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COVID-19 and Education in the Global North

Storytelling and Alternative Pedagogies

Edited by

Ruby Turok-Squire

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Foreword

No political policy-making exists within a vacuum, even when nations are held within the clutches of a global pandemic. How political leaders responded to COVID-19 must be read against the evolution of party political thought and cultural change. Previous decades had seen the ascendency of neoliberal philosophies, new right politics, individualism, populism, cultural wars and fake news, fuelled by advances in social media platforms. I use the English example to illustrate the complex nature of social and educational governance and reform, and this example has resonance across the Global North.

In 2019, Boris Johnson, British Prime Minister, was committed to following through on the results of the 2016 EU referendum and to finalising the divorce agreement. The UK's financial settlement, citizens' rights and arrangements for the Irish border had dogged agreement with the European Commission and split the Conservative party. Brexit, therefore, was to cast a long shadow over UK government policy making, complicated by the division amongst the devolved UK administrations, where in essence, England and Wales had voted to leave, whilst Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to remain. The split refuelled Nicola Sturgeon's (Scotland's First Minister) bid for Scottish independence and exposed new and pre-existing social and political fault lines in British politics. For Boris Johnson's Westminster Government, 'a new one nation government, a people's government', the primary agenda of the 2019 administration was to 'level up' communities and hold onto the new Conservative voters won from the traditional Labour (red wall) strongholds of the north.

It was just over a decade earlier that the then Conservative Party leader, David Cameron, chose the 'Big Society' as the leitmotif of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government of 2010–2015. With strong Conservative and Liberal philosophical antecedents, the Big Society appealed to a community-based, bottom-up approach to meeting the economic, social and welfare needs of the British nation. In reality, though, it presented a strong rationale for reducing the public sector and expenditure on public services, at a time of economic austerity following the global economic crisis of 2007–2009. Local communities and the institutions of civil society, including schools and universities, in theory at least, were left to make key decisions that would address local conditions and be exposed to market forces with reduced financial support from central government. In other words, 'the state where necessary' and 'the market where possible' (Crouch, 2013).

In terms of the English education system, under the guise of the Big Society, sweeping changes were made to the traditional local authority led system of state education. Local authorities were considered no longer fit for purpose as custodians of the education system and so schooling was opened up to a not-for-profit system of governance run by Trustees and Chief Executive Officers operating outside the control of local authorities. These not-for-profit systems of governance could make their own decisions about the curriculum and spending. Money was transferred from central government to Academies or Multi-Academy trusts, shored up by private investment. Parents were encouraged to choose between progressively underfunded local authority schools or the new confederations of schools with money for new buildings, higher paid teachers and the promise of improved standards. The Academies Act (2010) was enacted with astonishing speed, accruing greater powers for intervention to the Secretary of State. Autonomy was considered significant for school improvement, leading to a branded education system that enabled schools to turn their pedagogical beliefs and values into marketable commodities. Increasing choice and widening the number of education providers appeared to serve the interests of education consumers—the parents and pupils—whilst at the same benefiting those businesses and entrepreneurs servicing the market as owners of academy chains or facilitators of the start-up or conversion process. This 'liberalising' of education (Ball, 2012, p. 94) was indicative of a market/state dichotomy that continues to run through post-Brexit/post-COVID policy making.

What occurred as the pandemic unfolded was a plethora of interventions to help the nation 'stay safe, save lives and protect the NHS' supported by cross-party agreement reminiscent of Keynesian economics. One estimate suggests there will be a budget deficit of £350–£400 billion, following expenditure on essential Nightingale Hospitals, personal protection equipment (PPE), the furloughing of employees, a levelling-up premium for schools and additional monies for those on benefit (Peele, 2021). This was mirrored by a great outpouring of support for 'frontline' workers. The Clap for our Carers (later Clap for Heroes), a Thursday evening nationwide round of applause, ran for ten weeks during the first national lockdown, and captured the spirit of the nation, utilising the rainbow, that biblical symbol of God's grace and faithfulness, as a sign of hope for all. The 'Your NHS Needs You' appeal generated a 'volunteer army' that outstripped demand and local community projects adjusted with incredible speed to emerging needs. In my own community, our local church adapted an established 'soup and a roll' Friday lunch for the community, to administer food donated from local supermarkets to over forty families per week. Delivering these boxes uncovered further needs within the community, such that the group were soon collecting toys for children who had none and spending time in conversation with the lonely. Innumerable examples of such projects were to be encountered up and down the land, recalling for many the Dunkirk spirit of wartime Britain. This was the Big Society in action.

The lived experiences of communities and individuals varied enormously. Whilst the majority of school children were to be educated at home, by parents who were suddenly enlisted as educators, children of frontline workers were to continue in school. Teachers had to juggle online teaching and classroom based teaching throughout the crisis. Incidences of poor mental health amongst adults and children alike grew exponentially. Whilst our hospitals were not on the whole brought to a standstill by COVID cases, the aftermath is taking its toll in terms of delayed elective surgery. This book provides a timely critique of the diverse experiences of families, children and young people during these unprecedented times. There is no doubt that future enquiries will investigate many aspects of the COVID crisis and the lessons learnt. This book will serve as a valuable reminder of all that went on and how practitioners and children rose to the challenge.

Catherine A. Simon is an experienced teacher and visiting research fellow at Bath Spa University. Catherine acts as a PhD supervisor and higher education consultant for Education Studies. She devised and led the highly successful Education Studies Specialised Award programmes at Bath Spa University until her retirement from that institution in 2020. She is the co-editor of *A Student's Guide to Education Studies* (2019) with Emeritus Professor Stephen Ward, and also *Sociology for Education Studies: Connecting Theories, Settings and Everyday Experiences* (2020). Her monograph, *Beyond Every Child Matters: Neoliberal Education and Social Policy in the New Era*, was published in 2016. She is a longstanding council member for the British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society (BELMAS) (Director of Publications) and acts as reviewer for a number of leading national and international academic journals.

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October 2021

The Story of *COVID-19 and Education in the Global North: Storytelling and Alternative Pedagogies*

It has been my honour to see this collection grow into its current form so organically over the past year. I will describe the story of *COVID-19 and Education in the Global North: Storytelling and Alternative Pedagogies*, before my colleague Victoria Cooper goes on to map out a path through the book for our readers. In March 2020, as lockdown set in, myself and Li Liu, my colleague from the University of Warwick, began talking about what it might be like for children and young people to be finding their way through the pandemic. As we walked around streets so empty they almost echoed, we began noticing the rainbows springing up in people's windows, rainbows that children had painted or drawn or stuck together from whatever they could find, some with cotton wool clouds or sequins around their edges. These rainbows were like small signs of children's voices still sounding. It was as if they were not only reminding us of the presence of children, and of their different and perhaps more hidden perspectives on our situation, but also giving us hope there were ways to recover from the pandemic that might be even better than we could imagine at that moment.

Inspired by what we could see, and intrigued to know more about how children were experiencing the pandemic, Li and I designed an online, interdisciplinary conference entitled 'Rainbows in Our Windows: Childhood in the Time of Corona' (https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/research/conferences/coronachildhood). We invited teachers, students, authors, young people, members of humanitarian organisations, psychologists, academics and policy advisors to come and speak. Around thirty people agreed and volunteered their time. Over the course of a single very long day, over 250 people from around the world attended six

different panel sessions. I chaired most of the discussions and watched in amazement as contributors discovered similarities between their approaches that might lead to new collaborations. One young person, an author of a children's book, gave a presentation, and it seemed clear that thinking *with* children and young people about how to listen to young people was an area in need of further exploration. Spontaneous discussions filled the breaks between presentations. The day ended and it felt like something had just begun.

Recordings of the conference (sponsored by the University of Warwick Retired Staff Association) were published by the English Association and are still available online (https://englishassociation.ac.uk/no-15-rainbows-in-our-windows-childhood-in-the-time-of-corona/). I went on to edit a special issue of 'Issues in English', which detailed the conference proceedings and contained expanded contributions from various researchers. In one of those inexplicable moments of coincidence, I then contacted an editor at Palgrave just as she was about to contact me to ask about developing the conference proceedings into a book. We ended up going one step further: two books have been created, *Children's Experience, Participation and Rights During COVID-19* and *COVID-19 and Education in the Global North: Storytelling and Alternative Pedagogies*, each containing some chapters by contributors to that original conference, and many from new collaborators.

From the initial conference onwards, this project has been about encouraging a process of dialogue at a time where disconnections threatened to plunge our communities into silence. It seemed obvious that only through keeping an open mind could we find ways to address a new crisis. While proposing and editing these books, I have remained committed to including new voices and encouraging diversity of tone and subject matter. It was never a question of thinking about how a new chapter might fit with a preconceived idea about how the books would be. Instead, it was about asking what new direction a chapter might take the books in, and how an author might best say what they wanted to say. Readers might sense a varying texture to these chapters; there are different styles of writing, different balances of theory and empiricism, and moments where observational approaches or practical suggestions for change dominate. This variety forms part of our aim, in that we hope that by appreciating and cultivating a certain roughness amongst authors' various perspectives, we might reach insights that might otherwise be smoothed away.

While on a walk with one of the contributors earlier this summer, a new colleague and friend, we discussed how these books may end up becoming time capsules of sorts. They have the courage to speak of a crisis at that moment of crisis itself. They may be necessarily incomplete, but they are all the more vivid and powerful for it. They demonstrate a collective commitment to learning from a situation that challenges our ability to reflect, act and stay connected. They believe in the value of listening to individual children's perspectives on their own experiences and to those adults who most closely support them. They seek to understand and even to extrapolate from the experiences of children who are particularly vulnerable during this crisis. They integrate practice and policy with theory. Ideas accumulate within them, perhaps in a sedimentary fashion, without a final goal in mind, the process becoming the goal. That process may encourage ways of thinking with children and young people about their experiences, education and rights to become more holistic, dynamic and sensitive. I hope that many of the authors of these pages see themselves as not only contributors to a book but to an ongoing project of learning, of which this is one concrete realisation.

