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*Researching with the Sturm und Drang of COVID-19:  
Telling tales of teachers' teaching*

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# Researching with the *Sturm und Drang* of COVID-19: Telling tales of teachers' teaching

## Introduction

As the world bears witness to COVID-19, a reactive rhetoric and nomenclature of the 'new normal' has emerged to describe and define the materiality of the global pandemic. We are daily interpellated into socially isolating; shielding, physical distancing, tracking and tracing and Zooming protocols. COVID-19, much like the Odyssean Trojan horse, has been instantly victorious in instigating a redefinition of how we re-understand and adapt to a new quotidian reality.

A wider ideological narrative of disquiet, uncertainty and dis/ease with existing social social structures has crept in tandem with the spread of COVID-19. The destructive effects of nature and human individualism is being unleashed and is a prescient warning of a global 'Sturm und Drang'. Sturm und Drang is a term derived from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century German literary movement, named after Freidrich von Klinger's dramatic play. Exponents of the Sturm und Drang movement created artistic work that sought to alarm, unsettle, and produce intense emotion through the experiences of the senses. Within artistic expressions of Sturm un Drang, the intra-connectivity of nature, community and the individual extolled the dialectical impact of society on the individual. As with the emergence of any movement, Sturm und Drang was symptomatic of a particular zeitgeist: a rebuttal against the rationalist Enlightenment project. Hill (2003, p. 2) in his appraisal of the *Literature of Sturm und Drang* has noted:

The definition of any historical epoch is a problematic enterprise. Literary periods and trends do not have distinct, self-evident boundaries. They represent an attempt, either by contemporaries or by successors, to identify a common style or a set of common ideas that marks off one phase in a complex and relatively gradual evolutionary process. The use of a literary period is, therefore, always an act of interpretation that involves the insertion of caesuras and the selection and ordering of information. But, however problematic and provisional the definition of a period is, it is nevertheless an

essential tool...[that] allows us to see beyond the individual text to the wider pattern. What is important to recall that the identification of this wider pattern is part of an act of interpretation and is, therefore provisional.

Under increasing critical interrogation and deconstruction is an *a priori* worldview in which progressive social movement activists have toppled classicist symbols. The heterodox syntax exemplified in cultural gestures of progressive social movements calls:

for political and economic power to be accountable through a careful work of collection, elaboration and transmission of information on the effects of the pandemic on the poorest and more disadvantaged groups of citizens.... activists have produced a lay knowledge that is at least as much needed as the specialised knowledge of the expert. Using digital resources for information sharing as well as online teach-ins, they contributed to connect the different fields of knowledge that the hyper-specialisation of science tends to fragment (Della Porta 2020, p. 2).

The enterprise of thinking about a post COVID-19 world will require a new imaginary in which beliefs, values and behaviour will be shaped by the verities of existence. Intensity of feeling comes in many different forms and COVID-19 has unleashed expressions of rage, despair, individualism, and civil disobedience. Hill (2003, p.21) has suggested reading the concept of Sturm und Drang alongside 'the phenomenon we now know as alienation, the feeling of estrangement that comes from losing one's place in self-sustaining community'. And it goes without saying that COVID-19 has produced associative experiences of epistemic and ontological dissonance. The exclamation mark has become the default punctuation when constructing personal, social and cultural narratives out of the 'storm' and 'stress' induced by the pandemic. Ruminating on Darwin's suggestion of how [we] as species will continue to survive, we wonder about our own survival as teachers and researchers: the very pedagogical traits that define[d] us continue to disappear. A redefinition of teachers' work and how to make habitable the shift to an online pedagogy has served to illuminate the constitutive moments of teacherly identity. It has involved as Della Porta (2020, p. 2) notes: 'Intertwining theoretical knowledge with practical,

