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English teacher education in the time of COVID: Australian teacher educators share their experiences

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Abstract

Many studies have reported the disruption and anxiety associated with initial teacher education programs across the world lurching in and out of online and remote teaching because of COVID-19 related lockdowns. Few studies, however, have homed in on the day-to-day experiences of teacher educators in particular disciplinary specialisms or 'methods', or explored how these disciplinary contexts shaped the experience of teaching in the time of COVID-19. This essay presents extended autobiographical accounts of four English teacher educators from different universities on the east coast of Australia, who taught English methods during lockdowns in 2020 and 2021. The study affirms the uniqueness of their experiences, but also recognises four key dimensions of the English teacher educators' work: relational work; curriculum and pedagogical work; identity work; and professional learning. The study has implications for how English teacher education responds to the challenges of teaching during and beyond the pandemic.

Keywords: COVID19, English teacher education, relational work, identity work, professional learning, teacher education

Introduction

> There is no return to normal, the new 'normal' will have to be constructed on the ruins of our old lives, or we will find ourselves in a new barbarism whose signs are already clearly discernible. It will not be enough to treat the epidemic as an unfortunate accident, to get rid of its consequences and return to the smooth functioning of the old way of doing things….
>
> (Slajov Žižek, 2020, *Pandemic! COVID-19 shakes the world*, p. 3*)*

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization declared the rapidly proliferating COVID-19 virus to be a pandemic. Since that time, according to UNESCO, more than 1.5 billion school-aged children – that's more than 90% of enrolled students across the world – have been affected by partial or full school closures, forcing them to learn in remote or online modes (UNESCO, 2020). Institutions and systems were equally unprepared. Established practices and structures were radically disrupted. The words 'crisis', 'shock', 'traumatic' and 'unprecedented' have described the consequences for students, teachers, school leaders and institutions alike.

The disruption was experienced unevenly both within countries and across the world because of the existing inequities in social and educational systems (Sahlberg, 2021). While better-resourced settings supported creative problem-solving and innovation to ameliorate the disruptions, more vulnerable systems, schools and people felt their disadvantage more acutely (United Nations, 2020). Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, First Nations peoples, students living in remote areas, students with disabilities and those whose home language was not the dominant one in their national setting were amongst the most deeply affected. The literature widely acknowledges that although COVID-19 exacerbated existing social and educational inequities, it did not create them. Žižek (2020) argues that COVID-19 showed us the 'barbarism' of educational and political systems, which knew about this inequity and did little to address it.

And what of teacher education? Like schools, teacher education institutions across the world were radically disrupted by lockdowns and COVID-19 closures. Teacher education leaders and teams had no choice than to transform, sometimes overnight, all of their educational spaces, pedagogies and curriculum so that pre-service teachers could continue their learning online. The enormity of the disruption is clear when we appreciate that every decision and adaptation required consideration of not only the needs of diverse pre-service students and their teacher educator colleagues, but also the requirements of school partners

and systems, tertiary institutions, professional associations and accreditation authorities (Flores & Gago, 2020).

From early in 2020, studies emerged in which teacher educators from different countries and institutions shared their stories of pivoting to online teacher education in different national settings: e.g., Australia (Scull, Phillips, Sharma & Garnier, 2020; Ziebell, Acquaro, Pearn & Seah, 2020); England (la Velle, Newman, Montgomery, & Hyatt, 2020); Hong Kong (Moorhouse, 2020); Portugal (Flores & Gago, 2020); and the U.S. (Quezada, Talbot, & Quezada-Parker, 2020). Some studies analysed experiences across the diverse geopolitical world – Carrillo and Flores (2020), Ellis, Steadman and Mao (2020) – and special issues of international journals have focused exclusively on teacher education in the time of COVID-19: e.g., the UK-based *Journal of Education for Teaching*, *46*(4) and the *European Journal of Teacher Education*, *43*(4).

