with an increased delivery both for teaching and learning activities and for research.

Regarding the teaching, courses have shifted from blended learning with face-to-face sessions to blended synchronous learning with collaborative group activities online. Most of the synchronous activities are conducted in so called breakout rooms in the video conferencing tool Zoom. In programming courses, the outcomes have been better compared to when the same workshops were given face-to-face in active learning classrooms. The most positive surprise for programming courses is the good focus at full-day online gatherings. As an example, the introductory course starts with a ‘coffee & chat’ at 9.30 am followed by lectures, workshops, ensemble programming between 10 am to 4 pm. Important of course to have a lunch break and some shorter coffee/tea breaks as well, but the surprise is that some course participants stay on in Zoom after 4 pm for extra support and discussions.

Thesis supervision has worked out well, but with a need for different data collection methods during the pandemic. The quality of completed theses are about the same as before the pandemic, but sometimes with feelings of loneliness for thesis writers, especially the ones with only one author. Online seminars in the Zoom environment have worked well for the technical parts of the supervision and for the final seminars. Regarding my research, I have around 35 publications during the pandemic, which is more than for the same timeframe before the pandemic. The writing has been more focused, but research design has been a bit different. More literature studies and email interviews than earlier.

Research collaborations have worked well online, but I strongly miss the networking at traditional conferences. Virtual conferences could probably be improved and developed further, but we really need to meet face-to-face sometimes. Regarding my personal life, I feel healthier now than before the pandemic. The time that I spent on train travels earlier between Stockholm and Östersund have been used for more pleasant activities. I often go for jogging rounds on the lunch break, and I have eaten healthier food during the pandemic. A positive side effect is that I am better at cooking than before the pandemic. However, the lack of cultural events was boring, and I am really looking forward to attending live music sessions and theatre again.

To conclude, the new normality is a good normality. The best practices initiated by the pandemic should be kept, but it would be a great relief if we are now really experiencing the last phase of the Covid-19 era.



**Fig. 9** [New figure] My home workplace

### Untitled

*Janine Aldous Arantes, Melbourne, Australia, 4 April*

[Updated biography.] Dr Janine Aldous Arantes is a Research Fellow with the Institute of Sustainable Industries and Liveable Cities (ISILC) and Lecturer in the College of Arts and Education, Victoria University, Australia. Janine is 47 years old and lives in Melbourne, Australia, with her husband and two sons, but—since the last iteration, unfortunately, our Kelpie passed. We now have a nine-month-old Golden retriever, who is gorgeous.

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The ‘new normal’ for me is not exceptionally different. Well, in terms of working conditions at least. I remain working from home, although there is an expectation that we are back on campus. My physical office at the university is there, but I don’t expect the establishment of a new, blended work format until 2023. This is because all my classes for 2022 are formatted as online and remote delivery.

Although there is an anticipation that I will be on campus from my employer, my particular situation means that this has not been enacted for me yet.

This flexibility allows the execution of significant learning from the pandemic lockdowns. Working from home (for me) is a matter of increased productivity. The removal of commuting means that I have a greater output. The removal of walking between classrooms means that I am more efficient. This transformation means that I am more focussed. In terms of private life, it also means that I don't take time off work to meet the isolation regulations. Working from home (arguably, for my employer and me) is much better.

With all opportunities come challenges. But I would suggest that we have yet to experience the challenges of some being face-to-face and others working from home. For example, will we soon share an academic form of 'us' and 'them'? Will those working face to face on campus have more significant interaction and impact on academic work and promotion opportunities? Will those working from home publish more? Will students opt for more flexibility or the relational characteristics of being on campus? My thoughts are that answers to these questions will be context-dependent. Perhaps the Masters students would like the flexibility too? Maybe the Bachelor students might enjoy the on-campus experiences? Either way, this transformation brings a constant state of 'not knowing'. Coping with these feelings is left to leading, managing, and facilitating what I have control over whilst also keeping an eye on transformations I cannot control.

My thinking about the Covid-19 pandemic during the past year has significantly shifted. I was worried about data, profiling and privacy—and now I seem to have resigned myself to forms of algorithmic governance as part of the new normal. I do not seem concerned about corporates collecting and using my data now—I guess I have metaphorically drowned in the massive pool of information I have given away due to Covid-19 online and remote teaching. And, I do not seem to want to come up for breath. Instead, I am swimming in this pool and constantly looking for the good (arguably at the expense of my privacy). There are too many people around me, who are still struggling to keep their heads above water—in terms of climate change and wars. So, I guess I am wading in this pool because I have to. I have to find ways to make this new normal great. And in many ways—it is.





**Fig. 10** [New figure] We moved three times during the pandemic, and this is now my office. It is shared with the laundry but is light, bright, and private. Teaching online, with three others working in the house, meant we needed a room each—and this has worked out wonderfully. Our Goldie sits at my feet most days, and I am home when our children return from school every day

## The Enduring Benefits of Online Education

Paul Levinson, White Plains, NY, USA, 7 April

[Unchanged biography.] Paul Levinson has published 10 books about media theory (e.g. *The Soft Edge*, *Digital McLuhan*, *New New Media*) translated into 15 languages and 6 science fiction novels (e.g. *The Silk Code*, *The Plot to Save Socrates*), and is a singer-songwriter (*Twice Upon a Rhyme*, *Welcome Up: Songs of Space and Time*). He is a professor at Fordham University in New York City and appears on CNN, MSNBC, NPR, the BBC and numerous news outlets.

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I began teaching once again in person at Fordham University in September 2021 with a mixture of trepidation and exhilaration. Even though I and all of my students had been thoroughly vaccinated and wore masks, it was still more dangerous in the classroom than being safe and sound at home, where there was no way I could inadvertently catch Covid-19. But it was fun and satisfying to interact with the students in person once again.

Wearing masks provided no impediment at all to my teaching in person, and the two classes I taught went very well. Nonetheless, I missed the benefits of remote teaching via Zoom. No time was wasted driving to and from Fordham University. I had also gotten to know each student in the class better in the online environment, than in the in-person classroom, in which it was easier for a student to keep a low profile. My take-away from this experience is as I expected: online education has enormous value on the university level and should not be seen as just a stopgap in fighting the dissemination of the destructive Covid-19 virus.

In general, I found that the three terms I spent at home, teaching remotely during the pandemic, have had an excellent effect on both my professional and personal life. I had much more time for writing—both my science fiction stories and my scholarly nonfiction about the impact of social media—and projects I began during that time at home continued after I returned to teaching on the university campus. Similarly, the beneficial personal effects of staying at home, ranging from gardening to spending more time with my family, have continued.

My thinking about the Covid-19 pandemic is, if anything, to take it even more seriously. My wife and I have not only been vaccinated, but double-boosted. Clearly, the appearance of new strains of the virus means we—the human species—are by no means out of the woods as yet. My wife and I continue to take all the precautions we can take. We only eat outdoors in restaurants, or otherwise takeout food if we do not want to cook. We wear masks when we shop in supermarkets, go into post offices, etc., and stay in those places for as limited a time as possible. The same applies to my time in person at Fordham University. I go to the campus in person only to teach classes. I am glad that departmental meetings and the like are conducted via Zoom.

Given the depraved Russian attack on Ukraine, the world's attention has understandably moved away from Covid-19. I feel that way too. But until we get vaccines that can be effective against all variants, we need to continue to be on our guard about the virus and reap whatever benefits we can from remote education and conducting of business.



**Fig. 11** [New figure] The photo is of me right now on Cape Cod, at the house we bought last year with our daughter, for a brief getaway

### **Untitled**

*Jānis (John) Tāivaldis Ozoliņš, Ballarat, Victoria, Australia, 8 April*

[Unchanged biography.] Jānis (John) Tāivaldis Ozoliņš is Adjunct Professor at the University of Notre Dame Australia, Visiting Professor, Faculty of History and Philosophy and Honorary Fellow, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the University of Latvia, Latvia, and Adjunct Lecturer, Catholic Theological College, University of Divinity, Melbourne, Australia. He lives in Ballarat, Victoria, and also in Riga, Latvia, with his wife. He has four adult children.

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The past year has seen Melbourne claim the title of the most locked down city in the world and the return to a semblance of normality really only beginning in November 2021 with most restrictions easing. Return to my physical workplace became possible at the beginning of February 2022. Although my office looked the same, gremlins

had got into my Internet and phone connections so that my phone did not work and my computer could not access the Internet. Still, it was nice to be back, even though we were still expected to be sparing in our workplace attendance.

Classes commenced face-to-face for the first time in nearly a year, though with students having to maintain the mandatory 1.5 m apart. Classes, on government advice, were restricted to 2 h only, rather than the full three hours that was normally allocated and students were not allowed to linger after classes. The rules relaxed after 3 weeks, perhaps because common sense prevailed, as with 93% of the population having received their double vaccination, the danger from the virus was no longer as great.

In the workplace, the 2 years of mostly online learning meant that the option for students to join online rather than face-to-face was made available. The challenge is to find ways in which it is possible to not only teach the face-to-face class in front of you, but also involve the online students. It is one thing to develop teaching methods that work for online students only, quite another to find ways to teach both face-to-face and online. Add in the possibility of asynchronous learning via lecture recordings and web-based materials, and the challenges multiply. There is no question that the pandemic has thrown up a great many new challenges in the teaching and learning space.

One of the main revelations of the pandemic has been the authoritarianism of both corporations and state government in mandating vaccination and in the latter the tendency to stifle all dissent and happily impose nonsensical restrictions. For example, at one stage, as restrictions were easing, restaurant patrons were required to wear masks if they were standing but could remove them when seated. The demonisation of those who were unvaccinated was unconscionable and revealed a rising predilection for intolerance of alternative perspectives and willingness to use coercion to impose the fiat of the government. The pandemic has encouraged the undermining of democracy by allowing leaders to continue to invoke emergency powers that enable them to rule without the usual scrutiny by parliament. Unchecked power always leads to disaster. The lack of alternative voices means that many of the problems thrown up by the pandemic, such as the steep rise in mental health issues especially amongst children and adolescents are not being tackled as vigorously as they need to be.

The world has changed and many things as academics we took for granted, such as international travel, is much more restricted and made more difficult. Zoom has become the cheap alternative to face-to-face meetings. We have swapped appearance for reality. We are much more conscious too, of all the viruses and bacteria that are lurking around the globe waiting to infect us. A recent outbreak of Japanese encephalitis in Australia had the health department providing the rather unhelpful advice that people should avoid getting bitten by mosquitoes lest they succumb to this relatively rare disease. Despite all this, I face the future with hope and wary caution.



**Fig. 12** [New figure] My desk in my study. The only change is a new laptop

### **A Heightened Awareness Towards Scholar-Activism**

*James D. Kirylo, Columbia, SC, USA, 8 April*

[Unchanged biography.] James D. Kirylo is Professor of Education at the University of South Carolina. His published books, amongst others, are *The Thoughtful Teacher: Making Connections with a Diverse Student Population* (2021), *Reinventing Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2020) and *Paulo Freire: The Man from Recife* (2011).

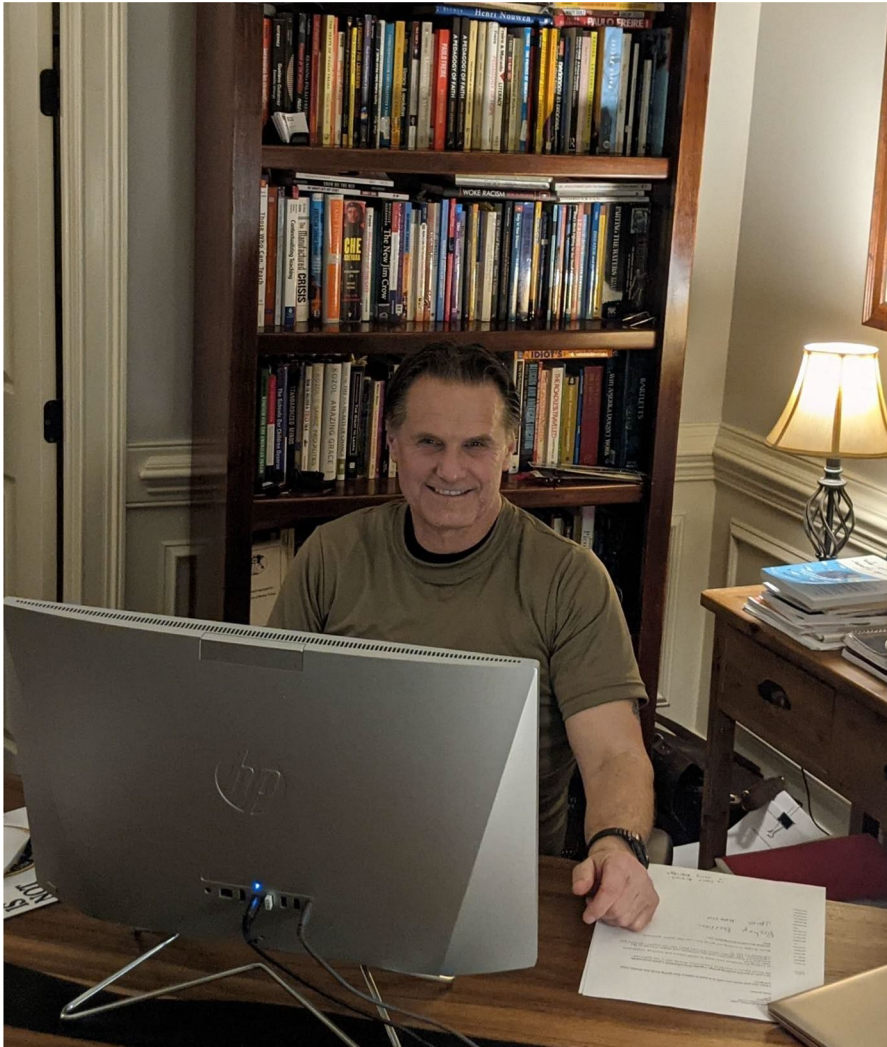
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It has been just over 2 years since Covid-19 viciously emerged on the world stage, with over six million succumbing to death and countless others who continue to deal with long-term effects. The magnitude of this deadly disease has clearly been no small matter. Equally consequential, however, the wonders of science to produce a vaccine at such a rapid pace has been a marvel to behold, saving countless lives and averting serious illness.

With respect to my professional life, not much has changed since my initial 2020 and subsequent 2021 instalments for this series of Covid-related articles. I pretty much exclusively taught online prior to the pandemic, continued to do so during its height and am continuing at this very moment. This means, of course, that there was not a necessity for me to change my instructional delivery forum from a traditional classroom setting to online. A seamless, minimally disruptive process was a good thing. Moreover, it became even more crystalized how fortunate I was (am) to be in a privileged space and have the availability of technology, access to medical care and to be fully vaccinated—indeed, to even have the luxury to ponder that we are hopefully coming out on the other side of the pandemic.

Whilst the vaccine is available to major portions of the world, we still have a way to go on that score. Just this morning as I gathered my thoughts to write this piece, it was reported that millions of the world's poor still have not received the first shot. This should alarmingly alert us all regarding how much work still needs to be done in the effort to foster a global-common-good when it comes to health and wellness care. When it comes to this care, along with access to opportunity, quality education and availability to technology, the idea of a 'new normal' remains as the 'old normal' for countless people. That is, not much has changed for those who have historically been on the outside, looking in. They are still knocking on the proverbial door.

The pandemic has exposed the human condition even more when it comes to the disparities between the haves and have nots. That is why, for me—right here, right now—writing this final narrative for this three-part-series of articles, I cannot help but think about ways that should be pursued in order to cultivate what the liberation theologian would call making a preferential option for the poor. In other words, this 'new normal' must be infused with a heightened sense of inclusiveness on how we stay actively engaged in advocating for policies and practices on behalf of the most vulnerable amongst us, whereby their 'old normal' of lack is brightly transformed to a 'new normal' of sitting at the table of access and opportunity. Becoming a more forceful voice—what many are characterizing as a scholar-activist—has amplified my attention during this era of the pandemic. My hope is that it does the same for still many others.



**Fig. 13** [New figure] At my desk in my home office

### **Keeping On Whilst Keeping On...**

*Paul R. Carr, Montréal, Canada, 9 April*

[Unchanged biography.] Paul R. Carr is a Full Professor in the Department of Education at the Université du Québec en Outaouais, Canada, and is also the Chair-holder of the UNESCO Chair in Democracy, Global Citizenship and Transformative Education (DCMÉT).

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Documenting the last 2 years of living with and through the pandemic has been a cathartic and transformative experience. The ebb and flow of hoping to re-create

social interaction has consistently been dashed and softened by the reality that each time the *society* opens up (and all of these terms need to be problematized, examined and unpacked), the number of cases of Covid-19 explode. Everyone wants to go out, get out, be with people, and enjoy cultural events, dining, lived experiences together and the like, and yet the risk of doing so is constantly a concern for everyone.

I, along with many others in my social circle and more generally in Canadian society, contracted the Omicron variant at the end of 2022. I have no idea how, where, from whom, etc., as I had little social contact at that time. Having already had two vaccinations certainly helped diminish the impact but I would not want to live through it again. The formally documented number of Covid-19 cases and deaths is most likely severely under-represented, and this means that we are really not sure of the true impact, especially in areas where data are not collected.

We are all learning to be arm-chair epidemiologists, attempting to digest and interpret figures, trends, concepts and information so as to make living together a more agreeable experience. The 10–15% who refuse to be vaccinated in Canada, for instance, have had an extremely deleterious effect on the healthcare system, with a disproportionate percentage of hospital beds being allocated to the non-vaccinated. The trucker protest and subsequent political movements for ‘freedom’, however that is interpreted, has also cajoled governments to ‘return to normal’, ‘open up society’ and to ‘live with the virus’.

Despite the debate and confusion around wearing masks, presenting or not mandatory vaccine passports, limiting access to public and private spaces, constant references to mental health and the need to socialise and, as well, the overarching framing of everything within an economic trapping, we continue to function, if that is the word for it. Things have changed but we still have social inequalities, which, on the contrary, are being more clearly illuminated as we learn to accept the integration of the virus within our social systems.

At my university, I have taught one course in person in 2 years, and everything else is distance education. The directives change often, and rightly so, and it is difficult to quickly switch, for example, from in-person to a distance course, and vice-versa. Surprisingly, I have adapted to online teaching but this requires support, re-thinking and a lot of preparation. What we lose in the affective interactions and relationships where we can see and denote body language, laughter, human emotions and interplay between students and professors can, in a small way, be compensated with online engagement.

For example, I have created a closed-group Facebook page which has allowed for more innovative sharing of content, comments and co-construction of knowledge and a more effective organization of assignments and evaluations (which are all submitted and evaluated online without paper and the potential of misplacing or poorly documenting students’ work).



Although attendance rates appear to have increased with online learning, we also face some dilemmas with cameras off or not knowing who is engaged or not. I am concerned about the impact on students, who are often isolated and who also face real-life situations in relation to employment, relationships, and support.

The committees, the meetings, the research, the proliferation of international presentations and a panoply of online activity have also increased markedly and substantially. My collaboration with UNESCO and international partners has also been enhanced through a re-orienting of how I/we worked before the pandemic. Not less busy, not less productive, not less engaged, not less fulfilled, but... this is a different experience. Perhaps, the incalculable benefit of working and living with my partner has made the transition, if that is what it is, more agreeable and enjoyable.

I am concerned about lots of things, and the pandemic has heightened my distress at how the world wishes/attempts to come together, especially with warfare being an almost unstoppable force that decimates humanity and the environment. We continue to get vaccinated (I will be getting the fourth one in a few weeks) but I am fully cognizant that vaccination, which is not, in the least, evenly distributed around the world, is but one part of the puzzle. But I remain hopeful and optimistic, despite everything, that we can build a better place together even if this will require millions and billions of individual gestures, actions, hugs and moments. This reflective project is but one of the actions to stimulate solidarity and humanity across boundaries and borders.



**Fig. 14** [New figure] This is not a pipe/office

## 2022: The New Normal

*Nina Hood and Marek Tesar, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, 13 April*

[Updated biographies.] Nina Hood is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Auckland and the founder of the not-for-profit organization The Education Hub. Marek Tesar is a Professor, Head of School and Associate Dean International at the University of Auckland. They live in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, with their two sons.

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With the Pandemic slowly winding down, and the ‘orange light’ setting being approved for Aotearoa New Zealand (on today, the day of writing this), which removes many restrictions, we have certainly moved away from our original elimination response to the idea that we can be living with the virus. This move coincides for us with promises of the future—to be able to attend meetings and to teach in person, and to have a physical graduation ceremony.

However, it is not as easy as it seems to shake the habits that we, collectively in the Academy, have established over the past 2 years. The workplace and those things associated with it, including the commute to work, have changed. We spend more time at home and less on the road. Our experience of working from home and from work has been driven by working with children. As William James (now nearly 4 years old) has been attending childcare on campus, Marek has been working on campus, dropping him off and picking him up, whilst Nina is working downstairs in our house, in the rumpus room turned into an office and playroom, whilst the Nanny is upstairs with nearly 1-year-old George. That way, whilst Nina works full time—with disruptions—her everyday engagement with George has remained very strong. Nina rarely comes to campus, runs work from home, teaches online (as per University regulations, although these are set to change in May) and has meetings in coffee houses. As the Nanny often gets sick, both Marek and Nina, but mostly Nina, look after George.

Marek became Head of School last year, during the 4 months of hard lockdown due to Delta, but has now fully transitioned to working on campus every day. He arrives, sits at his desk, but most of his time is spent zooming other people behind closed doors. There is an irony in him coming to campus to be part of the academic community but ending up being alone in his office seeing others on Zoom. The good news, however, is that the University has tried to resolve the tension of wanting students and staff on campus, and having everyone safe, and the challenges of dual modes of delivery for our courses and programmes.

Our personal life has also changed. We have become less social, going out less to meet people and with fewer people coming to visit us. The closed borders (until March to all, including New Zealand citizens, and still for foreigners) also mean a lack of international engagement, something that has been particularly challenging—despite the availability of technology, New Zealand becomes very insular, very quickly.

There is a longing for the old world, no matter how imperfect it was. The pandemic has been surreal for Marek and Nina, with multiple, crushing long lockdowns. However, during the pandemic, George Alexander Tesar-Hood came to our lives. This has been one of the most exciting moments of our lives, and he will remain forever our pandemic baby.



