Memories of the future: educational concepts in the shadow of a pandemic year

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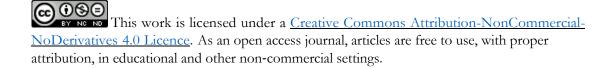
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Abstract

In June 2021, just after England had entered a fresh national lockdown, Liverpool John Moore University's Teaching and Learning Conference (on the theme 'Transition to Transformation') was hosted entirely online for the very first time. This paper was produced as a conference resource to offer a reflection on the pandemic year, 2020/21. Its aim was to encourage delegates to consider ten educational concepts (Bildung, critical social theory, epistemology, colonialism, identity, diversity, care, friendships, creativity and performativity) in the context of key national and international developments of the pandemic year, including the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, USA.

Keywords
educational concepts; practice; transition; transformation; critical reflection

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Memories of the future

In the dark times
Will there be singing?
There will be singing
Of the dark times.

    Berthold Brecht (1938) – *Svendborg Poems*

Over the past 18 months new routines have been thrust upon us. In the UK, during the early weeks of a nationwide lockdown (March-April 2020), city centres like Liverpool were eerily quiet. As restaurants and takeaways remained shut, cooking at home and local shopping – whilst masked and socially distanced – were key features of the collective experience. In a world turned upside down, office desks supplanted dining tables and, in many households, schoolrooms were fashioned from bedrooms. We appeared to connect with neighbours in a different way, perhaps joining them during the ritualised applause to support NHS staff, key workers and other volunteers. Catching up on reading, binging on Netflix, taking up new hobbies (especially sourdough making) appeared to be regular pursuits. However, for many frontline teaching staff, lockdown came as a jolt and, barely able to catch any breath, all had to adapt quickly to online practice and forge a very different relationship with their students.

Looking out in the communities and beyond, experiences were far from universal, for not everyone was inclined to making artisanal bread. The pandemic exposed spatial, care-related and social inequalities and, as we learned very quickly, COVID-19-related deaths were not randomly distributed. Many were confined to very small patches, faced by day-to-day canvases that were significantly reduced or withdrawn. Human feelings seep into a place; we infect them, leaving behind ghosts of ourselves, "haunted by fear, boredom and paranoia" (Krastev, 2020: 2). It is what deconstructionist theorist Jacques Derrida (2006) described as 'hauntology' (a portmanteau of 'haunting' and 'ontology' [or being]) for, in confinement, such trace memories can exert a certain melancholy. To support this assertion, in the early weeks of the first lockdown in Ontario, Canada, psychiatrist Madhulika Gupta (2020) reported the re-emergence of disturbing dreams and nightmares among 16 of her 20 patients whose post-traumatic stress disorder was previously in remission.

Spectres of the past cast a malevolent shadow following the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota and, thus, the pandemic year came to be identified with another invidious societal virus. Nine minutes and 29 seconds of a viral video sent a chilling reminder to American society (if anyone really needed reminding) that antebellum attitudes to blackness/Blackness and caste were as dominant as ever. George Floyd's desolate and final cry for his mother reached out to a wider humanity and the shockwaves were palpable in many other parts of the world. London, Paris, Brussels, Berlin and Copenhagen were just a few of the European capital cities where crowds marched in solidarity to condemn racism and/or drawing attention to a colonial past. In Bristol, Black Lives Matter (BLM) activists' forceful toppling of the Grade II categorised bronze statue of Edward Colston set in motion an urgent desire to piece things together again, albeit very

differently; confronting the past, asking new or uncomfortable questions. As the statue was unceremoniously rolled into Bristol Harbour, was this a point of navigation towards the 'right side of history'?