These teacher education studies typically detail the complex ways in which technology and unfamiliar spaces mediated new relations between lecturer and pre-service student, between student and student, and between school and student. They point out that the relational dimensions of teacher educators' work have become ever more crucial under changed and strained conditions, and that some teacher educators have responded by learning new skills and developing their identities in unanticipated ways. Ellis et al. (2020) emphasise 'the responsibilities all [teacher] educators [felt] for their students', and how these responsibilities were heightened by an 'almost existential anxiety' (p. 560). They speculate about whether some enduring change for the better might come from all this anxiety. Only briefly, though, do these studies home in on the day-to-day experiences of teacher educators in particular disciplinary specialisations or 'methods', or explore how these disciplinary contexts shaped their particular COVID-19 experience, for good or ill.

This essay picks up from where the general teacher education literature leaves off by focusing on a particular discipline: *English* teacher education. It inquires into the experiences of four English teacher educators who taught English methods to pre-service teachers at four universities on the east coast of Australia during COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020 and beyond.

Methodology

The inquiry is enacted through the presentation of four autobiographical narratives (Rosen, 1998; see also Parr & Doecke, 2012) written by teacher educators in response to an invitation from the Australian Association of the Teaching of English. The invitation read: 'Tell us a

story about your experience as an English teacher educator during the COVID-19 pandemic'. Four teacher educators – Alex from Victoria, Kelli from Queensland, Janet from New South Wales, and Fleur from Victoria – wrote contrasting narratives in which they reflected on their practices, emotions and professional identities during and after periods of lockdown.

In bringing together these four narratives in a single essay, our intention is not didactic. This is not a collection of 'best practices' of how English teacher educators *should* have responded to the disruptions to their programs caused by the pandemic. Rather, the essay provides contrasting windows into how four English teacher educators teaching pre-service teachers across the east coast of Australia responded to COVID-19 lockdowns and institutional closures, and what they have learned from the experience. Along the way, there are some examples of creative problem-solving and innovations embedded in the narratives, which readers might find helpful, but this was not the main purpose of the essay.

Alex, Kelli, Janet, and Fleur all hold leadership positions in specialist initial teacher education subjects/units that are focused on preparing the next generation of English teachers. Their narratives are juxtaposed, one after the other, with the intention that readers will engage with each narrative both on its own terms and in dialogic relationship with the others (Parr & Doecke, 2012). First, Alex shares some of his frustrations at teaching with the celebrated 'affordances' of online English teacher education and promises of 'digital forms of sociality'. He wonders if they could ever make up for the lost opportunities to develop trusting relationships in face-to-face education. Then Kelli, a well-known specialist in online teaching and learning, recalls 'an online teaching fail' after returning from long service leave, where almost everything that could go wrong did go wrong. Third, in a narrative enriched with literary allusions, Janet muses about her transformation into a 'prickly porcupine' along with the shift to remote learning, but emerges from the experience a nimbler teacher educator, more comfortable with uncertainty in 2021. Finally, Fleur narrates her intense and sometimes stressful professional learning journey over the same period, critically ruminating over gains and losses for herself, her students and the English education program in which she teaches.

The essay concludes with a brief discussion of some of the key issues about teacher education in the time of COVID-19 that emerge through the narratives. It considers whether English teacher education in Australia can avoid returning to what Žižek ironically refers to as 'the smooth functioning of the old way of doing things' before the pandemic. We begin with Alex's narrative.

The narratives

'They still didn't really know me and I didn't know them' (Alex)

'Hi Alex. My name is Sarah and I am in your Tuesday workshop.'

Email beginnings like this became common throughout 2020 as students in my English Method class reached out. On first glance, there is nothing remarkable here: just another student making contact with their method tutor. However, the frequency of emails starting in this way, including from students who had been in my classes for almost a year, was surprising. They still didn't really know me and I didn't know them. Despite all of the time spent learning together, a connection was missing.

