IT Educators Beyond COVID

Samuel Mann, Hamish Smith, Rachel Trounson
Otago Polytechnic, New Zealand
samuel.mann@op.ac.nz, hamish.smith@op.ac.nz, rachel.trounson@op.ac.nz

Tom Flannagan, Bob Gilmore
Training for Life, New Zealand
tom@trainingforlife.nz, bob@trainingforlife.nz

Neil Benson, Matthias Otto, Sandra Dyke
Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology, New Zealand
neil.benson@nmit.ac.nz, matthias.otto@nmit.ac.nz, sandra.dyke@nmit.ac.nz

Eddie Correia
Ara Institute of Canterbury, New Zealand
eddie.correia@ara.ac.nz

Oras Baker, Anita Murphy, John Mumford, Ken Sutton
Southern Institute of Technology, New Zealand
oras.baker@sit.ac.nz, anita.murphy@sit.ac.nz, john.mumford@sit.ac.nz, ken.sutton@sit.ac.nz

Keywords

Covid-19, Remote Teaching, Emergency Remote, Pastoral Care, Relationships

Abstract

In response to the Global Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020 New Zealand was placed into a lockdown which meant that all but essential workers were restricted to their homes for a period of four weeks. During this period all teaching moved online. After the initial four weeks a gradual relaxation of lockdown allowed for a gradual return to classroom teaching. This paper explores the experiences and approaches of Tertiary IT educators during this period. It is hoped that this reflection will provide a useful basis for discussion as we consider the nature of teaching and how we can prepare for the next disruption. This work aimed to capture the experiences of IT Educators during the Covid-19 lockdown.

The authors each prepared a narrative of their teaching experiences and responded to a set of prompts designed to elicit reflection on themes including drivers, opportunities and challenges. We met remotely and presented our individual reflections and agreed a set of focus areas which subgroups then explored further. It is worth noting that we met in late May two weeks after contact teaching was permitted again albeit with social distancing limiting numbers in classrooms.

The participants represented computing and IT schools from all of the ITP (Institutes of Technology and Polytechnic) regional providers in the South Island of New Zealand. All of the participants described moving online in various forms.

Three themes emerged from the narratives presented. These are tailoring engagement, pastoral care, learning for the next disruption. A student centric approach to educating beyond COVID involves much investment by the educational institutions. Authors reported an increased investment in time and skills needed - and this wasn't about the technology but in developing a different way of teaching and learning. The content was far less important than the interactions, and these relationships altered during the period of emergency online teaching. Moving the teaching into people's homes highlighted that an effective learning environment is not just on campus but involves learners' (and lecturers') whole environment.

Our recommendation is that everyone involved in learning and teaching have discussions about learning in the face of disruption - from the next global pandemic, to classroom technology not cooperating, to someone arriving late for class or even not understanding a concept. We managed during a massive disruption to maintain a positive approach to learning, even improved outcomes in some instances. The question now is how can we translate this positive approach into everyday practice so that relatively minor upsets that might otherwise derail someone's learning and career can be seen as learning opportunities?