**Fig. 15** [New figure] Nina with WJ and GG in the home office

### **In the Event of an Emergency ...**

*Sean Sturm, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, 13 April*

[Updated biography.] Sean Sturm is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Auckland in Aotearoa New Zealand. He is 53 years old and lives in the inner suburbs of Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland with his wife, son, daughter (sometimes), two cats and a fish.

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It is early autumn in the South. The weather has just turned colder—from the mid-20s Celsius to the low 20s at the height of the day—as it always does after Easter and the end of daylight saving. The virus is raging now, in its Omicron variant (we escaped large outbreaks of the earlier variants in Aotearoa New Zealand for 2 years, as they exploded elsewhere), and my family and I are ourselves about to emerge from isolation post-infection. Teaching face-to-face is about to start again, albeit still half offline, half online, teaching neither to on- or off-shore students, because many of our students cannot—or do not want to—come to campus (many teachers do not want to either because our safety and that of our students, especially that of those of

us and our students who are immune-compromised or anxious, is being ignored by our institution).

At the same time, our institution continues to try to capitalize on the crisis that emergency remote teaching in the lockdowns has offered it to ‘drag teachers into the future’. (Apparently, we are to continue to focus on a ‘campus-based learning experience’ because the campus retailers need customers... oh, and because we are still committed to our existing and planned ‘physical’ learning environments, i.e. lecture theatres, labs and offices.) We academics have seen:

- Pedagogically naïve existing and planned ‘physical’ applications like Zoom (synchronous online teaching) and InSpera (online assessment)—at the same time as our teaching and learning centre (where I used to work) has been disestablished and the teaching and learning leadership structure and policymaking further centralised.
- Workforce reductions—despite domestic enrolments increasing (and international enrolments remaining surprisingly consistent—such that academic workloads have increased, and more administrative tasks have been loaded onto academics through ‘self-service’ applications... whilst we are offered ‘well-being seminars’ and ‘self-care strategies’ in lieu of more staff and funding).
- Savings in infrastructure through remote working (for the costs of which staff are not compensated) and in travel costs through remote conferencing (which, for those of us whose networks are in Europe, means Zooming in the middle of the night).

What we see at work in such institutional facts is a kind of ‘digital governmentality’ (Badouard et al. 2016) that manages academics through the crisis by ‘responsibilisation’ (Rose 1990: xxiii), by proffering self-‘care’ (the duty to look out for and after ourselves) through digital means as the solution to the crisis of the virus *for the institution*. What is needed is, instead, a broader and more properly ethical ‘response-ability’ (Haraway 2016: 2) to the crisis of the virus *for the planet*, which could herald a new kind of care that involves a ‘think[ing] beyond the Anthropocene’ (Stiegler 2017: 389).

Such careful thinking could attempt, through the otherworldly encounter with the virus and immersion in the digital that the crisis represents, to rethink the ‘cosmotechnical triangle “human/animal/machine”’ (Viveiros de Castro and Hui 2021: 398). We might then find ourselves able to reckon with the institution of the university as it could be, namely, both posthuman and postdigital.



**Fig. 16** [Unchanged figure] This is the view from my now customary workspace since the Covid-19 lockdowns of 2020: the garden shed-office

### **Dancing in the Post-Pandemic Rain**

*Sandra Abegglen, Calgary, Canada; Tom Burns, London, United Kingdom; Sandra Sinfield, London, United Kingdom, 14 April*

[Updated biographies.] Sandra Sinfield, Sandra Abegglen and Tom Burns have worked and taught together at London Metropolitan University, London, UK, for many years. Sandra A. left LondonMet in 2018 and is now based at the University of Calgary, Canada, where she works on research projects that explore online teaching and learning, and design studio practice. Sandra S. and Tom B. are still based at LondonMet. They teach on the Postgraduate Certificate and MA in Learning and Teaching in HE courses for academic staff with a special focus on praxes that ignite curiosity, harness creativity, and develop power and voice. We research, edit and write together: collaborative writing as inquiry and sustenance.

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For the three of us, not much has changed since the Covid-19 pandemic started in Spring 2020. We are still teaching and researching from home 24 months after our universities went into their first lockdown. Whilst our universities have returned

to in-person learning for many courses this year, our own work has stayed online, although Sandra A has been able to undertake some face-to-face research activities. Tom and Sandra S have stayed completely online with their staff development work, having accumulated a total of five laptops, two PCs and an iPad.

Our collaboration as a three still takes place through synchronous and asynchronous writing in Google Docs, accompanied by real-time conversation through Skype. In 2021, we, as a three, have published a book, three book chapters, an edited special issue journal, and four articles, with more forthcoming this year.

Whilst the hope from staff on the ground was that the lessons learned about creative and empowering uses of digital education would be embraced by our employers, the feeling in the university sector overall was that students wanted a return to face-to-face teaching—so the promised ‘new ways of working’ became immediately moderated. Whilst staff may have lost their personal offices in favour of bookable workspaces—where the emphasis is on sitting and working in silence—they are still in the main expected to be on campus, physically distanced. New teaching and learning formats have yet to establish themselves. Whilst the three of us are not directly affected by this, we still feel the crunch on staff and student morale, the exhaustion of having to navigate a supercomplex academia.

Working from home means our private and personal lives still directly intersect with our work. There is still a struggle to make it all work, for our students and ourselves, in our own private spaces. The emotional labour needed is enormous, and the daily ‘battle’ with technology and bandwidth are making it no easier. Our ‘doing’ is completely dependent on ‘getting online’ and ‘being able to connect’. The 8 to 5, 5-day workday, has disappeared for good.

Daily tasks such as shopping that were definitely a hassle during the first wave of the pandemic because of health issues and product availability began to feel more everyday and normal. However, the current world situation with the war in the Ukraine has created a new horror to haunt the News—and led to new product shortages and price hikes.

We have found niche opportunities to be creative, playful, and joyful online. However, the education system overall feels more restrictive to us than it ever was. We are still far away from creating the humane and socially just academia we were hoping for. The pandemic created a mass, ground up experimentation with online teaching and digital education. Something powerful seemed on the cusp of emergence. The reality is that we are pushed to return to old models of teaching and learning, to return to Campus, regardless. In the end, the stress has not emerged from the pandemic—but from a refusal to learn from what has happened.

We are still asking: In the ‘new normal’, who will have the courage and the resources to experiment, draw, sketch, dance and sing—to move beyond a reductionist education?



**Fig. 17** [New figure] Sandra S, Tom and Sandra A, connecting through Skype

**Normal, or Not?**

*Georgina Tuari Stewart, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, 15 April*

[Updated biography.] Georgina Tuari Stewart is an Associate Professor in Te Ara Poutama, Faculty of Māori at AUT (Auckland University of Technology) in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. She is a double Marsden researcher, Co-Editor of *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies* and won a 2021 AUT Excellence Award for individual research.

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For the third academic year in a row, the Covid-19 pandemic is affecting my university work. The difference now is that all of us, students and staff, are used to the fact that there is a pandemic, and comfortable with working online. Compared to colleagues in other countries, in Aotearoa New Zealand, we have had longer to get used to the fact of the pandemic and the conditions of the response, which we have seen working to eliminate the Alpha (2020) and Delta (2021) variants,

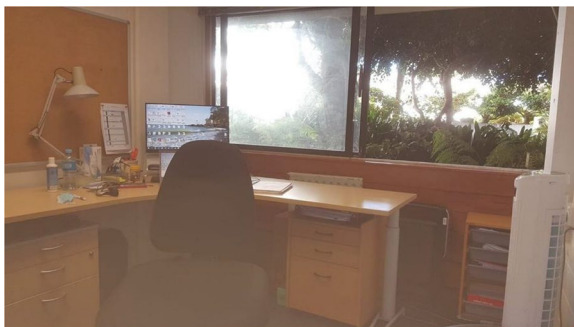
before the disease took hold in the local community, with our first real outbreak—Omicron—taking place in early 2022.

The Omicron outbreak was in full swing in February–March 2022 when I taught a 2-week intensive, face-to-face class of 34 student teachers, for a basic Te Reo Māori language course. Starting with almost 100% attendance, as the days passed, more and more students tested positive or were household contacts, so joined class online. Despite everything, all 34 students completed their assessments on schedule, either in the room or online, and everyone passed, with grades ranging from A+ to C. I think this success was enabled by good planning on my part, but it is a testament to their resilience and hard work.

Despite everything, we are getting on with things as much as possible. Teaching has ‘pivoted’ to online or hybrid/blended. Research is affected by a complete ban on staff international travel, which excludes international travel to collect data, and conferencing has gone online. So has all the background work: doctoral oral examinations, ethics committees, academic boards and administrative matters of all kinds. Many of us now spend large parts of our workdays in online meetings. Personal savings on the cost of the daily commute are welcomed by many students and staff, as the war in Europe pushes up the price of petrol to new record levels.

In April, our university advised that all staff are expected to return to campus from the start of May. The responses are ambivalent: most of us want to see our colleagues again in person, but at the same time worry about catching Covid-19. That same day a call for abstracts came for a face-to-face conference in December in Adelaide, Australia. This exciting news is tempered with caution, since there is no way of knowing what conditions will be like by then. New burdens of uncertainty and anxiety are part of our work now.

In many ways, it has taken this pandemic to realise the promise of technology held out to humanity for several decades: that technology will free us from spatial restrictions, such as being on campus all day, every day. For me, whose home and family are located 160 km north of my university in Auckland, these changes brought about by the pandemic mean that I can be more flexible in my working arrangements. Convening face-to-face meetings of people from around the country is no longer standard practice, when online meetings work just as well, especially for groups who operate on shoestring budgets. International academic activities such as giving online seminars and meetings for research and writing projects are made easier by the online environment, which really matters to researchers located in a peripheral academy such as Aotearoa New Zealand.



**Fig. 18** [New figure] My new office AR125 at Akoranga Campus AUT—January 2022



## February Is the Cruellest Month

Juha Suoranta, Tampere, Finland, 21 April

[Unchanged biography.] Juha Suoranta is a Professor of Adult Education at Tampere University, Finland. He is 56 years old and lives in Tampere with his spouse Anna and their three children.

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Last year, on the same day as today, I wrote that situations like the Covid-19 pandemic could lead to ‘biographical disruptions’ in which everyday life’s psychological and social structures may suffer. I guess that has also happened to me.

I have stayed in my home office teaching and writing for a better part of the academic year 2021–2022 due to my institution’s Covid-19 restrictions. From March on, we have slowly returned to campus. However, many students did not show up for some reason (although they said they wanted to return to campuses). Still, I was happy to walk again to my workplace, have a coffee at the campus coffee shop and meet students and colleagues.

The lesson we learned from the pandemic experience was that teaching, learning and administering are possible via digital tools. Still, face-to-face interactions are vital, at least in the social and human sciences, which are collective endeavours and based on informal encounters.

The major transformation in my life during the years of the pandemic is that I feel as if I had lost many precious years in my life, perhaps a decade. The major challenge has been to keep up a good mood and stay sane.

But after the early morning of 24 February, it has been ever more difficult. I thought I had a splendid birthday coming after the long months of Covid-19, but Russia’s despot Vladimir Putin ruined the day and the future for Europe and the world. As Slavoj Žižek puts it,

[t]he situation exhibits a basic madness: at a time when humanity’s very survival is jeopardized by ecological (and other) factors, and when addressing those threats should be prioritized over everything else, our primary concern has suddenly shifted—again—to a new political crisis. (Žižek 2022)

Yes, Covid-19 sucks but then comes another evil: Russia’s war against Ukraine. As I write these lines, Russia has bombed Ukraine for 8 weeks, and an omnicide looms on the horizon.

Honestly, I do not mind the pandemic too much anymore after the Ukraine war; perhaps this is a variation of mental agenda setting. I have accepted that the virus is here to stay, maybe a variation of compassion fatigue. And rest assured that more virus variants are coming.

In the coming months and years, too much is at stake because of the suddenly changed geopolitical conditions. These conditions, which somewhat resemble the years before World War I, threaten the Ukrainian people. Millions have fled the country; innocent lives have been lost. In addition, world peace and the fight against climate change are endangered as the imperial ambitions reign free.

The new geopolitical condition sets the agenda for social sciences. We must do everything in our power to stop the madness. As Chomsky says,

[o]ur prime concern should be to think through carefully what we can do to bring the criminal Russian invasion to a quick end and to save the Ukrainian victims from more horrors. There are, unfortunately, many who find heroic pronouncements to be more satisfying than this necessary task. (Chomsky in Polychroniou 2022)



**Fig. 19** [New figure] The workroom shrinks as teens grow older. The order of the rooms had to be changed

## Now Is the Time: Step Out of the Pandemic Shadows

*Jimmy Jaldemark, Härnösand, Sweden, 23 April*

[Updated biography.] Jimmy Jaldemark is an Associate Professor of education at Mid Sweden University (MSU). He is a 51-year-old homeowner living in Härnösand, Sweden, with his wife and their five children. He commutes to the office by train 50 min one way.

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Except for two quarantine periods, it was a blessing to have the opportunity to attend campus regularly. I described the first period in the 2020 testimony; the second period occurred in early 2022 when I finally was infected by Covid-19. I got an easy hit reminiscence of a common cold, including a few days of fever, cough and a heavy feeling in the body. The infection disrupted my work minimally. However, since the second testimony, I continued to improve my home office by moving to another room and upgrading the network capacity (see Fig. 20). Furthermore, in early 2022, I was appointed the head of the discipline of education, i.e. supervising and leading the discipline and its courses, research, and development. This function drew me into even more of a leadership role than before the start of the pandemic.

The Swedish government declared the country a non-pandemic state in February 2022, gradually lifting the restrictions to go back to normal by the 1 April. This process has not been without issues. From a student perspective, we learned that getting students back to campus meetings is a challenge. Such meetings are not typical of distance studies for students who began their studies during the pandemic. Nevertheless, campus meetings have been crucial from a quality perspective in many distance education programs. In addition, the pandemic taught us to a better use of our time between the physical meetings.

As mentioned in the first testimony, MSU is a national leader in distance education. This position builds on the geographical circumstances in a large and sparsely populated region and the possibility of being a relatively new university without centuries of old traditions to lean on. Therefore, MSU has many years of experience in delivering high-quality distance education. However, a lot has changed during the last 2 years. MSU still has the first-mover advantage, but other universities have at least proved they can deliver distance education. Combined with the pre-Covid insight, the gap will close if we stop developing our competence and methods. A conclusion drawn was a need to initiate new ideas and build on MSUs earlier experiences in the effort to hold a leading position. Therefore, MSU initiated HEaD (Higher Education and Digitalisation), a university-wide 5-year development project focusing on digital and lifelong aspects of learning. The project includes development efforts from all departments and several diffusion activities at various levels of the university organization (e.g. Bader et al. 2022).

Another lesson, building on both the pandemic and earlier initiated projects, is the importance of collaboration between the university and surrounding society. We need to ramp up our efforts in the lifelong learning field by building on a networked

mode of relationship between the university and society. This relationship should be hybrid and symmetrical by building on an ongoing dialogue. The networked mode goes beyond the asymmetrical power balances between the university and society emphasized in the traditional ivory tower and the new public management factory modes. Minor trials were made during the pandemic to develop new educational models (e.g. Jaldemark and Öhman 2020). In the post-pandemic stage, we will deliver education by focusing on expanding these models and building long-term relationships with organisations in society.

I am still more worried about the long-term consequences of the pandemic than the pandemic itself. Society needs to work hard to get people together again and reclaim lost democratic grounds. The restrictions damaged the cohesion of society, and now is the time for the university to step out of the pandemic shadows and reclaim its role as a vital force for societal development and be a creative place that stimulates necessary dialogues and nurtures new ideas.



**Fig. 20** [New figure] A new photograph of my home office

## The Life of a Swedish Doctoral Student

*Ulrika Gustafsson, Umeå, Sweden, 24 April*

[Unchanged biography.] Ulrika Gustafsson is a doctoral student at the University of Umeå, Department of Applied Educational Science, Sweden. She is 48 years old and lives in Umeå, Sweden, with her partner and their two children.

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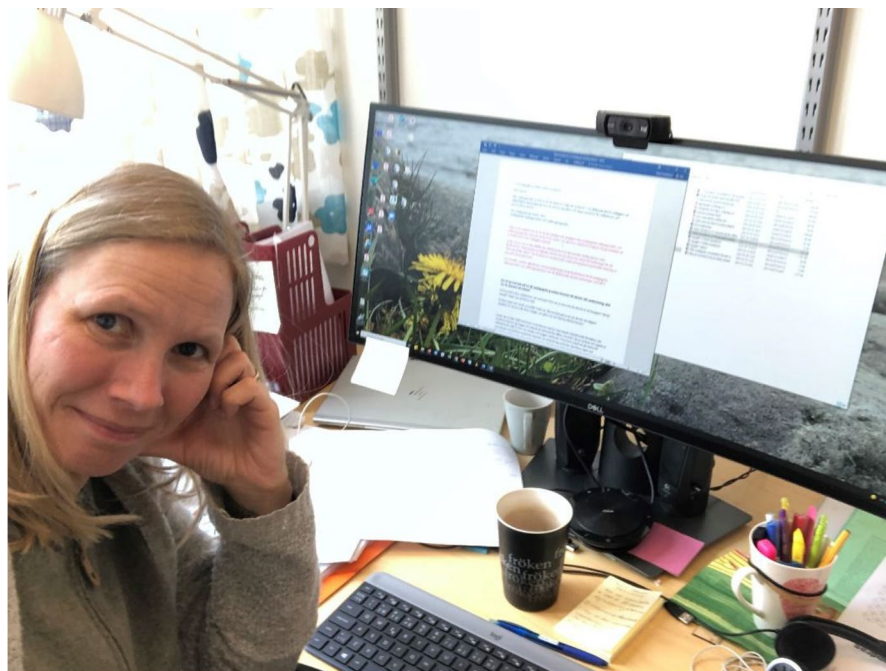
Back at work where I can spread some chaos on my desk. Piling papers high, putting post-its on the computer screen, propping the bookshelf with library books. My family is all well.

What I missed the most during these years are in-person meetings in an academic research milieu. Seminars and supervision have been possible online. However, the workplace small talk was missing, which included short questions to the senior researchers, listening in on ideas, and sharing experiences in all kinds of topics. Hence, things irreplaceable when working from home. Nevertheless, coming back to ‘the new normal’, it seems that not everyone shares this similar urgent feel to interact again. Some seem reluctant to even return to their university workplaces. Others strongly argue the importance of in-person meeting, and how we need new compensatory routines. Therefore, at my Department, we started having booster seminars, planned by a small group of doctoral students and professors.

These seminars pinpoint issues we might have come past during the 2 years of working from home. Seemingly gladly, the senior researchers holding these seminars share favourite tips and tricks on succeeding in academia, and until now themes addressed have been for example: the academic journal publishing processes, social media presence, conference participation and applying for funding or research visits. All booster seminars have been well attended and much appreciated. I reflect that the pandemic for some has brought forward how lonely the academic environment can be, how much in-situ knowledge there is within the researcher profession and the value for doctoral students (and senior researchers) if sometimes, some of the hard-earned insights are shared and discussed.

One other feature of ‘the new normal’ is that despite the possibility of having in-person meetings, the enabling of online participation seems to be permanent. Additionally, meetings rarely reschedule. There are pros and cons with this even though I mostly consider it positive. I fear, however, that this may increase feelings of FOMO-anxiety (fear of missing out) amongst doctoral students. Thus, bringing additional, unproductive and unnecessary stress to the studies.

My own strongest feeling thinking back upon Covid-19 is one of confidence. The efforts to handle this crisis by collaboration, cooperation and use of available technology have strengthened my faith in humanity. Furthermore, for myself as a doctoral student, experiencing the support given due to the challenges that the pandemic caused, I am more certain than ever that my thesis will be finished, eventually.



**Fig. 21** [New figure] Me at my desk in my university office. An organised mess

### Getting Back to What Matters

*Lilia D. Monzó, Los Angeles, CA, USA, 25 April*

[Unchanged biography.] Lilia D. Monzó is Associate Professor in the Attallah College of Educational Studies at Chapman University and Co-director of the Paulo Freire Democratic Project. She is the author of *A Revolutionary Subject: Pedagogy of Women of Color and Indigeneity*. Monzó teaches on critical pedagogy, social movements and history and philosophies of education.

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Living within the hypercapitalism of the USA, I had come to embody much of what I often critique in my work—a life overtaken with constant unnecessary purchasing and devoted to the work demands for greater and greater production at the expense of family relationships and actually moving through the world as a human being. The death and suffering of the world, the social isolation and work stoppages that the pandemic brought on allowed me to experience life in a way that, to a greater extent, honours what it means to be human. I gained a new perspective that challenged what we, as a society, seemed to previously value.

With the initial uncertainty of the pandemic, my work at the university was reduced to that which held the greatest priority—teaching my classes and the work related to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) efforts in response to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) uprisings that came about at the same time and

partially in response to the pandemic. It became clear how much of our daily work involved superfluous activity. Given the uncertainty of the time, many of us learned to reconceptualize notions of academic rigor. I began to express to each of my classes that since we did not know what any of us may be dealing with in terms of illness, family loss, job loss or other trauma, we all needed to be more thoughtful, more patient and more caring towards each other. I skimmed the fat off assignments and focused on what offered the greatest learning opportunities. I became more flexible with due dates and absences, recognizing that students have lives beyond their schooling. I offered greater opportunities for revising their work in ways that helped them learn more.

My personal life became more humanizing also. Given the store closures and the need to isolate, I spent much more time with my husband and my son. We began eating home-cooked meals routinely rather than the restaurant meals that had become an almost daily experience given our previously busy work schedules. I began learning to play the piano via YouTube and began a daily leisure walking routine that helped me lose 30 pounds. The shopping sprees and constant driving to pick up this and that stopped, giving me both more time and less stress. Incredibly, I paid off all my credit card debt. I also found myself spending more quality time with my parents, whom I continued to visit every Sunday at their homes.

Today, there is a strong push to move us back to the previous mode, with renewed dangers from Covid variants being minimised in order to improve the economy. Of course, any improvement to the economy is unlikely to be felt by the many Black, Indigenous and other People of Colour (BIPOC) whose previously precarious economic conditions were made harsher still by the pandemic and whose lives are always at greater risk of Covid.