A 'normal' year of relational work with my pre-service English teachers involves two semesters of at least 36 direct contact hours. These hours would usually include lectures (delivered face-to-face with interaction and participation encouraged), and workshops (with students spending much of their time working in small groups as I 'rove' around the room). There would be opportunities to observe students as they completed teaching placements, meeting with them in schools before and after their teaching, to engage in Freirean notions of praxis – reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it (Freire, 1972). Add to this the corridor conversations, standing in line together waiting for coffee, and occasions for connecting in other course subjects, and we can see an abundance of the types of socially and physically close contact that I've always believed are necessary for developing trusting relationships that can survive well beyond students' time at university.

The shift to online learning which began in early 2020 challenged all of this. As COVID took hold in Melbourne, and lockdowns began, face-to-face teaching ceased and we introduced a plethora of digital technologies and learning tools to continue our programs. We turned to Zoom for lectures and workshops. We met in breakout rooms to discuss ideas. We completed readings asynchronously, sometimes sharing annotations through software like Perusall. Lecturers became small faces in the corner of PowerPoint slides. Online quizzes became commonplace. Face-to-face discussion moved to digital discussion boards. Our relational worlds were transformed.

In some ways, we had become closer than ever, with students literally looking into the inner workings of my home. But the reality was that a gulf had opened up, one that would

become wider as the year unfolded. The opportunities for genuine connection, already greatly hindered by decades of encroaching discourses of neoliberal managerialism in teacher education, were limited even further.

For many pre-service English teachers, their time of study is a period of great anxiety. Stressors become magnified as they juggle the expectations of several 'masters': subject coordinators, course requirements, university regulations, teacher mentors, year level coordinators, school principals, parents and students, all vie for their attention. These pre-service teachers often reach out to their method leaders. 'Can we have a chat after class?' 'Have you got a minute to talk?' 'Can you help me with this unit plan?' These are the calls for help that are more easily made, and answered, when a trusting relationship is in place.

The move to online learning has meant that the personal has been sidelined for the possible. And amongst all this disruption, I was assured by digital learning leaders that the affordances of these new technologies meant that we wouldn't skip a beat. Twelve months since our first total shift to embrace these digital forms of sociality and I wonder whether this term 'affordance' has become just another example of doublespeak, a term repeated so many times, and in such vague ways, that it obscures any meaning.

When the Collins English dictionary announced the 2020 Word of the Year to be 'Lockdown', they must have under-represented educators in the voters they sampled. Teachers would surely have voted for 'affordances' as their Word of the Year, since they are apparently blessed with infinite affordances associated with websites, apps, and platforms. The term 'affordance' has its origins in the verb 'to afford' and was coined by American psychologist James J. Gibson just fifty years ago. Using the relationship between animals and their environment to explain the term, Gibson (1979) stated: 'The affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill' (p. 127). More recently, sociologist Ian Hutchby (2001) has applied this thinking around affordances to examine how technology provides possibilities for action, which are shaping sociality. His main argument is that all artefacts, including technologies, 'set limits on what it is possible to do with, around, or via the artefact' (p. 453). The digital technologies that have become so ubiquitous in educational contexts are both shaped by and shaping of the practices of humans, and the interactions with, around and through them. And, as Hutchby reminds us, all technologies have limits. Well, yes.

We spend so much of our time with our students helping them understand the role that language plays in mediating human relationships. We draw on the thinking of Vygotsky, Halliday, Barnes and others to emphasise the part that language will play in supporting their teaching and professional learning. Yet, the shift to training teachers online has raised many questions about the scope for teacher educators to communicate this message. I often wondered whether the experience of teaching English Method in the time of COVID trespassed into 'do as I say, not as I do' rhetoric.

