

Revitalising Universities in (Post-)COVID Times

Special Edition: A collection of papers from
the Revitalising Universities in
(Post-)COVID Times Symposium held at
University of Tokyo 2022

Guest Editor: Naomi Berman



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The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

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INTRODUCTION This special Issue presents a selection of papers presented at the Revitalising Universities in (Post-)COVID Times Symposium, held at the University of Tokyo, November 2022. This hybrid event gathered academics, educators, and experts from Australia, Japan and other regions to discuss the future of higher education as universities navigate pathways out of the pandemic. The experience of the pandemic may vary between countries based on cultures, expectations, and social organisation, therefore exploring a diversity of experiences and expectations as universities reopen offers a fruitful point of differentiation and comparison between globally diverse educational spaces.

Echoing Connell's original call to rethink the 'good university', COVID has thrown into question taken-for-granted notions about the position of universities, forcing a reframing of understandings around their social purpose. The pivot to online during the pandemic has highlighted the potential for digital technology to transform the way we teach and learn. Yet it has also become clear that such transformation does not come without its social, economic and wellbeing costs. Indeed, questions around whether the response measures introduced by universities across the globe early in the pandemic are still valid and viable need to be asked, as institutions decide what gets kept, thrown away, amplified, or diminished. The symposium provided a space for reflection on these questions as well as broader philosophical and theoretical deliberations on the 'good university'.

Naomi Berman
Guest Editor

REVITALISING UNIVERSITIES FROM AN ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT LENS

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BIOGRAPHY

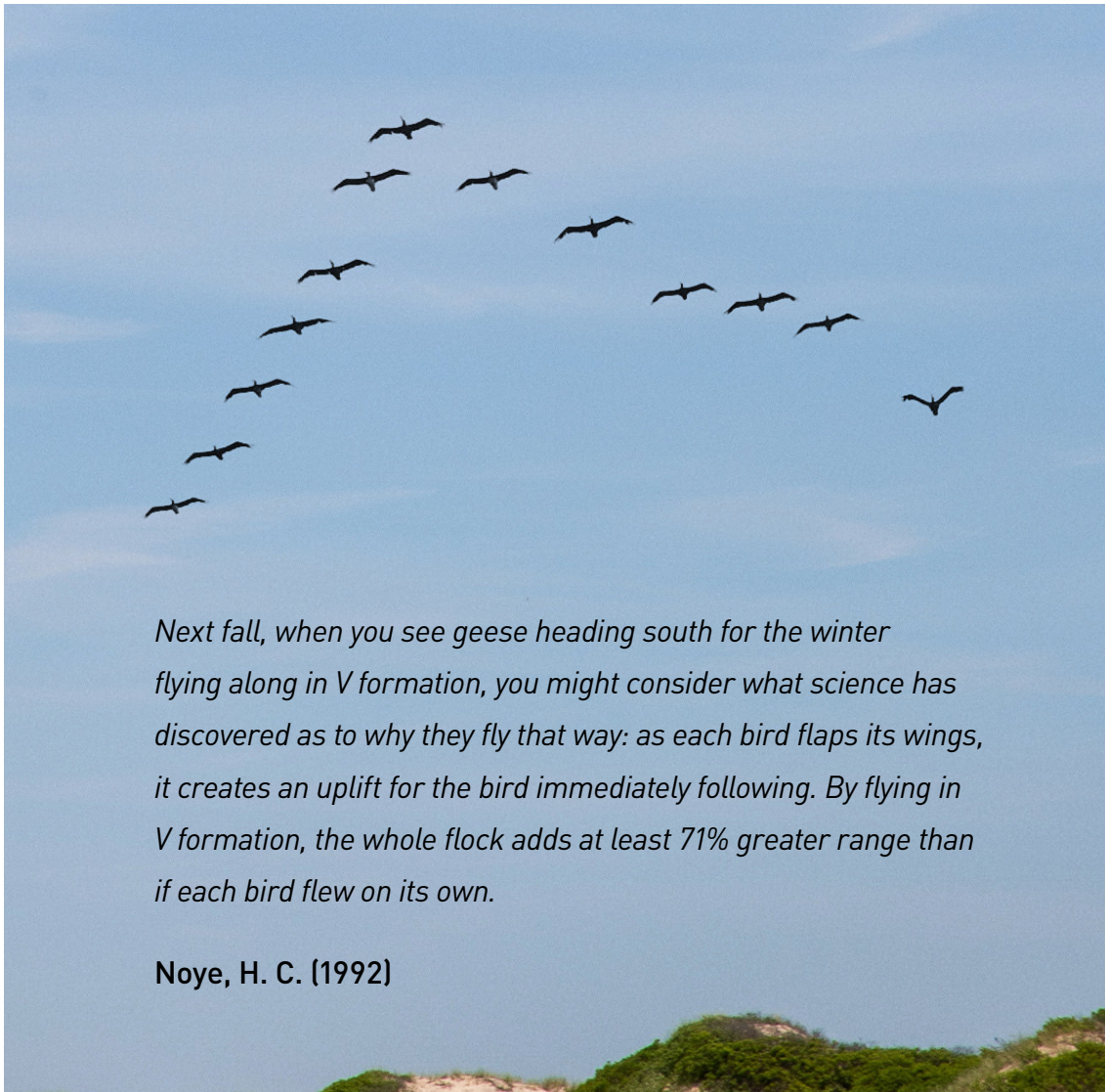
Yoko Mori is a doctoral candidate of higher education at the University of Otago, New Zealand. Her research interests include professional identity development, motivation, English Medium Instruction, intercultural communication, and internationalization of higher education.

ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 has brought about many challenges to universities. While there is increasing literature shedding light on this, studies on opportunities have been underexplored. In this paper, I reflect on how academic developers in the field/profession of academic development (AD) can contribute to revitalise universities. In particular, I explore how developers, as agents of change, can contribute to promote student-staff relationships since this has increasingly received attention to mitigate or prevent negative impacts of the pandemic; for example, loneliness felt by students. Acknowledging cultivation of collegiality to be a key for successful student-staff relationships (Fielding 1999), I highlight the need for developers' creation of a sustainable 'secure base' (Bowlby 1988) in which a caring environment can be nurtured. In this way, students, to whom the university focuses, can be reassured a safe space which they can turn to in times of need and take off from to challenge new things.

KEYWORDS

academic development, academic developers, collegiality, care, student-staff relationships, secure base



Next fall, when you see geese heading south for the winter flying along in V formation, you might consider what science has discovered as to why they fly that way: as each bird flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the bird immediately following. By flying in V formation, the whole flock adds at least 71% greater range than if each bird flew on its own.

Noye, H. C. (1992)

INTRODUCTION

The above writing is an excerpt from *The Goose Story* by Noyes (1992) which a colleague introduced to me a few years ago. The story implies how working with a strong sense of community can add efficiency to work towards a common goal. In relation to this Symposium: Revitalising Universities in (Post-) Covid Times Symposium, November 5, 2022, at The University of Tokyo, I argue that if all stakeholders in universities in their respective roles raised awareness for metaphorically flying along in V formation, it could increase not only efficiency, but also the degree of reassurance individuals feel for travelling towards a common destination. In this paper, I reflect on how

academic developers in the field/profession of academic development (AD) can potentially create a caring environment for students by focusing on the concept of student-(academic) staff relationship. Acknowledging the nature of many AD units to work directly with academic staff rather than students, this paper talks directly to academics rather than students, though, with a general understanding of AD as ultimately, for students' optimal learning experience.

The importance of a student-staff relationship has increasingly received attention to reduce or prevent negative impacts of the Covid-19, including public health issues caused by loneliness (Mori 2022). Many students have reported they felt loneliness from the physical isolation enforced by lockdown and other stay-at-home measures (Loades et al. 2020; Phillips et al. 2022). Loneliness has been identified to have a detrimental impact on students' learning experiences in the sense that it may trigger learning burnout, a stress-induced syndrome characterised by a lack of concentration and demotivation to learn (Lin & Huang 2012). Currently in a liminal space between pre- and post-Covid, I explore how academic developers could contribute to revitalise universities in (post-) Covid times by referring to AD literature and findings from my larger study on their professional identity.