At the university, we are teaching in person but the majority of meetings and other activities continue to be conducted virtually. I welcome this hybrid experience in my work since it gives me more time with my family whilst also having the opportunity to engage socially with others when it proves most fruitful. Teaching, I have learned, is often more effective and more enjoyable in person. However, virtual teaching can and should have a place in education. I continue to strive to create classroom contexts that are more humanizing, encouraging students to come into our educational spaces as human beings rather than mere students.

In my personal life, my husband continues to cook most meals at home and we have found joy in spending time together as a family at home without the need to constantly go out. Whilst I do enjoy new clothing, I find myself shopping rarely these days and only for things I actually need or find truly beautiful. I continue with my walking routine that brought me greater physical and mental health but I find myself sometimes forgoing my walks to meet virtually with students, forgetting that personal care is not only a human necessity, but also a form of ‘political warfare’ (Lorde 2020). My hope is that rather than reverting to the old consumerist ways of the capitalist world, that this new normal can serve as an example of possibility and the impetus for creating more human social relations.



**Fig. 22** [New figure] Back in my office for face-to-face instruction



## Untitled

*Ivana Batarelo Kokić, Split, Croatia, 26 April*

[Unchanged biography.] Ivana Batarelo Kokić is a Professor at the University of Split, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Croatia. Ivana lives in Split, Croatia, with her husband and two children.

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The last 2 years passed in uncertainty about various aspects of our lives, including the type of work and teaching environments. Whilst we were switching from physical to online and blended teaching, it was crucial to adjust course activities and expectations and achieve the maximum for given circumstances. For the last couple of months, we have been teaching without masks in physical classrooms, and I am quite happy with how classes are going. Students seem to enjoy their everyday lives and the opportunity to learn and interact face-to-face.

Whilst we are back in the classrooms, I believe that specific positive results of intensive technology use will remain. Due to the changed teaching conditions, teachers reconsidered ways to transfer their skills and knowledge about teaching and learning to the digital learning environment. Also, teachers on all levels of education greatly benefit from participating in online meetings and webinars. The return to a regular classroom gives me the energy to be a better teacher. Nevertheless, the most important lesson that I learned last year is to re-establish professional connections. Due to a more flexible work schedule, I used work and research opportunities in and out of the country. Regarding the place of my employment, the technology-related issues improved significantly. From the organisational standpoint, there is more extensive support and awareness of the possibilities of working in blended learning environments.

For the last 2 years, I have been working on most of my work tasks from home and have managed to determine the best daily routine. Due to this possibility, it was easier to balance private and professional life. I am grateful for the time that I am spending with my family. My children are in elementary school, and it is a privilege to be around them as support most of the day. Today's children are growing up in the technology condensed world, and despite my fondness for technology, I am constantly questioning how to regulate children's interaction with technology. At the same time, I am asking how educational technology is used and reflecting on the schooling experiences of my children and their life prospects.

I am currently working on the experimental study on implementing various information and communication technology models in elementary school classrooms. There are over 50 elementary school teachers participating in the study. It is an excellent opportunity to communicate with them and gain insight into ways they are utilizing technology to enhance teaching and learning. As expected, their experiences with teaching and learning in technology-rich environments in the last 2 years have significantly impacted the structure of this research study and study findings.

Finally, regarding my feelings and hopes, at this moment, I am very optimistic about my family and professional prospects and appreciate the opportunity to write this short reflection. I am trying to think that the worst pandemic times are behind us whilst being aware that we live in troubling times and that people in many countries are suffering.



**Fig. 23** [New figure] We are back in the classroom

### **Back to Normal Teaching Life**

*Jimmy Ezekiel Kihwele, Morogoro, Tanzania, 26 April*

[Unchanged biography.] Jimmy Ezekiel Kihwele is a Lecturer at Mzumbe University, Tanzania. He completed his PhD at Beijing Normal University, China, in June 2021. Jimmy is 37 years old and lives in Morogoro, Tanzania, with his partner and two daughters.

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I am writing this testimony at my working place in Morogoro, Tanzania. After graduating with a PhD, I returned to teach at the university. I can say that normal life has 100% returned to normal. The interactions, teaching and learning are the same as before the emergence of the pandemic. In very few places, one can spot one or two people wearing a mask. Installed handwashing places look abandoned. Teaching and learning still use face-to-face methods as the digital divide has hampered blended learning. Although the Commission for Universities in Tanzania has developed a guideline for implementing online and blended learning, still many universities find it difficult to implement in undergraduate programs.

The pandemic has taught us that we need to rethink the modalities of offering education that can withstand disruptions during emergencies. Investing in modern teaching and learning technologies is inevitable. It is also inevitable to raise awareness amongst key stakeholders to get the necessary learning facilities ready: having computers or smartphones, developing digital literacies and being flexible to change to any learning mode.

I take good care of my health. The pandemic has raised my awareness on how I interact with my students. I have taken a further initiative to orient my students towards using Moodle; the available Learning Management System at the university. Although the virtual learning environment is not fully utilized, I give my students questions for discussion in the forum, ask them to submit assignments online, share readings, and I even give them some announcements and instructions.

Because of the pandemic I do not prefer face-to-face consultation with my students, so they do not visit my office anymore. In rare cases, I meet physically with those I supervise. I no longer visit the crowded library, so I rely on the e-library. The amount of time spent in front of my laptop has increased, and that worries me. I sometimes continue working at home, so I give less time to my daughters.

I think the Covid-19 pandemic threat is real. I tested positive at one point and had to self-quarantine to protect my family members. The virus is everywhere, and no one knows how and when they can contract the disease. I am more cautious when interacting with people.

The pandemic has affected academic life to a large extent. Many conferences have been virtual, especially for participants from countries where the proportion of vaccinated people is low. The pandemic has created a divide between developed and developing countries. The benefits of international interactions through scholarships, exchange programs and collaboration in projects have been reduced to a large extent.



**Fig. 24** [New figure] The new office and a working place that I share with my colleague

## Unrecognisable

*Jake Wright, Rochester, MN, USA, 27 April*

[Unchanged biography.] Jake Wright is Senior Lecturer of Philosophy at the University of Minnesota Rochester's Center for Learning Innovation, where he teaches philosophy courses and conducts research into the ethical and pedagogical justifications for in-class practices at the introductory level.

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Two years ago, in what is now the first part of this trilogy of Covid-19 reflections, I wrote that 'it's difficult to know how long this crisis will continue. Certainly, it feels as though it will continue well beyond the point it should, and whatever state we find ourselves in after all of this is done, it will not be recognizably normal from our pre-pandemic viewpoint' (Jandrić et al. 2020: 1175).

In an essay, I recently published but wrote last year, I spoke about increasing vaccination rates, decreasing case counts and a return to what I hoped would be a 'new post-pandemic normal that is more responsive to [our] needs and experiences' (Wright 2022: 318). Indeed, in last year's reflection for this series (Jandrić et al. 2021a), I noted that I was recently fully vaccinated and, after sending my contribution to Petar, marvelled at the suddenly unfamiliar and almost magical experience of eating at Perkins, a decidedly middle-brow American restaurant chain. It was my first in-person dining experience in over a year, and I savoured every second of it, finding myself in a moment of hope that our new normal would be unrecognisable from before, but in a good way.

Instead, the new normal we find ourselves in is unrecognisable in a way our pre-pandemic selves would find deeply troubling. The current state of our Covid-19 response, which has certainly continued well beyond the point that it should have, is unrecognisable in the sense that we have so clearly learned nothing as a society whilst learning necessary but deeply unsettling truths about one another. We have not overcome Covid-19 so much as we have become bored by it. The desire to return to normal has overwhelmed any effort to learn from what we have experienced, instead rushing headlong into efforts to simply return to how things were, as though the square peg of our experience can be forced into the round hole it once occupied. Meanwhile, the selfishness and callousness that has defined so many individual responses to this crisis have been laid bare, as has the outsized degree to which these views hold sway. We will not 'avoid something like the plague', so to speak, if doing so involves any meaningful degree of inconvenience.

The end result for me has been a fundamental breakdown in trust. As the philosopher Nguyen ([forthcoming](#)) notes, trust is an attitude in which the idea of betrayal never enters our minds. Yet after watching individuals and institutions fail at so many levels, I cannot help but question whether I can rely on the people and individuals I had previously depended on to navigate the world. At some level, I must rely on at least some people and institutions; I cannot refuse to rely on them any more than I can refuse to rely on the air I breathe. And yet, the need to rely is undercut by the inability to trust as I look back at the last two years in grief, marvelling at all that has been lost.



**Fig. 25** [New figure] My campus office. Now that we have more-or-less completely returned to in-person instruction, the bulk of my work has returned to campus, as well

### Living With and Without Covid-19

*Pallavi Kishore, New Delhi, India, 28 April*

[Unchanged biography.] Pallavi Kishore is a Professor at Jindal Global Law School, O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonapat, India. She lives in New Delhi, India.

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I had been wondering if a call for a sequel would be issued this year. As soon as it was issued, I decided to write down my thoughts.

I am writing this testimony from my home in New Delhi where I wrote the previous two testimonies. I still teach at Jindal Global Law School, some 60 km away. My last offline class was held on 3 March 2020. For more than 2 years, I was teaching online. Offline classes resumed on 8 March 2022 for me. The offline classes are hybrid in nature which means that some students are present in-person whilst some are present remotely. Consequently, I am required to login on MS Teams and record the classes. At times, there is a technological glitch, but it gets resolved.

I am happy that offline classes have resumed. However, I am quite careful and follow all Covid-19 protocols. Though it is rather tiring, I wear a mask and teach. Before the lockdown, I had been commuting to work for almost ten years. After not commuting for over 2 years, the commute is exhausting. Hopefully, I will get used to it.

Offices, markets and educational institutions etc. are open and some states have done away with the compulsory Covid-19 protocols. People have started travelling. However, some states are starting to reimpose mandatory Covid-19 protocols such as wearing of masks since cases are slowly picking up.

It seems that this pandemic is here to stay—either forever or for a long time—and has only reinforced my knowledge about the uncertainty of life. It is better to continue to live one's life instead of restricting it. In any case, life will unfold whether or not we like it. By way of example, work continued during the lockdown and continues even during the 'new normal'. I published articles as well as participated in conferences and am now focusing on others.

Additionally, this is a very busy time of the year in India since we must file our income tax returns (even a pandemic cannot change that), something I am not looking forward to. But I also have writing and conference invitations, something I am looking forward to. Moreover, I finally bought a new laptop computer for myself (since the old one had slowed down)—another proof of life going on in spite of the pandemic. And as always, the cool mountains beckon in the intense heat.

Even in the scorching summer, I made some paintings and have been doing my morning walk as regularly as possible. I have also been attending cultural events such as music concerts, dance performances, exhibitions and plays, which have returned with renewed zest after a gap of 2 years. In fact, so high are their number, diversity and quality that it is difficult to decide which one to attend since many are held simultaneously in different venues. Delhiites are happy that Delhi is back to normal and the artists are performing even better than the pre-pandemic days. Let us hope that the active art scene of Delhi lasts forever.



**Fig. 26** [New figure] This is my workspace in my bedroom where I have written all the three testimonies starting in 2020

## The Acceleration of Academic Labour

Paul Alexander Stewart, Middlesbrough, UK, 29 April

[Updated biography.] Dr Paul Stewart is an artist and Principal Lecturer and Course leader for BA Fine Art and MA Curating at Teesside University. Recent publications include the Special Issue of *On-Curating* titled ‘Curating the Digital’ (2020); chapter ‘Knowledge Exchange and Knowing: Art and the digital’ (2020); *Art, Critical Pedagogy and Capitalism* (2020); and a new monograph with Bloomsbury on radical aesthetics and education forthcoming in 2024.

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There is something about institutions that absorbs trauma, in turn rubbing it into a faint memory without necessarily reflecting on the overarching journey taken. I think this has more to do with the industrious, factory nature of universities to maintain a momentum of practice and delivery, sustaining its continued recruitment, internment and then commencement of its student cohort. I do not feel able to acknowledge what I have experienced yet or how to quantify its effects towards my own pedagogic outlook and practice. The one thing I can attest to is the multiplication and acceleration of day-to-day work.

Since returning to 100% in person delivery (in September 2021), we have put aside all blended delivery and returned to pre-Covid contact. What has changed though is our relationship to where and how non-teaching work happens. Nearly all of my meetings are in Teams and sandwiched one after the other, covering each minute of the day. Each interaction, more like a briefing, comes with its own list of actions and there is an expectation that these actions can be achieved at a much faster rate. I currently work 3 days in the office and 2 days at home; each of us have a different pattern due to our teaching commitments. I have found solace though in the return of fleeting conversations and in passing ‘hellos’ from colleagues, which does ground a mutual experience in the malaise of perpetual capital work. Stress is something I am very aware of; I am finding it hard to cope with the expectations of continually delivering and sometimes wish to pause and breathe for a little bit longer.

The change to homeworking has however improved my family life and increased time spent with my children. This is something I would want to maintain. No longer having to travel for 2 h a day but using that time to play, socialise and be together with family.



**Fig. 27** [New figure] My office desk at the university

### **Waving Not Drowning: Year 3 of Covid-19 in Hong Kong**

*Susan M. Bridges (nee Hawthorne), Hong Kong, China, 29 April*

[Updated biography.] Professor Susan Bridges is Director of the Centre for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (CETL) at The University of Hong Kong. Since the PDSE 2021 collection, she has taken to long walks at Repulse Bay (when beaches are not closed due to restrictions) and was delighted to visit her family in Australia, viewing compulsory hotel quarantining as a social contract rather than imprisonment.

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A few weeks ago, a tweet from my #1 Hong Kong Covid-19 reporter drove all the poetry out of me. The tweet—‘Day 100 of the 5<sup>th</sup> Wave’. For those 100 days, life was reduced to a 700 ft<sup>2</sup> apartment with my husband, weekend morning walks, afternoon visits to the office (to avoid physical contact with staff and potential compulsory quarantining), conducting most work (and socializing) online. As per my last poetic update (Jandrić et al. 2021a), I remain as Director of CETL working with a dedicated team to support colleagues in course designs and curriculum renewal in a period of unprecedented change. I continue to reside, teach and research in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) and retain my identity as ‘bi-located’ between my two homes of Hong Kong, China, and Queensland, Australia. After the height of despair of the 5th Wave with elderly patients being treated in makeshift tents outside overcrowded hospitals, we gradually returned to campus. Our University organised our administration into



weekly rostered teams so that if one member was infected and the rest ordered to confine as ‘close contacts’, the alternate team could take up on-site duties.

A major capital works project was miraculously completed and, in May 2022, we will launch our CETL Learning Lab (Fig. 28), the design concept of which was featured as an ‘exemplar project’ in the ‘2022 EDUCAUSE horizon report: Teaching and Learning Edition’ (EDUCAUSE 2022). Our design has been greatly influenced by postdigital thinking and resonates with the Special Issue of *Postdigital Science and Education* on ‘The Postdigital Learning Spaces of Higher Education’ (Lamb et al. 2022)<sup>5</sup>. In short, we converted a multi-layered, built-in design into a flat, flexible and interactive space. Key to a postdigital entangling of ‘real’ and online, inside and outside in a windowless former studio space was my inclusion of a live green wall (Fawns 2022). Given the frustrations of synchronous hybridity, we spent 2 years designing tables that enable the online members of a group to be at the centre rather than at the periphery of zoom/room group interactions. Necessity is, indeed, the mother of invention, and so, I am now named as ‘Inventor 1’ on furniture patents in Hong Kong and mainland China for a ‘Hybrid Learning Mobile Desk Console’... Who’d have thought?

So, although the 5th Wave is abating in Hong Kong my ambivalence towards ‘Covid-ZERO’ (like Coke-Zero) is real—health systems are relieved but the surfacing of mental health disorders in random encounters and the daily news is clear evidence of the strain on the populace. We have overcome the trials of Year 3 of Covid-19 in my second home of Hong Kong and look forward to a summer return to Queensland, Australia visiting family, heading to the beach and reconnecting with colleagues at my *alma mater*, The University of Queensland.



**Fig. 28** [New figure] The CETL Learning Lab - our postdigital learning space

<sup>5</sup> See <https://link.springer.com/journal/42438/volumes-and-issues/4-1>. Accessed 20 June 2022.

## New Excuses, Same Normal

Mikkel Lodahl, Randers, Denmark, 29 April

[Updated biography.] I still work at Dania Academy, but I have taken up a position as a project and fundraising consultant. I no longer teach.

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On Tuesday 1 February, the Danish government rolled back the final Covid-19 restrictions. Since then, it seems to have become *comme-il-faut* to not mention the pandemic other than as a somewhat distant memory or as an explanation for anything and everything that might not have gone according to plan in the last two and a half years. This is problematic for a variety of reasons.

On an individual level, I feel like I have been asleep at the wheel. No, that is not entirely accurate. It is more like I have been in a parallel universe having other adventures for two and a half years, and now I am back in the main universe. Time has passed, but it is difficult to know what significance events in that time have had, or will have.

My wife and oldest son have both had Covid-19. They seem to not have any lingering effects. I find it difficult to believe the rest of the household has not had it as well, since the mandate for isolation had been lifted, but only they tested positive. This adds more fuzziness to the period. Was I sick? Am I tired today, or is it a lingering effect of an illness I was never diagnosed with? Can I trust my cognition?

On an organisational level, there was a lot of talk about how we could do more online meetings after Covid-19. This has materialised to a degree. Unfortunately, whilst the teaching staff were all forced to develop quite significant and impressive skills in communicating online, the same is not true of the managerial staff. This leaves quite a gap between what teachers expect in online facilitation and communication during meetings and what management can deliver. I foresee that this will become an organisational challenge in many HE-institutions going forward, especially since the willingness to engage with Covid-19 as a complex disruption is so low that it is difficult to draw lessons from it. It is better to forget.

Teachers also report that students have lower attendance rates. Whether this is a Covid-19 after-effect or a result of the favourable employment numbers in Denmark now—always a challenge for vocationally oriented educations like Dania—is anybody's guess. Covid-19, however, is a fine addition to our arsenal of excuses.

As a society, a lot of work has gone into documenting and developing new practises for the hybrid workplace and the sociological aftereffects of the pandemic. But this seems to me to have settled into specialised subfields, mirroring how people seem eager to confine it all to a category in history that the wonks can investigate. On to the next crisis, please.

Overall, the pandemic came and went, and is now managed. Or at least repressed. Like a collective trauma, we cannot deal with.

It is not my feeling that what has come here in Denmark is a new normal in any significant way. It is the old normal again, only slightly more haggard. Maybe it is because I am older. I do feel significantly more than two and a half years older now. But then again, who knows if I had Covid-19?



**Fig. 29** [New figure] As you can see, I am back in the office. Or rather, this is my new office in my new position. I think I was moving away from teaching anyway, but the extra overhead involved in the Covid-19 responses documented in earlier articles accelerated the process. Compared to my home office spaces, there is not that much to comment on here—but I noticed that I felt the need to tidy up before taking this photo. I did not feel that with the earlier articles. Perhaps that is after all a sign of a return to normalcy? Things I could forgive myself for in a crisis, I can no longer just let slide

### **‘Today I Dream of Home and Not of London Anymore’<sup>6</sup>: Uncertain Journeys Between the Past and the Never Normal**

*Peter Bryant, Sydney, Australia, 29 April*

[Updated biography.] Peter Bryant is Associate Professor of Business Education and Associate Dean Education at the Business School of the University of Sydney (Australia). He leads pedagogical change and innovation through strategic initiatives such as Connected Learning at Scale, Work-Live-Play-Learn and Leading in a Post-Crisis World. His London life is now 4 years and a pandemic past.

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The pandemic disrupted the social structures of educators and students. Teaching evolved from an emergency response, hyped up by adrenalin and a collective sense

<sup>6</sup> The title of this article is drawn from a song by the Australian band The Waifs, called *London Still*, released in 2002.

of community, to wayfinding a new normal that mutated with each successive variant of the virus. Leadership became learning how to react strategically and respond to rapidly changing unpredictability in predictable ways. I was leading staff and students through liminality with no clear light at the end of the Covid-19 tunnel.

Starting semester one in 2022, the new normal and the desire to return to the old normal did not sit comfortably together, in part because the pandemic crisis was not over, but we were/are experiencing an economic reality that rewards believing that it is. There were persuasive desires to snap back to 2019 and stop feeling liminal through reengaging with face-to-face teaching. For others (including myself), experiencing the pandemic through the lens of vulnerability or being restrained by border closures, remaining online (or hybrid) and building on the practices honed through two years of fire represented a path to a new normal.

Designing and delivering an educational program in this environment requires a complex counterbalancing of pedagogical approaches and institutional ambitions. The line that runs through this complexity is design. Design constructs experiences, and it is through experiences that learning occurs. Prior to the pandemic, I defined my pedagogical design approach through the lens of modality; the affordances of space, of nodes of engagement and variability of location. The fractures in modality caused by the pandemic deprivileged the classroom and the campus and exposed the multiverse of our staff and students personal and professional worlds. We saw Zoom-sized windows into their bedrooms, their workplaces and their lives. The technology and pedagogy of online teaching directly influences how they connect with each other, how they complete assessment and how they experience belonging to the community. It exposes intersections of students work, life, play and learning that are confronting, emancipatory and intriguing, all at once.

My challenge as we emerge into whatever the new normal in higher education looks like is to design an ecosystem of pedagogical change that enables students to learn from the knowledge and skills gained from their education, their lives and their networks to describe and share their liminality. Our design ecosystem is called *connected learning at scale*. It enables students to navigate and lead others through rites of passage, to understand and solve critical challenges and to make a difference to their cultures and community. It affords staff and students the opportunity to engage in making and leveraging connections throughout a learning journey, sharing skills and knowledge.

The challenge for any ecosystem is that the new normal may never be ‘normal’. The pandemic taught us that the social process of connecting *matters*. The social process of being connected through the exploration of the existential crises and challenges that shape our lives *matters*. Developing leaders for good who value connection and collaboration *matters*, not just to the students but to employers, the community, and to society. These are lasting impacts. The ways in which we lead our institutions through crisis can prepare us for the next one, in the same way the learning we enable should do the same for our students.



**Fig. 30** My office in Sydney as I left it 18 months earlier, whisky glasses still unwashed from the last day we were on campus

### **Are We Resilient or Stubborn?**

*Kulpreet Kaur, New Delhi, India, 30 April*

Kulpreet Kaur is an Associate Professor at Jindal Global Business School and Senior Fellow at Jindal Institute of Behavioural Sciences at O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonipat, India. She lives in Delhi with her mother.