University of Warwick, Coventry, UK Ruby Lindiwe Turok-Squire

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Notes on Contributors

Victoria Cooper is Senior Lecturer in Childhood and Youth Studies at the Open University and a former Co-director of the Children's Research Centre. She has published articles and book chapters on a wide range of topics, with a specific focus on issues of identity, research methods and children and young peoples' experiences living with a family health crisis building on her research with NGOs and national organisations including Amnesty International UK. She has recently written *Parenting the First Twelve Years: What the Evidence Tells Us* with Heather Montgomery and Kieron Sheehy and edited a new book with Naomi Holford entitled *Exploring Childhood and Youth*. Before joining the Open University, Victoria worked in a variety of education roles spanning early years teaching, further and higher education and professional development.

Gabriel Duckels is a Harding Distinguished Postgraduate Scholar at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge. In addition to his research into the construction of the COVID-19 crisis in children's literature, he is completing a doctoral thesis which provides a literary history of the representation of HIV/AIDS in English-language young adult literature from a queer pedagogical perspective. His research can be found in several journals, including *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* and the *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*.

Catherine Heinemeyer is a storyteller, drama facilitator and Lecturer in Arts and Ecological Justice at York St John University. Her practice research investigates the potential of storytelling to facilitate dialogue across social and generational divides, and in relation to challenging topics

such as ecological crisis, migration and mental health. She has led participatory arts projects with young people and adults of all ages in numerous schools, youth theatres, mental health settings, universities and community groups. Her book, *Storytelling in Participatory Arts with Young People: The Gaps in the Story*, was published in 2020 by Palgrave Macmillan. She is also involved in coordinating performance, arts and community outreach activities for Extinction Rebellion, and co-coordinates York St John University's Ecological Justice Research Group.

Lucy Jenkins is the project director of the MFL Mentoring Project funded by the Welsh Government. MFL Mentoring was recently nominated for the prize of Widening Participation or Outreach Initiative of the Year by the Times Higher Education Awards 2021. Lucy has led on the development of the project since 2017, expanding the scope and size of the project team substantially. Lucy has contributed also to the body of research associated with the project investigating language learning, multilingualism, digital practices and mentoring. She also designed and developed a sister project called Language Horizons, a Department for Education–funded digital mentoring project for languages. Most recently, Lucy has been employed as an Education Consultant to develop a schools programme to support the British Academy SHAPE initiative, which aims to increase the visibility of social sciences, the humanities and arts subjects across society.

Leigh Johnson is the principal at Harkaway Primary School, Naarm (Melbourne), Australia. Hidden away in the South China Sea, Leigh started his teaching career on a tropical island in front of tourism students and English language teachers. That was the mid-1990s. He's since learned a few things. When asked "What are schools for?" the answer is an unambiguous "Schools afford agency." With a couple of master's degrees and principalships tucked under his arm, Leigh is energised by leading all learners to harness the power to shape their world. He does this from the "whiteboard" as a science and environmental educator and from the "staffroom" serving in the principal role.

Alison Kington is Professor of Psychology of Education at the University of Worcester. Her research focuses on the nature, quality and dynamics of educational relationships. Alison has led a range of international and national research projects funded by research councils and government agencies, including studies of the work and lives of teachers (DfES), effec-

tive classroom practice (ESRC), school leadership and pupil outcomes (DfES) and inspirational and effective teachers (CfBT). She is currently engaged in a number of studies including the International Comparative Analysis of Teaching and Learning (ICALT), professional identity of mid-career primary teachers, the role of primary school staffrooms and the influence of teacher-pupil relationships on early career teacher identity. Alison is lead editor of the forthcoming volume *Developing Social and Learning Relationships in Primary Schools* (2020, Bloomsbury), lead author of *Effective Classroom Practice* (2014), co-author of *Teachers Matter* (2007) and co-editor of *The Role of Theory and Research in Educational Practice* (2008).

Lou Lahana (Ed.D.) is the Makerspace Coordinator at the Island School, a PK-8 public school on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. For over 20 years, he has worked with students to create powerful art, craftwork, music, documentaries and games to solve social issues affecting their worlds. As a researcher, Lahana's areas of interest include the intersection of technology, equity and youth activism. He has worked as an adjunct lecturer at the City College of New York focusing on critical literacy and technology in the classroom for pre- and in-service teachers. Visit Techbrarian.com to learn more about his middle school curriculum and view student artefacts.

Jeffrey MacCormack is Assistant Professor of Educational Psychology and Inclusion at the University of Lethbridge, Faculty of Education. As a former classroom teacher, MacCormack's research on after-school programmes, executive functions, social competence and play-based learning is also informed by ten years of experience teaching elementary students and many years of teaching post-secondary adult learners. His work has focused on creating spaces where youth can thrive.

Ian Matheson is Assistant Professor of Special Education as well as the Director of graduate students for the Faculty of Education at Queen's University. His research interests lie at the intersection of supporting exceptional learners and educational psychology, and he also has interests in teacher education. He is serving as the past president with the Canadian Association of Educational Psychology, and he sits as a board member for St. Lawrence Youth Association, focused on supporting youth at-risk.

Deborah Ralls is a Leverhulme Early Career Research Fellow at Newcastle University and an Honorary Research Fellow at the University

of Manchester. She has over 20 years of experience teaching in further education, higher education and alternative education provision, where she learnt so much about the world from her amazing students! Deborah's work explores how more relational approaches to teaching and learning, particularly artistic and participatory methods, can support democratic, collaborative decision-making relationships between children and young people, policymakers, schools and communities that can help the development of more socially just, inclusive places and futures for us all. She believes that education should provide a space for policymakers, community members and educators to learn collaboratively with and from young people, building a shared understanding of a place in all its dimensions.

Amy Ryder is an MEd student at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge.

Jacqueline Specht is a professor and director in the Canadian Research Centre of Inclusive Education in the Faculty of Education, Western University. Her research expertise is in the areas of inclusive education, teacher development and psychosocial aspects of individuals with disabilities.

Kathryn Spicksley is a research fellow in the Institute of Community Research and Development at the University of Wolverhampton. Her research explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the resilience and wellbeing of frontline workers in England. She is primarily interested in how language and identity interact, drawing on theorists including J. L. Austin, Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. In 2021 she was awarded an Early Career Researcher Career Development Fellowship by the British Educational Research Association (BERA). Prior to studying for a PhD in Education, Kathryn worked as an early years teacher in primary schools around the UK.

Briony Towers (Ph.D.) is a sociocultural psychologist living in Wurundjeri Country in southeastern Australia. Her scholarship and practice employ participatory action research methods and critical place-based pedagogies to engage children and young people in transformative learning and action for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. For the last 12 years, she has worked closely with children, youth, educators, disaster risk management agencies and non-government organisations across Australia to design and implement education programmes that provide children and young people with opportunities to actively par-

ticipate in disaster risk reduction in their households, schools and communities. Briony is the chief investigator for the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre's project on Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction and is a member of the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience Education Strategy Group. She is co-director of LEADRRR (Learning Ecologies for Action on Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience).

Ruby Lindiwe Turok-Squire completed her LLM in International Development Law and Human Rights at the University of Warwick in autumn 2021 and is now studying for the Graduate Diploma in Law at City, University of London. She is an assistant on a new Creativity Accountability research project at the University of Warwick. Recently, Ruby has worked as General Operations Assistant for Action for Child Trauma International and as a research assistant for the Central England Law Centre. She previously taught English as a second language to refugees in Canada and the UK; worked as an editorial assistant for *Lacuna Magazine*; studied English and Drama at the University of Warwick; taught Shakespeare at President Kennedy Secondary School, Coventry, UK; and studied English and Music Composition at Oberlin College and Conservatory, Ohio, USA. Ruby has been awarded a Watson Fellowship and a BMI Student Composer Award. Her first book of poems, *The Phantom Fundamental*, was published in the UK and the USA.

Jess Whitley is Associate Professor of Inclusive Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa. She conducts collaborative research in areas including mental health literacy, social-emotional learning and teachers' inclusive education beliefs and practices. She is currently serving in the Royal Society of Canada's COVID-19 Working Group on Children and Schools.

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Reimagining Education in a Pandemic: Children and Young People as Powerful Educators

Silver Linings? Teachers' Reappraisals of Children's Education in England During the First COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdown

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Introduction

What an individual has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow. The process goes on as long as life and learning continue.
—John Dewey (1938, p. 44)

The global pandemic marks a period in history when things quite literally began to slow down and the everyday and often taken-for-granted practices and experiences of schooling and education for pupils, parents and practitioners entered a stage of transformation. Close scrutiny of this stage affords opportunities to take stock, reconsider and move forward differently. Critical reflection thus lies at the heart of this book, as a process through which diverse professional voices, different global practices and the voices of children and young people are brought together. Fundamentally, this book asks both its contributors and its readers to reflect on what we have learnt during the global pandemic and to ponder what lies ahead.

The impact of COVID-19 on the lives of children and young people has been significant in shaping experiences marked by social distancing, social isolation, and health concerns and fears, amidst social and economic unrest. During the height of the pandemic, children and young people became seemingly detached from the institution of school, and from their peers and friends. Practitioners were compelled to find new ways of engaging with their pupils, and designing and developing new pedagogies that could meet the shifting and changing educational landscape. Furthermore, the identity of *parent* shifted to meet the demands of becoming home

educator. Notwithstanding the urgent move to provide digital and online learning that is accessible within a child's home—which for many is new and has been implemented at speed—the landscape of education is also shifting in terms of developing new, dynamic teaching approaches to suit a post-COVID world.