The killing of George Floyd touched all levels of society and several institutions reacted to this event. LJMU Vice-Chancellor, Professor Ian Campbell, posted the following on the university's website:

> *Black lives matter shouldn't just be a campaign. It's outrageous that we exist in a world where social and economic injustice is prevalent because of the colour of your skin. So what can we do apart from march and protest against racism? What can we do alongside our black students and staff here, now and in the future?*

> *We can and will call it out. Racism is not welcome here. We respect everyone at LJMU. Together, we will reach out further to embrace the black community in Liverpool and beyond. LJMU is part of your story and we will help all of our BAME [black, Asian and minority ethnic] students and staff to achieve their full potential. We see you and we stand shoulder to shoulder with you.*

> *If you don't think this is serious, I really don't think this is the right university for you.*

Adopting a defiant act, most notably demonstrated by NFL star Colin Kaepernick, the taking of the knee by footballers in the English professional game – as a gesture to condemn racism and other prejudices – accompanied by noticeable jeering of that act by some fans when first allowed back into stadiums, tells us there are many difficult conversations to be brokered. It is further reminder that, as arenas of 'cultural democracy' (DuBois, 1941a; 1941b), universities should equip learners (and staff) with the insights needed to be informed citizens in a fractured world (Housee, 2018).

Perhaps, an 'outbreak narrative' needs to come to the fore? Writing about a different coronavirus challenge (the severe acute respiratory syndrome [SARS] that first surfaced in China's Guangdong Province in November 2002 and then, in March 2013, subject to a global alert called by the World Health Organisation), professor of English and women's studies, Priscilla Wald (2008) depicted an outbreak narrative as one that follows a formulaic plot. Viruses begin, Wald opined, with the identification of an emerging infection, followed by discussion in the global networks throughout which it travels, resulting in a chronicling of the epidemiological work that ends with containment of a virus. Perhaps, like epidemiologists, we could begin by tracing the routes of the microbes, cataloguing the spaces and interactions, "animating the landscape and motivate the plot of the outbreak narrative" (Wald, 2008: 2)? Whilst the pandemic presented us a chance to observe our domains more clearly for a moment, lockdown meant different things to different people; narratives therefore require careful coaxing. An outbreak narrative may linger on the several fault lines to be found with existing arrangements (not all immediately insurmountable), provoking thoughts and responses that were once previously unspoken, reminding us that 'all that is solid melts into air' (Žižek, 2020).

Writing in the aftermath of the Second World War, historian R.C. Mowat (1951) surmised that the world was constantly on the brink of catastrophe but, with this

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spectre of upheaval, it would help if the global community came to some kind of arrangement with it: "To live with catastrophe we must face it, not try to evade it. Then we will find the purpose of catastrophe – to make us change" (p. 7). Echoes of this thought were captured in the very early critiques of the global community's response and assumed legacy of the pandemic (Maxton and Maxton-Lee, 2021). However, the pandemic crisis is very different from anything our generation (i.e. in the Western world at least) had ever experienced and different from what the majority ever imagined experiencing. Reflecting on the poet Joseph Brodsky's depiction of a prisoner's life ('a shortage of space made up by a surplus of time'), political scientist Ivan Krastev (2020) asserted that we would remember the pandemic "as a kind of mass hallucination" (p. 3). A UK study found, in the early weeks of lockdown, that news on the spread of COVID-19 accentuated the impact of fear of the disease, resulting in paranoia and hallucinations and, incidentally, students were identified to be among the most vulnerable to paranoia and hallucinations (Lopes et al., 2020).

Krastev noted too that the "great epidemics" tend to surprise us, even though they are relatively regular occurrences of life but, in a similar fashion to wars and revolutions, they can act as a departure point from which to reset the world (cf. Maxton and Maxton-Lee, 2021). Nevertheless, in spite of this 'grey swan event', pandemics rarely make a stamp on our consciousness or are chronicled in the same way as wars or revolutions (where enemies are easily seen and felt – and are not hallucinations) (Krastev, 2020).

To reset our world, to embellish the outbreak narrative, it may be useful to

chronicle the "contradictory but compelling story of the perils of human interdependence and the triumph of human connection and cooperation" (Wald, 2008: 2), and a window of opportunity has opened to leverage the very best of the present into a future that works for all. It is a future that could centre on care, collaboration, creativity, innovation or sustainability; or, alternatively/additionally, shared development, shared responsibility, shared vision and a shared culture. However we label that transformation and move forward is dependent on several factors, but maybe we should start by looking within ourselves?