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Twenty-three months (14 March 2020 to 14 February 2022) of work from home came to an end. Many of the faculty members commenced their physical classes, barring a few who perished in this macabre pandemic. Such resilient humans are, that no tragedy can cease evolution!

Notwithstanding the gruesomeness of this situation, there are some outcomes that could have a long-term positive impact on learning. Modification and spike of technology in education is one of those. To acquaint with this progress, hands-on training with BenQ (interactive board) and poly (voice and picture sensitive) cameras was held for faculty for over a week before officially re-opening of the campus to cater to the need of hybrid mode of teaching. The chaos of the past

2 years, however, lingered as the faculty was still figuring the effective teaching methodologies with their masks on.

As the ball rolled, relaxations took over, resulting in high numbers of Covid-19 cases again. The cacophony in the initial days of resuming physical classes plunged with a couple of students complaining of sore throat, upset gut and nausea, presuming to be new symptoms of a novel Covid variant. The medical and counselling facilities were well in place and immediately catered to physical and mental needs of the institute. The Quarantine building had helpers, exceptional food facilities and doctors stationed 24×7. Meditation sessions were conducted regularly as an intervention to relieve Covid anxieties, if any. Meanwhile, the news of China's most recent lockdown heightened the already prevailing anxiety.

Personally, when Covid-19 locked us down in 2020, I took to gardening, and re-ignited love for my pet fishes and birds. The home felt more alive with the entire family uniting over indoor games, exercises and polishing their culinary skills—trying distinct cuisines across the globe. YouTube and Over The Top (OTT) also became my best pals.

However, the relaxation of Covid-19 restrictions did not normalize my life, in fact it brought a sea change. Both my boys went abroad to study. My husband joined them as well in search for a new life. I was left alone to fight the empty nest syndrome and the consequent depression.

The re-opening of the campus doors seemed like an antidepressant just like dance and yoga classes, which I joined a few months back. But the wearying everyday 90 km drive to work and back made me unexpectedly anxious. I decided to stay on campus on the working days to poise myself and return to my so-called normal routine. My first day of physical teaching was overwhelming; firstly, to see the vibrant campus and secondly, to see my class nearly full of captivating students. Dressing up in formals was uncomfortable (thanks to the ever-forgiving pyjamas) but at the same time fascinating (the sarees had teary eyes hanging in the wardrobe for almost 2 years). This much-welcomed delight vanished soon, owing to some flu-like symptoms, a week-long sports fest and the resulting long weekends which led to dwindling of class attendance.

Life is always uncertain, unfolding a plethora of challenges at all forks. Nonetheless, humans are extremely supple, accommodating and resilient. Change is the only constant. The biggest pandemic of the century coached us to live in the present, water our relationships whole-heartedly and preserve the loving memories of our dear ones. Amidst chaos of mind and heart, social bonds are the real panacea.



**Fig. 31** [New figure] My first day in the tech-laden classroom of the post-Covid-19 era

### **Still Searching for Normalcy**

*Stephanie Hollings, Phoenix, AZ, USA, 1 May*

[Updated biography.] Stephanie Hollings is a recent graduate from the Educational Leadership and Policy PhD program at Beijing Normal University. She is currently lecturing at Jilin International Studies University but based in the USA.

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Many things can change in 1 year, especially as one searches for some semblance of normalcy in a world that is constantly changing. As I think back on the first reflection I wrote 2 years ago, I cannot help but think what does the expression ‘a new normal mean’? To me, it seems that the concept of normalcy is constantly

evolving and shifting, and the more we seek for normality the more it alludes us by transforming what it means for our world, community and ourselves.

For me, however, the new normal sees me having finished my PhD and as a recent graduate who is still searching for a new academic home. Yet, this quest for an academic home was something I felt all throughout the pandemic as I was unable to return to the institution in which I was studying. Nevertheless, I have found a home for the time working at a Chinese university as a lecturer, although not in my field of study. Yet, I find myself teaching from a distance. With each class I teach, I am reminded of the fact that I will likely never meet my students face-to-face and for the majority of them the most I will ever know about them is their chosen English name. Sadly, they could probably walk in front of me and I would have no idea that they were one of my students.

To be frank, one of the reasons I took this job was because it allowed me to teach from home, as going back to China was an emotionally conflicting prospect as it was the country that locked me and so many other international students out for 2 years (some continue to be locked out). This act in many ways seemed to nullify the experience of being an international student. Perhaps that is why it remains comical to me that I keep finding myself drawn back to China, which is probably one of the last countries to hold onto the pandemic and pandemic measures. Yet, I will be the first to admit that much of my research over the past year or two has also held on to the pandemic. I must also admit that I am probably not alone in this focus, as this article can attest to. I have written about my own experience as a locked-out student, seen the implication of the pandemic during the interviews I conducted for my PhD dissertation and I am even currently working on a few other research projects on international students locked out of China. Thus, whilst I may have not been able to return to my academic home, I have been able to pick up an academic writing topic preference.

Since my first reflection, my view on regarding the pandemic in a multi-faceted lens, one of which was a novel opportunity for research has not changed. What I believe has changed is how I perceive normalcy. As for me at this time, teaching online at inconvenient hours (for example, I teach until midnight on Mondays and at 3:45 am on Wednesdays) is my normal. Well, at least until summer that is, and then I will have a new normal.





**Fig. 32** [New figure] My small desk in which I prepare my lessons and do my research and my makeshift teaching area in which I teach my classes. I joke with my students that the closed door behind me is my door to Narnia

### **The New Normal**

*James Benedict Brown, Stockholm Arlanda Airport, Sweden, 2 May*

[Unchanged biography.] James Benedict Brown is an Associate Professor of Architecture at Umeå School of Architecture in northern Sweden. James' research is concerned with architectural pedagogies and representation.

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On 2 April 2022, my mother died of cancer. First diagnosed in 1996, she had received a terminal prognosis just before Christmas 2021. The 2 years of the Covid-19 pandemic limited my ability to travel to see her. Like many of us, I went 18 months without seeing my family face-to-face. But as the world opened up again, I was suddenly thrown back into a surreal pre-Covid lifestyle of frequent international travel. I was able to spend the last months of my mother's life going back and

forth between my home in Sweden and hers in England, spending every third week looking after her and my father.

When I began to travel in January 2022, the still uncertain consequences of the Omicron variant meant that airports were shrouded in an eerie silence. The airplanes were mostly empty. With each week, as the effects of Omicron were found to be largely contained by vaccination efforts, things started to change. By the time I made the fateful journey home after my mother's passing, the airport bars were once again packed with cheerful holidaymakers toasting the good times.

I spent many hours during this time working on my laptop in airport terminals, waiting for interminably long connections between domestic and international flights. The same technology that allowed me to work from my living room (see Jandrić et al. 2020, 2021a, b) now allowed me to continue with my work from these strange interstitial places. I became an expert in finding the quietest and most comfortable places to sit and work in Umeå, Arlanda and Heathrow airports.

Yet extensive and intrusive lockdowns were continuing in many other parts of the world. Amongst the privileged and libertarian northern Europeans around me, it seemed as if Covid-19 have never existed. Phuket, Miami and Milan: maskless Swedes were going on carbon-intensive holidays again.

My return to the workplace is, therefore, somewhat unusual. Just as I was expecting to tentatively re-occupy a desk in a shared office on my campus, I was thrown into a strange liminal world between pandemic and endemic, between life and death, between home and away.

In Sweden, we talk about *vårvinter*—literally ‘spring winter’—a fifth season of above-freezing daytime and below-freezing night-time temperatures. This indeterminate period is characterized by an air of hopeful anticipation that—in spite of the cold grip of winter—persists. As my mother's condition worsened, the world around me was beginning to change. The airport terminals appeared to fill with optimism. Within me, the fear of this apparently conquered illness did not retreat. As people around gaily abandoned their masks, I persisted. As the first tentative hints of spring began to appear, for many of us the long shadows of winter continued to fall.



**Fig. 33** [New figure] My mobile office, in the non-Schengen gates of Arlanda terminal 5, pier F

### The New Grief

*Anne Steketee, Santa Ana, CA, USA, 2 May*

[Updated biography.] Anne Steketee, Ph.D., just accepted a new position as an Associate Professor of Education at Oakland City University, (Oakland City, Indiana) where she will work with graduate students. Whilst at Millikin University, she competed for a funded research opportunity; this will support her continued examination of grief-related issues in higher education.

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The slog of grief is everywhere I go. Like a foggy overlay, the sun cannot quite break through. Even though I am teaching face-to-face, with undergraduates who *say* they are happy to be back on campus, it is like they are carrying the detritus of grief in their backpacks. I hear the reverberation of trauma in our critical conversations; we avert our eyes from the scars of pain as we discuss assignments, deadlines and requirements. They falter on, lurching from class to fieldwork to office hours, always carrying the continuing impact of Covid-realities.

I am preparing student teachers, K-12 preservice teachers. They inhabit liminal spaces right now—sensitive, treacherous spaces. They step into rural classrooms to do ‘fieldwork’ or ‘internships’ or ‘student teaching’ and are faced with more

grief and trauma with none of the power to enact any change. They are in precarious places, physically and emotionally.

I am used to equipping preservice educators to be prepared as mandated reporters: I can talk in a supportive way about suicide, sexual abuse, physical abuse, domestic violence, and more. These are topics that need to be addressed as we prepare our K-12 teaching force. Teachers need to be calm, steady, and ready. I lean into my training and my life experience to provide this teacher preparation.

I was unprepared, however, for the amount of trauma my students would be carrying and facing in the field. Preservice educators in the field began to ask me these questions:

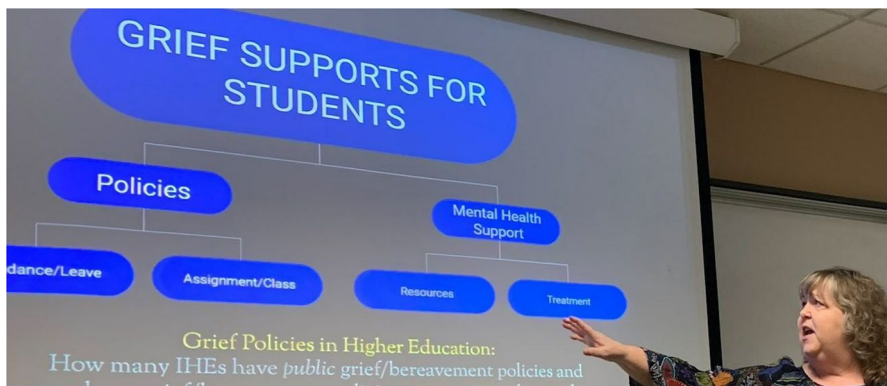
What do I do if my supervising teacher just starts crying?

How do I handle the classroom if the cooperating teacher leaves again? This is the second time that the teacher picked up her purse and walked out of the classroom. My teacher keeps telling me that I should not be a teacher. It's kind of scaring me. I think she is going to quit.

The cooperating teacher has not even seen me teach for nine weeks. As soon as I started teaching, he just walked out of the classroom. He said he needed the break or he was gonna have a breakdown. Isn't someone supposed to be watching me?

To be clear, there are plenty of supervising teachers who are doing fine, or good enough. But for the thousands of K-12 teachers who are at the end of their coping, my heart and support go out to them. And...for the preservice educators placed with them for their on-the-job training... their heightened feelings of loss and uncertainty in these situations are warranted.

This year, I started teaching as an assistant professor at a small, liberal arts university in Illinois, USA. I also started a pilot research study on grief policies in institutions of higher education. It is not enough to address the trauma; it will not stop the trickle, stream or flood of grief; it cannot bring clarity or peace or power to a liminal space. But it is where I can tuck in and respond. If this is Covid's *new*, then I will keep adjusting and responding to meet the *new* needs.



**Fig. 34** [New figure] Dr. Anne Steketee, presenting at the Millikin University Academic Interdisciplinary Conference, 'Grief Policies in Higher Education: A Pilot Study of Universities in Illinois', 1 April 2022

## Untitled

Paul Prinsloo, Pretoria, South Africa, 2 May

[Unchanged biography.] Paul Prinsloo is a Research Professor in Open and Distance Learning in the Department of Business Management at the University of South Africa (UNISA), South Africa. Paul is 63 years old, and lives in Pretoria, South Africa, with his partner.

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Two years. From feeling totally unprepared for working from home at the start of the pandemic, to being settled into a new normal... depending on how we see 'normal'.

'Normal' used to mean going to work, returning home, possibly switching on my laptop for an hour or two extra work after hours. This sense of 'normal' included doing washing, cleaning the house, tending the garden and shopping for groceries *before* or *after* work, and/or over weekends. Thinking of it, this sense of 'normal' had something called 'weekends'...

Now normal is doing the washing whilst also attending a Zoom or Teams meetings, making coffee, doing a literature review or responding to emails, all at the same time. Normal now means a constant stream of multi-tasking whether eating breakfast, watering the garden, submitting yet another productivity report and attending an online meeting, or attending meetings whilst driving quickly to a shop because I ran out of coffee (coffee!!!). There are no longer dedicated times for shopping, doing washing and switching off (what is that?).

Recently, my employer provided staff with an opportunity to indicate their preference whether to continue working from home, to commit to 1 or 2 days in the office or to be fully back on campus. I opted to continue working from home, something I could not have foreseen at the start of the pandemic. I used to be the first in the office and the last to leave. I used to go to the office over weekends just to have my books around me and to work in a space dedicated for work. Now I am permanently between my books, my two screens, the washing, the laptop, the garden, the shopping list and seemingly endless to-do list. *And somehow it works.*

Of course, this is a comfort zone, and I am very aware of the dangers of living increasingly isolated from *physical* meetings, and increasingly only *virtually* connected to colleagues, friends and those who fall in the category of neither colleagues and/or friends. Of course, there is also a sense of waking up on a Saturday or Sunday morning contemplating what makes Saturdays and Sundays different? I therefore have to consciously make an effort to get out of the house, reach out to others, celebrating being alive and having an internal compass in these uncertain times.

Yes, I have also become less certain of doing things I did with my eyes closed prior Covid-19, like travelling internationally, making hotel bookings and finding connecting flights knowing that everything is less certain, that the outcome of a PCR test will determine whether you will catch the connecting flight. I have become less sure and more scared. Such uncertainty can be paralysing, and yet also strangely liberating, forcing me to surrender to bigger processes, processes beyond my control and remembering to breathe, to be in the moment.

I will be compelled to retire in a little bit more than 2 years and whilst I still do not know what exactly ‘retirement’ will look like, the past 2 years eased me into a new way of thinking, actually *being*. Somehow, I feel more ready, less scared and yes, almost excited. *It can work.*



**Fig. 35** [New figure] Paul’s working space

### **The New Normal: Peregrinating Between New Trends in Teaching and Learning and The Status Quo Ante**

*Hazzan Moses Kayode, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, 2 May*

[Updated biography.] Hazzan Moses Kayode, Ph.D. (in view), M.Ed. (Master of Education in Personnel Administration), MA (Master of Arts in History), B.Ed. (Educational Management and History) is the Director of Studies at *Great Visionary Educators* and a research scholar at the Department of Educational Management, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.

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My experience of the return to the physical workplace (in my private establishment) is that since the hue and cry about Covid-19 has subsided, the numerical strength of the students (compared to that of last year’s) has improved phenomenally. Initially, especially towards the end of last year, issues relating to the Covid-19 protocols were taken seriously in my public workplace, unlike in my private workplace where the teaching and learning were 85% physical and 15% online (most especially for

the submission of students' assignments and the occasional zoom meetings between teachers and students and members of staff).

Similarly, in my school, the University of Ibadan, the blended mode was used during the recent convocation. However, this mode was highly frowned upon and disparagingly regarded as risible discrimination against the majority of the graduating students. This was so when the university authorities formally informed the general public that physical attendance at the International Conference Centre (the venue of the convocation) was only opened to First Class Honours graduates and recipients of prizes and awards. Hence, all other graduates who are not first-class holders were expressly instructed to attend the convocation online.

The main lessons I drew from the pandemic experience are multifaceted. On the one hand, I realised that teaching and learning can continue irrespective of any eventuality that could somewhat put a kibosh on the smooth running of academic activities either nationally or globally. On the other hand, I also realised that the contemporary world is so connected that whatever happens in one part of the globe can ineluctably have not only ripple but also debilitating effects on other parts, especially when the ethos of collective responsibility is not embraced by all and sundry in the 'global village'.

This, indeed, was exactly the case with the Covid-19 pandemic, which had its initial onset and outbreak in Wuhan, China. Perhaps, the tentacles of the pandemic would have been seriously curtailed if the trading of blaming games, buck-passing activities, as well as the adducing of various conspiracy theories to plausibly pinpoint and show the 'stratagem' of 'the precipitator' of the pandemic amongst the 'global family' were not taken the major concerns.

One of the main transformations that have happened in my work and private life is that I do not need to travel far from my place of residence to attend seminars, conferences and other important meetings. Indeed, almost all meetings I attended made provisions for online attendance and active participation. Even at the initial stage of the Ph.D. seminar presentation in my department, a blended mode was used and the attendance of most of the postgraduate students was taken online. However, as the number of students in attendance reduced drastically, the authorities of the department mandated the physical attendance of all the postgraduate students at the seminar and subsequently made this one of the fundamental prerequisites for students' seminar presentations at both the departmental and faculty levels.

Several challenges militate against the efficiency and effectiveness of the operation of the 'new normal' in my professional, personal, and private life. The main one amongst these challenges is the epileptic power supply. Although an alternate source of power supply was later sought in my private workplace, this often costs a fortune to maintain. However, in recent time, teaching and learning in my workplace are mainly predicated on physical contact between teachers and students. Hence, the challenges have become minimal. Meanwhile, my online 'globetrotting activities' are often confronted with not only the spasmodic power supply and the cost implications, but also the ineffectiveness of the network, which sometimes hampers my active participation.

At the moment, my thoughts are focused on the panoramic view of this 'global village'—world and the ingenuity of its inhabitants in devising various means of adaptation

and coping mechanisms in response to the unavoidable eventuality that had shaken the fabric of world's society. Besides, the fact that countries are naturally structured to observe different time zones still constitutes part of my excitement. For instance, I did attend online meetings in the middle of the night whilst the time zones of the 'hosting countries' happened to be in the morning or afternoon. Perhaps it is time we embraced the tenets that uphold global citizenship and/or cosmopolitanism by amplifying the connectivities and convergencies amongst humanity rather than underscoring the differences ossified by the consciousness of racist ideologies, divergent cosmologies, and geopolitical barriers.



**Fig. 36** [New figure] Addressing a set of science students on the forthcoming Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME)

### The Point of Writing

*Michael Jopling, Berlin, Germany, 2 May*

[Updated biography.] Michael Jopling is Professor of Education and Director of the Education Observatory in the University of Wolverhampton, UK. He spends quite a lot of his time in Germany.

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Two years ago, it felt like there was some hope that the restrictions forced on us by the pandemic might lead us to positive long-term change, both in education and more widely. A year ago, that seemed less likely. Now, it seems that this opportunity has receded still further, because of both the rush to return to (the old) normality and the war in Ukraine. The privations of the first lockdowns in 2020 sent me back to Auerbach's *Mimesis* (2003), written in Istanbul during the Second World War. At the time, few expected that the events that forced him into exile would be mirrored so literally and so quickly in Europe.

Two years on, the pandemic seems paradoxically to have resulted in paralysis *and* normality. Life seems both relatively unchanged and, compared with 1 and 2 years ago, unrecognisable. On an everyday level, teaching face-to-face is possible again, although most meetings remain online, both of which feel like a relief, although my experience is that



there is still some way to go before blending really works. In our research centre, work is less intense than it was a year ago because the pressure to complete research projects and generate ever more research income has receded to some extent (a good thing), in part because we have not been able to replace excellent colleagues who have left (a bad thing).

Travel is back in a way that seemed unlikely in 2020. Having got used to living in one country and working in another, I have to work out how to reconcile that originally improvised transformation with the uncertainties of the near future. So my feelings at the moment alternate between calm and anxiety, which is probably as it should be, just as my employer seems to shift between panic and business as usual. I cope with all this by trying to focus on the things that are important to me, which takes me back to *Mimesis*. In its epilogue Auerbach (2003: 556) wrote: ‘If it had been possible for me to acquaint myself with all the work that has been done on so many subjects, I might never have reached the point of writing.’

This translation of restriction into possibility seems helpful now. Writing this in a city still marked throughout by the experience of the war that exiled Auerbach, it is impossible to ignore the enduring effects of the pandemic and what is taking place in Ukraine, but his words are also a reminder to keep thinking and to keep working in order not to lose the point of writing.



**Fig. 37** [New figure] A new flat and a new workplace

## Isolation, Education, and How the Pandemic Stressed the Student-as-Client Perspective

Julia Mañero, Seville, Spain, 2 May

[Updated biography.] Julia Mañero holds a PhD in Education (University of Seville, 2020) and graduated with a Bachelor of Marketing and a Master's Degree in Education. She has collaborated as a teacher in Massive Open Online Courses and in the Master of Network Communication and Education at The National Distance Education University (UNED). She is a member of the *Communiars* collective and Associate Editor of *Communiars* journal. Her current research interests include art education and digital education from a critical and social perspective. Her academic interests also include cooperation projects, having been part of projects and research in India and Greece.

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Since I wrote my first contribution to this series of testimonies started in March 2020, some feelings have disappeared but others have taken place. Overlooking some of the lessons that the pandemic has taught us—such as the importance of refreshing and reflecting on the implications of digital education—all of us who have the opportunity to write a few lines about our experiences in the present collective article can provide some insight into how educational practice has been managed at the education system level in our institutions. Without going into a debate on whether health has been a priority or whether the management of the Covid-19 de-escalation has been successful, what I am most interested in highlighting in these brief lines is the lack of active attention to the parts involved.

Administrative and management staff, university students and professors who have been somehow silenced have led to pedagogically invalid decisions. When I refer to pedagogic decisions, I am alluding to investments and supposed transformations in classrooms and curricular adaptations that differ from the real meaning of educational practice, the failure to encourage community ties and solidarity during the pandemic, and large investments in technological material that reproduce the educational-digital deficiencies (Jandrić et al. 2021a).