There is an abundance of literature that explores the fundamental role teacher education has in shaping processes of 'being' and 'becoming' associated with English teacher identities. I am reminded here of the reflections of Parr, Bulfin, Diamond, Wood and Owen (2020), who in their investigation of the impact of standards-based reforms on teacher education argue that writing, reflection and dialogue are key enablers through which processes of ideological becoming are activated and sustained. I certainly agree that the act of writing about the past twelve months for this narrative has led me to reflect on my identity as an English teacher educator. I've even been prompted to question the very activities that I have planned for next week's online English Method workshops. But what of dialogue? How is it impacted by the digital interface that has dominated teacher education of late? And what will be the long-term impact on those relational literacies that enable the sharing of knowledge and meaning-making beyond the pre-service years?

I think I'll pose this question to my English Method students in their next Kahoot.

[please leave space for a figure e.g. screenshot here]

Figure 1 [TBC]

* * * * *

'The webcam was the least of my problems' (Kelli)

I looked on from the distance of my long service leave while my English curriculum colleagues endured the confronting ordeal of transitioning, overnight, all of their on-campus class materials into digital format because of the coronavirus pandemic. I had dodged that mother of a bullet, having begun five months of long service leave in semester one, 2020. While on leave, I continued to read my colleagues' tweets. I felt their struggles and their wins. But I had my own challenges to contend with at home. I was experiencing home-based learning as a parent. I even vlogged and blogged about it.

Toward the end of my long service leave, I guess part of me was mentally preparing for teaching online in semester two. I figured I'd do OK. Online teaching was my jam, and if I could just source a decent webcam for my home PC, I thought, the jump into the virtual space should come naturally.

In the weeks leading up to Semester 2, my university in Queensland announced that students were to return to campus, but lecturers were also required to provide online options for any students wishing or needing to stay home. I mentally calculated the invisible workload increase. Everything would need to be prepared twice, and with only a few weeks' notice. Still, the prospect of having half of the teaching online was appealing to me despite the increased workload. I had gotten used to my own fence line, my 'home pants', the rhythm of the day in my own back yard. Friends and family nearby had gotten used to having me around the suburb more, not losing me for most of the week to on-campus work near the city. Half-at-home was better than none-at-home. As long as I could find a quality webcam.

But on that day, on the first day of Semester 2 classes, the webcam quality was the least of my problems. It began with a comedy of errors leading up to that online workshop. First, my university informed me that they had no webcams to spare. Then I found that local stores were all sold out of affordable equipment. I decided to purchase a very expensive webcam anyway, only to find that the expensive webcam would not work with my older computer without disabling the microphone. The comedy crescendoed one hour before the workshop when our home internet went down. And when that happened … I had to think quickly.

I realised in that moment I was rusty – I hadn't practised tethering my phone to my tablet as an internet hotspot. I was hamstrung. Having planned to share my desktop screen, I suddenly couldn't see a way to share it without the wifi connected. In that moment, I was confused. I noticed my phone battery was low, but hopefully charged enough to make it

through an hour and a half. I decided to run the virtual class via the Zoom app on my phone, using my phone data for connectivity, with fingers crossed that the recording would work.

In the panic of changing all the technology at the last minute, I'd missed my window to check my hair and put on some make-up. I wasn't going for the 'I just woke up like this' kind of look, just the 'help your eyes and mouth stand out to increase expression on camera' kind. I knew that like an actor on a stage, a teacher on a screen needs to be framed well to draw the right focus. But as I balanced my phone precariously on a stack of books, I knew I'd lost my chance this time to get the angles right…

After the online workshop I walked up the backyard stairs of my house, still giddy with adrenaline. I paused to take a selfie. It was cute and totally Instagram worthy, with an authentic adrenaline-fuelled glow that maybe made the pain of the online teaching fail worthwhile. The planned technology for the class might have been a bust, but now I had epic social media content, which I could talk about next week with my English curriculum students (amongst others). So how could I complain? I was finally sharing the real COVID teaching experience and, as a silver lining, had been brought entirely back down to ground.