Research exploring the ongoing impact of the pandemic on learners, practitioners and educational contexts has largely considered school attendance, alternative provision, including home-schooling, online and remote learning, as well as global governance and policy responses to the pandemic (see Reimers, 2022). Aside from the considerable shifts in educational provisions, the pandemic ushered in a number of catastrophic losses: the loss of life for many and the effect of this upon families and communities, as well as the potential loss of learning for many young people throughout the world. The impacts continue to unfold, and researchers strive to examine the long-term ramifications perhaps most notable amongst marginalised young people (Donnelly & Patrinos, 2021) and those from socially and economically disadvantaged communities who already face educational inequalities and for whom COVID-19 adds yet another layer (Roberts, 2018).

Discussions around the impact of the pandemic thus stray into much broader debates about educational inequalities and educational justice. Education is recognised as a fundamental human right, as stated by the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All, and yet inequalities in provision, access and engagement shape many children and young people's learning experiences globally (Cooper & Holford, 2021). Krouger and La Roux have argued that efforts to re-imagine educational justice call for 'collective development' and collaboration and dialogue between professions, professionals and young people and across contexts, to examine the ways in which opportunities can be opened up (2017, p. 57).

Whilst there can be no denying the negative impacts of COVID-19, research also points to this period as an opportunity to reflect on educational provision and practice and to consider where the opportunities for growth and development lie. There are many strengths and positives to be learnt, and in this volume the reader will engage with insights not only from practitioners who have used the pandemic to explore new ways of teaching and interacting, but also from young people and practitioners who have developed strategies and curriculum to better understand and deal with crisis.

As well as sharing insights from diverse pedagogical and interdisciplinary perspectives, this book marks a collaboration that asks a series of fundamental questions about the nature of education, in reflecting on its past and considering its future. How have practitioners evolved during a time of significant change? How can the diverse needs of learners be aligned to a changing educational landscape? How can teaching pedagogies be developed to equip young learners with the skills needed for the post-COVID world?

Each chapter takes as its starting point the commitment to reflecting on practices implemented during the start of the global pandemic, with a view to making informed changes to meet the needs of young learners. Despite the different research examples and case studies presented in this book, they each share strong common themes and are connected in distinct ways.

Central to this book are reflections upon how children and young people are situated within the teaching and learning process and how their voices are brought to bear on decisions regarding future practices. The year 2019 saw the thirtieth anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), the human rights treaty ratified by all UN member states except the USA, which outlines the rights to which children are entitled. Research illustrates that, despite increasing developments to engage young people in decision making (OECD, 2020) they often do not feel heard and frequently notice that their views are considered yet not acted upon (Cooper et al., 2020). Positioning children's and young people's everyday experiences of education and learning at the heart of this book, we recognise their fundamental rights to share their views on matters that affect them and to have the agency and capacity to steer and influence their own lives. Ideas about social and educational justice, how children and young people can be supported to achieve, and how educational practices can be developed to align to their individual needs are pursued throughout. Rather than seeing children as victims of uncertainty and change, children and young people are positioned as experts, with voices, and as rights bearers who can provide important insights into the educational practices that shape their futures.

While the pandemic has had different impacts at the local level, the lessons learnt and the process of critical reflection for practitioners, educators and academics reverberate globally and provide important takeaways for readers across professional sectors and contexts. Many of these takeaways connect to debates about how to support additional learning needs of pupils, how to foster autonomy and independence, and how to employ

pedagogical tools to support young people in exploring and managing their emotional responses to crisis.

A final theme developed in this book could be said to be the value of dialogue. Contributors come from a variety of disciplinary and professional backgrounds and have distinct interests spanning education, youth justice, arts education, MFL teaching, support for mental health and teaching children with additional needs. Using different lenses to explore and understand educational practices, they are brought together here in ways that conceptualise new visions for teaching and learning.

The different ways in which the pandemic has opened out opportunities for reflection and change are a central concern for Chap. 1. Drawing upon case study examples from a Social Justice Makerspace in a New York City school and a student-led Education for Disaster Risk Reduction project in Naarm (Melbourne), Australia, Deborah Ralls, Lou Lahana, Briony Towers and Leigh Johnson explore relational, creative and democratic approaches to education. Despite the uncertainty and disruption of the pandemic, the authors recommend a much broader contextualisation, which recognises how children and young people throughout the world face socio-economic uncertainty and disruption every day and how the voices of children and young people are positioned in debates and policy discourse seeking to make changes. Throughout each of the case studies in this chapter, there is a strong focus on the creative, relational voices of children and young people, as activists, advocates and stakeholders who have important messages to convey. The authors draw upon the theoretical tenets of Freire and Dewey to propose a democratic education and one that, rather than seeing children and young people as victims of uncertainty, repositions them as 'power-full', expert educators who can shape a more inclusive, socially just education and future.

Despite the well-documented limitations and challenges of the pandemic, in Chap. 2, Kathryn Spicksley and Alison Kington chart many of the 'the silver linings' that practitioners have reflected upon when faced with the challenge of re-imagining education in a post-COVID world. With a focus on a more individualised, equitable and supportive education system for the future, the authors consider that for some children, forms of remote learning can improve learning behaviours and facilitate independence and responsibility. This raises many questions about how best to incorporate blended learning opportunities into students' teaching and learning and the long-term sustainability of the high-stakes testing regime in England. For all of its challenges, for some children and teachers the

very early days of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown offered a glimpse into an educational future with more freedom and increased focus on the holistic development of the individual child.

Underpinned by the voices of families, Jess Whitley, Jacqueline Specht, Ian Matheson and Jeffrey MacCormack discuss their research in Chap. 3, exploring how families navigated at-home learning during the spring of March 2020. Their study unveils the challenges parents were met with, often in the face of support systems 'full of holes', as they accommodated their new identities as home-schoolers of children with additional learning needs. By reflecting on efforts to develop and maintain collaborative relationships between school and home, they consider how parents have become able to be more like partners in their children's education. By exploring the time and space that parents have for this—often embedded within overloaded school schedules—they question how it is possible to create partnerships with those who are disengaged or without the capital to be able to navigate the pathways into and through school systems. Furthermore, they question how educators and system leaders can develop a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in parenting, working and supporting the learning of children with special education needs. Engaging with young people, particularly vulnerable groups, provides openings to connect with the interests and needs of young people. This provides insights that can help shape practices across education sectors.

Set against a background of declining numbers of students studying the Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts (SHAPE), in Chap. 4, Lucy Jenkins focuses on the situation for language education in Wales, as just one of the SHAPE disciplines that has been impacted by widespread in-school teaching closures. The chapter explores a Post-16 Language Recovery Project implemented by MFL Mentoring. Jenkins describes how the project was highly effective in developing learners' motivation and curiosity to explore other languages and cultures beyond their areas of study, showing that language learning could be enhanced if learners were afforded the opportunities to think on a global scale.

The theme of how educators can help young people to explore and understand a global crisis is developed in a new direction in Chap. 5. Here, Catherine Heinemeyer reflects on COVID-19 and considers what lessons can be learnt to better support practitioners in developing 'crisis pedagogies' that can address the *ecological grief* and *eco-anxiety* experienced by many young people in relation to climate change and ecological destruction. She asks, how can we pass on our wisdom about how to live

well in a world in crisis? Drawing upon the voices and experiences of young people, Heinemeyer debates how important issues such as climate change can be effectively taught through drama and storytelling, and what this may suggest about how to teach the crisis of the pandemic.

The different ways in which children and young people navigate a time of uncertainty and change, and the real threat of disease posed by COVID-19, are explored through the lens of literature in Chap. 6. As a space that can both support escapism and connect to the lived and very real experiences of a pandemic, Gabriel Duckels and Amy Ryder examine how 'emergency children's literature' not only provides the very youngest of children with information that may help them to process questions and concerns, but also allows older children and young people to explore the nuances of disaster, disease and the challenging questions that align with these areas.

Drawing together a variety of quite different perspectives, this volume challenges many assumptions about young people and their capacity to direct their own learning, both within formal contexts and in the home. This creates different ways of understanding and positioning parents as partners and advocates in and for their child's learning (Cadieux et al., 2019). The book also ponders a future where crisis, be it health or climate, is part of everyday life, central to how academics understand education and how practitioners design and deliver new curricula that can support a new global landscape.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this book acts as a first step. A step towards greater dialogue and collaboration globally and a step towards educational justice for all.

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Reimagining Education in a Pandemic: Children and Young People as Powerful Educators

Deborah Ralls, Lou Lahana, Briony Towers, and Leigh Johnson

Abstract COVID-19 has caused unprecedented levels of worldwide disruption to the education of children and young people, who have been among the worst affected by the socio-economic impacts of the global pandemic. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that children and young

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people are not passive victims. Conversely, during lockdown it has been impossible to ignore the ways in which so many children and young people have emerged as powerful educators. Our youngest citizens have been at the forefront of protests regarding Black Lives Matter and systemic racism, climate change and, in the UK, class-based bias in examination results during COVID-19. The lessons they have taught us have resulted in policy change at local and national levels and created conversations across the generations about desirable futures and the importance of making change happen.

This chapter uses examples from a Social Justice Makerspace in a New York City school and a Student-led Education for Disaster Risk Reduction in Naarm (Melbourne), Australia, to explore how more relational, creative and democratic approaches to education can continue to recognise and support children and young people's power to initiate, develop and lead change and create more inclusive, socially just futures for us all.