Before I proceed further, I would like to give a brief introduction about myself because this will clarify the positionality from which I am writing this paper. I am currently a doctoral candidate of higher education at the University of Otago, studying the professional identity of academic developers in two higher education institutions in New Zealand and Japan. My thesis aims to better understand how different AD models influence the formation and growth of developers' professional identity. Prior to becoming a student, I worked at The University of Tokyo as a project researcher engaged in faculty development (FD) work. This experience guided me to pursue a cross-cultural study in this area. Having majored in international relations and applied linguistics in my earlier years, I also teach a global communication class at a medical school in Tokyo. My multiple identities as a student and staff, compounded with the interdisciplinary space I occupy, have led me to apply a social constructivist view to contemporary issues of importance: in this case, to issues of revitalising universities in (post-) Covid times.

HISTORY OF ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT

Considering I use an academic development (AD) lens for my exploration, it is pertinent to touch on what the field/profession entails and the historical background. The field/profession of academic development (or faculty development; instructional development; educational development; staff development; teaching and learning development) is often described as complex, dynamic, and fluid. The concept has no universal definition (Allen 1988), and the movement initiated and developed both formally and informally in different times and spaces. In general, AD has mainly focused on how to improve teaching and learning but in recent years, has become to include other areas such as consultation, well-being, time-management, and all aspects of research that academics do (Sutherland 2018). In many cases, AD is positioned within the broader field of higher education. One of the prominent features of AD is its ambiguity: whether an AD role is academic or service, or even hybrid has remained unresolved. In my current study, while most participants in the New Zealand case regarded AD as strongly academic, most in the Japan case regarded FD (the term used for AD in Japan) as service, which is an interesting contrast.

Moreover, the historical background varies according to different countries and institutions. For instance, in New Zealand and many other culturally Western countries, AD emerged as a result of massification of universities where pressing needs, such as attending to failing students, soon surfaced. The concept of FD (the term also used for AD in the US) is generally agreed to have started in 1880 at Harvard University when a few academics took the current form of sabbatical leave, a paid leave in which they were freed from administrative work and teaching assignments to catch up on their subject matters and literally, 'rest' (Eells 1962). Meanwhile, in Japan, FD was 'imported' from the US (Arimoto 2006) in order to implement the Japanese government's internationalisation scheme which started in earnest in the late 1980s (Ninomiya et al. 2009). Many FD units in Japan have endeavoured to promote active learning and transform the medium of instruction from Japanese to other languages, notably, English. These movements have been aimed to invite more international students and staff to Japanese universities.

The varying historical backgrounds of AD have brought about nuances in how individuals understand the field/profession, as represented in the different terms used for AD. Accordingly, it is necessary for universities to carefully investigate the local contexts before setting intervention measures for a desired future. In the next section, I depict how AD units in many parts of the world have conducted their AD work prior to and with the outbreak of Covid-19, which will guide to discussions on how academic developers could contribute to revitalise universities in (post-) Covid times.

AD BEFORE AND WITH THE OUTBREAK OF COVID-19

Before Covid-19, AD units conducted workshops and seminars mainly focusing on improving teaching and learning so that it can be meaningful for the students. In institutions where AD work is regarded as academic, developers also actively produced research in this area. For instance, during the 2019 academic year, the Higher Educational Development Centre (HEDC) at the University of Otago with its over 40 years of AD history produced 40 peer-reviewed journal articles in print and online, two edited books, twelve book chapters, two conference posters, and four conference proceedings (HEDC Annual Report, 2020).