Figure 2 Kelli's adrenaline-fuelled selfie

* * * * *

'And King Hamlet's Ghost zoomed in …' (Janet)

I have photos of my English teacher education students from Week 1 2020. Seated close together in table clusters, they are smiling, relaxed and anticipating the year ahead. Who could have known then what the year ahead would involve? One week later they were scrambling to set up home offices in busy family spaces, closed-in verandahs and cupboards under the stairs à la Harry Potter … and I was certainly uncertain.

Romantic poet John Keats gives us many wonderful things on which to reflect as English teacher educators: a Grecian urn; a melodist for 'ever piping songs for ever new'; a nightingale that '[s]ingest of summer in full-throated ease'… He also offers the beautifully evocative concept of 'negative capabilities', which he describes as 'capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason' (Keats, 1817). It is this concept of 'negative capabilities' that I turned to in order to re-frame my teaching during the shift to remote learning … and it is a concept that continues to resonate, reminding me that it is perfectly OK to harbour mysteries and doubts about my English teaching in these uncertain times.

Teaching for me has always meant creative pedagogy, student engagement, and the cycle of influence (Manuel, 2003), whereby I share my love of English with my students. How then to achieve this in the year of Zoom? How to know what to retain, what to adapt, and what to cast off? English has been described as a 'pedagogical porcupine' (Newton Scott as cited in Woods, 1990, p. 50), but in so many ways COVID highlighted not the prickliness of our teaching area but rather its capacity to be dynamic, adaptable, and, like the porcupine's multiple quills, its capacity to reach into new territories and ways of doing with confidence borne from uncertainty. It's this story I share.

So, how to model creative pedagogy within the limits of the square, often frozen, digital meeting space? To my surprise the students eschewed independent learning in favour of the connections that a Zoom tutorial could facilitate. They happily inhabited breakout rooms for tutorials and lingered at the end to share cute dogs, babies and the books they were reading. I confess that several weeks into the online pivot a prickly porcupine might have been an apt description for me, as I struggled to deal with the vagaries of online teaching and learning. It wasn't that I craved the certainty of fact and reason, but I did long for some kind of familiar rhythm to my teaching that would allow me to recognise myself as an English teacher educator.

Over time, this rhythm and this recognition began to emerge. I created optional exit points in tutorials, so students who were also parents/carers could hand over computers to school-aged children or yield the dining table/bandwidth/computer to a partner or housemate. I looked to crazy hat days to define key moments in our textual studies, or just to lighten the mood. Even drama texts could be brought to life in Zoom. Table readings replaced blocked readings, Shakespearean shared lines could be shared across the digital divide and, with

careful planning, the ‘conscience alley’ drama strategy still worked albeit without the eponymous alley.

Creativity remained central to the teaching and learning. It enlivened the virtual Zoom backgrounds we created as visual representations of Tomas Transtromer’s poem ‘Blue House’. It underpinned the choice of symbolic objects we held aloft in our adaptation of the ‘mystery box’ characterisation strategy, and the multimodal texts we created by s/mashing together famous poems, memes, and prose first lines in outrageously short time frames. As anxiety about the new eased, I loosened the reins and let my students be leaders of learning in breakout rooms. I learned again that learning can be messy and that, as a reflexive teacher, the best thing I could offer my students was to be humble and acknowledge that I will always be learning to be a better English teacher.

Reflecting on the year that was, I am keenly aware of what a big decision it is to become a teacher, and of the passion for English that sustained my students through that challenging period. In some ways online teaching made it that much harder to prepare my students for their work as classroom teachers. Proxemics, gaze, and non-verbal communication strategies couldn’t be modelled. The dance of ‘think, pair, share’ looked different on a screen. And the physicality of performance and texts was absent. I grieved the loss of nuanced individual interactions that usually shape my work as a teacher educator, and I never found a way to transfer fully my capacity to ‘read’ the classroom.