Keywords Student-led • Relational • Democratic • Creative practices • Protests • Policy change • Social Justice Makerspace • New York • Disaster risk reduction • Melbourne • COVID-19

Introduction

COVID-19 has caused unprecedented levels of worldwide disruption to the education of children and young people, who have also been among the worst affected by the socio-economic impacts of the global pandemic. Traditional classroom-based approaches have proved to be extremely difficult to replicate via remote learning from home and many students have inevitably found it hard to engage with virtual school during the pandemic. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that children and young people are not passive victims. Conversely, during lockdown, it has been impossible to ignore the ways in which so many children and young people have emerged as powerful educators. Our youngest citizens have been at the forefront of protests regarding Black Lives Matter and systemic racism, climate change and, in the UK, class-based bias in examination results during COVID-19. The lessons that they have taught us have resulted in a variety of policy changes at local and national levels and have opened up

conversations across the generations about desirable futures and the importance of making change happen.

This chapter considers how, despite the hardships suffered during the months of school shutdowns, the virus has revealed spaces of transformative possibility for education that go way beyond innovative approaches to technology and distance learning—and beyond the school walls.

As we look to a world post-pandemic, we use examples from a Social Justice Makerspace in New York City school and Student-led Education for Disaster Risk Reduction in Naarm (Melbourne), Australia, to explore how more relational, creative and democratic approaches to education can continue to recognise and support children's and young people's power to initiate, develop and lead change that can create more inclusive, socially just futures for us all.

Recovering from Disaster: Power Shifts and the Importance of Pedagogy

For people in the Global North, the pandemic has caused a huge rupture in our everyday, taken-for-granted approaches to education. If anything, it has taught us to expect the unexpected. It is important to recognise, however, that millions of children and young people (CYP) across the globe, and particularly in the Global South, already faced such uncertainties on a daily basis, often through the consequences of socio-economic policies that have led to hardship for them and their families, or which have been found to exacerbate the frequency of environmental hazards and disasters, causing huge disruption to millions of young lives.

It is vital to view COVID-19 in this broader socio-economic context. We need to recognise that many of us in the Global North have much to learn from colleagues worldwide, who, in the face of disaster and huge adversity, use alternative pedagogies to support CYP to recognise and exercise their fundamental right to participate in matters that affect them (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989) and to advocate for change for a more socially just and inclusive society. The approaches discussed in this chapter are two such examples of how, in extremely challenging contexts, pedagogical approaches are used to reposition CYP as powerful educators and change makers, rather than passive victims of circumstance.

International thinking in the field of social justice and the economy calls for education "to focus on learning environments and on new approaches to learning for greater justice, social equity and global solidarity" (UNESCO, 2015, p. 3), and for the balance of power to shift towards young people, enabling them to help build flourishing, sustainable and inclusive communities that foster notions of social justice and solidarity (IEA, 2016; OECD, 2018). In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for pedagogical approaches that support such learning environments is more important than ever. Indeed, at the height of the pandemic, the UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development highlighted the need for countries to implement the following measures to aid sustainable and equitable global recovery from the pandemic:

1. Partnering, safely and effectively, with young people during and after the COVID-19 crisis;
2. Recognising young people's own actions and their potential to advance the fight against the pandemic; and,
3. Understanding the specific impacts the pandemic has and will have on young people, while ensuring that the responses uphold their human rights and are inclusive of young people's specific needs. (UN IANYD, 2020, p. 1)

Furthermore, during the pandemic, there has been a growing recognition that CYP have done much to contribute to raising awareness and instigating change for a more inclusive society, despite being offered few opportunities to participate in democratic and political life (European Commission, 2021, p. 3):

> The sight of young people lining the streets around the world to call for climate action or as child human rights defenders show us that children are active citizens and agents of change. While in most EU Member States children do not have the right to vote until age 18, they do have the right to be active members of democratic societies and can help to shape, implement, and evaluate political priorities.

Recent research (OECD, 2020) shows that, despite the major role that CYP have taken in addressing societal injustices and challenges (Gooch, 2021; Ralls, 2020a), they feel less heard in political debates and are less

likely to trust their government than their parents' generation. There is a need for policymakers to recognise CYP's own actions and their potential to advance innovative developments for an inclusive future (UN IANYD, 2020)—and to better understand the role that pedagogy has in supporting this aim. The pandemic provides us with the opportunity to reimagine education, using alternative pedagogies to engage CYP as active citizens and change agents (Ralls, 2020a, b). A sustainable and equitable recovery from the global pandemic will require approaches to education that go beyond a drive to improve individual academic achievement and employment outcomes. Instead we should recognise how, rather than choosing to focus on the individual, our choice of pedagogical approach can help to build the type of strong, collaborative working relationships between and among children, their communities and local policymakers advocated by the European Commission (2021) and the UN IANYD (2020) and position CYP as decision makers in building a more inclusive and socially just world.

Theory Matters: Praxis and Thinking Relationally

Research points to how certain pedagogical approaches can illuminate ways of building thicker democratic relationships among and between different stakeholder groups (students, teachers, parents and community members), with students viewed as being key decision makers in the education process. Thin understandings of democracy are consumer driven and individualistic (Apple, 2013). In an education context this can be seen in conceptions of education that position the student as a separate, individual consumer, in contrast with thick collective forms of democracy, which tend to be orientated towards the notion of education as a collective endeavour and are thus more closely associated with a 'community' standpoint (Carr, 2012; Gandin & Apple, 2002).

Pedagogy can also position students as the experts in their own lives. Dewey (1916, p. 150) suggests that enabling students to have some say over what they learn is also beneficial for teachers, helping teaching to become an "educative process for the teacher," where the teacher learns from her/his students in a relationship of "intellectual companionship." Dewey's beliefs are echoed in the work of Paolo Freire (1970), whose approach to pedagogy is based on the notion that teachers should be in

constant dialogue with their students about the learning that is taking place, so as to develop pedagogy "with, not for" the students. Freire's (1970) approach is founded on the notion of praxis, which Glassman and Patton (2013, p. 6) explain thus:

> The action-reflection-action cycle that helps individuals understand what they are doing and why they are doing it.

Freire (1970) believes that using a pedagogy based on praxis gives students the opportunity to recognise their power and agency in their day-to-day lives and "to make conscious, self-aware decisions regarding their life and their community" (Glassman & Patton, 2013, p. 6). If we are to build back fairer post pandemic, we argue that this requires pedagogies that are rooted in praxis and an explicit recognition of the distinction between compliant, passive forms of student engagement and more agentic or deep engagement in the learning process (Crick, 2012; Reeve, 2012).

Reeve (2012) describes an agentically or deeply engaged student as someone who can offer input, bringing something personal to the engagement experience to enrich, modify or adapt the processes and activities that take place, whilst Crick's view is that a deeply engaged student is "an intentional participant in a social process which is taking place over time" (Crick, 2012, p. 678). Pedagogies that engage with students as "intentional participants" in the education process can thus also help to change relational identities, recognising the value of young people's own actions and their potential to act as educators and change agents in the fight against the pandemic (UN IANYD, 2020).

Relational identities are inextricably linked to our day-to-day social interactions and lived experiences (Holland et al., 1998). There are associated notions of power and positionality that emerge from the ways in which these identities are formed in, and emerge from, education contexts (Ralls, 2017). It is important, therefore, to consider how pedagogy impacts on our students, how it makes them feel about speaking to others, working collaboratively with others, having authority to make decisions or going into what is considered to be another's space (Holland et al., 1998). Lawson and Lawson (2013) define positionality in an education context as being formed by person-activity-environment interactions. These three elements (person-activity-environment) can be considered in terms of interactions, or relationships:

1. Person: the opportunities offered to different stakeholders to interact with other people.
2. Activity: through what sort of activities.
3. Environment: in what type of environment.

Positionality is defined as who stakeholders are and what they do "in relation to a particular engagement activity, in specific social contexts, at any given point in time" (Lawson & Lawson, 2013, p. 445). It can be said that our choice of pedagogy, and the learning experience which it creates, has an indelible impact on the relational identities of CYP.

The alternative pedagogies explored in this chapter deliberately set out to create new types of person-activity-environment relationships for students. The Social Action Makerspace and the Harkaway Primary School Bushfire Safety Committee change traditional classroom dynamics and learning contexts, establish new collaborative relationships and disrupt traditional notions of power and positionality in education. These alternative pedagogies, as explained below, necessitate asset-based approaches to learning, which "make visible, value and utilise" the students' "skills, knowledge, connections and potential" (Foot, 2012, p. 8), explicitly acknowledging the assets that students can bring to bear on education, and viewing that education as a collective endeavour.

The Virtual Social Action Makerspace, New York City: Lou Lahana

School Makerspaces have shown remarkable potential for developing creativity, academic achievement and activism in students. Here, I provide an account of my virtual School Makerspace that took place as part of a New York City public middle school class during spring 2020 of the COVID-19 pandemic. Using the Positive Youth Development framework, I reflect upon the development of the pedagogy and practice of the virtual Social Action Makerspace, including student learning outcomes and artifacts. Situated in a school where nearly half the students are homeless, this piece illustrates how students can draw strength from their own adversity in order to promote resilience and visions for a better future during a uniquely challenging time.

Background and Context

For over a decade, I have run a Social Action-themed Makerspace (SAM) for middle school students at The Island School (The Island School, n.d.) in New York City. Nearly half of our students are homeless, coming from nearby shelters or doubled-up/tripled-up in what should be single-family housing (Coffey, 2020). Despite their harsh situations, rather than withdrawing from creative practices, students in our Makerspace use their lived experiences as fuel to ignite activism in pursuit of positive change. In past years, the physical Makerspace has enabled students to research a social issue that concerned them and use a diverse set of creative practices to raise awareness and invent solutions to address issues of social justice. Central to the success of these projects (and the Makerspace itself) were student "choice" and "voice." That is, students chose both the issues that were important to them and the forms of expression that they felt passionate about.