Concepts

As practitioners, we are familiar with many educational concepts which are the foundational basis of our thoughts and beliefs. Concepts can be relatively tricky to navigate because our understanding and interpretation of them is mediated, not just by our disciplinary backgrounds but, by our personality, political stance or identity. It may take several years before we are able to fully comprehend how the pandemic has affected our thinking but, for the moment, it is likely that the concepts we have encountered have a somewhat different resonance about them. In some cases, these concepts may be clearer or have greater purpose in our practice; in others, they may have been shrouded by a dense, impenetrable fog. As essentially dynamic entities, educational concepts are constantly evolving and, in offering an alternate and radical frame of reference, it is highly probable that the pandemic year has short-circuited or laid bare the workings underlying some of these shifts.

What follows are short descriptions of ten educational concepts drawn from a significantly longer list from Trotman et al. (2018). It is not an exhaustive list and

you may wish to add other concepts or refine the questions, some have been adapted from Trotman et al. or, in the case of 'identity', from Setiya (2020). A few seminal texts and references are supplied alongside each educational concept.

Bildung

At the 2015 LJMU Teaching and Learning Conference, Professor Ron Barnett presented a keynote on the event's theme, 'Supporting Transition: Exploring Pathways of Success.' Central to the presentation were recognitions of 'being' and the state of 'becoming' in university and into an uncertain world (cf. Barnett, 2004). *Bildung*, a process of becoming through education, is an ontological turn that emerged from German philosophical thought (cf. Wilhelm von Humboldt, 1767-1835) (Biesta, 2002). Rather than focus on the acquisition of a particular skill, *Bildung* encourages a deeper, cultural and spiritual development through self-reflection. Therefore, *Bildung* might be presented as a response to the technocratic or market-driven forces of higher education, and towards the enhancement of an orientation to citizenship with particular emphases on self-determination, freedom and emancipation.

Which aspects of *Bildung* were evident in your practice or experience before and during the pandemic? How might these change or be strengthened? How have you grown as a teacher, or your students as learners? Which aspects of *Bildung* might be problematic or difficult to negotiate when 'normality' resumes? Is it possible to know when *Bildung* might be purposeful and, if so, what might be your indicators of success?

Barnett, R. (2004) 'Learning for an unknown future', *Higher Education Research & Development,* 23 (3): 247-260

Biesta, G. (2002) '*Bildung* and modernity: the future of *Bildung* in a world of difference', *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 21 (4-5): 343-351

Critical social theory

Approximately a year after universities went into lockdown, the UK government released a policy paper outlining how they would 'build back better' (HM Treasury, 2021). The paper stressed the importance of investment in infrastructure, skills and innovation, whilst also citing a need 'to unite' [the country] and 'to level up'. Encased in this new language, how might we reflect critically on the things that need rebuilding? Jürgen Habermas (1986; 1989) championed a belief in "undistorted" communication as a basis for both political action and knowledge, leading to a theory of communicative action which was regarded as crucial to the progress of modern society. Habermas also warned how democratic ideals (the "lifeworld" – the imbedded background comprising shared understanding and communication, thus imbuing meaning, purpose and cohesion) implicit in communicative interaction could be undermined by economic and administrative tendencies within modern society.

How has lockdown enabled you to recognise more fully the structures that exist in wider society that limit particular groups' opportunities and/or achievement? How might these relate to your practice, intentional or otherwise?