Expensive software licenses and cameras installed in classrooms that allowed hybrid teaching and that mostly resulted in teaching lessons in the guise of informative pills in video format—which have nothing to do with teaching and learning practices—allowed numerous companies and corporations to enter the educational system. I guess it was a logical consequence of a pandemic caused in part by the crisis of a globalized and economically neoliberal system. A problem is generated by the market itself and now the same market offers a solution.

Technology and product development companies offered digital solutions, without considering the pedagogical component, which should be the main factor in any educational institution. Educational practice was reduced to a service, a product which you pay for, or to which you are entitled if we are talking about public education in Spain. It was completely forgotten to favour interdependence, to recognise bonds of solidarity so important during the first months of

the pandemic, to appreciate the feeling of belonging, and to generate common knowledge in the classroom. It was not necessary, but it was requested—and even demanded—to comply with decisions they were not pedagogically favourable for teachers and students.

I believe that there has been an accidental empowerment of the student's sense of individuality, a perversion of the educational system, a displacement of the agents involved in decision making and an ignorance of many of the involved parties of what it means to educate. We have now returned to the classroom with a total presence and hardly any restrictions. The spaces are the same but none of us are the same people who left the classroom in March 2020 without knowing when we would return. Many teachers and students have entered this dangerous perspective of reducing educational practice to 'take and receive', as if it were a mere requirement.

To live the educational practice from the individuality can create a progressive degradation of education. A customer view of education undermines the critical and understanding spirit of those involved in educational practice. Therefore, educational decision making should listen to teachers, students and others working directly teaching and learning.



**Fig. 38** [New figure] Third workspace since the pandemic emerged in 2020

## A Shout-Out to Everybody In the Age of Managed Wellbeing

Andrew Gibbons, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, 3 May

[Unchanged biography.] Andrew Gibbons is Professor at Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand. He has published widely on topics including early childhood teaching, the philosophy of education, the role of technology in education and the future of the university.

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In May 2022, Auckland University of Technology early childhood student teachers returned, again, to campus. The first day back, Monday 2 May, the carparks and cafes were only slightly more active than in the months of March and April. On Tuesday 3 May, the number of cars had tripled; however, the school of education was relatively quiet because classes that were expected to return were back online because their lecturers were in isolation. One colleague had symptoms, but a negative rapid antigen test, whilst another had a positive test and minor symptoms. Both were planning to teach online. I offered to cover those classes. When you are unwell, rest is important. Working online on a distance education programme is not resting up. Both colleagues said they'd manage. I wonder about this prevalence of prioritising teaching the class over one's wellbeing—although of course there's always the possibility that teaching a class is great for one's wellbeing ... like an orange.

The entire nation is in the 'Orange' state of alert and management in the nation's 'Traffic Light' Covid-19 response strategy. Campuses are open, there is no requirement to be vaccinated in order to be on campus and mask wearing is advised for inside. A year ago, the mainly unvaccinated nation would hold its breath when there was a single community case. Now, the mainly vaccinated nation looks on with ever increasing disinterest at the thousands of daily cases. There is perhaps more interest in the increasing reports of youth crime. It is unclear to me whether the crime or the reporting is on the rise. Either way, there is a very important educational conversation to engage in with regard to the impact of two and a half years of pandemic for youth in terms of the opportunity for youth to engage in critical dialogue on the socio-political and economic construction of crime and the associations between crime and wellbeing.

The surge of interest in the behaviour of youth at this stage of the pandemic is a very relevant and critical topic. In reflection on another year of teaching in the pandemic, behaviourism is rampant in education policy making and is popping up in all real and virtual nooks and crannies across all sectors of education.

At my university, this emphasis popped up on the new staff intranet. On the homepage, there is a heading called 'Shout Out'. Beneath the heading there's a list of four possible shout outs, and an invitation to give a shout out to someone. I've asked whether it's possible to remove this function from my homepage. I am open to the possibility that for some people it is an excellent device for connection, recognition,

and celebration. For me, it is an offensive and worrying strategy that symbolises the tensions between behaviour management and collective educational endeavour. The Shout Out function highlights a possibility that educational policy leaders have few conceptual and theoretical tools to call on when responding to concerns about wellbeing in education at the time of a global pandemic. I have yet to hear back as to whether I can remove the function. I would like to finish with my own shout out... to all the early childhood student teachers who continue to show their collective commitment to the care and education of children in this age of Covid-19.



**Fig. 39** [New figure] Office AR302 at Akoranga campus. A close inspection of the right-hand monitor reveals that I am currently learning to read the matrix—not sure why

## Variety and Fragility as Normal Now

*Sarah Pfohl, Indianapolis, IN, USA, 3 May*

[Unchanged biography.] Sarah Pfohl is a disabled, chronically ill artist and teacher. She makes work about the value, power and complexity of a rural hill, the disabled body and classroom teaching. Sarah runs the photo and art education areas in the Department of Art and Design at the University of Indianapolis, USA.

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My experience of the return to my physical workplace has been complicated. I moved to a larger teaching space a week before this academic year began and, whilst the new space is most welcome, the organization and process of learning how to utilize the new space most effectively (in general and relative to Covid-19) remains ongoing.

Relative to my teaching, I have been caught and remain caught in the process of figuring out what to keep from 1.5 years of online instruction, what to discard from the online period and what to bring back from prior to March 2020. My courses feel, to me, like giant mass of hybrid resources whilst at the same time my students need clear, honed learning experiences that are as uncomplicated as possible in delivery.

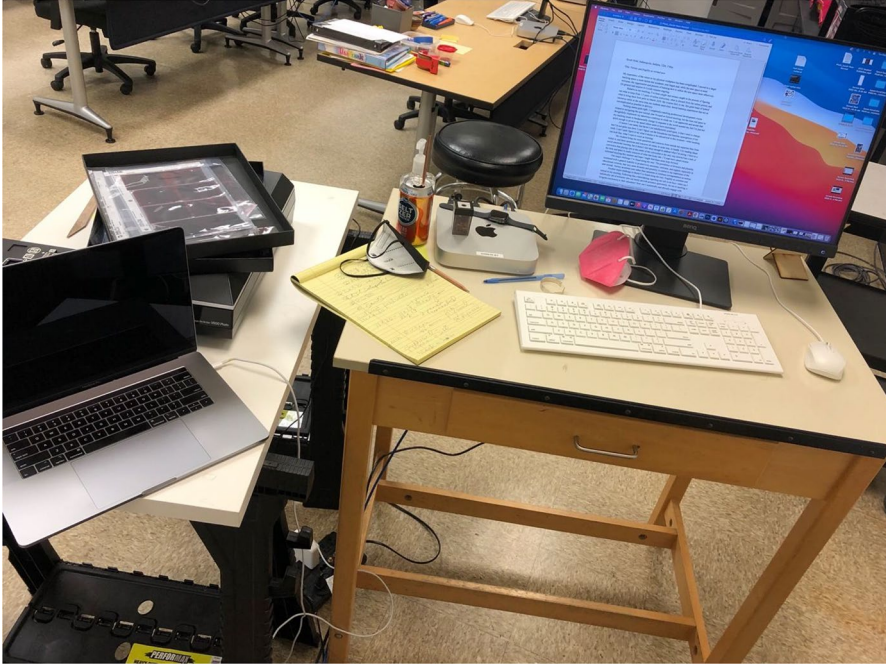
Nothing seems quite right. I completed a teaching professional development course related to navigating the new normal, that focused on hybrid teaching, but the time and space to thoughtfully implement my takeaways continues to elude me. I can appreciate and accept that my teaching needs to fundamentally change in response to the world around me, but I am just not quick enough to pivot at the speed others seem to have maintained.

A lesson I can name, but have not yet satisfactorily acted upon, is that I need to change, but I am not quite sure how. I cannot figure out the boundaries and baseline assumptions of my work. I cannot quite figure it out what it means to be educational in this moment—what teaching can look like, what I want to count as learning.

My students bring me more questions and concerns from outside my expertise than from within it, and these questions and concerns all relate, in some way, to health. I try reading about social emotional learning, but it does not feel deep enough to address what I am seeing. I land on a conviction that placing care at the centre of the curriculum is the only way forward but a lack of the time and space to really conceive of what that looks like. I'll read more about trauma-informed teaching this summer and hope I might find there some help forward.

One major challenge I have found along the way: The prevalence of diversity and plurality combined with a general inability to productively encounter, welcome and support, especially in educational contexts, that very same diversity and plurality, is central to my experience of the new normal. Variety as normal now rather than sameness or common correspondence as normal.

Another major challenge or theme I have found along the way: Fragility as common and central in my teaching. Following this, a bewildering regarding my role in its face—what can I realistically ask of someone who can barely provide presence (previously, for me in teaching, a foregone conclusion) to their education? How can I realistically and ethically engage with someone educationally when they cannot provide presence, let alone production, to their schooling?



**Fig. 40** [New figure] This is the desk I teach from at work: 2 masks, 2 screens, 1 hand sanitizer

### **Stand Up, Take a Break, and Go for a Walk**

*Niklas Humble, Gävle, Sweden, 3 May*

[Updated biography.] Niklas Humble is a Ph.D. student in Computer and System Science at Mid Sweden University. Niklas is 35 years old and lives in Gävle, Sweden, with his wife, son and dog.

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With the pandemic, my wife and I decided to move from the city where my work is located to be closer to friends and relatives. Now in the new normal, I still mainly work from home but travel 5 h on a train to my workplace when necessary. This is not that different than before the pandemic. We are accustomed to distance and blended work; even before the pandemic, most of my work was conducted via the computer screen. However, I believe that we are many who have learned the need for being flexible. A change in workplace directives can come swiftly and then you need to be ready.

A big change in my personal life is that my wife now works at the office and my son spends more time at preschool. That is the same as before the pandemic,

but since I work a lot from home, it feels like I am seeing them less now. That makes me sad, but I understand that it is inevitable. Also, one of our dogs passed during the pandemic. He was old so it was expected. I believe that grief hit our family especially hard since we spent so much time together during the last couple of years. At the same time, I am thankful for the extra time I got to spend with him working from home. He truly was a good boy.

We still have one dog left and she keeps me company during the days when my wife and son are away. She reminds me to stand up, take a break and go for a walk, which is good way to keep anxiety, stress and other negative feelings at bay. I have also managed to keep up my exercise from the pandemic. I go for long runs at least 3 times a week and try to visit our local gym a couple of times a week. This also helps keeping me calm and focused during the day and I believe that I perform better in my work because of it.

When you are done reading this, take a lesson from my dog: stand up, take a break and go for a walk.



**Fig. 41** [New figure] This is my new workspace, located in the living room at our apartment



**To Be Continued...**

*Jacob Davidsen, Aalborg, Denmark, 3 May*

[Updated biography.] Jacob Davidsen is Associate Professor of digital learning at Aalborg University, Denmark. Jacob is 38 years old, and lives in Nørresundby, Denmark, with his wife and three children.

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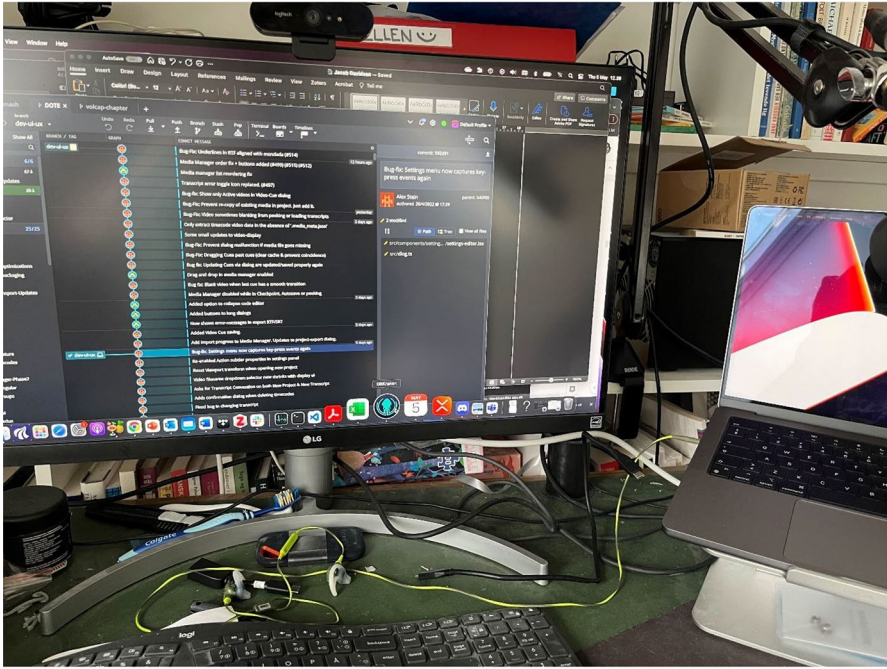
In Denmark, the restrictions were suddenly gone at the beginning of February 2022, and staff and students returned to university buildings. Today, it almost feels like Covid-19 never existed in Denmark—no daily updates in the news, no government press conferences and no news about newly infected in schools and kindergartens. Only a few historical relics now remind us of the past 2 years—face masks in the streets and empty bottles of disinfection spray in shops and schools.

Students were eager to return to classes, but the first couple of weeks of February were so hectic and frustrating. Many students and teachers were infected with Covid-19. Classes were cancelled daily. The pressure to reschedule was immense. It was impossible to navigate in that situation. Teachers were no longer required to stream the lectures. Students were very unhappy and frustrated about that and felt that the university abandoned them. The students are now sitting outside my office, working on their projects. It is really stimulating to see their joy and engagement in their project work. It almost feels like the students are getting back some of their motivation to study!

Whilst the students are starting to inhabit university buildings again, many researchers are still in their home caves—they only go to the university when they teach. We are not sitting in the ivory tower, but isolated at home. I wonder if the researchers will ever return to the university! Most days, I go to the office, but today I am home for the first time in many weeks, waiting for a plumber. When I have walked in the corridors in the last couple of months, only a very few colleagues were physically present in their offices. It is a ghost university—and it is difficult to imagine that this will change. I wonder how if we are ever going to get back to normal or if the pandemic has really re-instantiated the dream of the researcher sitting in his/her chamber reading and writing papers.

In May 2022, I will go to my first physical conference in a couple of years. I am really looking forward to the Networked Learning Conference in Sundsvall, Sweden<sup>7</sup>. It will be great to attend live presentations together with colleagues and have a beer when the official schedule is done. I really miss that chat in the cafés and bars.

<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.networkedlearning.aau.dk/>. Accessed 20 June 2022.



**Fig. 42** [New figure.] Views from a room

### Moving in a Smaller World

*Derek R. Ford, Indianapolis, IN, USA, 3 May*

[Updated biography.] Derek R. Ford is an Associate Professor of Education Studies at DePauw University, where they study and teach how educational theory can relate and contribute to contemporary political struggles. In addition to co-editing three book series, they are associate editor of *Postdigital Science and Education* and deputy editor of the *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*. Ford's published seven monographs, the latest of which is *Encountering Education: Elements for a Marxist Pedagogy* (2022).

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In Fall 2021, my university (a small residential liberal arts college) returned to in-person classes. With a vast majority of campus fully vaccinated, the 'threat level' has moved up and down without triggering any large-scale change. I am a much better teacher when I can walk around, stand up, sit in different desks and write on the board (I like moving). I know my students much better; we build deeper and more trusting communities; I easily call them on their BS and display my own thinking processes. The students talk to each other more, which helps as I depend heavily on word-of-mouth. My teaching style is not for everyone, so please tell your friends if they should or should not take a class with me next semester. We start, then, with a sense of belonging. We easily establish collective rhythms inside and outside of class meetings.

Rather than replacing digital gatherings, it seems like physical meetings now supplement digital ones. The brief pauses I missed so much, the few minutes before or after class, the walk from the car to the office, are consumed by new digitally mediated demands, used not for respite but for phoning into meetings or filling out g\*\*damn online forms. It is incessant.

It turns out that I have a body with complex needs. I did not realise it until somewhat recently, but during the pandemic I gradually retreated into thought, spent more and more energy reading and writing. My world got smaller and less populated over a long and unnoticeable period. I ‘produced’ a ridiculous amount of work these past 2 years, some of which was out of curiosity and some of which was out of the need to sublimate my anxiety and depression. I never was good at ‘balance’ but now I am terrible at it.

Halfway through this academic year, I received tenure and promotion, which is both a gain and a loss. A loss of a relation to this external and abstract object that could help determine or guide my decisions and movements. A gain of job security. A loss of purpose and a gain of possibility. More anxiety.

Throughout the pandemic, I have been organizing with the Indianapolis Liberation Center, Party for Socialism and Liberation, ANSWER Coalition and other groups. This is where my real hope comes from. We see people open to new ideas, fed up with the way things are and hungry for analysis and change. They want things to change but do not always think it is possible. The US government’s response to the pandemic reinforced that because the opening provided by the pandemic was quickly sutured in the name of profits. But we are still winning, just slowly and with necessary retreats.



**Fig. 43** [New figure] A view of our reading area in our house in Indianapolis

## Untitled

*Navreeti Sharma, Sonipat, Haryana, India, 3 May*

[Updated biography.] Dr. Navreeti Sharma is Assistant Professor [French] with Global Languages Centre in O.P. Jindal Global University. She teaches French language and literature and enlighten students on French and Francophone culture and civilization.

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I returned to campus in the middle of February 2022, with a lot of excitement and positivity in spite of the fact that Covid-19 continues to stay. Of course, there was a bit of anxiety, given the fact that I was to return on campus almost after 2 years. I was witnessing a major transition in the education system given the pandemic: from traditional methods of teaching to online and now hybrid, with the return on campus.

Hybrid learning has been a new experience and our university has really provided an excellent setup post-Covid-19, both for students and teachers. With the installation of the latest technology on campus, like poly cameras, BenQ Interactive Panels etc., and so on, teaching and learning have become really convenient and a close contact has been created between the learner and the teacher. Life slowly returns back to normal, with all Covid precautions and patience. The hybrid mode of learning and teaching has permitted the teachers and students to carry out various academic and cultural activities. It seems that 2 years of confinement in our homes has taught us to cherish the freedom to move, breathe and carry out our daily tasks, whilst following all the Covid protocols.

The pandemic has taught me to be patient; it has inculcated deep faith in the almighty and the acceptance of what comes my way. Past 2 years have not been easy with serious health troubles, especially during 2021. But somehow, I have always tried to maintain a balance and do justice to my professional and private life.

With return to campus, I have managed to successfully organize various webinars and talks on themes such as ‘Francophonie and various techniques of improving French language for the students of O.P. Jindal Global University’. The hybrid mode of education has allowed enthusiastic participation of our students, faculties and guest speakers.

With lot of positivity, I do hope that in the coming months we will all have a chance to be in a complete offline mode and that we will perform our teaching and learning activities with full enthusiasm and free mind.



**Fig. 44** [New figure] My dedicated workspace at home

### **New Normal of the Wounded**

*Kevin Stockbridge, Santa Ana, CA, USA, 4 May*

[Updated biography.] Kevin Stockbridge is the project manager for CalEPIC, a teacher education transformation center at the Thompson Policy Institute on Disability at Chapman University, USA. Kevin is 41 years old and lives in Santa Ana, CA, with his fiancé.

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As the number of vaccinated persons rose, and a sub-variant of Covid-19 was waning in its impact upon the community in which we live, my University pivoted to a full return to in person learning. I began this academic term as a non-tenure track professor with a four-class teaching load each semester.

The life of faculty, particularly those on tenure track who often have fewer classes to teach and focus more directly on publishing and research, has always been one that is less situated in one location. Even prior to the pandemic, some faculty would come to campus only for required meetings, office hours, and teaching. At other times, they worked remotely. For non-tenure track faculty like myself, the impact of moving to full in-person learning for all classes meant a greater shift in schedule than was experienced by our tenure-line peers. Office hours and most meetings are permitted to take place remotely, requiring even less time for those who were selectively on campus.

Mid-way through this year, I transitioned my role from faculty to administrative staff. I now serve as project manager for teacher education transformation collaborative that centers equity and disability justice. This shift enables me to work closely with others who wish to advance inclusion in and through teacher education.

As with many places, my university has felt the pain that comes with larger-than-normal numbers personnel leaving the institution. Friends that I know have left our university for other institutions for many reasons. Many institutions, like my own, developed monetary incentives to help stave off the mass exodus. Some of these personnel have not been replaced by new hires, changing the workload and nature of the job for those who remain.

When the pandemic began, I felt great anxiety. At time, I was unable to go outside my house without fear of the virus. We lived a life of high alert in which one was always acutely aware of the possibility of contracting or passing along a potentially deadly disease. What remains now is the scar of that prolonged anxiety—trauma. With a shrinking workforce and an unchanged expectation of productivity, workers in all fields find themselves taxed of their energy. Our emotional capacity seems lessened as we are all seeking to heal the emotional wounds left by the pandemic.

We are far from the end of the pandemic; it has ravaged the social and emotional wellbeing of many. These less-physical manifestations of injury will take much time to heal. The faster we strive for a ‘normal’ world that mirrors that of pre-pandemic times, the more residual damage we will cause as untreated wounds compound.



**Fig. 45** [New figure] This is a picture of my desk in a shared space with my co-worker

### **Covid Autosociobiography?**

*Olli Pyyhtinen, Helsinki, Finland, 4 May*

[Unchanged biography.] Olli Pyyhtinen is a Professor of Sociology at Tampere University, Finland, and the founder of Relational Studies Hub (RS HUB).

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Timidly, we came to the stairhead of the faculty building, bearing leather bags which contained our laptops and piles of books. We wore face masks. It was the end of October 2021. The day was special, as it saw us returning to the university campus for the first time in a long while. Over a year and a half had passed since our last visit.

A new course we were to teach was scheduled to start that day. The course was titled ‘From Social Constructionism to the Construction of the Social’, and

it was the first course to take place face to face after a long period of online teaching and working remotely from home. Seeing all these people—in the flesh!—seated in the lecture hall was almost overwhelming. Uncertainty about social codes and norms of interaction (we were struggling to recognise social cues and expectations: should the students keep a safe distance whilst seated? should everyone in the audience wear a mask? what about teachers?) was mixed with a fear of contagion (is it really safe here?), nervous anticipation and collective effervescence.

