

Virtual Conversations: Provocations for Aotearoa New Zealand 2020



Commentary on Cancelled Conference Conversations Series

I am struck by three features of our experiences as a community of educational researchers illustrated by the Cancelled Conference Conversations series. The first is the richness and diversity in our research. The second is in one sense a product of the first, the significance of our scholarship for the hard challenges we need to solve as a community. The third is what these papers presage for the future of our scholarship.

It is a well-worn observation that our research frameworks and methods are diverse. But a strength in this diversity is demonstrating how mātauranga Māori representations such as those of literacy and narrative, and Pasifika models of research such as talanoa, add complementary frames of reference to, and opportunities for mutual learning with what have been the default models of science. Having multiple methods in our kete is one thing. But being able to call on ways of understanding the world that can be challenging as well as enriching is another.

The contributions to the conference in their different ways illustrate the significance of a robust research culture. There are contributions helping us to: understand and support children's resilience to traumatic events; identify the role of knowledge in the design of assessments, curriculum specifications, and digital tools; test the design of classrooms; explain the role of complex platforms for learning and teaching such as classroom discourse and the cultural, social and psychological resources that children bring to schooling; refine methodologies that are informed by cultural meanings and that make meaningful the idea of whānau and partnerships; and provide evidence for how best to engage learners and reduce achievement disparities, for example in mathematics.

This is an impressive list. Without questioning this significance, could our 'impact' as a research community be even greater at a national level with a more collectively held set of priorities and foci? If we really are going to make a difference to the enduring educational challenges such as inequalities and the need for resilient and critically aware citizens, is there a role for developing a set of priorities like those developed for the health sector in the Health Research Prioritisation Framework (NZ) / Te Mahere Whakamātāmuatanga a Rangahau Hauora Aotearoa¹

This reflection on collective foci leads me to the third feature. It is what these papers presage for our role in the wider Research, Science and Innovation (RSI) landscape. Unlike health research, specific funding and priorities for educational research do not figure in pre Covid statements about the RSI landscape by The Ministry of Business, Innovation and

¹ <https://www.hrc.govt.nz/resources/new-zealand-health-research-prioritisation-framework>

Employment.² But the role of educational research does figure in post-Covid recovery statements by the Departmental Science Advisors to MBIE. Having noted the inequalities starkly exposed through the lockdowns and with the shift to on-line learning and teaching, they comment:

Research that builds on what schools, families and whānau and students have contributed, including the cultural expressions of whānau and Pasifika households, will be important. More broadly, the threats to our physical and economic health and other dimensions of our social and cultural wellbeing should not be ignored. Not the least because the strength of our educational and social sectors underpins our recovery, there is a strong case for increased RSI in, for example, improved educational practices, social cohesiveness and the health of our cultural institutions. Such investment, of course, provides a natural vehicle for genuine research partnership with Māori. (Evans, Murdoch & Spencer, 2021 pp.6-7)³

I agree, there is a strong case and the case is well represented in the papers presented at the conference.

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² For example: Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (2018). Research, Science and Innovation System Performance Report 2018. NZ Government.

³ <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/11628-a-resilient-research-science-and-innovation-sector-enabling-post-pandemic-economic-transformation>