Habermas, J. (1986) *Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalisation of Society* (Volume 1), Cambridge: Polity

Habermas, J. (1989) *Theory of Communicative Action: The Critique of Functionist Reason* (Volume 2), Cambridge: Polity

Epistemology

The decisions taken by Westminster to order a mass lockdown in March 2020 (and later in the year) and to delay full reopening until July 2021 were, as the public was assured, 'informed by the science'. Daily briefings led by Public Health England and media coverage on the '*r* number' may have contributed to an awareness of mathematical knowledge, but how had the pandemic tilted the *order* of that knowledge (the epistemology) that we live within? Unconscious sets of assumption defining what constitutes knowledge were presented differently in alternate spheres of life during the pandemic. Thus, whilst there may have been transparency in the techniques for the production of knowledge for advisory bodies like SAGE (Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies), why had there been less certainty about the sense made of that knowledge and/or its implications to society, the economy etc.? Knowledge on the efficacy of mask wearing, social distancing, the application or dosage of vaccines (and their side effects), as reported by different media (including the occasionally prosaic/sometimes toxic social media), may have felt nested like Russian dolls – fact enclosed by fiction, and then fact, and then fiction, and so on. Applying a global and ideological lens, philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2021) noted that both the 'libertarian Rightists' (US) and 'Leftist groups' (Germany) vehemently opposed lockdown, criticising medical knowledge as a tool for disciplining people or treating them as helpless victims. Thus, this propensity to ignore particular sets of data and ('non-fake') evidence seemed to underline Matthias Gross's (2010) assertion that, "new

knowledge also means more ignorance" (p. 1).

> Has the pandemic privileged a deeper understanding of (or complicated the nature of) knowledge and its status? What different types of knowledge have you observed? Have you derived an idea of the role of knowledge in contemporary social settings (including the university)? How has your idea of the production of knowledge mutated and, if so, what have been the driving forces behind such changes?

Feyerabend, P. (2010) *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge* (Fourth Edition), London: Verso

Kuhn, T. (1970) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press

Colonialism

When artist Mark Quinn's resin statue ('A Surge of Power') of BLM activist Jen Reid was erected on a plinth where the slave trader Edward Colston (1636-1721) had stood since 1895, Reid herself endorsed this act, "This sculpture is about making a stand, for my mother, for my daughter and me". The figure's clenched fist and raised arm radiated a power. Both statues told a story and were reflective of the way in which meaning within a place evolves and is socially situated (Olusoga, 8 June 2020). In an opinion piece for *The Atlantic*, Deirdre Mask (22 July 2020) observed that there were those within the BLM movement beginning to decry the renaming of street names or spaces (such as the Black Lives Matter Plaza in Washington, DC) as 'mere performative acts'. The events in Bristol in June 2020, including the desecration of a 1987 statue of Alfred Fagon (1937-1986, a black Bristolian playwright of Jamaican decent), were reminders that the UK was

not inhabiting a *post*-colonial world. The colonial and the postcolonial are intertwined, with ongoing dependency between the margins and the centre (hooks, 1984), with neo-colonial or postcolonial retaining (whether cast in bronze or in resin) the marks of colonial dynamics and identity (Sartre, 2006; Trotman et al., 2018).

> To what extent does colonialism shape your identity in the university and/or that of your community in Liverpool? Do the colonial legacies of Liverpool only impact on BAME (black, Asian and minority ethnic) students and staff? How might you critique the globalisation of education from the perspective of colonialism?

hooks, b. (1984) *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, Boston, MA: South End Press

Sartre, J-P. (2006) *Colonialism and Neocolonialism* (Translated by Haddour, A., Brewer, S. and McWilliams, T.), London: Routledge

Identity
Class, ethnicity, ableism and gender (and their intersectionality) have been particularly highlighted in higher education, and views on identity have increasingly depicted it as variegated, patchwork and complex (du Gay et al., 2000). During the pandemic year, another identity came under the spotlight. In a *New Statesman* column piece, MIT professor of philosophy Kieran Setiya (7 May 2020) examined personal identity in its broadest sense, as universities pivoted towards full online delivery of teaching. Whilst some may have been convinced that, with a distant and dislocated online experience, one could be in any place at most times, this disembodied existence could never be truly whole. Setiya observed that the corporeal identity was evident in the experience of isolation, "we cannot feel each

other's breath or movement, we cannot look at the same object in our surroundings, we cannot sense each other's warmth, we cannot touch" (ibid.). Setiya advised that there be an appreciation of ourselves as embodied beings, rather than as 'streams of consciousness': "when we communicate through our screens, we feel the absence of others" (ibid.).