Whilst the call for testimonies invited me to write about *my* experience, in the first-person singular pronoun, I see it tempting and potentially sociologically illuminating to speak about the pandemic experience in the ‘we’ voice and by using impersonal pronouns. In *The Sociological Imagination* (1980), C. Wright Mills suggested that the sociological imagination makes it possible to comprehend broad historical changes from the perspective of what they mean to the lives, fates and experiences of individuals, and how the individuals have a say—to a lesser or greater extent—in the making of society and the course of its history. In other words, the sociological imagination connects biography and history. To me, the pandemic offers us an exceptional situation to examine what happens in ordinary people in those passing moments when history and their life stories intersect.

The insistence on the ‘we’ voice and on using impersonal pronouns is not of my own making, but it is a narrative technique masterfully used by French author Annie Ernaux in her ‘autosociobiography’ *The Years* (2017), which reports the changes of post-war Europe between 1940s and the first decade of the 2000. As Ernaux writes of the narrating self of the book, ‘There is no “I” in what she views as a sort of impersonal biography. There is only “one” and “we”, as if now it were her turn to tell the story of time before’ (Ernaux 2017: 240).

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, we have seen an abundance of ‘Covid diaries’ being published by literary authors, but what still remains to be done, perhaps, is to hunt down, in the manner of Ernaux, the collective sensations of living through the pandemic, of ‘retrieving the memory of collective memory in an individual memory’ (Ernaux 2017: 239). Or perhaps this trilogy of Covid-19 testimonies is about just that? Perhaps by looking through the entire corpus one can get a glimpse of the lived and collectively experienced dimension of history?





**Fig. 46** [New figure] I do not have a dedicated workspace in our new home in Helsinki. Instead I use various spots—the kitchen table, the living room sofa, the bed... depending on my mood and where peace and quiet can be found. Today, I occupied our (unmade) bed, which is ergonomically not the best place to be typing, as my wife lovingly keeps reminding me. However, the comfort is very hard to resist

## 7995 km

*Carlos Escaño, São Paulo, Brazil, 5 May*

[Unchanged biography.] Carlos Escaño is an Associate Professor of art education at the University of Seville, Spain, and Visiting Professor at UNED, Spain. He is director of the Research Group Education and Audiovisual Culture (HUM401) and Editor in Chief of *Communiars* journal.

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Return to normal... What does it mean? Who is benefited? It is not necessary to rush to go back to normal. Because normal was a colonial, ableist and discriminatory system. (Castro in Freedman and Escaño 2022).

These words emerged from the dialogue which took part on 21 June where 20 teachers from different places of the world developed the possibilities and challenges that arts education maintains in the face of the reality that we inhabit and the lessons that these days of international upheaval have offered us. They summarize the political, educational and social feelings and concerns in relation to the pandemic situation that persist today and also the post-pandemic future that we project.

I am writing these words in São Paulo, Brazil, 7995 km from my (not online) place of work and daily residence in Seville, Spain. I am at the Paulista State University on a teaching stay. Normality has started to recover in academic mobility; professional ties of international collaboration are recovered in face-to-face spaces. This stay was first cancelled in 2020, then again in 2021, and now we finally made it work.

The original stay was planned for May 2020; a moment of global fear and caution, accompanied by millions of masks and daily reports of Covid-deaths. Two years later, three doses of vaccines later, and 7995 km later, the fears and the dead are paradoxically still 'alive'. But they have been exchanged for other, *new old* fears, worries and problems; war in Europe has violently pushed our zone of cultural and social concern towards the brink of a world conflict.

New scenarios remind of historical dangers: the rise of the ultra-right in Europe is nothing more than a vivid reminder of what was happening few years earlier with Trump and Bolsonaro along with the Lepen, Salvini, Orbán and now Putin. Further, 7995 km cannot separate me from the horror of a 'new normal' that continues to attract old fears. There was no rush to return to an ableist, colonialist and discriminatory normality, but reality has violently pushed us to the centre of this crude new normality.

Education is the only antidote to face this (ab)normality. It must be. Education must turn its gaze to Freire in order to bring renewed hope in this normality crossed by new old fears. I am not writing this because I am in Paulo Freire's homeland, Brazil. As the teacher from Recife said, this is not my wish, or my stubbornness—it is a historical and social imperative for every teacher and every person. It is the time to bring new mobilities and opportunities, to engage in face-to-face networking, online and offline, and to develop networks of solidarity and hope. This is more than desire—it is an obligation.



**Fig. 47** [New figure] View from my window in São Paulo, Brazil, on a teaching stay

### Untitled

*Charlotte Achieng-Evensen, Los Angeles, CA, USA, 5 May*

[Updated biography.] Charlotte Achieng-Evensen is the senior transformation specialist for the California Educator Preparation Innovation Collaborative (CalEPIC) for Thompson Policy Institute at Chapman University. Her scholarship focuses on the intersections of critical teaching practice, African Indigenous Philosophies and decolonization. In addition to teaching university courses in educator preparation programs, she is a practitioner within K-12. Over the past 23 years, she has served school districts in a variety of roles including secondary humanities and language arts teacher, district program coordinator, professional practice and development and equity specialist.

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The pandemic with its tumultuous crescendos kept me deeply entrenched in the status of remote work. I spent my days in prolonged Zoom interactions punctuated by the constant hum of electronic work equipment. My social interactions

collapsed into a multipurpose living-work space. This narrowed experience was at the same time a limitation and a privilege. I had the protection of minimal contact with the world.

The experience of returning to the workplace was jarring, if only because I did not return to the TK-12 school district where I would spent the last 13 years of professional life. Instead, I transitioned into higher education. I would spent the summer months contemplating possibilities of a future that required from me a different type of engagement—another professional location where my boundaries were more expansive. The opportunities for professional, intellectual and social growth unstructured by the specificities of top-down mandates seemed rejuvenating. My return to the workplace landed me in a hybrid work situation where I spend three days of the week working from home and two in a hundred-year-old craftsman bungalow remodelled into an office space.

This space is shared, and therefore engenders a kind of intimate collaboration that feels strange. I fight Los Angeles traffic for 45 min to get into this space. But, I think I am content with it. The drive allows me to transition through my social anxiety and move beyond those pandemic crafted physical walls so that I can experience an external other. The hybridity of this new position jogs a certain creativity brought on by the continual experience of ‘different’. Days do not seem to blend into each other without boundary because my physical space shifts according to the day.

As I have returned to this new, external workspace, I am learning the boundaries both my employer and I have to negotiate—time and space jostle with productivity. What do I give up with an elongated commute in terms of time and work output, but gain in terms of reflective space to foster problem solving and problem-posing creativity? We are learning, too, the limitations of communication. Learning that clarity seems to be a fluid economy negotiated differently when in person than when virtual. This observation expands out from my internal world to one of the lessons I carry from the pandemic. Mainly, what are the chasms of opportunity afforded to those with privilege—be it economic or otherwise—and those without?

I take cautious breaths at the moment, uncertain about the upcoming variants and the ongoing impact on those pushed to the margins. We in California seem to collectively move about as if the last pandemic years have been an anomaly. We are maskless, packing ourselves into large gatherings with anxious verve. I am nervous that we are throwing ourselves together without shared public analysis of how we will negotiate societal living spaces of collective social caring. I am hopeful that the glimpses of human connection that healed us during the pandemic will continue to carry us through.



**Fig. 48** [New figure] Untitled

### **Until Death Becomes Us**

*Jennifer Rose, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, 6 May*

[Updated biography.] Jennifer Rose is from Canada and her background is in the philosophy of education, epistemology, and psychology.

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In mid-2020, when I wrote an article about postdigital negative epistemic inculcation, there were just over 850,000 human deaths from Covid-19. This number was a moving target as I updated it daily until the article when to print, immortalizing it at that point in time. Now, just under 2 years later, the worldwide Covid-19 human death count is over 6.2 million. Death is an inescapable feature of our lives, but in recent times with rampantly spreading Covid-19 and variants, death has assuredly and precociously changed the experience of life for many survivors, mine included.

As a survivor of four family members who have passed away over the last 18 months, the essence of death and its intrinsic relationship to life have elicited much contemplation in me. Most apparently, death is connected to life when life succumbs to death; for we cannot have one without the other. Death interconnects with life when we use death as a life extender. Consider the medical student who dissects a corpse for learning about the detailed workings of anatomy to acquire knowledge about how to extend the lives of others, or consider a surgeon who transplants bodily organs to extend another human life—in death, we pursue extending the duration of lives.

Whilst the person who passes away does not experience their death, the survivors *do* experience the death of the person who passed away; only in life can we *experience* death. We grieve, mourn and celebrate the lives of those no longer with us. We feel the hollowness at the loss of the corporeal presence of our family members laid to rest, but we do our best to handle the pain by remembering the joy they brought to our lives; we savour and relish in the memory of special moments we shared with them. As humans, surviving the death of someone with whom we share a close relationship is also a catalyst for considering our human mortality, finitude, purposes, and meanings we make in life. Such existential thought is not new or novel as people search for life meaning and purposes in various ways no less than religious beliefs, theoretical stances, knowledge, family, friendships, romantic relations and so on... but experiencing the death of close others, educes such existential thinking as death swallows us, consuming us in an emotional experience of our corporeal loss and finitude.

However, we have choices. We can mourn deeply and in lengthy timeframes or accept our new life with its inherent loss, knowing it is inescapable and mostly temporally unpredictable; we can look to the future with a renewed sense of what life can be, what life can mean, and what purpose we can serve in our lifetime even with our bounded corporeality, its minuscule speck on earth, and our propensity to allow evanescent infinitesimal circumstances to expend our energies and drown our thinking to the depths of Mariana's Trench (such as dwelling on the driver who cut us off in traffic or dwelling on how we feel wronged).

In death, we acquire a new perspective, a rejuvenated lease on life and we are awakened from our adaptation to 'how things are' and the people, or experiences we may have taken for granted; we learn that purpose and meaning are paramount and possessing clarity of these is incongruent with surrendering our minds to lives we did not consciously choose. When having a clear direction of meaning and purpose, we choose to reject the purposeless or meaningless according to our conscious dictates. We drive down particular roads, not necessarily to follow a *path* or an *exact* path, but because our purpose is to eventually arrive at a particular destination, regardless of the route we take. We may encounter roadblocks or detours, and consequently, change our route, but we are unwavering in our aim to achieve our purpose, to arrive at our destination.

One may ask what do life, death and purpose have to do with higher education? As educators, researchers and academic scholars, we are not excluded from death or life's finitude. So I ask, what are the goals and purposes of general education but also higher education? What are the goals and purposes of knowledge production? Are we driving down directionless paths, without a definitive destination in clear sight? Do we have a clear aim that, regardless of the route taken, firmly lands us at our destination? If any person regardless of their socio-political, ethnic or epistemological or geographic background were to drive your route, would they arrive at your desired destination?

In my personal experience of being a survivor of the death of close ones, I have made choices about my purpose and my destination. In education, we are no less mortal beings. We have a choice to choose what we do; we have a choice to choose a clear purpose for a chosen destination. We have a choice to consider how the literal or metaphoric understandings of death can influence our approaches to education. But, this choice must be made in life, before death becomes us.



**Fig. 49** [New figure] Here is the small place where I sometimes sit to write. It is a little corner facing a window that provides a muse for reflective writing

### **Ivan Illich and a Deschooling of the New Normal**

*Jones Irwin, Dublin, Ireland, 9 May*

[Updated biography.] Jones Irwin is an Associate Professor in Philosophy and Education, Institute of Education, Dublin City University, Republic of Ireland. He has a strong commitment to pluralism in education and for 5 years (2015–2019) was working with the Curriculum Unit in Ireland to develop the first state curriculum in values. He has written widely on education and on philosophy and his latest text (co-edited with Professor Letterio Todaro from University of Catania) has just been published as *Paulo Freire's Philosophy of Education in Contemporary Context: From Italy to the World*.

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Ivan Illich once spoke of the ‘last chance’ given to education, by way of its complete deinstitutionalization (Todaro 2021), and this was effectively his call for a ‘deschooling society’ beyond school. The lessons of the Covid 19 pandemic in education and society have a distinctly Illichian tenor, I will suggest here. An interesting and important reading of Illich’s thought is provided by Erich Fromm, in his

‘Introduction’ (Fromm 1971) to Illich’s 1971 text *Celebration of Awareness. A Call for Institutional Revolution* (Illich 1971a). Fromm highlights the radical and critical aspects of Illich’s thinking which, from the beginning of his work in the Church, are set very much against the power bloc of institutions and power.

Fromm clarifies first that he is most interested in describing not a specificity of ideas but rather an attitude, a whole ‘approach’ (Fromm 1971: 8) to education and indeed to existence itself (each of these thinkers we can argue are existentialists above all else). According to Fromm, the radicalist humanism that is distinctive of Illich’s approach is based on the principle of *omnibus dubitandum* (everything must be doubted).

We might say that 2 years after the Covid-19 pandemic emerged, we are now in a perfect time to reconsider its lessons and indeed to put this Illichian principle of *omnibus dubitandum* into operation. Crucially for Fromm, this capacity for radical doubt is not an end in itself but rather points to more positive possibilities of transformation. This leads in Illich to ‘the readiness and the capacity for critical questioning of all assumptions and institutions which have become idols under the name of common sense, logic and what is supposed to be “natural” (Fromm 1971: 8). But whilst such radical questioning may appear to be wholly negative (or as was often the case in the reading of Illich, destructive) for Fromm it is precisely the opposite. It can both negate and affirm in the same approach as a way of deconstructing so as to reopen the possibilities of transformation of humanity in education and in politics. ‘Humanistic radicalism is radical questioning guided by insight into the dynamics of man’s nature and by concern for man’s growth and full unfolding.’ (Fromm 1971: 9).

In *Deschooling Society* (Illich 1971b) and in the many other essays which emerge at this time from Illich, one sees both of these tendencies at work. The contemporary resonance of this simultaneous radical critique of the existing institutional system, alongside a reconstructive and hopeful future vision, has a strong contemporary significance for us today in 2022. With an eye to some of his critics, Fromm says of Illich’s writings that ‘by the creative shock they communicate—except to those who react only with anger at such nonsense—they help to stimulate energy and hope for a new beginning’ (Fromm 1971: 10).

Let us say then in 2022, that the New Normal may be precisely such a New Beginning, acknowledging both what we have learnt from the pandemic but also what remains to be done.





**Fig. 50** [New figure] Back to the real office!

## **This Hybrid Teaching: To Life, to Students!**

*Richa Shukla, Sonipat, India, 10 May*

[Unchanged biography.] Dr Richa did her MPhil on Simone de Beauvoir's Philosophy. The dissertation was titled 'Webs of Identity: A Relationship between Self and Others in Simone de Beauvoir's Philosophy'. Her PhD on Feminist Phenomenology is titled 'Dialogues in Silence: A Study of Mourning, Shame and Vulnerability in India'. Richa's theoretical leanings are in feminist philosophy, existentialism, ethics, and social and political philosophy. She has numerous peer reviewed publications under her name.

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It was somewhere in the month of January 2022 that I received the confirmation about my university re-opening the campus for students, faculty, and administrative staff after 2 years. Our mode was going to be hybrid. Amidst surviving and losing our loved ones, I was hopeful about creating a beautiful future. When it comes to online education—surviving it, living through it, and most importantly still understanding its nuances—I think that we all did our best.

For me, mourning the loss of our dear ones from one part of our heart and putting our best efforts to create collective healing for our students from the other part of our heart is a paradox defines hybrid/ physical opening of the campus. For many, an added challenge was to look for more engaging pedagogies whilst trying to balance online and physical identities. Initially the thought of leaving my family members (with whom I have stayed for two years during the lockdown after a span of 12 years) was giving me jitters. Added to this, was the feeling of uncertainty and contingency as how would I perform in class.

As I am writing this, I cannot stop but think about how we, educators, tried to bring a certain order to this chaotic world. I cannot forget the moments of frustration, silence, giggles, satisfaction, and hope, during online lectures. When I entered my classroom in person for the first time in February 2022, I was accompanied by a sudden puff of restlessness and curiosity.

One of the takeaways from the pandemic is to accept our online identities and online world. Be comfortable with the technology, make it your friend rather than your foe, and most importantly, use it to build a strong empathic collective with our students. A collective which also relies on being fragile at times.

The thin rope of uncertainty on which I was walking was challenging me on multiple grounds. With the physical opening of campus I realised that its best to perceive it as a cocktail: a bit of everything you need, a bit of everything that's required. The first day I was interacting with my students, I could see a few engagements, a few disagreements, a few dissents, and amidst all, smiling faces ready to be engaged. I realised I have found hope and life again. Hybrid teaching is dedicated to my students whose presence, dissent, and thoughts inspire me to walk on this thin rope again and again.



**Fig. 51** [New figure] My lecture theatre

### **Manufactured Ignorance and Post-Covid Fog**

*Suzanne SooHoo, Orange, CA, USA, 31 May*

[Unchanged biography.] Suzanne SooHoo is Professor Emeritus at the Attallah College of Educational Studies at Chapman University in Orange, California, USA. She teaches part time and is active on dissertation committees. She has two grown children and lives with her husband and dog, Chewy.

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Has post-Covid fog slowed our response time to critical social issues? What is the relationship between Covid lethargy and our activism? As a recent faculty emerita, I now have the privilege of perspective and we seem to be moving in painstakingly s-l-o-w motion or not moving at all.

In April, I attended several sessions at American Educational Research Association's (AERA) annual conference in San Diego, California<sup>8</sup>, and listened to sessions deconstructing anti-Critical Race theories (CRT). AERA presenters Gloria Ladson Billings, David Stoval, and Kevin Kumashiro, were noble in getting the alarming messages out. Their talks were met with standing ovations.

Informal conversations with colleagues in neighbouring institutions revealed weak institutional responses. People apparently ran back to teach classes, grade papers, write annual reports and prepare for graduation activities. There was not a whisper of CRT at faculty meetings: no discussions, alerts, task forces, conversations, implications.

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.aera.net/Events-Meetings/2022-Annual-Meeting>. Accessed 20 June 2022.

The irony here is this ideological attack by the conservative right has been characterized by Giroux (2021) as manufactured ignorance: ‘The conservative wrath unleashed against any form of critical thinking is an example of the manufactured ignorance.’ On the one hand, we have 35 states banning CRT/critical thinking. On the other hand, our response to the legislation is to reframe from thinking critically. We ignore uncomfortable truths and sidestep them like walking over the homeless on our streets.

What prevents us from seeing the seriousness of this ideological war? CRT claims all whites are racists and that it teaches children to hate America. Congressman Ted Cruz (2021) argues CRT makes children ashamed of being white. He accuses teachers of indoctrination and therefore calls for restrictions on what they can teach. As of February 2022, 35 states either passed or were considering legislation to restrict what students can learn and what teachers can teach about United States history (Alfonseca 2022; Singer 2022).

All this political noise has caused a moral panic amongst parents who does not technically know what CRT is. A Virginia bill allows parents to be curriculum vigilantes (Singer 2022). In New Hampshire, Moms for Liberty tweeted<sup>9</sup> that they would pay \$500 to the first person who ‘successfully catches a public school teacher breaking this law’ (Peiser 2021).

‘Anti CRT legislation is designed to make CRT a catch-all phrase for anti-white sentiment and thus alert Trump supporters to denounce so-called leftist teachers.’ (McLaren 2022) Suddenly teachers who just months ago were heralded as courageous first responders at the Covid-19 front are now enemies of the state.

What are we doing to address this movement back at our homefronts? Faculty members made a quick return from the conference to continue the work of winding down the spring semester without a nod to anti CRT. Whilst higher ed has always been slow to confront and make changes, seems slower this year. It makes me wonder:

Are we so numb from Covid isolation and disengagement that we cannot move quickly?

Brain fog?

Slow mental acuity?

Dispassionate activism?

Avoidance to uncomfortable truths?

Did we drink the koolaid too? Did Covid-19 quarantine acculturate us to isolate and distance ourselves from hard truths?

Why is the anti-CRT movement not a topic at faculty meetings?

What are we doing as a unit to get clear about our concerns?

What conversations are we not having to gain moral clarity about our position on CRT?

Did Covid-19 brain fog roll in and paralyze us with inertia?

When the fog rolls out, will we be ready to address manufactured ignorance and our own?

<sup>9</sup> See [https://twitter.com/Moms4LibertyNH/status/1459166253084467205?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw](https://twitter.com/Moms4LibertyNH/status/1459166253084467205?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw). Accessed 20 June 2022.



**Fig. 52** [Unchanged figure] This is my starship communication hub: Zoom center, writing workbench, classroom, library, research lab, meditation perch

### **Back to Not Normal**

*Ian Truelove, Leeds, UK, 1 June*

[Unchanged biography.] Ian Truelove is the Course Director of the BA Illustration course at Leeds Beckett University, UK. His research, which is predominately technology-led, is informed by philosophy, quantum theory and art history. Ian is currently investigating the potential for using virtual and augmented reality technologies in a variety of creative contexts.

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In my first reflection, written at the start of the pandemic, I was worried about the impact isolation would have on the art and design students I teach. Art education is a physical pursuit, and I had not quite worked out how we might cope. In my second reflection, written as we started to look back on our lockdown teaching, I noted how humour and the resourcefulness of my highly creative colleagues had largely taken

the sting out of enforce technology-enabled learning. Today, I am reflecting on the transition back to ‘normal’ and attempting to work out what the heck just happened there.

In many ways, our initial move back into the studios proved to be the most difficult part of the pandemic, because it was not really a move back into the studios; it was a move back into studios that had to be configured as classrooms. We were fortunate that the team at Leeds Beckett University worked hard to find a safe way for practical courses to get back on campus. The necessary health and safety measures were tough to adapt to—in many ways, tougher than full online learning mode. Solo-occupant desks were at least 2 m apart and all facing the front, where tutors were constrained to a ‘teaching zone’, well away from potential sources of infection (or ‘students’, as we normally call them).

We were exposed to the horror (for us) of what we imagine it must be like for proper teachers doing proper teaching on normal courses. This was, for us, far more traumatic than the risk of getting Covid-19. Our usual, loosely planned, activity-based, responsive, reflexive, chaotic and fun studios session went out of the wide-open windows, and we felt compelled to deliver things directly into the eyes and ears of student who stared at us from above their masks until we did it. It was a total nightmare.

Now we are back to normal. Normal, for us, typically involves things like pushing ink around with fake plastic hands on sticks, bringing dogs into the studio to use as life models, building dens, gluing bits of dolls and wood and cars together for the sake of it, and smashing wet-floor signs in the stairwell to make soundscapes. We know now, for sure, that this approach is the best way for us to teach creativity. They ‘say don’t knock it until you’ve tried it’. We have tried it—‘it’ being what we always imagined we would be made to teach like if anyone ever found out what we *actually* do—and it is just weird. We do not like proper teaching and we are not doing it again. That is what we learned from this pandemic.



