

Introducing the COVID-19 Special Issue: Indigenous academics' resilience during the coronavirus pandemic

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Indigenous peoples have routinely proven their resilience in the face of diverse challenges. Coronavirus is one of the most unsettling challenges we face as it sweeps the globe with devastating consequences for individuals, families, and communities. The current pandemic reignites painful memories of Indigenous peoples' encounters with infectious disease brought by colonisation and the resultant legacy of devastation. We are not strangers to the impacts on economic, governance, education, welfare, and cultural fronts. Despite the magnitude of this challenge, Indigenous academics are rising to the call in innovative ways – proving once again the creativity, strength, and resilience of Indigenous peoples.

The first twelve months of the coronavirus pandemic saw unsurpassed innovation, reflection, and adaptation by Indigenous academics across the globe. Digital technology proved invaluable in maintaining and establishing connections among academics, students, and community members. In many cases, and as outlined by many authors in this issue, new opportunities for collaboration, support giving, and community building emerged somewhat serendipitously from our shift to socially distanced digitally mediated communication.

This special issue arose from observations of Indigenous academics' enthusiasm in embracing digital technology and establishing new modes of connectivity quickly and efficiently. We observed that Indigenous academics, students, and community members connected to higher education were quick off the mark in ways specific to their individual roles and backgrounds. As such this special issue consists of papers from three thematic streams related to Indigenous higher education: education, teaching, and studentship; theoretically engaged scholarship; and community, reflective, and creative.

The education, teaching, and studentship theme saw papers reflecting on the important work being done by Indigenous and non-Indigenous lecturers and student support networks across higher education institutions in Australia, Aotearoa, and North America. The pandemic had a significant impact on these individuals and groups who normally rely upon face-to-face close contact with students and communities.

Two papers addressed issues faced by Indigenous Student Support Units on campuses on both sides of the Australian continent. Tamika Worrell and Leanne Holt identified specific hurdles faced by Indigenous communities as they are increasingly asked to participate in a digital economy. They offer

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a culturally appropriate, three phase approach to ensuring the success of Indigenous student support services during the COVID pandemic. Braden Hill, Keneasha Lindsay, Tracey Taraia, Grantley Winmar, Ashah Wright, Tilly Casey, Chanelle van den Berg and Rosey Feehon added to this analysis, outlining the innovations of an Indigenous Student Support Unit and the enthusiastic continued engagement by Indigenous students.

Other contributors focused their attention on pedagogical impacts of the COVID pandemic across the globe. Aiono Manu Fa'aea, Sonia M. Fonua, Cherie Chu-Fuluifaga, and Janice Ikiua-Pasi draw on their own individual experiences of relationship building during the pandemic to offer a critique of conservative neo-liberal approaches to higher education and pedagogy which appear to fall short in their efforts to build relationships that are relevant from *Moana*/Pacific ontology. Alex Wilson too, reflected on their experiences in Saskatchewan, Canada of encouraging students to critically reflect on their own pedagogical practises through a queer Indigenous lens. Alex Wilson highlights the successes that were achieved through collaboration across vast geographies. Also, with a focus on Canada, Erica Neeganagwedgin follows with their own examination of pedagogical impacts of the COVID pandemic for Indigenous scholars. They highlight the opportunities for Indigenous peoples to enact sovereignty through innovative approaches to digital technologies.

Many submissions in this section reflected on the impact of the COVID pandemic on research collaborations in academia. Beth Madsen, Llewellyn Williams, Mitchell Rom, Ren Perkins, Sasha Purcell, Emma Olssen, Annette Simpson, Toni Torepe and Marnee Shay address a significant concern for Indigenous doctoral students in particular – isolation. They suggest that Indigenous innovations in establishing a regular online *corroboree* fostered a groups culture of support and conversation. Odette Best and Bronwyn Fredericks similarly examined the collaborative experiences of producing an Indigenous Studies textbook while unable to work together in physical proximity. Bronwyn Fredericks, Tracey Bunda, Stephanie Gilbert and r e a Saunders discuss the many ways that social media and other forms of technology can be used maintain strong relationships while working 'together but apart'.