> To what extent has online interaction met emotional needs? What do you think happened to personal identity as we interfaced with others as avatars rather than beings in a physical space? How did we embrace our disembodied selves, and/or what led others to recoil from it?

du Gay, P., Evans, J. and Redman, P. (Eds.) (2000) *Identity: A Reader*, London: Sage

Setiya, K. (7 May 2020) 'What the pandemic tells us about personal identity', *New Statesman,* retrieved from: https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2020/05/lockdown-physical-digital-communication-alienation-loneliness-philosophy (accessed June 2020)

Diversity
Following the BLM protests in summer 2020, columnist Matthew Syed featured in several interviews, arguing in favour of '*cognitive* diversity'. Syed (2019) had posited that many EDI (equality, diversity, inclusivity) practices were prone to failure because they are predominantly focused on simple awareness raising. Diversity is often applied with 'equality' but, whilst the latter stresses the importance of ensuring equity, diversity recognises the individual as well as group differences, *and placing positive value on these differences*. For Syed, diversity equals 'diverse thinking' – a channelling of different perspectives, opinions, backgrounds and experiences – but leaders

of organisations often fail to recognise this in relation to decision making or in creativity. Fundamental to Syed's stance is a recognition of where or who wields power, and how those power imbalances impact on institutional thinking. This is somewhat complicated in a university setting long characterised as tribal in its make-up and where 'standardisation' is viewed as the goal. In this scenario, power is transferred from academics to managers, where the 'bottom line' eclipses pedagogical and intellectual concerns (Berg and Seeber, 2017). Holligan and Humes (2007) go a step further and, in an indictment on the nature and context of applied research in education in the UK, strongly assert that the integrity of knowledge is being corrupted through an engagement with – and capture by – particular academic and non-academic tribes. These tribes may have political interests that lie beyond academia in the economic and political spheres and, therefore, "pose threats to objectivity and independence" (p. 24). To promote unity - in the context of pluralistic values - requires honesty and transparency as well as an effective (and just) application of safeguards to ensure that diversity is valued: it is a reminder that diversity is a fact, but inclusion is a choice.

> Which areas of the university do you think diversity has most impact on and how? What areas of diversity within the university do you think require refinement and/or significant improvement? Who are best placed to influence policies on diversity?

Syed, M. (2019) *Rebel Ideas: The Power of Diverse Thinking*, London: John Murray

Care

As the sector entered lockdown, Universities UK (UUK) – the representative body for most of the UK's universities – launched its #WeAreTogether campaign. How institutions supported their local communities, especially in relation to care and wellbeing, was a significant feature of the campaign (UUK, 2020). When normality resumes, many will confront a new reality and how we care for one another becomes ever more salient. In other words, what happens when the communal swell of support dampens? As immediate and future economic realities hit, a commitment to one another becomes more important than ever. As an alternate to the market-driven institution, might it be helpful to examine our practice through the lens of wellbeing (Hughes and Spanner, 2018) – and/or to evolve as 'a therapeutic university'? Drawing on the works of Martin Heidegger (1927 [1962]) and Nel Noddings (2005), Barnacle and Dall'Alba (2017) conceptualised how care could inform a framework of student engagement that resists performativity and neoliberalist values. They argue that a capacity and commitment to care is a mark of personhood but, by broadening student engagement (i.e. beyond collaborative learning), posit that an appreciation of care would encourage students to take a stand on what they were learning and who they were becoming.

> How might you define care? Has your sense of care altered during the pandemic? How might curriculum planning and practice consider care? How might this be informed?