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3 experimenting with different ideas, building on past experiences, [that] prefigure[s] a  
4 different future'. She suggests how, 'Times of deep crisis can therefore (admittedly  
5 not automatically) trigger the invention of alternative but possible futures:' (ibid p. 3).  
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10 In this paper, we provide an account of researching the 'Sturm und Drang' of COVID-  
11 19 in narratives drawn from a research project entitled *Teaching storylines:*  
12 *snapshots of educators and education*. In doing so we sought to understand how  
13 teachers emerge as professionals in specific moments in time and place.  
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19 The project was originally aimed at investigating – through their own stories – the  
20 lived experience of preservice teachers in their final year of the Bachelor of  
21 Education P-12 and of recent (1-5 years) graduate teachers. Participants' stories  
22 were captured during a ten minute recorded interview. The interview transcripts were  
23 then edited by the researchers into short posts to be uploaded to the Instagram site,  
24 *teacherwhispers*. This editing was essentially to draft the interview transcript into a  
25 grammatically correct (as speech often is not) narrative. Another element of the  
26 editing concerned ensuring that any identifying details (of the participant, their  
27 students, their school) were removed or changed in order to ensure anonymity. The  
28 proposed posts were sent back to the participants for approval before they were  
29 uploaded to the site.  
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39 As Instagram relies on images, each post had a photo. Some photos were provided  
40 by participants, others were found on free access image sites, and others were  
41 created by the researchers, by utilising key quotes from the posts. Though aware  
42 that on Instagram the image is meant to be the hook, we were nonetheless very  
43 aware, as we were with the stories told through the posts, that images should not  
44 identify the participants, their students or the location of the school. The photos,  
45 however necessary for Instagram, were a minor consideration in this project, as the  
46 stories were always intended to feature front and centre.  
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55 The purpose of the study was to identify themes connected to the participants'  
56 professional perceptions and views of current trends in education with a view to  
57 situating the research as critical interruptions into the bigger political discourses  
58 surrounding education. We sought to question why pedagogical practices are  
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3 increasingly being positioned and located for political and economic reasons and to  
4 frame the questions of how we emerge as teachers in specific moments in time.  
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8 And then along came COVID-19 and we captured responses that ‘contributed to a  
9 much needed task in a tragic moment: the production and distribution of services of  
10 a different type’ (Della Porta 2020, p.2).  
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## 14 15 16 Lifting the veil – Methodological deliberations 17

18 *Teaching storylines: snapshots of educators and education* began in early 2020. As  
19 the pandemic materialised and began to spread throughout the globe, it did not take  
20 us long to realise we were standing in the way of an impending educational tsunami  
21 and immediately started requesting participants provide some commentary on the  
22 COVID-19 crisis. At the time of writing this paper, out of the 42 posts we have  
23 uploaded to the Instagram site, *teacherwhispers*, more than half are COVID-19  
24 related.  
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32 The participants were invited to capture, at a point in time, their thoughts, ideas and  
33 aspirations and the themes covered a range of topics related to teaching and  
34 learning. Personal perspectives were sought from the participants on teacher  
35 wellbeing, creativity, agency and autonomy alongside professional considerations of  
36 curriculum, pedagogy, theory and assessment. Whilst the project was  
37 conceptualised before COVID-19, and aimed to map the stories of emerging  
38 educators at a time of unprecedented pedagogical change – it was not expected that  
39 the pedagogical changes the participants would end up focusing upon would turn out  
40 to be pandemic-driven.  
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49 Certainly, even if we had envisaged such a scenario, we could not have speculated  
50 on the wide-reaching ramifications a pandemic would have on many facets of  
51 education. In this regard, we found in hindsight that we were perfectly placed to  
52 provide a lens on how COVID-19 disrupted and changed education through the  
53 inevitable and compelling need for social distancing. In keeping with the focus of the  
54 project, which was to capture preservice and graduate teachers’ views on a variety  
55 of educational issues, as earlier outlined, the participants were not given explicit  
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instructions. There were no set questions that were the same for all. Within the project context of educational issues relevant to preservice and graduate teachers, the participants were left with the open-ended task of commenting on *something* to do with COVID-19 in their teaching during those affected weeks. The range of responses in relation to teaching and learning matters during COVID-19 was eclectic and provided a strong indication about what matters to preservice and graduate teachers during this time of great uncertainty.