But in other ways the shift was deeply reassuring. I am thrilled that over 30 years after I started teaching (and class of 1984 Brad Mitchell, Stephen King, Dot Panaretos and Annette Lamont, I wonder if you’re reading this!) I was able to bring new territory and new ways of doing English to the mysteries and doubts of 2020. Like so many English teachers, I sought to bring what I call a ‘nimbleness of gaze’ to my pedagogy and resource selection (Dutton, 2017). English teacher education was sufficiently dynamic and flexible to re-shape itself to suit my new context. By year’s end there was nothing prickly, just familiar things re-worked and the marvellous anticipation of the unexpected.

At the start of 2021, I took photos of my classes again, to help me learn students’ names and to record for them their first day of being an English teacher. I am now teaching in blended mode. For every class the students are clustered in a socially distanced way around a computer screen, as they seek to make Zoom students feel included. It requires nimbleness on everyone’s part to navigate different time zones, settings and technologies. There are familiar

rhythms, yet still some certainty. There's also an ever-present creative spark that could ignite anywhere. When I recently witnessed my students' tableaux in which an overseas-based King Hamlet's Ghost rose from the centrally positioned computer, I knew we had left behind any danger of 'irritable reaching after fact and reason'.

[please leave space for a figure e.g. screenshot here]

Figure 3 [TBC]

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'I wonder about English teacher education post-COVID' (Fleur)

The sequence of units titled *English Education in the Secondary Years* (EESY) at my university have traditionally been a face-to-face on-campus experience. Before 2020, I had taught EESY with a variety of English teachers and teacher educators, enacting a pedagogy that emphasised small-group work, dialogic inquiry, exploratory talk, collaborative writing and building community among the pre-service English teachers.

In 2020 I was scheduled to teach EESY with my colleague Dr Scott Bulfin. As warnings of the approaching coronavirus increased in intensity, and the prospect of online learning loomed, Scott and I questioned how we were going to translate this dialogic experience into the medium of Zoom. The sensation at the time was of walking a quickly shifting landscape as university administrators adapted to almost daily changes in health and policy advice. Following a delayed start to classes, some educators had one day of face-to-face teaching before the university announced by the end of that first day that all educational offerings were going online. Faculty were granted a four-day reprieve to adapt their units for online learning. We never met our students face-to-face. We would get to know them through the media of their writing and a Zoom screen.

Scott and I re-planned and re-fitted teaching that had been carefully designed for classroom learning. Transposing what we had traditionally done in classrooms into the medium of Zoom meetings became an intense journey of professional learning. We threw ourselves into this work. Each week demanded long planning sessions, also on Zoom, as Scott and I combed through our teaching repertoire and re-imagined our workshops for an online experience. The students were on the whole philosophical about the necessity of remote learning. Everyone seemed to understand that the social isolation we were all obliged to experience was to protect the vulnerable and keep the community safe. The students 'rolled with it' and this proved to be a huge advantage as I learnt on the job about breakout rooms, screen sharing, recording online lectures, and the affordances of the chat function for plenary discussion.

In those first weeks both Zoom and my home internet connection proved temperamental. Early workshops saw me logged out of my own classes on several occasions. I well recall these stressful weeks, as I struggled to wrangle the technology while holding fast to our ideals of exploratory talk and dialogic teaching. We were determined not to succumb to a model of education that sees the teacher's role as simply transmitting information. Instead, we planned around opportunities for students to work in small groups, with the Zoom breakout room functioning like a round-table group in class.

Autumn deepened into winter, and COVID case numbers in Melbourne were climbing. Both my partner and I were working from home, while my son was doing Grade 6 from the kitchen table and a laptop. Like so many families in the Melbourne lockdown, we were having to negotiate living in each other's pockets, with the kitchen table functioning as classroom, office, and lunchroom. As the person running lessons for in excess of 30 students at a time on Zoom, I had commandeered a small desk in the bedroom as out of the way of foot traffic. For months, I spent almost every hour out of the 24 in that space, working, reading, or sleeping. I developed an acute case of office envy for colleagues whose bookshelves formed the backdrop to their Zoom calls.

