

Once Upon A Time There Was a Virus... by Jane Melvin

The week before lockdown, from all over the nation
Came colleagues to Glasgow, their minds on creation
Plans were created for conference with care
In the hope that all members would soon be there.

Who would have known at the end of the strike
That soon communication would rely on a mic?
With hopes that this situation would soon be resolved
Denial lasted some days before new plans evolved.

It soon became clear what we needed to do
Both academics and students would need to accrue
Skills in technology, way wider than Skype
Developing digital pedagogy amongst all the hype.

'Business as normal', taught sessions still to provide
Many staff lacking skills, confidence and frankly terrified.
Not only for themselves, their families and friends
But also of their work practice seen through a Zoom lens.

At my place they decided to train us in Teams
60 folk in one room – you could hear all the screams
Of 'what madness is this?', 'you need us to stay well'
'Where are we all headed?', 'what is this new hell?'

And so we rushed home having grabbed all we could take
With laptops and ipads, our home offices to make.
On March 23, the virus was winning
But for most academics, this was just the beginning.

'I've a taught session next week, how on earth do I do it?'
I found myself saying, 'I'll help you get through it'.
Barely able myself, I spent hours in support,
Sessions were trixy and colleagues were fraught.

'Can you all see my slides?' 'I'm sure this should work'
For students on camera, you could see them all smirk.

'I uploaded them earlier, why isn't this working?
Honest I did, please see I'm not shirking.'

And students were struggling and failing to enter

'Use the menu to unmute – it's all in the centre.'

'Can you all hear me, cos I can't hear you?'

Was this all for real, or a bad dream to get through?

'Use the chat to make contact' is another dimension
But that then requires me to divide my attention
Between input and slides and typing answers to questions
Often to trivialities and crazy suggestions.

One answer of course, was to work in a pair,
One to do input, the other to share
Answers to questions, troubleshooting was easier
Both more relaxed and jokes became cheesier.

But what of the pedagogy, what did this all mean?
Had anything changed cos I just shared my screen?
For those with more confidence, experiences were shared
Resources were pooled and we felt more prepared.

The flipped classroom is key, here's your work for next session,
We expect you do it, but it's not a transgression.
I'm comfortable with silence, my webcam turns off
And I wait in the dark for discussion to take off.

I truly can wait as long as it takes,
As there's pressure online for the silence to break.
If discussion doesn't start, I can challenge via chat,
As a type-written challenge avoids it all falling flat.

I can see your name tag so I can't be unsure,
I can welcome you in to make sure you're secure,
I can make sure the expectation to speak is set up
And I can go online after to follow you up.

Listening is good but let's not just assume
That's all there is too it, I want ideas to bloom.
Long sessions are tiring, how to keep content compelling?
How do we do this without students rebelling?

'What do you think about what I have shared?
We must pause to review just how they have fared.
It's easy in Teams, to present and drone on,
But in terms of learning is this just a con?

With students eating breakfast, in the bath or just lurking,
How to make sure that our teaching is working?
We have to be active, creative, upbeat, and outrageous
And above all else, we must be courageous.

Oh how to make material engaging
That requires interaction, that is more than just staging?
Planning it takes to move students between channels
To manage poster presentations, and to answer to panels.

So where to from here? Where does all this take us?
Increased asynchronous learning where staff are superfluous?
I don't think that's the future. Students want human contact
Clever blended opportunities may be what we enact.

But all of this requires a pro-digital stance,
Some blending of methods and the intention to enhance
Not replace - a hybridity of thought, using tools where they fit
...how about, a pedagogical identikit?