Barnacle, R. and Dall'Alba, G. (2017) 'Committed to learn: student engagement and care in higher education', *Higher Education Research & Development*, 36 (7): 1326-1338, DOI: 10.1080/07294360.2017.1326879

Heidegger, M. (1927 [1962]) *Being and Time,* (Translated by Macquarrie, J. and Robinson, E.). Oxford: Blackwell

Hughes, G. and Spanner, L. (2018) *The University Mental Health Charter*, Leeds: Student Minds

Noddings, N. (2005) *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education* (Second Edition), New York: Teachers College Press

Friendships (peer to peer support)

Sociologists such as Anthony Giddens (1992) developed frameworks for conceptualising friendships. Relationships are critical to emotional wellbeing and Giddens identified 'pure friendship' as one emphasising: openness, disclosure, emotional communication, active trust and (disclosure of) intimacy. Giddens also noted that friendships are maintained only for as long as it satisfies the needs of the persons involved. Zygmunt Bauman (2003) asserted that postmodernity had pivoted friendships towards 'networks', offering a matrix enabling simultaneous connection and disconnection – "connections are entered on demand and can be broken at will" (p. xi). In spite of the 'support bubbles', social distancing has meant that friendships and relationships have been under considerable strain, especially when restrictions have been applied (such as 'the rule of six'). In a small-scale qualitative study, Rachel Brooks (2007) discovered how friendships emerge in university and the effect of this in both academic and social arenas. Brooks found significant transformation in the quality of friendships when students reflected on their previous school/college experiences (e.g. more mature, 'serious', equal friendships). Friendships cultivated in non-academic arenas (e.g. in clubs and societies, halls of residence) were found to offer greater

emotional support and 'social learning', resulting in greater confidence, resilience and self-reliance.

> Why do friendships (student-student) matter and what have we learned about this during the pandemic and its effects on your practice? To what extent has the use of technology during the pandemic impacted on students' interpersonal skills?

Bauman, Z. (2003) *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*, Cambridge: Polity

Brooks, R. (2007) 'Friends, peers and higher education', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 28 (6): 693-707

Giddens, A. (1992) *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*, Cambridge: Polity

Creativity

Honorary fellow of LJMU, the late Sir Ken Robinson (1950-2020), was a passionate advocate for creativity and, in his famous 2006 TED Talk, argued that creativity in schools is as important as literacy. How do we nurture creativity? What lessons from the pandemic might we be mindful not to forget? The global pandemic has shed light on the roles of experts, interdisciplinary collaboration and ingenuity when normal resources have been restricted – creativity and innovation have been the by-products. The sudden lurch to online teaching meant that we all had to adapt. Experimentation, risk-taking, problem-solving, imaginative or divergent thinking, innovation and originality are all associated with creativity. Perhaps, these new experiences can alter how we consider sectoral guidance that is allied to creativity, such as Advance HE's (2019) framework for enterprise and entrepreneurship? Csikszentmihalyi (1996) cautioned that creativity will be subject to

different emphases depending on the particular orientation a person has to it. Thus, an enterprising perspective may stress innovation and risk-taking; a person-oriented perspective might be concerned with creativity as a process.

> How has the pandemic illuminated the interplay, if any, between creativity as an outcome (e.g. something that can be assessed) and/or as a process (self-fulfilment, motivation etc.)?

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1996) *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention,* London: HarperCollins

Robinson, K. (2006) 'Do schools kill creativity?' TED Talks [transcript], retrieved from:
https://www.ted.com/talks/sir_ken_robinson_do_schools_kill_creativity/transcript
(accessed June 2021)

Performativity

In August 2020, thousands of pupils in England had their A-level results downgraded and blame was apportioned to a 'mutant algorithm'. Following outcry, the results were scrapped and grades by teachers (thereby giving students the benefit of any doubt) took precedent over machine decisions (which were biased towards not giving students the benefit of any doubt). Successive governments have been concerned with grade inflation and algorithms have been thought to help reduce this. In a macro-societal pursuit of efficiency and outcomes, Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984) contended that performativity is both a 'culture' and 'technology' in which regulation serves to drive performance against generalised standards. However, there are ethical concerns (especially in relation to social mobility or in 'levelling up') when applying a

narrow and bureaucratic process to precisely gauge the performance of, for instance, student progression and attainment.