Methodology is always in constant evolution and digital technologies increasingly transform and multiply opportunities for research practices in educational domains. The epistemological and ontological new of COVID-19 situates an ever-emerging assemblage of meanings, practices, technologies and contexts. Vicars and Neal (2019, p.4) have noted ‘the production and consumption of texts online is increasingly becoming an open-ended joint construction: a ‘we’ space in which learning involves intra-action of social environment and identities’. As Instagram posts are limited to 2,200 characters (this translates to around 400 words) the site is effectively presenting viewpoints on teaching anonymously in the way that a blog or online diary might (Walker Rettberg 2014; Wolfe 2014). Similar to a blog *teacherwhispers* enacts yet another avatar to think through the methodological material and situational affordances of researching with digital technology.

Each interview usually yielded three or four posts. These were not uploaded sequentially, as they provided a juxtaposition of various perspectives as the participants reflected on the intersections of the professional with the personal. Enacting identities in textual practice(s) and relationships that are socially embedded in larger life practices and discourses necessitates, as Roberts (2005) has suggested, an interrogation of pedagogical approaches that correspond to the social practices of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Some of the participants, indeed, welcomed the opportunity to *unload* and in this paper we pay attention to practices of engagement and relationality as a pedagogical assemblage. Vicars & Neal (2019) have noted how ‘Participation in digital networks is an ever-expanding social phenomenon that has brought together a constellation of previously unimagined communicative [and research] practices’.

We draw upon 'the long history of self-representational writing' (Serfaty 2004, p. 1) to provoke new thinking about learning in and amongst COVID-19 and offer narrations not in an individual sense, rather as a collective. In this paper the teachers represent themselves through whispered conversations that chronicle the Sturm und Drang of contemporary life and educational practice.

One might wonder how a collection of non-sequential posts anchored in the senses and emotions may constitute research data. St Pierre (1997) has called such data transgressive, it is out of category, and does not fit but akin to a literary period invites an evolutionary interpretation of the wider shifting patterns induced by COVID-19. Vasudevan (2011) has suggested 'unknowing' must be central to reading such data and Holbrook & Pourchier (2014, p. 754) reference doubt in a 'chase after the intangible, undefinable and the always escaping assemblages'. It is with this proviso, that we put forward the following participant posts. Of the five selected for this paper, only one was from a preservice teacher. The rest were graduate teachers, some of whom were mature-aged.

### When in doubt? – An associative and emotive rhetoric

In the following, COVID-19 themed posts taken from *teacherwhispers*, cultural interpretations of the process of re-acculturation to the experiences derived from teaching and learning remotely (online) are articulated. These posts were selected for further analysis in this paper because of their emotional impact, and for the way they encapsulated the essence of what was challenging and discomforting about teaching and learning at this point in history.

Emerging from the participants' experiences were a range of insights that frame how the COVID-19 crisis has impacted them, their students and of the institutional, economic and social limitations in how educational domains have responded to mitigate the effects of the pandemic.

Nina, a first year graduate teacher commented how:



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pandemic containment measures such as online learning have been really hard for teachers and for students, but also as a parent. It's really scary for me too because if I have two children at home doing remote learning, and I'm also remotely teaching, I have no idea how I'm supposed to do all of that at the same time. But it's just, like, we've sort of come up with a plan in terms of how we're going to deliver the content. Unfortunately it does not seem equitable. It's only going to serve the students who have access to devices, and Wi-Fi, and whose parents can help them, whose parents are home and can understand what we're delivering. For the students who don't have that... We can send them worksheets, but we're not there to explain it to them. We're not there to help them, we're not there to answer their questions. We have expectations that we'll conference with students for half an hour once a week, and that we will do Running Records via a video link and we'll hold the book up to the camera and the kids will read it. It's hard, because teaching is such a collaborative thing... I'm in a team of fourteen. We have fourteen Foundation classes, so we're a massive team, and not being able to see each other, to bounce things off each other, or to support each other is also really hard too. And this being my first year. Like, I just got used to the way things were, and now they're kind of all like... changed.