**Fig. 53** [New figure] A typical teaching activity taking place in my workspace, the BA Illustration studio

## Can We Build a New Normal?

Rachel Buchanan, Newcastle, Australia, 1 June

[Updated biography.] Rachel Buchanan is an Associate Professor in Education, and the Deputy Head Education for the College of Human and Social Futures, University of Newcastle, Australia. Rachel is 43 years old, and lives in Newcastle, Australia, with her husband, three children, two dogs and a cranky parrot.

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The reflection I wrote 12 months ago seems naïve in retrospect. I was in a new office, and my region had been relatively unscathed by Covid-19. That was until June 2021, when we entered another lockdown and I spent months working between home and an empty campus. As the state-mandate lockdown ended in the last quarter of 2021, the University leadership made it clear that the expectation was that students return to campus and staff return to work. And then at the beginning of December 2021, the Omicron variant struck, and although not state mandated, students and staff voted with their feet and refused to come to campus. After more than 18 months of the pandemic, home was the place of security, and the university was experienced as a place of risk and danger.

2022 has seen a battle to reset mindsets. Restrictions no longer apply, and it is expected that we return to campus. For many of my colleagues, work from home has become normal and there has been resistance to leave that sanctuary. The office area where I work is often only half full, as people are now working from home a couple of days a week. The Covid experience has led to a new flexible workplace policy, with Human Resources compromising to meet the demand for continued acceptance of new patterns that have developed.

I have a new role this year that sees me in a new building. My office is on the 8th floor and overlooks the cityscape of Newcastle. I feel very privileged to have such a lovely workspace. I have enjoyed seeing the building partially fill up with people as students returned to campus in March.

There is tension in the air. Some people are still apprehensive and although Covid-19 is running rampant in the student population (necessitating that they take a week off their studies), it is not the same deadly virus that exploded into our midst in March 2020. Our screens no longer show images of mass graves and imperilled hospitals. Others are ready to be done with Covid-19, in their minds the danger has been downgraded and the illness and risk are considered to be mild. Of course, some amongst us remain vulnerable and in Australia more people have died with Covid-19 in 2022 than in 2020 or 2021.

The disruption has changed the university. We have become so *au fait* with Zoom that it is perfectly acceptable to no longer drive to different campuses for



meetings, to Zoom in from home or from the comfort of your own office to a meeting taking place on a different floor. University leadership here wants to make up for lost time—to reactivate the campus and have it alive with students and staff. Students and staff alike want to continue with the flexible arrangements that got us through the crisis.

I can feel the tension in the air. The burnout from two years of constant disruption caused by Covid-19 and change management is palatable. We are a leaner institution, maybe a meaner institution. The dust has not yet settled, and it will not for a while, yet in the battle of wills between those who want things to go back to ‘normal’ and those who seek to use the ongoing disruption as a chance to build a new normal.



**Fig. 54** [New figure] My office is a spot of calm belying the tension and chaos of 2022 academic year

## Settling into the New Normal

*Shreya Urvashi, New Delhi, India, 1 June*

[Unchanged biography.] Shreya Urvashi is a sociology researcher based at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. Her academic profile consists of degrees in physics and sociology. Her research interests include sociology of higher education, sociology of identity and politics.

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To say that the pervasive nature of the pandemic has impacted everyone all over the globe deeply would not be an understatement. From people opting to work from their hometowns or resigning from their jobs to pursue less stressful lifeways, Covid-19 has affected the way we function and think. Being in higher education has been no different.

Education is a very dynamic field and the last two years have been especially transformative for the sector in India. Whilst one could say that educational institutions, or at least the higher education institutions, remained mostly online and remote since 2020, there has been a constant uncertainty about campuses opening every couple of months. Moreover, in the last semester of 2021, colleges did open, at least for a while. This meant that students could come back to campus for classes. This also meant that my fieldwork, which is largely talking to students in university campuses, could resume.

However, this phenomenon was short-lived with the end of 2021 again seeing an inexplicable rise in cases all over the country. Fortunately, this time though, the government and the citizens were more prepared in the sense that there was no strict lockdown and social gatherings continued to be allowed. It was at this point where it hit us about how we have already adapted the ‘new normal’—a hybrid form at work and a subdued social life otherwise. And masks are as mandatory as phones!

At a personal level, I have had mixed emotions about this new form of life. The opening up of places, albeit lukewarm, does bring some cheer since this means a return to normal times. At the same time, it brings in scepticism about us being ready to go back to how life was pre-pandemic. More than that, so much has happened in these 2 years physically and emotionally. Is there even a normal to go back to?

In my case, my institution decided to open the campus on a priority basis and thus, those who could manage working from home were encouraged to continue doing so. Being one of them, I continued to work on my thesis from home. But it is not always from home. Most days I work at a local library or a café. This has helped me build up my mental health way more than I could have anticipated. In search of the perfect ambience to study, this last year has been a journey of finding

new cuisines and reconnecting with old friends. Although I have lived the most of my life in this city, I am always amazed by how much there is left to discover and re-discover.

Nevertheless, there are multiple times that staying at home proves to be challenging. There is an obvious comfort of never feeling alone since there is always family around, but professional loneliness does creep in. Not having anyone to talk to about work grievances does tend to make work more overwhelming than it needs to be. However, I have had a lot of time to read and reflect about humanism and holistic development recently so I appreciate what exists at the moment. There are many alternatives that could have been worse and thus, appreciating what I have is good enough!



**Fig. 55** [New figure] The search for a perfect drink whilst desperately trying to maintain deadlines continues. Meanwhile, I revel in the sinful memory of luxurious and perfectly bittersweet coffees

## Sometimes You Just Have to Be There

E. Jayne White, Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand, 2 June

[Unchanged biography.] Having moved back to New Zealand, Jayne is Professor ECE at University of Canterbury in Christchurch. She continues to support colleagues at RMIT as Adjunct Professor and is concurrently Professor II at Western Norway University of Applied Science. Jayne is also Fellow of Philosophy of Education Society of Australia and President of Association of Visual Pedagogies. As Editor-in-chief of open access *Video Journal of Education and Pedagogy*,<sup>10</sup> she supports cross-disciplinary research which she applies to early years thought and practice.

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Having escaped the ravages of Covid-19 in the long Melbourne lockdown in my return to New Zealand, I watched with anticipatory dread as Covid-19 infiltrated the shores of this sanctioned terrain in the latter part of the year. The national and local response to its eventual arrival, however, differed markedly to what I had experienced the year before. There were a number of reasons for this—not least the significant benefit of hindsight drawn from the tragedies of other countries. These somewhat macabre insights led to a planful series of vaccination campaigns, assertive mask-wearing regimes, which led to an eventual acceptance awareness of the inevitability of infection that was to transpire. Not, however, without tensions between human rights and freedom of choice that permeated this landscape - exposing deep societal issues that were confronting for many of us when viewed against the democratic ideals of our forebearers and the collective consciousness of our Indigenous heritage.

Notwithstanding these tensions, face-to-face classes (for the most part) continued here in Ōtautahi for students (at least those who were vaccinated), and a fine balance was established concerning mask-wearing in classrooms. We invented new approaches to social distancing using the technologies at our disposal—teaching from behind lecterns and, when infections struck our students (as they did with a vengeance—often more than once), placing ourselves and others in the classroom or online virtually or in well-utilised ‘breakout’ rooms. Distance classes continued as normal, since we offer both campus and distance programmes, so in this regard, nothing had changed, except that we had gotten a lot better at it! Irrespective of the mode in which we teach and learn we have realised the importance of connectivity for us as much as our students.

Many of us have sought out face-to-face encounters where we could. In our bicultural context, this *kanohi ki te kanohi* form of interaction is especially important, since it pays heed to the Te Ao Māori worldview of our Te Tiriti partners that

<sup>10</sup> See <https://brill.com/view/journals/vjep/vjep-overview.xml>. Accessed 20 June 2022.

is heavily invested in relationships. This has led to creative solutions in order to facilitate real-life learning contexts whilst remaining vigilant to alternative possibilities (in this regard, I have been working on a Virtual Reality Baby for my ECE students—watch this space!). In my view, however, there remain aspects of our work that are best undertaken outside of virtual worlds. Sometimes, you just have to *be* there!

For me, as for many others, there remains a profound sense of loss of time to be with those we care about the most due to over 2 years of travel restraints. My loss was most keenly felt when my son got married in Melbourne at the end of last year and I ‘attended’ the wedding via Facebook. There is something deeply tragic about watching a significant life event play out as a spectator—as if one is part of a movie about somebody else. As members of my family have contracted Covid-19, I have had to suffice with text messages of support from across the miles, and the conjuring up of images of hope for happier times ahead. Nonetheless, I remain grateful to have survived Covid-19 (thus far), as I know many others have not, or will be suffering its devastating impacts for many years to come. As winter approaches and we are exposed to the world once more, we brace ourselves to see what comes next.



**Fig. 56** [New figure] Me hugging a colleague I had not seen for 3 years at a hybrid event!

## Flexible Work Arrangements

*Rene Novak, Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand, 6 June*

[Unchanged biography.] Dr. Rene Novak has a strong passion for early childhood pedagogy and technology education. He is currently supporting the Southern centres as a Regional Professional Practice Leader for BestStart and is a published academic with his recently completed PhD thesis focusing on developing new methodologies to study the importance of play involving Virtual Reality as a tool and a method.

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As I am writing my third contribution to the ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19’ series of articles, I am realising just how much has changed since last year. The New Zealand Government has changed its strategy in dealing with the epidemic and has moved from an eradication strategy to one of managing the fallout.

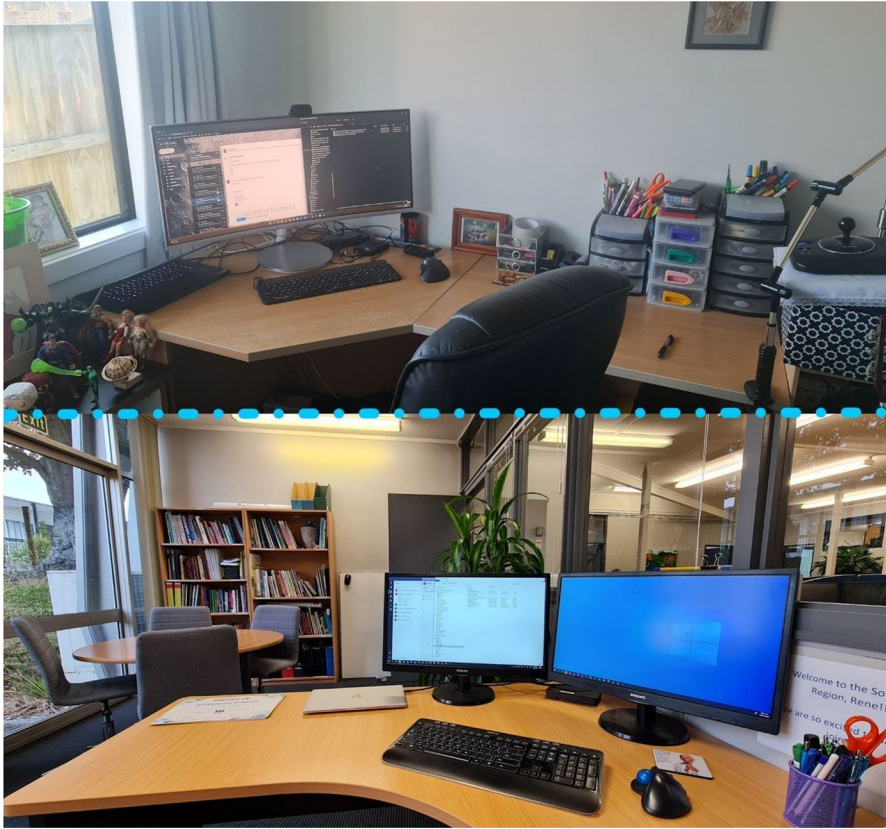
This resulted in a large part of the population contracting the virus and consequently isolating for the mandatory one-week period. For us in the Early Childhood Education sector, this meant that many of our centres went through partial or full closures due to the impact of the virus on our staffing. Again, the organisation I work for has been well prepared with robust systems and processes, having learned and adapted from lessons in Australia, as they went through the ordeal months before us.

In my leadership team of over twenty people, I am now one of three remaining who has not yet contracted the disease. Seeing how hard the illness has hit some of my peers, I am left to wonder if it is better to continue trying to avoid it, or if I should for the sake of removing the sense of anxiety about contracting it, do just that.

Only a couple of weeks ago we had an organisation-wide meeting discussing a newly established policy/procedure about flexible working arrangements. Like many other organisations, we have likewise learned that people are a lot more productive when they have more freedom in the way they mould their working week, considering their circumstances and needs, and ensuring a lack of impact on the workflow and requirements of others. For me, this resulted in two to three days working from home and the rest at the office or in travel. I feel that this allows me to have a great balance between productivity and keeping real-life social interactions alive. I feel that these kinds of work arrangements are working extremely well for most people, as the employees are also awarded trust in their professional conduct as a productive and valued part of the organisation.

The second major change that occurred in our organisation was the intentional focus on staff wellbeing, as it was recognised that Covid-19 induced a secondary pandemic of fatigue. People got tired of having to deal with constant staffing shortages, unpredictability and the way the epidemic impacted them personally. Many are also tired of waiting for normality to return and they may finally realise that they are waiting for something that may well never arrive.

Educators may need to accept the new normal, whatever that may be. Perhaps even accepting that as our current reality is deeply rooted in unpredictability, we might just need to learn how to deal with it. I think that Covid-19 is now forcing us to embrace a new way forward for teaching and learning, one that must predominately focus on how to deal with a constantly volatile future.



**Fig. 57** [New figure] My hybrid workspace

### **A New Normal**

*Thomas Ryberg, Aalborg, Denmark, 6 June*

[Updated biography.] Thomas Ryberg is Professor of PBL and digital learning. He is the director of Institute for Advanced Study in PBL at Aalborg University (AAU). Thomas is 45 years old, and lives in Aalborg, Denmark, with his partner and their two daughters.

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This is the third part of a trilogy, and hopefully a final—although from popular culture we know that trilogies suddenly expand with prequels, sequels, etc. Looking back at the previous episodes in the trilogy, it is now the first time that I am not under lockdown and working from home. This spring has really become a new normal. In Denmark, there were restrictions in place during January. We were only allowed to come to work for 20% and then later 50% of the time, and we had to wear facemasks in transportation, supermarkets, and maybe also at work when walking around in the building (as I recall). Then it all changed very abruptly!

From 1 February, Denmark decided to remove *all* restrictions (with very few exceptions, such as wearing face masks in doctors' offices/hospitals). So, on Monday, restrictions were in place and on Tuesday they were all gone. No masks or other restrictions. In the period from December to February, the Omicron variant had been spreading fast, but apparently being relatively mild, people were vaccinated, fewer were hospitalized and it was therefore decided to remove the restrictions. So, since February, things have been normal, or new normal, at home and work. Vaccine program has been halted (but might be put in place in the Autumn/Winter). Testing facilities are more or less gone. Only pregnant or particularly vulnerable people are tested. As non-vulnerable you do not get tested even if you have symptoms or are sick.

There are still Covid-19 traces in the physical surroundings. In supermarkets, restaurants, workplaces, there are still bottles with disinfectants and slowly withering stickers with 'keep distance'. Relics from a distant past they often seem, because Covid-19 is (currently) 'gone', 'out of mind', 'non-present' to most people. I am myself quite surprised how quickly many of us reverted to traditional behaviour—going to concerts, being in crowded places, hugging etc.

Having said that, Covid-19 has also left more durable traces. We are not reverting completely to normal, but rather a 'new normal'—particularly in relation to working life. One notable trace is the continued existence of online and parallel meetings (some online some onsite). Many meetings are now onsite, and we have to move in-between meetings. However, it has become normal to call in for online meetings even if people *could* meet. This provides more flexibility and can also reduce unnecessary travel. Another trace is the slow transition towards more flexibility in terms of coming to office. It seems that it has now become common that people are offered the opportunity to work from home, e.g. up to 2 days a week, and some organisations are actively responding to this by reorganizing the physical workspaces to larger, open offices with free or flexible seating.

Finally, it is also clear that period of remote emergency teaching has left students and teachers with new experiences for designing and running courses. Many students liked the flexibility of being able to join online or view lectures later, some teachers experienced that there were some advantages to adding online resources and activities. In this manner, I think we are now entering a period which can be viewed as a window of opportunity for re-thinking and re-negotiating work-life and education. In the coming years, it will become a collective challenge to establish what values and rationales will steer and form these changes.

Surely, flexibility to work from home is nice, but are the intentions to empower employees or to save money on office spaces? Online videos and activities can be empowering for both teachers and students, but will they be implemented with that underlying intention or to reduce costs? I think we are currently in a liminal space or in a window of opportunity. However, we need to think really hard and fight for what rationales and values should be shaping the changes that will follow from the Covid-19 period.





**Fig. 58** [New figure] My office space in Kroghstræde 3, Aalborg Denmark

### **New Hope and New Developments!**

*Sonja Arndt, Brunswick East, Melbourne, Australia, 7 June*

[Unchanged biography.] Sonja Arndt is a Senior Lecturer in the early childhood team at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne. Her teaching and research intersect philosophy of education and identity, philosophical methods, and contemporary research methodologies in early childhood education (ECE).

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After 2 years of harsh lockdowns and disruptions, in early 2022 we were expected to return to our offices at the University of Melbourne in Carlton. In reality, only a small handful of people followed this mandate, at first still hesitantly wearing masks, and even now every floor remains eerily quiet and desolate.

2021 was the year of vaccinations—despite complaints about supplies on a national scale, most Australians are triple vaccinated, with over 65-year-olds or more vulnerable people being entitled to their fourth booster vaccine. The

‘anti-vaxx’ movement was not lost on Melbourne, with sometimes violent regular protests before the state parliament.

Despite there still being between 7000 and 8000 new cases a day in Melbourne, Covid-19 has become something that authorities and the University have decided we can live with. The blended work format we had established over the past 2 years, it turns out, had worked quite well for many, especially when there were long commuting times involved. My commute involves only a short tram ride to the University, or a 50-min walk through leafy northern suburbs and foody districts (both of which I love), but even so I am very inclined to retain 2–3 days of working from home, with the view in the image below, and the flexibility to fit work around family and other commitments.

One of the main lessons that we learnt from the pandemic experience is that working in physical isolation has not minimised our connections across countries. Actually, it strengthened them! An example of this was that it gave opportunities for building on an already strong focus of my work on intercultural understandings within early childhood teaching teams (as distinct from between teachers and children), by pushing us to innovate new ways (or new to our faculty) to support early childhood student teachers in their studies.

Many who had returned to their homelands prior to or during Covid-19 were still stuck there in 2022 and unable to fulfil placement requirements according to the standard University of Melbourne expectations. The blended work format offered an opportunity to implement offshore placements in their home countries, empowering students to seek their own placement settings and enabling us to collaborate with English speaking settings. Not only were the teachers that mentored our students extremely enthusiastic in this approach, but our regular Zoom support sessions became so much more enriched by the international exchanges, similarities and contrasts. University events are finally being realised, enabling me to launch the Global Childhoods Seminar Series in June.

Major challenges along the way have been mostly in relation to the inability to travel widely to visit my family—although these years have also led to a rethinking of the ethics of travel. With almost daily easing of travel restrictions, this is becoming more accessible once more. Hospitality and entertainment events and venues are operating, live music is on and life, we could sometimes imagine, has returned to some form of hesitant normal.



**Fig. 59** [New figure] Launching the MGSE Global Childhoods Seminar Series with my colleague Catherine Hamm (used with permission)

### **Crazy Covid Times!**

*Bridgette Redder, Tauranga, Aotearoa New Zealand, 8 June*

[Unchanged biography.] Bridgette Redder is a Senior Lecturer and researcher at Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand. Bridgette teaches in a fully online post-graduate programme.

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Today, as I look back across the last year, only remnants remain of the vaccine mandates, mandatory mask wearing and regional lockdown restrictions that were put in place at a governmental level to keep the population of 5 million safe. These remnants are now visible in workplace health and safety policies and procedures that constitute the new normal of the physical workplace:

- Arrive at work
  - Use the workplace QR code to scan in (the governmental QR code is optional)

- Leave work
  - Use the workplace QR code to check out
- If sick stay at home
- If visitors cannot prove they have been vaccinated they must wear a mask when they enter the workplace
- If you or a member of your household tests Covid positive, self-isolate at home for 7 days
- The choice is yours whether to wear a mask or not
- Reminders about self-care measures to protect yourself and others

I share the same workspace with two other colleagues so daily rituals like wiping down my desk are commonplace. There is more flexibility around working from home but the expectation is that employees will work from the physical workplace unless unwell. So the work experience is tinged with an underlying pressure to be physically present even though omicron is running rampant in the community and no one knows how they will be impacted until it catches them—to this point I have escaped its clutches.

As the postgraduate programme I teach into is fully online, there has been little disruption to its delivery. However, with the upsurge in omicron cases, most students in my courses, many of whom are teachers, are taking on increased work responsibilities to combat staff shortages due to sickness or are self-isolating because they have tested positive themselves, or have family members who need support due to contracting omicron. As a result, pressure has been applied to the amount of time they can commit to study. This means that more of my work time is spent in online meetings with students providing pastoral care and ‘catch up’ sessions to ensure their wellbeing.

These are crazy, fast-paced times in terms of workload. Staying calm, positive and not becoming overwhelmed with the pressures of increased responsibilities is constantly front and centre! Lately, I am becoming more aware of my own wellbeing and the amount of time I am spending in front of the laptop screen—which I am sure augments the exhaustion I feel at the end of a workday. The image is of my motel room office. I am presently travelling for work during these crazy Covid-19 times with such high numbers of people testing Covid-19 positive on a daily basis. This is something that would have been unheard of and that would have caused panic only 8 months ago. Vaccines have made it possible to have our freedom back in terms of moving from place to place.

I enjoy visiting students in their home centres and on practicum but am very aware that I may come into contact with someone who is Covid-19 positive and have had to cope with that. Therefore, I ensure I wear a mask and sanitise, even though most centres no longer require me to do so. Mask wearing, I believe, will help safeguard me and those I love from contracting Covid-19. I still have this huge sense of responsibility to do everything in my power to not pass on Covid-19 to others.