Fortunately, there were positives that emerged from the wholesale disruption. For example, the re-scheduling of our students' professional placement experiences stimulated valuable re-thinking of our EESY program. One of the most positive outcomes to emerge from the challenges of our year of online teaching came in response to these rescheduled placements. We needed to come up with a new program for the weeks some students were still with us while others were teaching online in schools. Our English education teaching

team have a love of Young Adult Literature (YAL) and in the past we had tried several times to integrate the topic of teaching YAL into EESY units, with mixed success. The main barrier had consistently been students feeling unable to read a YAL novel in the week we usually allotted to this task. They needed more time and more scaffolding for thinking pedagogically about YAL. Having three weeks to fill with material that could not be assessed (because only some students would be present), we devised a teaching sequence about using YAL in the secondary classroom. This involved a roadmap for teaching a YAL text, pacing the reading of the novel against different phases of a novel study. The students got three weeks instead of one to read a YA novel in small groups and the uptake of this was much stronger than in years past. The feedback on this 'mini unit' on teaching YAL was positive. We could thank COVID for allowing us to develop valuable resources that we could carry forward in our teaching beyond 2020.

Taking the teaching of EESY home has necessitated some hard thinking about what we prioritise in English teacher education. My colleagues and I are determined to build in support and flexibility to enable students to succeed, even in the confines of Zoom and learning management systems. And yet we eschewed quizzes and other popular tools of online learning that are often promoted as 'interactive'. We were more concerned in any online learning to retain the special place of interpretation in subject English and the importance of interpretive communities than to ensure students remember a discrete set of facts. In 2021, we are required to teach EESY as a 'hybrid' model of education, with lectures and some workshops online, while other workshops are face-to-face. The advice now is to plan for online teaching first, and then adapt from that to face-to-face classes. What comes through strongly from the 2020 experience, whether we're teaching online or face-to-face or both, is the enduring importance of exploratory talk and a sense of connection with our students, even when mediated by screens. Perhaps especially when mediated by screens.

The return to face-to-face classes on campus this year has been a relief on one level, while on another, I find myself faced with new dilemmas. I wonder about English teacher education post-COVID, and how teachers and students will understand their roles. We have had, for example, increased numbers of students asking for a recording of online workshops in lieu of attending them. Does this suggest that coursework is now akin to media 'content', and something that should be available 'on demand'? Where does this leave the learning process in English as a dialogic encounter with other voices, other minds, a conversation which *demands* something of us and in which we are each involved? The 'call of stories'

(Coles, 1989) is something that migrates across media and can be usefully employed in online learning. However, it is worth remembering that call is also the call of the other, and our ethical relation to others, something that we have been asked to live by as we try to control the spread of a deadly virus.

[please leave space for a figure e.g. screenshot here]

Figure 4 [TBC]

Conclusions

The narratives of Alex, Kelli, Janet and Fleur are just four of the 'numberless' educational stories being told and retold, framed and reframed, as teacher education across the world continues to struggle with the ongoing disruption and trauma of the pandemic. These four English teacher educator authors are by turns cautious and assertive, impatient and respectful, sombre and upbeat, critical and creative, funny and serious. Using a range of narrative strategies they show, up close, the uncertainty in teacher education but also the resilience of teacher educators that recent research has highlighted. There is a particularity to their stories, a situated uniqueness to their voices (Cavarero, 2000). Their stories invite readers into a professional and personal dialogue with them.

As part of that dialogue, English teacher educator readers cannot help but recognise familiar details – we see ourselves, our struggles, our frustrations, our small wins. We can relate to aspects of their experiences. There are four dimensions of English teacher educators' work woven through the different narratives – relational work, curriculum and pedagogy work, identity work, and professional learning – which we briefly summarise below.