With the outbreak of Covid-19, many universities turned to their AD units for support for transferring the mode of teaching to online. This naturally led to increased attention to AD units, which in a way, marked a significant point in AD history. Until the outbreak of Covid-19, a sense of marginalisation from the rest of the institution (Fyffe 2018; Manathunga 2007; Popovic & Fisher 2016) was what characterised AD. Under the sudden spotlight, many AD units were successful in seizing the moment and proved to the broader community that they could be dependable in times of need: in this case, as emergency units to assist and equip other academics with skills on how to use and maximise technology to create a meaningful learning environment for the students. As for research output during this time, in places like the Higher Education Development Centre (HEDC) at the University of Otago mentioned earlier, where AD work is regarded as academic, publication numbers stayed pretty much the same despite the outbreak of Covid-19, resulting in 34 peer-reviewed

journal articles in print and online (of which postgraduate students were co-authors in seven), three books (two single-authored and one edited), three book chapters, and eight conference proceedings (HEDC Annual Report, 2021).

AD IN (POST-) COVID TIMES

Now, in (post-) Covid times, where online transfer has been successfully completed, AD units are back to business, implementing workshops and seminars on improving teaching and learning and other related areas (e.g., well-being, time-management, and emotional intelligence) so that it can be meaningful for the students. Also, there have been active discussions widely across universities on lessons learned from Covid times and how to reflect those to future practices (e.g., Revitalising Universities in (Post-) Covid Times Symposium at The University of Tokyo, Japan, 5 November 2022; COVID-19's Impact on Teaching and Learning at the University of Otago: Lessons Learned Symposium, 14-15 November 2022). With aspirations to sustain the attention once gained, many AD units are currently revisiting what their field/profession entails and exploring new areas.

In this context, I would like to share an interesting finding stemming from my current study which I mentioned earlier. My qualitative study on academic developers' professional identity involved 19 current and past academic developers in two higher education institutions in New Zealand and Japan. Since my study incorporated elements from life history research which values artfulness and playfulness, I asked my study participants and a developer related to my study what they thought the art of AD to be. I received insightful responses that elicited the essence of the field/profession. Naturally, how developers perceive their roles in AD deeply connects to how they form and grow their professional identity, so the philosophical responses helped me gain insight to the different ways of seeing the roles against the different AD models that currently exist in universities. The responses included concepts and activities such as 'collegiality', 'personal development', 'doubt', 'reflection', 'negotiation', 'pragmatism', and 'experiment'. The most popular response was 'collegiality' with similar ideas such as 'support' or 'collegial support'. Collegiality is shared as a key concept for a successful student-staff

relationship (Fielding 1999), and indeed, my own experiences as a student with my mentors during the Covid-19 have taught me that the spirit of collegiality could be understood as a form of care that could foster student-staff relationship and also, a process for mutual empowerment (Mori 2022). That said, the term is often contested as 'a complex and somewhat "slippery" idea' (Kligyte & Barrie 2014).

Collegiality (i.e., a form of care; a process of mutual empowerment) resonates with the values and beliefs embedded in many of the discussions in this Symposium such as those on 'a caring institution' (Baker 2022) and 'a good university' (Connell 2016, 2019), to highlight a few. Baker, through her reflection on 'a caring institution' in higher education argued that under-cared institutions have significant implications for students and staff. Connell also inquired qualities of 'a good university' in this context. In her earlier work, she emphasised that 'Universities need to be places where people feel valued' (Connell 2016:72). While this claim focused on the workforce (including academics) in universities, Connell's philosophy is believed to extend for students as well. Indeed, universities need to be places where students feel valued with a warm sense of care: not a place to feel loneliness. The values and beliefs of care shared in various forms and contexts in this Symposium begin to shape a common vision which stakeholders in universities can collectively work towards in (post) Covid times: strengthening collegiality between students and staff. In this process, I believe academic developers can play a pivotal role as 'agents of change' (Land 2001, 2004). Mathews' (2022) reflection is believed to support my argument. In this Symposium, she put forth a set of incisive inquiry and response: 'Why should universities consider [academic] staff when their focus is [on] students? Because well-adjusted, well-supported [academic] staff will be better equipped to support their students' (Matthews 2022).