Tools and materials incorporated into such work included hammers and wood; paint and clay; a 3D printer and a laser cutter; cameras and pianos; and/or beads and sewing machines. Students' social activism occurred through both community outreach and by sharing their projects with larger audiences through social media. Examples include portable homeless shelters, handcrafted jewellery embedded with messages against domestic violence, documentaries battling street harassment and Islamophobia, and music supporting gun control. Numerous other examples are available online (https://vimeo.com/channels/socialaction).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, our school was one of a majority of public-school buildings that closed in the United States and switched to virtual learning. Accordingly, the school's SAM had to be re-designed to flourish with digital, rather than physical, tools for student projects. A virtual structure had to be designed to preserve the ability of students to choose their own issue and forms of expression (i.e. "choice" and "voice"). Like the in-person SAM, success of the virtual SAM hinged on whether it could be used effectively to communicate students' lived experiences and advocate for positive social change. Approximately 120 middle school students were enrolled in the virtual SAM, primarily taught asynchronously using lessons on the Makerspace website (https://techbrarian.com). These lessons were supplemented by individual and small-group student conferencing.

This section provides both a descriptive account and a critical analysis of the pedagogical practices that took place within my virtual SAM from March 2020 through June 2020. A selection of student projects is included to provide a fuller picture of what transpired during this time. Their work will be examined through the lens of Positive Youth Development, a strengths-based approach to promote positive outcomes for young people (Lerner et al., 2011).

The Framework: Positive Youth Development

Researchers often use a deficit perspective when studying the impact of a given educational approach with underserved communities (Mertens, 2010). Rather than focus on the existing strengths and the positive resources available within the community, this perspective seeks to "solve" problems, often through imposing researchers' values. A deficit perspective has been widespread in academic texts examining the negative impact of COVID-19 pandemic-related school closures on students of low socioeconomic status in the United States (e.g. Agostinelli et al., 2020; Lancker & Parolin, 2020; Mitchell, 2020). Seen through this lens, these closures will result in lasting socioemotional, academic and economic effects for students living in poverty.

Positive Youth Development (PYD) challenges the deficit approach by positioning children and teens as agents capable of affecting positive change in themselves and their communities. As practitioners of PYD, our Makerspace views its students as "resources to be developed, rather than problems to be managed" (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Our PYD approach centres on efforts to bring out students' "sparks"—their full talents, interests and sense of purpose (Roehlkepartain et al., 2010). For this to happen, adolescents must be surrounded by opportunities and resources that allow their assets to emerge (Hamilton et al., 2004).

These assets are operationalised according to six characteristics (the six Cs): competence, confidence, character, connection, caring and contribution. Broadly referred to in the PYD literature as "thriving," adolescents possessing strengths in these areas positively contribute to their contexts, setting up a mutually beneficial relationship (Lerner et al., 2011). Put another way, positive feedback loops occur when youth feel good about themselves and believe in the value of helping others. Students take action to better the world and the world celebrates their good work. This

Table 1 The six Cs through the lens of our Makerspace

PYD characteristic	*Makerspace student indicator*
Competence	Possessing a deep understanding of their social issue and project tools.
Confidence	High level of creativity, problem solving and advocacy for their issue.
Character	The authenticity of their conviction towards their issue.
Connection	Student's identification with their issue and/or empathy for those affected by the issue. For group projects, the level of collaboration between members.
Caring	Personal investment in their work. Awareness of an audience and effort to connect with them.
Contribution	Student's sense that their project has made a difference.

affirmation from the world, in turn, leads to more good work being done, and so forth.

As an emerging educational model, School Makerspaces have been shown to support many of these characteristics of PYD through the building of equity and diversity, the promotion of peer-to-peer teaching and the generation of passion-based learning and activism. These outcomes derive, in part, from the ability of School Makerspaces to democratise knowledge and invention, encourage creative problem solving and invigorate core curricula (Blikstein, 2013; Clapp et al., 2017; Vossoughi et al., 2016).

The closure of school buildings throughout New York City due to the COVID-19 pandemic brought unique challenges for our students. Yet it also presented opportunities for students to foster community connections, instil hope among one another and share valuable perspectives on overcoming adversity. Using indicators aligned to PYD (see Table 1), the degree to which our virtual Makerspace achieved these outcomes was measured.

Implementation

A Menu of Choices

With many of the structural features of my physical Makerspace missing, it was uncertain whether students would be able to create projects within their homes. Struggling with housing and food insecurity, few were likely to have the scroll saws, 3D printers and T-shirt presses found within our *in-person* SAM. Still, because our educational department provided a large

percentage of our students with internet-connected tablets, I set about creating a menu of web-based and low-tech creative practices by which students could express themselves and educate others. These included creating art pieces, songs, podcasts and graphic novels. Students used my website (https://techbrarian.com) to research their social issue. Once identified and researched, their assignment was to create a project to raise awareness of the issue and offer solutions.

Momentum Builds

In the months that followed, students produced a remarkable set of projects ranging from heartfelt songs and compelling podcasts to meaningful embroidery and heart-breaking drawings (Figs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6). As with our in-person SAM, projects were infused with the six PYD characteristics outlined above. These included deep research and display of skill mastery (competence/confidence), genuine self-expression and advocacy for an issue (character/caring), as well as an interest in connecting with their project's audience through outward facing art, use of language and a variety of digital media creation strategies (connection) (Eyesatou, 2020). Such projects positioned students as assets within their local and global communities, rather than passive victims of a dysfunctional school system.

Fig. 1 Eighth-grade student embroidery: Have Faith

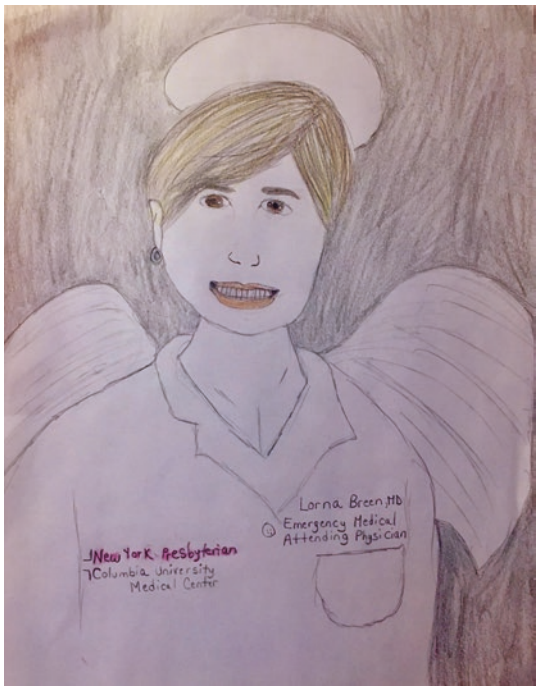


Fig. 2 Sixth-grade student COVID-19 hero memorial

Many students found inspiration through creating art depicting the heroes of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially overlooked frontline workers like sanitation workers, MTA workers and shopkeepers. Others paid tribute to healthcare professionals or chose to honour their own family members for keeping their family afloat during this troubled time.

More than anything, students spoke of their own struggles with life at home: the isolation, the limitations of virtual learning, the new safety precautions and the fear within themselves and their community. This took many forms, including deeply felt poetry, an arresting podcast and portraits. Through a PYD lens, the entire local/global communities' shared experience of the pandemic gave students a unique connection to a diverse group of people. Like all those in their community, they were experts in the pain, loss, depression and gratitude that COVID-19 brought forth. As experts on their own experiences, many were deeply invested in helping others, and armed with digital and low-tech tools, they believed they had something to contribute in order to bring about a positive change.

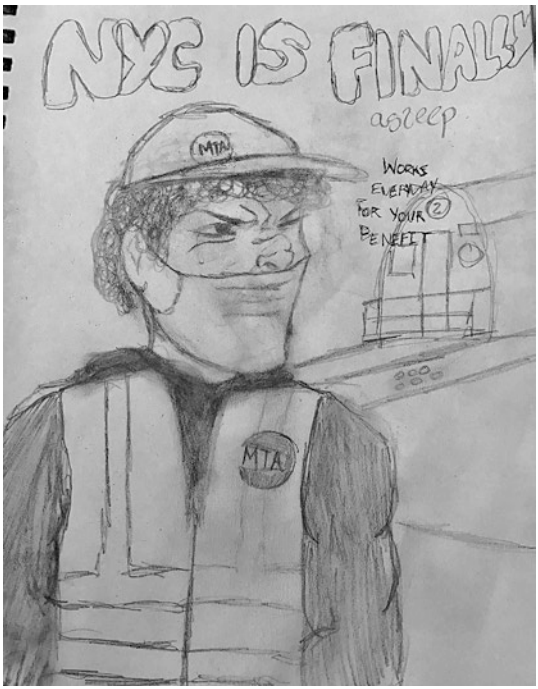


Fig. 3 Eighth-grade student COVID-19 hero

Interestingly, a significant number of students who found it hard to develop creative projects within the *in-person* SAM found their voice when working virtually. Several factors seemed at play for those students. First, because many of our students are English as a new language (ENL) learners, having asynchronous instruction meant they could learn at their own pace. They could pause media to translate, use subtitling or get help from family members. These affordances might have reduced the cognitive load that can impact retention (Abeysekera & Dawson, 2014). All students could now take breaks when they needed them and study during their highest functioning hours. For students with social anxiety, learning virtually may have allowed for less unwanted stimulation, fear of judgement and/or bullying.

A prime example of the benefits of virtual learning was eighth grader Dashana. As an ENL student, she often struggled with the research element of my class. Many of the resources contained on my website are English-only and in-person lessons are taught primarily in English (with

Walls

by Elijah Ais

Walls all around me
Sunlight only through glass
Moon only through glass
Air, but not fresh
Life that feels like death
Trapped when I am free
Lost with questions
unanswered
Fogged from confusion
Darkened by loss

Eggs, bacon, pancakes
Its a routine
Dinner by 6 its a routine
Shower at 7 its a routine
Bed by 11 its a routine
Homework daily its a
routine

The TV is scary
Nothing is clear
There is nothing but fear

Games and movies
Nothing else to do
Walls all around me
I am in a glass jar and
I wish it would break

If walls could talk
They would talk
Laughter
Music
Love
Family
Happiness
Because that is what these
walls see
But sometimes there are
Tears
Fear
Pain
Bordom

How much longer?
How much?
When does it end?
When will the air be fresh
again?
When will we walk?
When will we play?
When will the freedom be
ours again?