Several papers drew on Indigenous methodologies and theory to explore various understandings of the evolving impact and response to the pandemic. These papers demonstrate the enthusiasm with which Indigenous academics respond to current affairs through critical evaluation and engagement with contemporary scholarship. In this section, Dion Enari and Jacoba Matapo exhibit the use of relational praxis and *talanoa* (talking and story methodology) for critical engagement with colonial and capitalist crisis-discourse around the COVID pandemic and Pasifika nations and communities. Exploring the cultural practices and pedagogical methods of *kava* gatherings as they shift into *vahaope* (ocean-space beyond borders or cyberspace), Edmond Fehoko , 'Inoke Hafoka and Arcia Tecun consider the implications of this for *talanoa* between Pasifika tertiary educators, professionals and students in Aotearoa (New Zealand). Byron Rangiwai and Acushla Sciascia examine the impact of the COVID pandemic restrictions on *tangihanga* (Māori funeral practices). They offer a thoughtful account of digital grieving and virtual *karakia* (prayer) in Taranaki, Aotearoa.

Across the Pacific, Odette Best and Bronwyn Fredericks highlight how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and students' avid use of social media to connect, maintain relationships and build networks with other Indigenous people both locally and globally, primed them to adapt to online research and learning during the pandemic. Reflecting on his fly-in fly-out arrangement between Kaurna Country (Adelaide, South Australia) and Dharug Country (Sydney, Australia), Tristan Kennedy contemplates the challenges and the future of digital communication, global collaborations and, travel and mobility for Indigenous academics.

Further north, Jose G. Moreno presents Mexican and Latinx Indigenous perspectives on the COVID pandemic, and, in doing so, unpacks the failures of colonial infrastructure, governance and industries in the United States of America that lead to its status as a COVID-19 hotspot and a state of crisis, particularly for people-of-colour and colonised communities. Common threads of resilience and resourcefulness run through each of these accounts of innovations and adaptations of Indigenous methodologies and practices.

Papers presented in this special issue which reflect on community responses and creative expression related to the pandemic demonstrate both the close ties between Indigenous communities and Indigenous academics as well as the solidarity and tenacity that exists amongst Indigenous peoples in the face of adversity. In the first paper included in this section, Bep Uink, Rebecca Bennett, Ashah Wright and Chanelle van den Berg outline how staff at the Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre (KAC) located at Murdoch University on Noongar Country (Perth, Western Australia), supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through the transition to online learning using a 'relationships-first' strategy. Traveling from Gadigal to Yuin Country (Inner Sydney to South Coast New South Wales), Lou Glover unpacks ongoing patterns of lawlessness and protectionism in Australian systems of governance, and how patterns of Country and Ancestors embed ancient innovations in the work of Indigenous academics.

In the next paper, Kylie Gemmell reflects on their own experiences of dispossession, isolation and self-doubt as both a PhD student and teacher adjusting to online learning at Oregon State University which stands on the lands of the Kalapuya people (Corvallis, Oregon, USA). Meanwhile, Kalyanam finds ancestral power, connection and healing in the realm of the culinary as a PhD student and immigrant on stolen Kalapuya lands under constant surveillance by the American settler nation-state. Souksavanh T. Keovorabouth offers a prayer for their friends and family of the Navajo Nation (Arizona, USA) impacted by the COVID pandemic. As both a PhD student and community member, they consider settler-state action and treatment of both Black and Native lives as disposable, and the significance of solidarity and sovereignty in times of crisis.

Sandy O'Sullivan writes of First Nations networks and friendships who were lifelines to them as a Wiradjuri (Central New South Wales, Australia) and transgender academic struggling with suicidality during a pandemic. Finally, Jo Rey reflects on the resistance, resilience and renewal experienced by

Dharug people as a result of colonisation, and how these qualities lend themselves to adapting Ngurra-based (land-based) learning when students cannot leave their homes. The theme of relationships between Indigenous peoples, communities, lands and ancestors underpins each of these responses and creative pieces.

Together these articles present an account of the way in which Indigenous people, scholars, and students were able to adjust and rethink “business as usual” to accommodate for the changing circumstances that the pandemic presented. From Aotearoa/New Zealand to North America and across the continent known as Australia, this special issue presents a range of innovative strategies to keep people safe; continue their studies and in caring for our communities. Sadly, there have been many lives lost to COVID-19 and unfortunately the pandemic is not done with us yet. We all wait in anxious anticipation of a vaccination. In the meantime, Indigenous people have done a lot of the heavy lifting when it comes to caring for our communities. There have also been many job losses as the higher education sector tries to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the industry. Indigenous scholars and support staff make up so few of the percentage of people working in academia. Any losses of Indigenous positions in these institutions would have a significant impact in the sector but also in the gains our ancestors and communities fought for. While recognising the serious challenges brought about by the pandemic on Indigenous peoples and communities worldwide, overall this collection highlights the tenacity and adaptability and resilience of Indigenous people.