[Nina – graduate teacher]

The stress of teaching students remotely foisted upon teachers with little notice, professional development and time to prepare has become the 'new normal' in how educators across all sectors have experienced COVID-19. Teachers' work underwent a dramatic change virtually overnight. It was more dramatic than having to fashion a home office and ensuring their Wi-Fi connection was adequate. Teachers are now expected to administer their services as they did in the classroom but remotely, through an online platform. Nina's post echoes the concerns of other participants that this seemingly do-able task is eminently un-doable. Nina reports being overwhelmed with the enormity of *teaching online* and flags several points of concern in regard to her students' ability to achieve learning outcomes: lack of access to devices, lack of, or inadequate Wi-Fi connection, parents/carers who (for a wide variety of reasons) are not able to assist their children to learn in this way. Nina has identified issues of equity and access that are prominent in other posts.

Brown et al. (2020, pp. 1-2) note that:

many parents and caregivers lack the time needed to support their children's learning. This is occurring irrespective of socio-economic status, with full-time waged and sole-parent waged families reporting difficulties. Further, parents who have lower levels of educational attainment, or have limited capability with technology, face particular challenges in facilitating children's learning at home.

However, Nina's most significant concerns centre on a particular understanding and expression of what constitutes effective pedagogy. She questions how maintaining connection with students can be achieved remotely. She notes teaching is 'such a collaborative thing' in preface to deeper concerns about working in isolation from colleagues. There is a strong sense of the seismic shift that has occurred in Nina's professional world. The playing field has changed, and with it, the rules of engagement.

Mitchell, a first year graduate teacher, works in an inner city school where most of the students come from the nearby high-rise housing commission estate. Despite the school being zoned in the heart of a wealthy, gentrified part of Melbourne, the families in this school community are some of the most vulnerable in the state. Many of the community members are refugees, are not confident with the English language and live in crowded conditions in extended family groupings. This latter fact is not helped by the prevalence of low paid work, under-employment, or unemployment, which is a factor in the community's reliance on the welfare system. These kids are already doing it tough, and their teachers know it.

Teaching online because of COVID-19 isn't feasible at our school. A lot of the families live in the commission flats. High density and large families. Some of the kids in my class have got four or five siblings at the school as well, plus they live with aunts and uncles, so potentially, ten, eleven, twelve people living in a two or three bedroom flat. And then some families don't have devices at home, some don't have internet. If they do have devices, they have to split it between three or four siblings as well. So all the talk about teaching online, there hasn't really been enough talk about families who don't have that access. I've spoken to other friends who are teachers in high

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school, ‘How are you finding if you have to teach online?’ ‘Oh, easy! We already teach the stuff online, we just have to get on Google classroom.’ But for us, even if we sent heaps of worksheets home, 98% of our students are EAL. We send home a worksheet, if they can’t read it, they can’t probably to go a parent or someone who can help them. I’m teaching Grade 5/6s so that’s not that much of an issue. A lot of the kids can read their own stuff. But for the younger kids, it’s different. The teachers in the 1/2 class actually held a fundraiser on GoFundMe last week, which raised \$10,000 because they just wanted to get heaps of puzzles and games for kids to take home because a lot of the kids don’t even have coloured pencils at home.

[Mitchell – graduate teacher]

Before the onset of COVID-19, politicians and policy-makers have argued that these most vulnerable students’ life expectations could be the same (or comparable, at least) as those of other children in more middle class suburbs (Li, Miranti & Vidyattama 2017). Virtually overnight, it became obvious this was not the case. Institutional rhetoric became glaringly unstuck as teachers swooped in and quickly raised money for resources they knew the school budget could not provide, but which they knew were necessary for life in lockdown in small apartments with no outdoor space, and limited if any access to the devices, support and infrastructures necessary for remote (online) learning. Voicing teachers’ realisations and newly-discovered realities for Mitchell and his colleagues meant taking matters into their own hands: side stepping government and departmental inertia and inadequacies by calling out illogical approaches.