Walks in the park
Drives to the beach
This is what we need

The air
Dark
Feared
Toxic
But is it really?
What is reality?
We live
But do we really?
Trapped in these walls
Nothing is the same
Everything has changed
All so sudden

We find ways to be happy
To laugh
To love
To help each other
When will the glass break
So that we no longer have
to be
Trapped in these walls

Fig. 4 Seventh-grade student poem

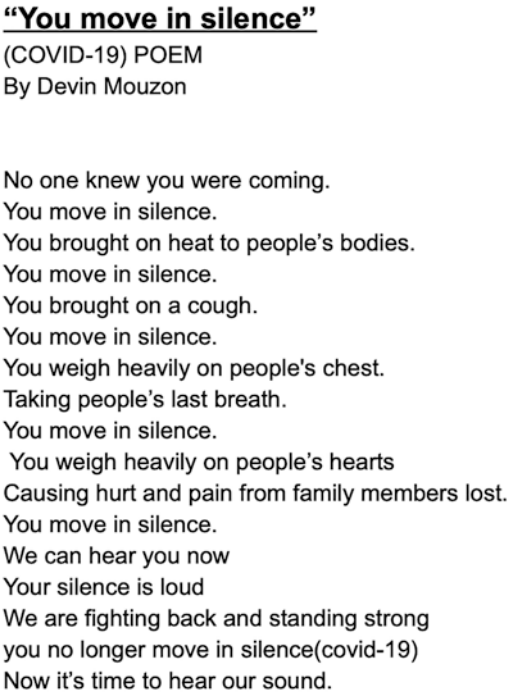
occasional Spanish translation). Her past art pieces included dream catchers, an embroidered Puerto Rican Flag and papier-mâché masks. While artistically impressive, these projects lacked the PYD characteristics of Character, Caring and Connection. They were arts and crafts disconnected from her lived experiences or perspective on issues affecting her world.

Fig. 5 Seventh-grade student podcast. https://soundcloud.com/techbrarian/adan-podcast-e1-COVID-19-and-virtual-learning?in=techbrarian/sets/social-action-1

This changed dramatically during the Virtual Tech Café. Week after week, she produced stunning projects about her experiences with COVID-19. Her work included a hip hop song, calling on God to save her future children (https://soundcloud.com/techbrarian/god-is-with-me-by-dashana?in=techbrarian/sets/social-action-1), as well as a spoken word poem in which she lamented that her sick grandmother could not go to the hospital for help (https://soundcloud.com/techbrarian/both-of-them-by-dashana?in=techbrarian/sets/social-action-1). Both pieces required an enormous amount of competence, confidence and character to write, record and edit. As with all exemplary projects, I highlighted her work on my website and on our school's social media channels. Classmates and the wider community reacted glowingly to her projects, leaving comments, and re-posting the work. Contributions like Dashana's helped build momentum and illustrated the power of students to create transformative work, even in the most difficult of times.

Reflections

From a Positive Youth Developmental perspective, post-pandemic education disrupts power dynamics in favour of those who have experienced hardships. Students like mine who have lived through multiple traumas associated with food insecurity, housing insecurity, drug abuse and domestic violence are uniquely positioned to empathise with those in crisis. Projects generated during the pandemic have illustrated what occurs when students show a willingness to connect, combined with competence at



“You move in silence”
(COVID-19) POEM
By Devin Mouzon

No one knew you were coming.
You move in silence.
You brought on heat to people’s bodies.
You move in silence.
You brought on a cough.
You move in silence.
You weigh heavily on people's chest.
Taking people’s last breath.
You move in silence.
You weigh heavily on people’s hearts
Causing hurt and pain from family members lost.
You move in silence.
We can hear you now
Your silence is loud
We are fighting back and standing strong
you no longer move in silence(covid-19)
Now it’s time to hear our sound.

Fig. 6 Seventh-grade student poem

wielding creative tools. Through caring and contribution, classmates and viewers beyond the walls of the school building recognised that students, often perceived as deficient, were instead imbued with the ability to teach resilience, inclusivity and the value of social activism.

The Harkaway Primary School Bushfire Safety Committee, Naarm, (Melbourne): Briony Towers and Leigh Johnson

Historically, children have been viewed as vulnerable victims of disasters who are wholly reliant on adults for their safety and protection (Anderson, 2005; Fothergill & Peek, 2015; Tanner, 2010). Over the last decade,

however, a burgeoning literature has demonstrated that when children have access to knowledge and resources, and are afforded opportunities to participate in action and decision-making, they can make highly valuable contributions across the full spectrum of disaster risk management, from the assessment of local hazards and disaster risks through to the planning, implementation and evaluation of local actions for disaster risk reduction (DRR), response and recovery (Haynes & Tanner, 2015; Peek et al., 2018; Mitchell et al., 2008, 2009; Mort et al., 2020; Towers et al., 2018). At a time when we are experiencing disaster on a global scale, in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic, research and practice in the field of DRR education provides educators, community members and policymakers in the Global North with examples of how to engage more relationally with CYP as experts in their own lives.

In recognition of children's capacities for reducing disaster risk and building resilience, the *United Nations Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030* (UNDRR, 2015) identifies them as "agents of change" who should be "given the space and modalities to contribute to disaster risk reduction, in accordance with legislation, national practice and educational curricula" (p. 23). The Sendai Framework also states that "while recognising their leading, regulatory and coordination role, governments should engage with relevant stakeholders, including…children and youth…in the design and implementation of policies, plans and standards" (p. 10). Climate change, environmental degradation, rapid urbanisation, increasing social and economic inequality, and ongoing colonial violence and injustice are exposing increasing numbers of children to the devastating impacts of environmental hazards and disasters (Bolin & Kurtz, 2018; Birkmann et al., 2017; Fletcher et al., 2021; Hore et al., 2018; IPCC, 2014, 2021; Williamson et al., 2020). Now, in the context of the global pandemic, the implementation of education programmes that enable children's genuine participation in action and decision-making for disaster risk reduction, recovery and resilience has never been more urgent or important (UNDRR, 2015, 2020; UNESCO/UNICEF, 2014).

In southeastern Australia, where bushfire hazards and disasters are recurring with increasing frequency and intensity (van Oldenborgh et al., 2021; Steffen et al., 2019), the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre and RMIT University have been collaborating with children, teachers, school leaders and emergency service agencies to design approaches to teaching and learning that position children as agents of change for disaster risk reduction in their households, schools and

communities (Towers, 2015, 2019; Towers et al., 2018, 2019; Towers & Ronan, 2018). While this work has been predominantly focussed on bushfire, we believe it can provide a useful theoretical and empirical foundation for promoting children's roles as intentional participants in risk management for a wide range of hazards and disasters, including biological hazards, such as COVID-19.

Background and Context

On Saturday 7 February 2009, bushfires of an unprecedented magnitude and intensity burned across the state of Victoria in southeastern Australia. The destruction wrought by those fires was immense: 173 people were killed, including 23 children; 2133 homes and three schools were destroyed; and the damage bill was estimated at $AU4 billion (Teague et al., 2010). In the immediate aftermath of what is now commonly referred to as "Black Saturday," the Victorian government established the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, which was tasked with conducting a full and detailed inquiry into the disaster. In its final report, the Commission noted that a general lack of bushfire knowledge and preparedness in the impacted communities had contributed, at least in part, to the degree of loss and damage (Teague et al., 2010). The Commission also identified bushfire education for children as the most effective means by which to rectify lack of this knowledge and preparedness in the community:

> *The Commission is of the view that educating children about the history of fire in Australia and about safety in the event of a bushfire will probably influence not only the children but also their parents, siblings and extended family and community. A concerted education program remains the most effective approach to instilling the necessary knowledge in Australian families.* (Teague et al., 2010, p. 55)

The Commission made the official recommendation that bushfire education be made a formal part of the national school curriculum:

> *Recommendation 6: Victoria [should] lead an initiative of the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs to ensure that the national curriculum incorporates the history of bushfire in Australia and that existing curriculum areas, such as geography, science, and environmental studies include elements of bushfire education.* (Teague et al., 2010, p. 2)

As a direct result of Recommendation 6, the Australian Curriculum for Grade 5 Geography now requires students to learn about the "impacts of bushfires or floods on environments and communities and how people can respond" (ACARA, 2019). The introduction of this new curriculum has prompted a national effort to develop models of school-based bushfire education that not only increase children's knowledge, skills and understandings of bushfire hazards and risks, but afford opportunities for their deep engagement and genuine participation in meaningful action for risk reduction and resilience at the local level (Towers, 2019). This has required us to challenge the dominant paradigm of bushfire education in Australian schools, which strongly resembles what Freire (1970) referred to as the "banking model," characterised by a strong emphasis on the rote memorisation of standardised content that is decontextualised from the political, social, cultural, economic and environmental contexts in which children live. If children are encouraged to engage in risk reduction activities, those activities are usually prescribed by external actors, and the primary means of assessment is the recognition/recall of key safety messages, and/or the successful completion of prescribed activities (Towers, 2019).

What follows is an account of how Harkaway Primary School, a Victorian government school located on the bushfire-prone, peri-urban fringe of Naarm, Melbourne (Harkaway Primary School, n.d.), has adopted a Critical Pedagogy of Place to subvert the dominant paradigm of bushfire education and position children as agents of their own learning and action.