I have learnt that it is important that we do not become complacent as a society. We need to take the time to try and understand what others may be thinking

and feeling at this time. We need to understand that it is potentially very different to what we are thinking and feeling. We need to endeavour to be more vigilant critical thinkers, seers and doers.



**Fig. 60** [New figure] Pop-up office

## Teaching in the Brave New World!

Mousumi Mukherjee, New Delhi, India, 12 June

[Updated biography.] Mousumi Mukherjee is an Associate Professor and Deputy Director of the International Institute for Higher Education Research and Capacity Building. She is also the Founding Executive Director of the Centre for Comparative and Global Education, O. P. Jindal Global University in Sonapat, India. She is the Vice-President, Research and Partnership Development of the Society of Transnational Academic Researchers (STAR) and a Research Standing Committee member of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES). She is also a Steering committee member of the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) Supporting Research Community. She has over 20 years of experience in the higher education sector in the USA, Australia and India.

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Seeing the University campus bloom in February 2022 with Spring flowers and students after almost 2 years was a wonderful experience. I almost exclaimed like Miranda in *The Tempest*:

O wonder!  
 How many goodly creatures are there here!  
 How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,  
 That has such people in't. (Shakespeare 1610-1611)

The Pandemic brought deep learning experience for all of us teachers and university administrators. Because there was no alternative to continue teaching and learning, we were forced to transition to fully online mode in the middle of the pandemic. Each and every aspect of the university administration also transitioned to the online mode. But, over the past couple of years, we realised even more the importance and value of our beautiful green physical campus of the university.

Humans are social animals. We need to socialise and be mobile. We just cannot keep sitting in front of a computer screen all day and we cannot be satisfied with just 'life on the screen'! We need to feel this world around us with all our senses. Even the much-acclaimed author of the classic *Life on the Screen* (1997), Sherry Turkle, who has been researching and writing on human–computer relationship for decades, recently acknowledged during an interview that:

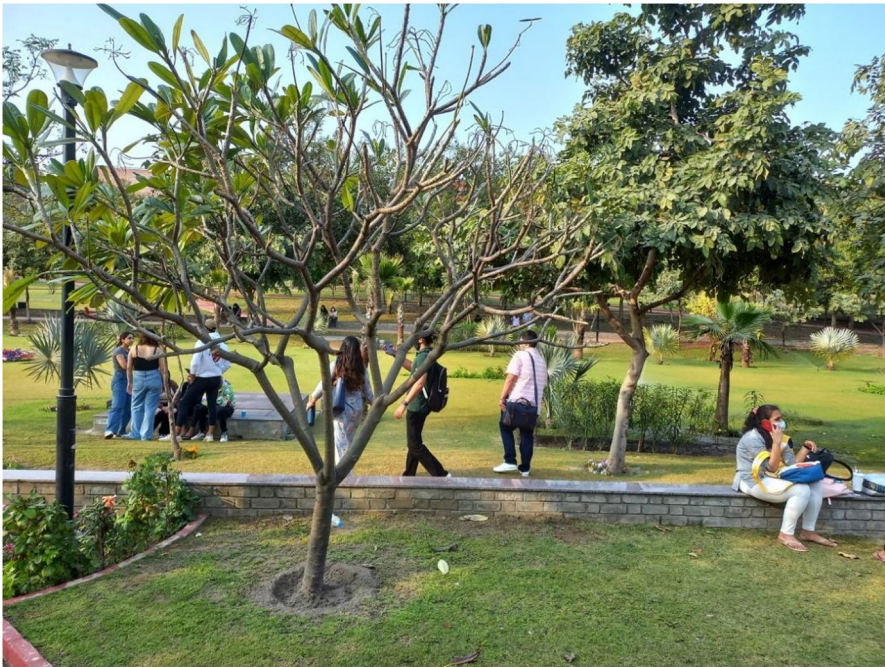
Living through the pandemic has shown that people need relationships, people need people. We can write programs that mimic us, but I don't want to talk to a robot, something without a body, that isn't a child, that didn't have a mother. (Turkle in Tucker 2021)

Frankly speaking, I was quite depressed about a year ago when I wrote my second testimony in the middle of the pandemic imposed social isolation. I recalled depressing lines from Pablo Neruda, Gray's *Elegy*, T. S. Eliot, and raised the question: 'Aren't we all dying as a human civilization these days?' (Jandrić et al. 2021a: 1211).

I must acknowledge that being able to conduct classes from campus in the blended mode and being able to meet some my students and colleagues have uplifted my spirit. Partial freedom to travel within the country and to also continue my research related fieldwork has further uplifted my spirit.

Still, the pandemic continues to impose many challenges to travel and work-life. Any kind of travel now needs more elaborate preparation. Conducting classes in blended mode with some students off-campus and others on campus is also an additional challenge for most faculty. Since we are now destined to live with the ever-mutating Covid-19 virus, every social gathering and travel involves additional stress-factor.

I have personally come across colleagues, students and friends who have become Covid-19 positive recently even after being fully vaccinated and boosted. One saving grace is that the mortality rate in India is very low now compared to last year. As the fear and anxiety of infection continues, I am trying hard to get used to the brave new world of masks, hand-sanitizers and classrooms with microphones and polycom cameras.



**Fig. 61** [New figure] Students and spring greenery on campus at O.P. Jindal Global University, February 2022

**Untitled**

*Blessing Funmi Komolafe, Ondo State, Nigeria, 13 June*

[Updated biography.] Blessing is a Lecturer at the Adekunle Ajasin University, Nigeria, and PhD holder in Curriculum and Pedagogy in Physics Education.

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Normalcy had returned to China in early 2021 but things changed again towards the end of the year because of new local and imported Covid-19 cases. The journey of 1 year seems like a journey of many years. I left my husband in Shanghai, China, in early December 2021 to check on our first son Favour who was just 4 years and a few months old and bring him back to China. My husband was quarantined for 14 days because he escorted me to Hangzhou Xiaoshan International Airport from Shanghai.

My initial plan was distorted a few months after I left for Nigeria, because Shanghai was in total lockdown from 13 March 2022. Similarly to what happened in Wuhan in early 2020, lockdown had lasted for almost 3 months. My son's visa expired whilst I was searching for returning flights to China. I was put to bed and welcomed our second son. It was a mixed-feeling experience, as my husband was not here with me in Nigeria, but I am thankful to my family, in-laws and friends for their care and love. My initial plan was to come back to China by applying for maternity leave, because the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in Nigeria is on strike.

In Nigeria, there are no lockdowns or restrictions, whilst in China, as narrated by my husband who is doing his postdoctoral program at ShanghaiTech University, things are different. My husband's school management decided that all off-campus staff should move temporarily to school apartments, yet due to limited facilities, some staff needed to temporarily stay in offices. My husband was amongst them. During his stay at school, a self-antigen test needed to be carried out twice a day (morning and evening), and a nucleic acid test was done once a day.

At the peak of lockdown, getting daily necessities like groceries, cosmetics and toiletries was very difficult. Food quality was very low. The most challenging thing was not being able to move out of the school compound. The other challenge was hygiene, as some offices are not equipped with a bathroom, so staff had to wait for a few days for access to bathroom. All other teachers who had not made it to school before the general lockdown had to find a means of working from home.





**Fig. 62** [New figure] Workspace at my sitting room in Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria, where I currently reside with my two sons

### **Back to the Blackboard: Challenges in the Post-Pandemic Physical Classroom**

*Madhav Mallya, Sonipat, India, 13 June*

[Unchanged biography.] Madhav Mallya is an Assistant Professor at the Jindal Global Law School, Sonipat, India. His research interests focus on international investment law, environmental law and colonialism.

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After two traumatic years of illness, seeing friends and loved ones fall ill and meeting the varied challenges that come with online teaching, our university resumed classes in hybrid mode in March 2022. Conducting classes in hybrid mode means having some students online and some students physically present in the classroom. To me, having classes in hybrid mode made sense since universities (especially

residential ones like ours) have several logistic challenges to work out after being closed for almost 2 years.

I was excited about being back in the classroom. In the week preceding commencement of classes, I picked out my wardrobe and reworked my schedule. I bought masks, sanitizer and all other equipment which would prepare me to face the outside world. I imagined animated and critical discussions with colleagues and students over coffee or after class.

Whilst I did have those animated and critical discussions, returning to work in physical mode did bring out several individual and collective challenges. I am confident that we will overcome these challenges, but it is important to highlight and discuss them.

First, physical challenges. After almost 2 years of sitting down and looking at a screen, travelling to work and interacting with people does take effort. A whole new routine must be established, and I must admit that it took me about a month or two to get used to it. I felt fatigued at the beginning, and it took me a while to adjust to the new schedule. I realised that I did not have enough time for cycling or running—some of my favourite activities. Moreover, Covid-19 has affected many people physically; there is lingering tiredness and other health issues. Students face these issues as well and many of them took their time to adjust to the classroom.

Second, challenges of mental health. The pandemic was lonely. It brought mental health issues in the academia, which has always been a lonely and isolated profession, to the forefront. The mental health issues were exacerbated by illness and death as well as the challenge of being in closed spaces with others. Many people, including myself, are still recovering from the mental trauma of the pandemic. It is sometimes difficult to navigate the world of physical teaching whilst the mental effects of the pandemic linger.

Third, and the most important, are the challenges of critical thinking. I sincerely believe that our ability to think critically and analyze is not affected, yet our minds must be retrained to go back to the pre-pandemic levels. Admittedly, the pandemic did dilute the quality of our teaching and reception. I think there is only so much you can convey online. Amongst other pandemic-related issues, syllabi were cut short and classes were disrupted because of connectivity issues. For students, attending several classes online was not easy—there is a time limit to staring at computer screen and listening.

The readers of this short piece might think I did not really enjoy going back to work physically. Honestly, I did. But I also think that it is important to highlight these challenges. It is also important to celebrate the tenacity of the human spirit to bounce back and find solutions to problems. Since March we have overcome several problems. We will continue to successfully face challenges and create suitable teaching, learning, and research atmospheres.

## Covid and Alienation... Anomie... and Aspiration

Nesta Devine, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, 14 Jun.

[Unchanged biography.] Still a Professor at the Auckland University of Technology, but more detached from the committees and administration and more focussed on my graduate students, my writing and reading and the three journals that I edit—*ACCESS: Contemporary Issues in Education*<sup>11</sup>, with Andrew Madjar; *New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work*<sup>12</sup>, with Christoph Teschers; and the *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*<sup>13</sup>, with Georgina Stewart.

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Three years into a new Covid world—and I find myself more affected than I expected. Initially my fears were for my mother, but now she is safely dead, I have transitioned to being the oldest and most vulnerable in my family—and I cannot say I enjoy that role! In Auckland, we experienced more disease, and more lockdowns, than the rest of the country, and quite possibly the existential anxiety that comes from sustained exposure and restriction are worse here than elsewhere in Aotearoa New Zealand.

My university has only recently required physical attendance from undergraduates and staff, and one is conscious that the risks are consequently heightened. Has renewed attendance revived the ambience of the university? No, or at least not yet. The financial stress caused by the absence of international students affects us in obvious and insidious ways. We cannot travel, cannot therefore attend conferences and are having to double-up in our offices. My overall state of mind—and I do not know which of these phenomena are the cause, or if any or none of them are—is a state of disengagement. I have lost a lot of the sense of pleasure in academic work which has driven me for the last 20-odd years. I find it harder to get totally immersed in the work—possibly because of that ever-present sense of anxiety and dislocation.

Notwithstanding that, there are some really bright points on the horizon. Recent changes in senior personnel have enabled a reset of the institution's direction and values towards respect and acknowledgement of *tangata whenua*, the Māori people who were here before Europeans, and the significant Pacific immigrant groups who make up a large portion of our young people, especially here in Auckland.

And despite existential issues, the work keeps on: last year 5 of my students completed their degrees: four doctoral theses and one Master of Philosophy thesis. Their work was concerned with Māori, Pasifika, Tongan, environmental and pedagogic philosophies—ideas and values that I treasure highly, and which form a substantial contribution to their respective fields. My academic sense of self is largely founded on aspirations to support diverse ways of thinking, especially those of Māori and Pacific peoples, so perhaps the last 3 years have not been entirely wasted!

<sup>11</sup> See <https://pesaagora.com/access-journal/>. Accessed 8 June 2022.

<sup>12</sup> See <https://ojs.aut.ac.nz/teachers-work/>. Accessed 8 June 2022.

<sup>13</sup> See <https://www.springer.com/journal/40841>. Accessed 8 June 2022.



**Fig. 63** [New figure] The photo shows my desk in my house at McLeods Bay on the Whangarei Heads. It looks up to Mt Manaia (which is not shown in the photo)

### Learning (and Teaching) What Is ‘The New Normal’ Normalized

Sahar D. Sattarzadeh, Tkaronto, Turtle Island, 14 June

Sahar D. Sattarzadeh is an Assistant Professor of Education Studies at DePauw University and a research associate with the Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation (*CriSHET*) at Nelson Mandela University.

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In their co-edited collection of essays titled ‘2020 Keywords Symposium’, Jennifer C. Nash and Samantha Pinto (Nash et al. 2022) invited fellow scholars to contribute to a ‘glossary of Covid-19 neologisms’ to demonstrate ‘how 2020 is now its own keyword’. The resurgence of terms such as ‘the new normal’, they argue, has also become a part of our collective consciousness and vocabulary (Nash et al. 2022). ‘The new normal’ can also be rather subjective, forcing one to question what *is* ‘normal’, and for *whom*.

Aside from ‘the new normal’ referring to the consequences of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, including routines and practices adopted by millions of people around the globe in response, it has also been recently coined to refer to mass shootings and explicit/public demonstrations of white nationalism in the USA (Chan 2021; Watts and Ferrell-Zambala 2022)—only a few examples as to why ‘the new normal’ is not a part of my vocabulary. It seems to be nuanced with *normalized*. What has been normalized before and during the pandemic will continue

to be oppressive. As Ed Yong writes, ‘[i]ndividualism couldn’t beat [Covid-19]. Self-interest is self-defeating, and as long as its hosts ignore that lesson, the virus will keep teaching it.’ This lesson is also implicitly taught at the university.

No matter how extroverted I may be and how much I enjoy teaching, I was not looking forward to physically going to teach on campus. Since my first year of teaching at DePauw University was fully remote, I had become complacent with working from home. Although the convenience and comfort of staying home and teaching remotely appealed to me, my resistance to being on campus had to do with the growing rates of Covid-19 cases in the region. We learned early on that the coronavirus ‘did not exist’ here. Most people were/are not masked in public spaces such as grocery stores and other indoor businesses. Restaurants were/are bustling with people. Subsequently, my trust in people’s accountability and commitment to be safe and conscious about our collective health and wellbeing rapidly diminished, and that sentiment applied to the university as well.

In its amplification of the social ills of this world, the pandemic reminds me that the university has a long-overdue obligation to prioritize individual and collective health and wellbeing, and it should be held to account for this. Wearing masks in the classroom was definitely an institutional requirement, for which I was grateful, but regardless, enforcing appropriate and safe mask-wearing in the classroom was a daily struggle, especially when personal physical discomfort superseded collective wellbeing. Several weeks away from the end of the spring academic semester, a new upsurge of Covid-19 cases emerged across campus. Consequently, affected students who were able to attend, joined courses remotely.

During both semesters of my first year on campus at DePauw, I taught classes in a hybrid format—physically in the classroom and on Zoom simultaneously. Perhaps this opportunity may teach us that physical and digital transformative pedagogical designs and practices must consistently be upgraded and normalized.



**Fig. 64** [New figure] Teaching a hybrid class session at DePauw University

## Are Universities Simply Driving Ahead Without Checking the Rear-View Mirror?

*Sarah Hayes, Worcester, UK, 30 June*

[Updated biography.] Sarah Hayes is Professor of Higher Education Policy at University of Wolverhampton, UK. Sarah is 59 years old and she, her partner David, and her two sons are still collectively owned by a cat called Jasmine.

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It is 1 year and 1 month since I wrote my section for ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19—1 Year Later’ (Jandrić et al. 2021a). Reading through the testimonies in this third (and probably last) cycle of Covid-19 narratives has caused me quite naturally to revisit authors’ previous accounts. Often, writers mention that they too looked back at their earlier testimonies, in order to comment on how they now feel, what has changed and what they believe they have learned. Perhaps it is not surprising then, that as I write, I find myself thinking about the process of driving and looking ahead, but also keeping one eye on the rear-view mirror. With this idea in mind, I smile as one author comments: ‘I feel like I have been asleep at the wheel’ and another writer refers to ‘uncertain journeys between the past and the never normal’. Yet, even this process of reaching for metaphors to help us to describe what we have each experienced suggests to me that many of us have reflected deeply on our lives, families, mobility, how we teach, research or interact with others and indeed with technology. We have also watched how our institutions and governments are responding (or not) towards shaping the so-called new normal, something I will return to a little later.

In my own context, as others here have voiced, I experienced this year the sheer joy of being able to travel again, at least within Europe, even though masks were still required. It was a pleasure to meet in person with partners on a research project in beautiful Granada. At the same time though, I am acutely aware that such opportunities have diminished for many around the world, as scholarships and exchange programmes have reduced, and the appalling effects of the war in Ukraine takes its toll on people’s lives.

This year so far has seen us settling one of our sons into his new home quite near to us in Worcester, and now helping our other son to look for a flat in Edinburgh, so that he can be closer to his sea crossing between Scotland and Ireland where he works for a ferry company. My partner and I have now looked afresh at our own home, and after several major clear outs, have changed rooms around, had them re-decorated and re-carpeted and are now enjoying these reclaimed spaces in the company of our elderly cat, Jasmine. During the work on our house, I became quite nomadic, shifting to different rooms, sofa or garden to work, and even into our aging campervan in the drive, as you can see in the picture below.

As well as thinking about the changed spaces that the pandemic has brought about, I have been fascinated by the layers of culture that have emerged globally

and in organisational contexts. Several authors in this latest collection have described a loss of the personal touch from face-to-face settings and the power of renewed physical connections with each other. Others question whether we have really reconnected with our colleagues at all... arguing too that ‘society needs to work hard to get people together again and reclaim lost democratic grounds’. Yet if we have all been ‘learning to live again’, to quote the Live Lounge Allstars cover of the Foo Fighters’ *Times Like These*, there seems less evidence that our educational institutions are learning very much at all.

Many of these powerful testimonies share the conclusion that in education and in wider society, we are simply returning to old ways of living (as if Covid-19 had never happened). Indeed, despite one author calling for ‘the university to step out of the pandemic shadows and reclaim its role as a vital force for societal development’ and ‘to be a creative place that stimulates necessary dialogues and nurtures new ideas’, many others have voiced their disappointment and alarm at quite the opposite occurring.

Therefore, as Peter has said, the ‘Teaching in the Age of Covid-19’ trilogy now arrives at its inevitable end. Yet still our collective statements declaring that now is the time to develop the new normal in education do not seem to have been heeded. All of us here have drawn personal and often emotional lessons from the pandemic. One author argued that these concern ‘the fundamental truths of being human, including our need to connect and learn from one another, both of which are foundational for the very existence and purpose of Universities’.

Such reflexive academic learning is apparent here:

Many of us learned to reconceptualize notions of academic rigor. I began to express to each of my classes that since we did not know what any of us may be dealing with in terms of illness, family loss, job loss, or other trauma, we all needed to be more thoughtful, more patient, and more caring toward each other.

Whilst in contrast to the above, the failure of institutions to even pause their route of travel or check the rear view mirror, so to speak, is clearly expressed here:

There is something about institutions that absorbs trauma, in turn rubbing it into a faint memory without necessarily reflecting on the overarching journey taken. I think this has more to do with the industrious, factory nature of universities to maintain a momentum of practice and delivery, sustaining its continued recruitment, internment and then commencement of its student cohort. I don’t feel able to acknowledge what I have experienced yet or how to quantify its effects towards my own pedagogic outlook and practice. The one thing I can attest to is the multiplication and acceleration of day-to-day work.

Other authors point out that many online meetings, that have become ‘briefings’ rather than interactions are reinsforcing acceleration of an old normal, rather than

the advent of a new one. Authors agree that balancing personal and work lives in this context amounts to ‘emotional labour’ and ‘daily battles’. Despite devising ‘opportunities to be creative, playful and joyful online’, still ‘the education system overall feels more restrictive to us than it ever was’.

The stark observation that comes through repeatedly from author observations in this final article is that ‘we’ve so clearly learned nothing as a society whilst learning necessary but deeply unsettling truths about one another’. As such, it is deeply worrying to acknowledge that ‘we have not overcome Covid-19 so much as we’ve become bored by it’. This seems in many ways to be a most dangerous phase that we have entered, one where we are no longer keeping an eye on the rear view mirror to recall what is only just behind us, but instead forging blindly ahead, having learned very little, in our very places of learning:

The desire to return to normal has overwhelmed any effort to learn from what we’ve experienced, instead rushing headlong into efforts to simply return to how things were, as though the square peg of our experience can be forced into the round hole it once occupied.

For those of us who drive, the feeling of having been ‘asleep at the wheel’ can be unnerving, with potential risks to ourselves and others. It is a deeply uncomfortable metaphor though if we adopt it in our institutions and governments and treat the pandemic as nothing more than a stopover in the usual journey. During Covid-19, many vehicles remained still, but their drivers still undertook a form of travel, as we all did, towards a new normal. As one author put it, Covid-19 demonstrated that we cannot even rely on the very air that we breathe. Another commented that:

We continue to get vaccinated (I’ll be getting the fourth one in a few weeks) but I’m fully cognizant that vaccination, which is not, in the least, evenly distributed around the world, is but one part of the puzzle.

Perhaps it will take time to bring together the other parts of the puzzle, to consolidate what we have learned, and to cease using the pandemic ‘as an explanation for all that has not gone according to plan’. Or maybe we can return to our institutions with fresh eyes, a new plan and new hope and optimism that, as one author put it:

[d]espite everything, we can build a better place together even if this will require millions and billions of individual gestures, actions, hugs, and moments. This reflective project is but one of the actions to stimulate solidarity and humanity across boundaries and borders’

On that note, I give my thanks to each and every author for all that they have taught me.





**Fig. 65** [New figure] Working in the campervan without leaving the drive

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