Students facing disadvantage face particular barriers to learning around access to materials and resources for learning. Thomas et al. (2019) in the Digital Inclusion Index report found access to the internet amongst economically disadvantaged communities is significant but reliance on traditional materials, resources and support is also problematic – see *Learning at home during Covid-19: Effects on vulnerable young Australians- Independent Rapid Response Report* (Brown et al. 2020). The socio-economic disadvantages faced by some students have been highlighted by the COVID-19 reality as clearly antithetical to equitable learning

outcomes. The institutional rhetoric that the system can provide, transform, guarantee progress for all students, has been revealed as a sham.

The *Review of funding for schooling: final report* (Gonski et al. 2011) revealed the extent of inequity and disadvantage that is present in educational domains. Under the COVID-19 spotlight, an unacceptable reality and an ugly truth that some children will always be left behind has been yet again revealed for a group that Slee (2011) has termed the 'educational Other'. The social and economic disadvantages faced by some students highlighted by the COVID-19 reality move beyond the nuts and bolts of access to curriculum and pedagogical approaches but address a wider ecology of health, wellbeing and provision of basic needs (Conner & Pope 2014). Yasmin, a preservice teacher studying a Bachelor of Education degree at a Melbourne metropolitan university, observed how:

There are a lot of times at school, when kids don't have lunches, and sometimes this is because it's simply not a priority and sometimes it's because families don't have those resources. With COVID-19, what worries me is those children who are at risk. Normally, you have a teacher seeing a child at school, they're present, you know they're ok. You can look for signs of abuse, or trauma or neglect. And as a teacher, you know what to look for, you see the tell-tale signs. When these students are at home for extended periods of time, you don't know what's going on in that house. You don't know if there's abuse, you don't know if there's substance abuse, and I think it's a really risky road for them, for that handful of students that you might have. Especially in regards to food. You don't know if they're getting fed. At school, there'd be programs where lunch is provided. And that might be their only meal for the day, so you're kind of happy to take that. Or it might be the breakfast club in the morning. But when it's not there, that's a little worrying, especially for the students that you know are at risk.

[Yasmin – preservice teacher]

According to Langton & Ma Rhea (2009) poverty is the leading factor for children's low academic performance in socially and culturally disadvantaged communities and Brown et al. (2020) reference respondents from their school-based survey who expressed serious concerns about students' lack of access to food. Economic

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adversity and disadvantage has been noted by the participants as an instrumental factor inhibiting learning during COVID-19. At the time of writing this paper, greater Melbourne has been returned to Stage 3 restrictions, with undefined Stage 4 restrictions being proposed. It is a few days since nine high-rise housing commission estate buildings were placed in total lockdown (residents unable to leave their premises for any reason whatsoever). Initially, school closures and remote learning during the initial COVID-19 lockdown had been planned to extend until the end of Term 2 (26<sup>th</sup> June 2020). Low infection numbers and even lower deaths prompted an early return to school for many students. But more recently, with rapidly soaring infection rates, the announcement of a return to Stage 3 restrictions on July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020 came with notice that the school holidays are to be extended by one week, followed by a likely return to school closures. We will again watch as the already present gap between the haves and the have-nots worsens. The danger is not just limited to reduced learning outcomes. The stakes are much higher than that, as teachers are aware that some students rely on the safety and dependability of school routines, of the importance of students having positive role models and mentors in their lives. Students need their teachers in their world.

In the next post, Riley, a graduate teacher confirms the participants' understandings about their role in students' development, the significant role they play in the teaching and learning process, and how this cannot simply be actioned remotely without dire consequences. The post not only rails against the ineffectiveness of remote learning, but provides a epiphanic crystallisation that education is made up of a finite number of crucial interactions, without which the process will irretrievably break down.

COVID-19 has made me realise how much we actually do in a classroom. It never clicked how much on-the-spot feedback I give in order to guide my students until I was no longer in a classroom doing it. Working from home has been an all-consuming process. Tasks that normally take me 20 minutes, are taking double the time. Giving feedback is no longer talking to someone or marking a page in front of you, it is a series of upload and download processes. I feel that when we go back to school the students will have a newfound appreciation for us, about 20 times more than they did before. I think many will have come to realise how much we actually do, how much

we support, guide and help the processes of understanding. Teaching encompasses a huge range of functions. It's not just teaching content. It's being; supporter, motivator, passion driver, nurse, counsellor... everything. Working from home, your job is expanded. I've had to become a remote IT specialist, YouTube extraordinaire, Google classroom professional, WebPro genius and assistant for the learning enhancement team, as well as teaching my own classes.