The Framework: Critical Pedagogy of Place

Over the last decade, there has been a substantial increase in academic research on DRR education for children (see Amri et al., 2018 for a recent review). While this research has provided valuable empirical evidence of the benefits of participatory educational approaches that privilege children's voices and perspectives (e.g. Peek et al., 2018; Mort et al., 2020; Towers & Gough, 2019), there remains a distinct lack of any guiding theoretical framework that can inform future research, policy and practice. We believe that critical pedagogy of place (Gruenewald, 2003), an educational theory which synthesises critical pedagogy and place-based education, can serve to address this gap.

Critical pedagogy and place-based education are both concerned with the contextual and geographical conditions that shape people, and the

actions people take to shape those conditions (Gruenewald, 2003). However, they each represent distinct educational traditions.

Critical pedagogy is socially grounded: it is characterised by a social and educational vision of justice and equality; a belief that education is inherently political; and a dedication to the alleviation of human suffering (Freire, 1970; Kincheloe, 2008; Giroux, 1988; hooks, 1994). Critical pedagogues are concerned with "situationality," in terms of both the lived experience of people and the often oppressive social structures that shape experience and need to be transformed (Freire, 1970; Gruenewald, 2003). The aim of critical pedagogy is to engage learners in the act of what Freire calls *conscientizacao* (or critical consciousness): the act of perceiving social, political and economic contradictions and taking action against the oppressive elements of reality (Freire, 1970, p. 17).

Place-based education, meanwhile, is ecologically grounded: it emerges from the particular attributes of place; it is inherently multidisciplinary and experiential; and it connects place with self and community (Sobel, 2004; Smith & Sobel, 2010; Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000). Place-based educators are also concerned with "situationality," but the emphasis is not so much on transformative change, as on promoting the well-being of places and organising curricula in ways that enable children to experience a deep empathetic connection to others, human and non-human (Gruenewald, 2003; Sobel, 1996). The aim of place-based education is to engage learners in a process of naming those aspects of cultural, ecological and community life that should be conserved, renewed or revitalised (Bowers, 2001).

As conceived by Gruenewald (2003, p. 9), "critical pedagogy of place blends critical pedagogy and place-based education into a coherent framework which aims to (a) identify, recover and create material spaces and places that teach us how to live well in our total environments (reinhabitation); and (b) identify and change ways of thinking that injure and exploit other people and places (decolonisation)." The utility of this framework becomes more obvious when we consider the decades of scholarship that has firmly established disaster risk as a socio-environmental phenomenon which derives from the interaction of environmental hazards, the vulnerability of exposed people and assets, and the capacities people possess for disaster prevention, preparedness, response and recovery (Cardona et al., 2012; Gaillard et al., 2018; Hewitt, 1997; Kelman, 2020; Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 2019; Wisner et al., 2004; Wisner, 2016).

If we are to reimagine education in the context of COVID-19, it seems vital to remember that the forces that determine people's exposure,

vulnerability and capacities are not natural, but social, cultural, political and economic. This is why scholars of hazards and disasters strenuously reject the term "natural disaster" (O'Keefe et al., 1976; Chmutina et al., 2017). To put it simply, disasters are not caused by nature—they are caused by human actions and decision-making (Kelman, 2020).

At Harkaway Primary School, we have sought to co-design a critical place-based bushfire education programme in which children can learn to identify the social, cultural, political and economic processes that create disaster risks and take action to transform them. This dimension of the programme speaks to the process of "decolonisation," whereby children engage in *conscientizacao* to identify and change ways of thinking and acting that create the conditions for hazard-related damage and loss. We have also sought to create opportunities for children to connect with people and places in ways that will build their individual and collective capacities to live with bushfire as part of their total environment. This dimension of the programme speaks to the process of "reinhabitation," whereby children are creating, recovering and revitalising aspects of cultural, ecological and community life that can serve to keep themselves and others, both human and non-human, safe and well.

Implementation

The programme at Harkaway was initially piloted in 2019 with a class of 42 Grade 5/6 students (see Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, 2021 for more detail). Following the completion of the pilot programme, the students collectively decided that this critical place-based pedagogy of bushfire risk should be implemented as part of their formal school curriculum. To facilitate that process, they produced *Bushfire Education for Kids: A Manifesto from Harkaway Primary School*, which encapsulates their needs and priorities as learners and citizens.[1]

The content of the manifesto emerged from a participatory workshop with the children in March 2020, just two weeks before the first COVID-19 lockdown. In this workshop, facilitated by the third author (B. Towers), the children were presented with ethnographic data that had been generated through focus groups, semi-structured interviews, informal

[1] To make the manifesto more accessible to other children, educators and policy makers, the Grade 5/6 class of 2021 have created a film version. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ItvK5k4xqSM

interviews and participant observation throughout the implementation of the pilot programme. Using methods of Socratic discussion, the children were encouraged to critically reflect upon and critique the data, and expand upon key themes. As the discussion progressed, the content of the manifesto was mapped out on large pieces of poster paper. The manifesto was then written up into a draft document that was edited and ratified by the children in a meeting with their school principal.

The manifesto, which can be seen in its entirety below, identifies the historical failure to educate children about bushfire as a key factor in the production of bushfire risk. It also challenges the notion that children are passive victims of disaster who are entirely reliant on the actions and decisions of adults for their safety. In the manifesto, the children emphasise their capacities for identifying risks that others might overlook, thus articulating the fundamental importance of their own power and agency in decision-making for transformative action. The manifesto also highlights the value of relational, place-based approaches that afford opportunities to engage in meaningful dialogue with experts, including Aboriginal Custodians who have been using fire to care for country for over 60,000 years (for a detailed account see Fletcher, 2020 and Steffenson, 2020). Perhaps most importantly, the children argue for their continued participation in the design and implementation of bushfire education, so that future generations of children can engage in purposeful, meaningful learning experiences that give them the power to shape their world.

Bushfire Education for Kids: A Manifesto from Harkaway Primary School

All of us at Harkaway Primary School would like to say thank you to the Bunurong and the Wurundjeri people—tribes of the Kulin Nation—for letting us share your land. We promise to look after it—the people and animals too. We promise to care for: The Land, the Sky, Ourselves and Each other (Fig. 7).

1. We need to learn about bushfire safety. *Bushfires can be very dangerous. People need to have a good understanding of bushfires and how to survive. Otherwise, when there is a bushfire, there will be more casualties and more deaths. It will be more catastrophic. Kids also need to know what to do to be safe and they need to learn it from a young age. When kids learn about bushfire safety from a young age, they can grow up knowing about their environment. Most people don't know about bushfires because they didn't learn*

Fig. 7 Bushfire flames. (Artwork by Chloe)

about it when they were kids. If a bushfire is happening, kids need to know what they can do so they can stay calm and help their parents, instead of the parents doing everything and the kids just going "AARRGGHH". When kids know what to do, there will be more hands on deck and everyone will be safer (Fig. 8).

2. We want to make decisions about our own learning and action. *Kids have really good ideas and sometimes we see problems and risks that adults don't see. We also know what kind of action is possible for us to achieve at home, at school and in our communities. If we can make decisions about our own learning and action, we can solve real problems that matter to us. We all learn differently and we have our own special interests and talents. When we can make decisions about our own learning and action, we can achieve more than if we are just told what to do. We also work harder to succeed because we are doing what we are good at and what we enjoy. We also need to learn at our own pace. Learning about bushfires can be overwhelming and sometimes we need to slow things down a bit or take a break to let it all sink in. When we can learn at our own pace, we get a better understanding of complicated information. We need independence. We need to figure out how to learn and discover stuff on our own. We just need the adults there to guide us, put us on the right track and help us if we get stuck. We can do the rest* (Fig. 9).

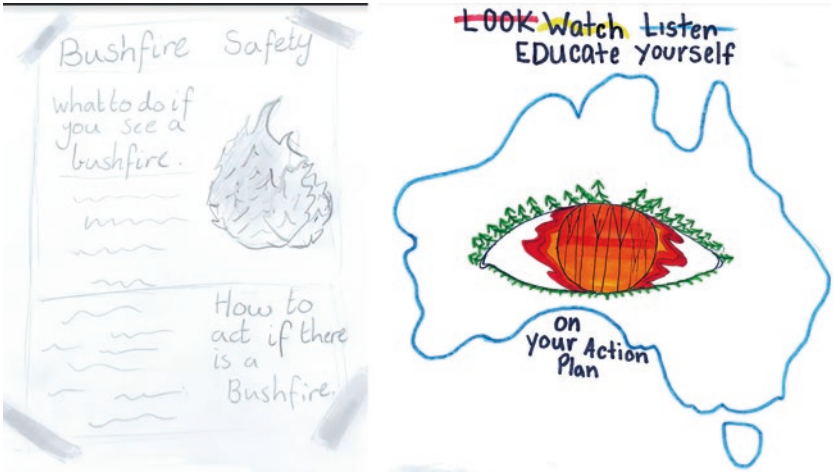


Fig. 8 Kids need to learn about bushfire safety. (Artworks by Chloe and Madi)

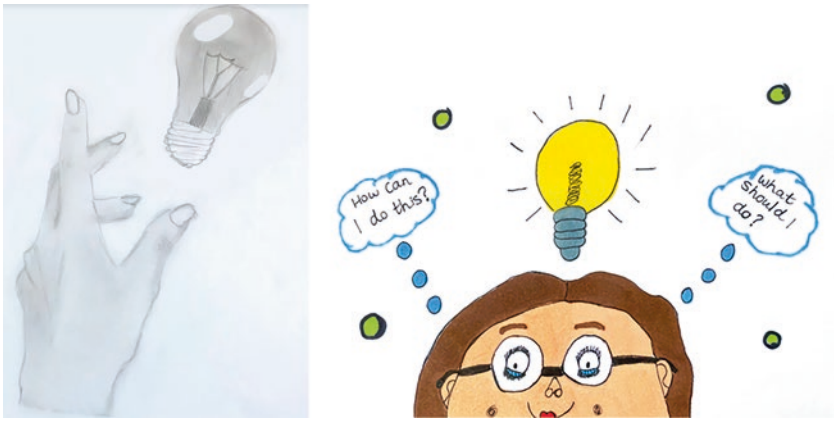


Fig. 9 Kids want to make decisions about their own learning and action. (Artworks by Chloe and Kealey)

3. We need access to trustworthy information from experts. *There is a lot of information about bushfires on the internet, but sometimes the information we are looking for isn't available or it's not explained in ways that we can understand. If we can talk to experts, we can get the information we need and it can be explained to us in ways that make sense. We also want to learn from Aboriginal people because they have been here for a really long time and they know so much. We need feedback from experts to make sure we understand things correctly. Bushfire safety is serious and we need to make sure we've got our facts right, especially if we want to share our knowledge with other people. People who are experts can check our work and help us fix problems and mistakes before we go any further. When we learn from experts, we are more confident about sharing information with other people. If our parents or other people don't believe what we say, we can tell them that our information has come from experts that we talked to at school. If we have learned from experts, people will trust us and take us more seriously. Learning from experts also gives us opportunities to improve our communication skills. Making phone calls, writing emails, and doing research interviews are good skills for us to learn. These are skills we can use to learn more about bushfires, and other important topics, throughout our lives* (Fig. 10).