(1) *relational work*

Each narrative, in its own way, reinforces the importance and nuances of professional relationships in English pre-service teacher education. Despite the emergence of some valuable pedagogical innovations, the narratives share a concern that the pandemic is

contributing to a ‘new normal’ where the relational work of English teacher education is felt to be curtailed. There is also a wondering about what this curtailment means for graduate English teachers entering the workforce.

(2) *curriculum and pedagogical work*

Sprinkled throughout the narratives are some delightfully engaging, creative, sometimes idiosyncratic resources or technology-mediated teaching practices spawned through the authors’ encounters with unfamiliar or unexpected challenges. It is worth observing at this point that these four teacher educators were privileged to be working in contexts where they and their students had access to technology and resources, which could facilitate these creative practices.

(3) *identity work*

Prompted by the intense and stressful experience of negotiating a range of educational tensions and compromises in the time of COVID-19, the narrative writers inquire into, affirm or modify both their educational philosophies and their senses of themselves as English teacher educators. There is a sense in their narratives that this intensity and stress can potentially enrich teacher educators’ crucial identity work and becoming (Parr et al., 2020), although it seems there were times when the stress became almost overwhelming for them.

(4) *professional learning*

For some authors, the experience of teaching during the pandemic can be framed as a destabilising but rich professional learning journey. The authors’ encounters with challenge and anxiety are not just problems to solve, but opportunities for professional learning and dialogue – about technology and pedagogy, about English and language teaching, and about teacher education. With that learning came opportunities for growth, development and new knowledge.

One of these four dimensions that deserves more space to tease out here is the authors’ identity work. Ellis et al. (2020) observed in their transnational study in the early months of COVID-19 that teacher educators across the world were feeling an abiding sense of ‘responsibility’ toward their students, along with heightened anxiety about that responsibility. Stress, struggle and/or discomfort are never far from the surface of the four narratives in our essay. We see this in responses to sustained confinement (within the four sides of a screen or the four walls of a house or room), in grappling with intensified workloads and rapid policy changes, and in the negotiation of meaningful English teacher education when the circumstances often seemed to militate against this.

For most authors, though, there is a satisfying sense of achievement evident by the end of their narrative. Or perhaps it is just relief. Having endured a precarious and challenging 2020, there is some optimism – optimism that at least as far as these four English teacher educators in Australia are concerned, the pandemic is in no danger of being forgotten as 'an unfortunate accident'. Through essays such as this, the teacher educators' resilience and forbearance under acutely challenging circumstances will not be forgotten.

The knowledge that the teacher educators have drawn from their teaching experiences, and from writing about those experiences, is valuable and worth celebrating. Occasionally, that knowledge affirms some important 'old ways of doing things' that were/are beyond the scope of remote or online learning. For example, most narratives express concerns about the curtailment, during periods of lockdown, of opportunities to build rich professional relationships through regular in-person and informal social interaction. Reflecting on the experience of teaching during the pandemic generated rich insights into the experience of curtailed agency. This too is knowledge that should not be forgotten. Similarly, the new possibilities, knowledge, and discourses that the experience of COVID-19 has helped to generate for English teacher educators will surely not be forgotten.

In the context of this essay, the Žižek epigraph can be read as a call to English teacher educators across the world to engage in a professional dialogue about the experience of teaching through the pandemic. It is a call to resist the seductive lure of a 'return to normal' rhetoric. One important dimension of teacher education that the narratives do not mention is the deep social and educational inequities, exacerbated by the pandemic, which this essay began by observing. It is important to acknowledge that the authors of the narratives (and their students) appeared to be operating within contexts that were better resourced to deal with the pandemic than many of the schools or social institutions that their pre-service teachers will work in when they graduate as teachers. How will the experiences of English teachers who are graduating in resource-rich institutions during the pandemic prepare them for the challenges of teaching in low-SES schools and communities? This is one of many questions that English teacher educators, like the authors of these narratives, are no doubt reflecting on as part of the professional dialogue and learning prompted by the pandemic.

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