[Riley – graduate teacher]

Vibert & Shields, (2003) have noted the significance of macro-level social, economic, cultural and political context within which the school and school community are embedded. Gergen & Dixon-Román (2014) speak of relational processes for understanding student inequality and the unequal distribution of resources. In the final post a teacher's fury as a result of COVID-19 restrictions and school closures is enunciated. It is a cry for help, a shrieking of pain and distress.

Here we see a virtual embodiment of the elements of Sturm und Drang: a cry against a destructive force. The Sturm und Drang movement, characterised by stress, unease and rebellion, was represented by and was evident in Franz Schubert's musical rendition of Johann Wolfgang van Goethe's poem, *Erkönig*. The poem relates the story of a boy, riding home through the forest on horseback with his father when the Elf King (an evil, spirit-like being) appears and insistently tries to lure him away. The Elf King makes many promises to the boy: games on a flower-laden beach, golden clothes, the Elf King's own daughters waiting upon him, singing and dancing for him, rocking him to sleep. The boy's father desperately tries to warn his son not to yield to the Elf King's promises, to not believe his lies, but the Elf King's will proves overpowering. The boy believes the false promises, and surrenders his life to the Elf King. Despite the father's frenetic dash home, trying beyond his strength to outrun the Elf King, there is grief at the end as he realises upon arriving that his son's body is lifeless. Goethe's words are highly emotive, and provide powerful lyrics to Schubert's frenzied musical rendition of the poem; a veritable embodiment of the stress and turmoil of Sturm und Drang. The educational consequences of remote learning as a result of COVID-19 are no less tumultuous for many students.



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The Elf King’s rhetoric was based upon lies. The promised enticements were nothing but a game of entrapment. Like the Elf King, politicians, policy-makers, administrators and bureaucrats (the education establishment) have presented a view of remote learning that has turned out to be a fantasy for those who are most vulnerable. Likewise, the most vulnerable students have been sold possibilities that will not materialise. No matter how well-meaning the teacher, how gifted in their pedagogy, the outlook is grim and educators are realising through the COVID-19 realities that social distancing is not just about location, it is about loss of connection. School lockdowns prompted by the COVID-19 crisis have highlighted this loss.

This COVID-19 and remote Learning/Teaching has brought out an ugly side to teaching, at least, from a localised level, it has. I know these are uncharted waters, and there's no precedent to follow. Things are changing weekly and the DET are constantly coming up with new protocols. There is still a lot of uncertainty. When this all began, whilst we really received no formal direction and very few of us actually knew what to do, personally, I felt at ease, because I have always felt supported at my school. One of the best things about my little, disadvantaged, low-socioeconomic, high EAL school is that all staff, teaching and non-teaching, are extremely supportive of one another. We are all facing the same battle with our students - no one is alone. No one is isolated. Until COVID-19 and remote learning came about. Now, it's clear that many of my colleagues have very little regard for anyone but themselves. Gone is the mindset "one in, all in" or "we're all in this together". No. Gone is the notion of equality for all students...gone is the underlying principle that "no one is left behind". Being a low-socioeconomic school, many of our students do not have access to technology. And yes, our Federal Government went and made the extraordinary statement that laptops and internet will be provided to those most in need. But what the Federal Government didn't realise is that this just can't happen overnight. The laptops that we have at school are configured to be used at our school. We are a small school...our ICT guy comes in once a week! Bottom line...it's taken us until the beginning of Week 4 to have the majority of our students at least set up with a device. Internet was another issue...we just could not source any dongles or modems! There is none available. Apparently, teachers care about their students and have their best interests at heart. This is clearly an