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE COVID-19 TIMES

Looking forward, how should academic developers take on the initiative to revitalise universities and how should staff (and students that are essentially the focus of universities) be involved in this process? I believe they can be involved in creating a 'secure base' (Bowlby 1988). This concept

by a renowned psychiatrist, Bowlby, stems from his Attachment Theory, a discipline he founded nearly a half century earlier in the context of parenting. According to Bowlby, a parent-child bond is an essential element for a human being since a healthy parent-child bond continues on to adulthood, while an unhealthy one characterised by early abuse and neglect potentially impacts individuals to have psychological problems into adulthood. Thus, among the many key ideas in Attachment theory has been the 'sensitive care-giving as a foundation for psychological health' (Bowlby 1988: xiii). Children with a secure base are reassured of a safe space in which they can seek for help in times of need. This in turn allows them to have confidence to challenge new things because they know that they always have a secure base to return to if of need (Bowlby 1988). I believe the concept of a secure base can also be applied to student-staff relationships. The creation of such base is expected to promote cultivation of trustful student-staff relationships, which in turn reassures students of a robust safety-net in times of need. This includes a safety-net for reduction and prevention of students' loneliness mentioned earlier (Loades et al. 2020; Phillips et al. 2022). Moreover, in accordance with Bowlby's theory, students will be able to have the confidence to take risks for challenging new things because they know they will always have a secure base to return to if of need. Human relationships cannot be built in a day, and purposeful efforts are required to promote such movement.

Two characteristics unique to AD are deemed to contribute to such endeavour. First, the interdisciplinary nature of AD: Developers enter AD units from various fields. They bring in with them different cultures and values from their respective home disciplines. Accordingly, as a community of practice, they have a fertile multi-disciplinary ground on which to build a secure base. Second, the liminal nature of AD: Developers exist in an in-between space 'between students and teachers, between academic staff and management, and between teaching and research' (Manathunga 2007: 25) which requires them to be a 'chameleon on a tartan rug' (Kensington-Miller et al. 2015), changing colours as fit for each situation. In theory, they are expected to be neutral agents of change that play a role like diplomats: negotiating between multiple stakeholders for the sake of reaching a goal that can be ideally, satisfactory for all, and in line with the university's policies.

HOW CAN DEVELOPERS CONTRIBUTE TO REVITALISE UNIVERSITIES IN (POST-) COVID TIMES?

I propose the following two strategies for consolidating a secure base. First, to invite more academics from different disciplines to participate in AD workshops and seminars that share knowledge on research methods for improving teaching and learning. In Australasia, it is not uncommon for academics to write for pedagogical journals in their respective disciplines. This is beneficial for students who will, in theory, be taught by academics who are conscious of teaching excellence, as well as on their respective subject content. Additionally, it will be beneficial for academics themselves in that teaching and research are bridged in this way. Conducting a pedagogical research in a discipline aligns academics with the institutional culture of many universities where research is prioritised over teaching. Second, to open regular coffee time sessions where students and staff can communicate informally. Laksov (2020) shared that an introduction of a very good coffee machine in her workplace opened opportunities for educational conversations. Echoing such findings, a past academic developer in my current study reflected on how he/she succeeded in bringing a new interdisciplinary institute together by making a daily afternoon coffee-time session the only rule. This unique rule guided academics to initiate many interdisciplinary collaborative projects. Potentially, the same could be expected from student-staff coffee-time sessions in which they could inspire each other and strengthen collegiality.

CONCLUSION

Without purposeful promotion of collegiality, students and staff could easily be left in silos in the busy life of academia. As shared above, this could be detrimental for higher education in that isolation may lead to students' feeling of loneliness which in turn could lead to lack of concentration and motivation for learning (Lin & Huang 2020). Many developers in my study shared their positive past experiences as students. These included receiving in-depth feedback, being guided to valuable opportunities, and having someone standing by them in challenging times, which they believed shaped them to who they are: caring academics. Applying Bowlby's (1988) ideas to the

university context, student-staff relationships are a foundation for students' psychological health. Whether students feel reassured that they are cared or not is believed to make a great difference in their university life and even after graduation, just like how influence of a parent-child experiences continue on to adulthood. Academic developers are believed to play an indispensable role in ensuring cultivation of healthy student-staff relationships. Care for students cannot wait.

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