

Virtual Conversations: Provocations for Aotearoa New Zealand 2020



Editorial Introduction

With the advent of Covid-19 in March 2020, conferences were cancelled worldwide. Realising the importance of conferences as an opportunity for collaborating with other academics, the Associate Deans of Research from Auckland, AUT, Canterbury, Otago, Victoria, and Waikato created a virtual symposium series, which they termed “Cancelled Conference Conversations.” The Cancelled Conference Conversations initiative arose as part of an agenda to support the sharing of ideas and development of collaboration across our universities.

The conversations were initially designed to allow academics to share presentations that were accepted for a now-cancelled conference online via Zoom but expanded beyond this over time. Every session (apart from the initial presentation) included two papers linked by a common theme. We ensured presenters were from different universities and had complementary, but not necessarily the same, perspectives. Through this curated approach, we were seeking to develop and support networking across Aotearoa New Zealand. Presenters ranged from postgraduate students to professors. The Conversations were hosted by Aaron, Joanna, Leon, and Bronwen. They ran weekly on Tuesdays from 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m., from 7 April to 28 September, 25 sessions in total. Audience numbers ranged from 30 to 95 and included doctoral students, established researchers, as well as participants from Australia, the UK, and the USA. A group of regular attendees across institutions emerged, with some connecting with old friends and others forming new research collaborations. The regularity, scheduling, and duration of the sessions enabled educators to commit to weekly attendance to come together to learn and think.

A silver lining has been that the Conversations acted to democratise opportunities to showcase colleagues’ work locally, and potentially internationally, using technology at no cost and at greater frequency than is possible through face-to-face events. We have had feedback that many participants appreciated the opportunity to learn about a broader range of educational research topics and approaches than they might have had if they had been in a regular conference format.

This special issue offers a snapshot of research interests of colleagues around Aotearoa New Zealand - a lasting imprint of some of the educational issues that were to the fore in 2020. We invited Conversation participants to submit a short paper that drew on and extended their presentations. All submissions were double blind reviewed. In the spirit of continuing collaboration, there was an expectation that all submitters would peer review at least two submissions.

This special issue includes some but not all of the contributions to the series. For the record, a full list of contributors and topics is included in the Overview of Cancelled Conference Conversations section. Seven universities are represented in the papers. Foci

include early childhood education, primary and secondary learning, adult education, various curriculum areas, Māori and Pacific/Pasifika education, the role of ICT, innovative learning environments (ILE), and cross-disciplinary studies.

This issue is a testament to colleagues' willingness to come together to support the mahi to the benefit of educators in Aotearoa New Zealand. We would like to thank all contributors. Our sincere thanks to Grant Zouch who provided tireless high quality technical editing of and support for the production of the special issue.

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