absolute joke. What COVID-19 and remote learning has illustrated in our beautiful little school is that we have been deluded in believing we are a team....that we are supportive...that we are collegiate. Those of us who have only ever cared about our students having equal access have been seen to be "blockers". The very worst thing about all of this is that for the students in my class who have younger siblings, who have teachers who have gone full bolt with a Google Classroom, it has created a "fear of missing out" (FOMO) for them. Would you believe that teachers activated their Google Classroom knowing full well that there were students who would not be able to access it? Some of these students have siblings either in the same year level or older. Those students' teachers spent a couple of days "putting out fires" with parents of siblings calling and asking for their code, when nobody should have had Google Classroom up and running. The approach has also been inconsistent amongst different classes. Some teachers are video-conferencing with their students when most others are not. It has been a DET directive that we use Webex for such purposes. These teachers are clearly disregarding this as our students are not yet set up on Webex. Video conferencing might begin to take place in week 5, once everyone has had a chance to adapt to Google Classroom. One of my students has a sibling in one of these teachers' classes. I have received numerous messages from the parent, underhandedly pressuring me to do the same.

[Greta – graduate teacher]

Greta's perspective is clearly one in which unease and distress at seeing the disadvantage of certain students becoming further entrenched is articulated through a rebellion against the imposition of operations, processes and standards that do not meet students' and teachers' needs. Disconnection and conflict – a blow to an educators' core beliefs – is eminently at play here. For some teachers, collegiality ends in the presence of changed conditions and personal ambition (Löfgren & Karlsson 2016) whilst politicians and the various Departments of Education across Australia over-simplified the complexity of the task. The Victorian Education Department website offers advice about operating under COVID-19 to schools (Government 2020) but this advice does not address directly the day-to-day reality of remote learning. Greta's account of departmental and leadership guidance to teachers at this fraught time seems as useful, or indeed, as infuriating to teachers,



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as a virtual pat on the head. When framing how the current COVID-19 crisis has impacted on teaching and learning, *teacherwhispers* has shone a light on previously hidden realities of the wider educational landscape. By providing a forum for teachers to express themselves without fear of reprisal the insights derived from the participants were remarkably alike in terms of what generated stress and discomfort for them in their teaching work. The relatively sudden onset of COVID-19 has meant that the ground has literally shifted under the community’s feet, altering ways of socialising, exercising, studying and conducting the mundane tasks of everyday life in dramatic and unforeseen ways.

Reflections

The critical tradition of reading the world developed from the Frankfurt school in the early 1900s was based on the view that ‘the world was in urgent need of reinterpretation’ (Kincheloe & McLaren 2000, p. 279). Contemporary qualitative inquiries have increasingly demanded an expanded imaginary that moves beyond the individualistic to the systemic (Weis, Fine & Dimitriadis 2009). The participants’ posts in *teacherwhispers* reference how curriculum and pedagogy can be read as the significant structures within schools through which access to educational opportunity are materialised. They also point to the salience of interrogating the taken-for-granted, dominant cultural and structural forces that conceal the inequity inflicted on marginalised people (Kincheloe & McLaren 2000). COVID-19 has produced a discourse in which there are no neutral, objective, positivist perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). Responses to the pandemic range far and wide and are situating ‘both researcher and participant [as] being positioned by virtue of history and context’ (Olesen 2005, p. 248) with/in a dystopian imaginary as a methodological endeavour.

It goes without saying that the social phenomenon of COVID-19, is embedded within wider sociological relations of power and is increasingly to be understood to involve a complex web of relations across multiple domains and discourses: cultural, social, economic, political, linguistic and medical. Taking into consideration these wider relations of power and practice, Teese & Polesel (2003) have argued how the quotidian operations of schools ‘acquire meaning only once their implicit references

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3 to the broader culture and structures within which schools work are made explicit' (p.  
4 187). COVID-19 has achieved much of what many have previously tried and failed:  
5 'the unending project of social transformation' (Giroux 2012, p. n.). However, despite  
6 appearances to the contrary, the pandemic has not been the great leveller it was at  
7 first thought. The epistemic and ontological dissonance has been most keenly felt  
8 and expressed by individuals and communities at the pointy end of raced, classed,  
9 gendered, and ableist discourses.  
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