> In what ways and in what areas might performativity be considered 'a good thing'? What aspects of performativity should we be most concerned about? What makes performativity powerful as an agent of accountability? In what ways might performativity be positively addressed?

Lyotard, J-F. (1984) *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Translated by Bennington, G. and Massumi, B.), Manchester: Manchester University Press

Coda

The masks we have worn became an emblem for 2020/21 and may, as etiquette evolves, continue to be markers of responsible citizenship. Additionally, a new vocabulary – 'a patois of the pandemic' (cf. 'social distancing', 'rapid lateral flow test', 'variants of concern') - may continue to linger as we strive to live with COVID-19. In an academic year when time seemed to collapse in on itself, when days were sometimes hard to tell apart, when weeks seemed to merge, when we speculated if life would return to normal (and what that normal would look like) in a few weeks and then months, our sense of the world may have changed in ways we have yet to fathom. In time, our minds will gradually settle, feelings will start to resolve and a different perspective on the pandemic year will emerge. Documentary filmmaker Adam Curtis's six-part series for the BBC, 'Can't Get You Out of My Head: An Emotional History of the World' (first aired in February 2021) reflected on the self in turbulent times – '*what we feel* is the guiding force most follow'. To explain the idea of the self in times of crisis and uncertainty, Curtis attempted to explore people's thinking -

telling stories about people - rather than the events that have happened in society. This seems like a helpful reference point for an outbreak narrative. But what of the conditions to give clarity to these feelings? Before lockdown, we lived life in the fast lane and this cult of speed also seemed to be engulfing higher education (Berg and Seeber, 2016). It was a cult that seeped into other parts of our lives, obscuring any compensations elicited by being slow and deliberate (Mistry, 2019). Speed, it appeared, had heightened the risk of neglecting life's significant gifts.

As we emerge from the pandemic year several plans and strategies will be presented in the hope of 'building back better'. The problem with such exhortations is that, in organisational terms, they are directed by those at the very apex of a triangle and may not align with the deeper feelings that have accumulated over several difficult months. Perhaps what is needed is a manifesto rather than plans and, relative to the rhythm and speed we have grown accustomed to, something on the lines of the Slow Food movement's education manifesto seems like a sensible – and relatable – point of reference. (The Slow Food movement began in 1986 – initially, to protest against the opening of a McDonald's restaurant at a prominent cultural site in Rome. Now established in several countries, the movement promotes the pleasure of good food with a commitment to community and the environment.)

(A manifesto) Education for slow food:
o Is about **pleasure**, a light and convivial occasion to feel good and enjoy ourselves;
o Teaches the values of **slowness** and respect for our own and other people's rhythms;
o Is learning by doing, because hands-on **experience** increases and strengthens educational outcomes;
o Values the **diversity** of cultures, knowledge, skills and opinions;
o Recognises everyone's needs, and stimulates the interests and **motivation** of each individual;
o Approaches topics in their **complexity**, favouring a multi-disciplinary approach;
o Means taking **time** to understand, internalise and elaborate one's own vision;
o Encourages **participation** by facilitating dialogue, self-expression, **cooperation**, listening and mutual acceptance;
o Is a personal journey that involves **cognitive, experiential** and **emotional** dimensions;
o Is nourished by its own **context**, giving value to memory, knowledge and local cultures;
o Facilitates exchange among local networks, reinforcing the sense of **community**;
o Develops **self-awareness** of everyone's own role and actions;
o Stimulates **curiosity** and trains intuition and **critical thinking**; and
o Promotes **change** generating new and responsible thoughts and behaviours.

Slow Food Italia – 7th National Congress, 2010 (note: emphasis in original)

In our collective learning, we have discovered hidden pathways through our emotions which may have been obscured by the tangle of everyday life. COVID-19 has

been a rude awakening to all and revealed, even with the most meticulous planning, how fragile and elusive the future can be.

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