4. We want to teach others. *A lot of people don't know very much about bushfire safety. Most kids don't know anything at all. We want to help educate everybody—our families, our teachers, and the other kids at our school. We also want to educate kids from other schools. There is a thing called 'Kids Teaching Kids' and it's really good because kids know what other kids know*

Fig. 10 Kids need access to trustworthy information from experts. (Artworks by Madi and Kealey)

Fig. 11 Kids want to teach others. (Artworks by Kealey and Madi)

and don't know. Kids can explain things in ways that are easy for other kids to understand. We can tailor information to fit with kids' perspectives. We can make videos, posters, and books to help get important information to people who need it. We can run workshops and give presentations. We can show people how to use online tools and smartphone apps so they can understand their risks and receive emergency warnings. Teaching others improves our own learning. Sometimes you don't know how much you know until you try to teach someone else, so it's a good way to find out if you actually know what you think you know. Also, teaching others can show us that we have really learned a lot and that makes us feel proud. We can also share our knowledge and perspectives to help teachers and fire agencies create better bushfire education programs for kids. We can tell them what is important to us because we are experts in our own lives and we can show them the best ways to teach us because we are experts in our own learning (Fig. 11).

Reflections

The critical pedagogy of place being implemented at Harkaway Primary School provides a valuable example of the role that CYP can play in disaster risk reduction in their schools and communities. It demonstrates the importance of involving children in disaster risk reduction, response and recovery as equal partners whose voices, perspectives and experiences must be listened to and acted upon.

While the work at Harkaway is focussed on bushfire hazards and disasters, it is important to recognise that the conditions that expose vulnerable

communities to these hazards and disasters are the same processes that have exposed vulnerable communities to the impacts of COVID-19: namely, social and economic inequality, racial injustice, gendered discrimination, political marginalisation and exclusion from processes of policy development and implementation. Importantly, the capacities that communities can draw on to prevent, mitigate, prepare for and respond to bushfire hazards and disasters are also the same capacities that communities have drawn upon to survive the COVID-19 pandemic: namely, local knowledge, social networks and collective resources.

This begs a series of fundamentally important questions. What might we learn from a place-based critical pedagogy of the COVID-19 pandemic? What might we learn by listening to children's voices, perspectives and experiences and affording them power and agency in decision-making as we move forward? What might they learn about themselves and their communities in the process? Most importantly, what contributions, through the dual processes of reinhabitation and decolonisation, might they make to the resilience of their communities, both now and into the future?

Conclusion

Rather than forcing our youngest citizens to be passive observers of challenges that are all too often seen as being beyond their control, the Social Action Makerspace and the Harkaway Primary School Bushfire Safety Committee support CYP to develop their confidence and capacity for difficult decision-making (Wood & Hamilton, 2021).

Our chapter illustrates how our recovery from the global pandemic can be viewed as a catalyst for change, presenting us with an opportunity to build a more inclusive, socially just society (Picketty, 2020). Research shows that when CYP are engaged and empowered, societies will be more cohesive and resilient and democracies more vibrant (OECD, 2018). Moreover, as we recover from the global pandemic, the agency and co-agency of CYP are essential for future individual and collective well-being (OECD, 2019, *Learning Compass 2030*):

We have sought to show that theory matters in this process, by addressing the need to "connect critical educational theories and approaches to the actual ways in which they can be and are present in real classrooms and other educative sites" (Apple, 2011, p. 21). Pedagogies, and the storytelling that accompanies them, are a fundamental and inextricable part of our

CYP's lived experiences (Dewey, 1916) during COVID-19 and beyond, and can give CYP "the possibility to get to know and to act upon their own problems, and the problems of their surroundings in a creative and constructive way; in a productive way." (Mata, 2004, p. 8)

The most important message of our chapter is that children and young people are already "power-full." By reimaging our approaches to teaching and learning, we can reposition CYP as expert educators who can use their power to "build back fairer" (Marmot et al., 2020) and help shape a more inclusive, socially just future for us all.

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Silver Linings? Teachers' Reappraisals of Children's Education in England During the First COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdown

Kathryn Spicksley and Alison Kington

Abstract In many countries around the world, including in England, efforts to contain the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the closure of schools for the majority of students, with remote learning replacing face-to-face teaching. Rightfully, there has been much media and academic attention focused on the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's educational opportunities, attainment, and mental health. However, such discourse backgrounds concerns about children's mental health and wellbeing, and the narrowing of the school curriculum, which were growing prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter, which draws upon interviews conducted remotely with 30 teachers across

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England during March and April 2020, highlights some of the 'silver linings' of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some teachers noticed an improvement in student behaviour, and were able to explore innovative teaching approaches and provide additional support for students; one spoke of regaining a joy in teaching without the focus on outcomes which had dominated teaching prior to the pandemic. These comments provide a springboard for discussion about the type of educational recovery which should take place once the immediate threat of the COVID-19 pandemic has subsided.

Keywords Learning behaviours • Innovative teaching • Covid-19 • Holistic educational approach • Teacher interviews • Lockdown

Introduction

COVID-19 and Education in England

The COVID-19 pandemic has been described as the 'loss and trauma event of our time' (Miller, 2020, p. 560). For children, some of the most vulnerable members of society, this loss and trauma is likely to have devastating effects on their health and wellbeing moving forward (Fore, 2020). It is undeniable that the lives of children 'have been turned upside down by coronavirus' (UNICEF, 2020, p. 1), despite children and adolescents being 'largely spared the direct mortality impacts of COVID-19' (UNICEF, 2021). Schools in 188 countries were closed in 2020, impacting on more than 1.6 billion children (UNICEF, 2021). In England, schools closed on Friday 20 March to all but the most vulnerable children and children of key workers (BBC, 2020), with schools required to implement remote teaching for the majority of students in their care (Andrew et al., 2020).

The pandemic had many notable impacts on education in England. All examinations were cancelled on 31 March, replaced by an algorithm which clearly disadvantaged 'very bright pupils in poorly performing schools' (Timmins, 2021, p. 20) and was itself eventually scrapped. Remote learning was difficult for some children to access, with school leaders reporting that 28 per cent of pupils had limited access to IT (Sharp et al., 2020, p. 7). Teachers' working lives were abruptly changed overnight, leading to

feelings of insecurity and vulnerability (Kim & Asbury, 2020). Furthermore, as an indirect result of measures imposed to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus (including the requirement for schools to teach remotely), many children faced increased food insecurity, decreased access to health services and reduced protection from domestic abuse (UNICEF, 2020). Although the majority of children returned to school in September 2020 (Ofsted, 2020), it was uncertain how long the first lockdown would last, which created additional instability and pressure for teachers, children and families.

It is interesting, therefore, that when we interviewed teachers during the first pandemic lockdown in March and April 2020 about remote learning, some chose to highlight or foreground positive aspects of the crisis. Teachers constructed both themselves and their students as receiving some benefits from the requirement to teach remotely. It is this unexpected puzzle that we explore, drawing from qualitative interviews conducted with 30 teachers working across England in both primary and secondary phases. In this chapter, we argue that positive perspectives on the requirement to teach remotely by teachers provide a signpost to intransigent problems in the education system, which require significant attention in order to build a more equitable and inclusive education system post-pandemic.

Previous educational research conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted some unexpected positives to have emerged out of the challenges faced in this unprecedented time. One of the key positives of the pandemic for education was that it showed the importance of teachers and face-to-face learning (OECD, 2020; Hargreaves, 2021) when previously online and blended learning had been promoted as a route to increasing efficiency, consistency and student attainment (Hargreaves, 2021). International research has shown that despite a lack of formal training, teachers were highly capable and willing to deliver lessons online, demonstrating their agency and commitment (Gudmundsdottir & Hathaway, 2020), and that many parents were satisfied with the provision provided during lockdowns (Carpenter & Dunn, 2021). As a result of interviews with three primary headteachers in Scotland, Ferguson et al. argued that the lockdown reoriented these leaders' pedagogical focus towards 'pupils and families' wellbeing and care, rather than on performative acts of learning' (2021, p. 1), which reinforced their professional identities as caring practitioners. Similar findings emerged from Beauchamp et al. (2021) who found that headteachers in England, Scotland, Wales

and Northern Ireland had pragmatically focused their attention on developing and consolidating positive relationships with students and parents during the pandemic lockdown.

Our own research focused on teachers' peer relationships during the first 2020 lockdown in the UK, and highlighted some positive impacts of the requirement to teach remotely. Some teachers who participated in the study identified as having increased commitment and motivation, alongside a more secure sense of collective identity within their schools, as a result of the challenges experienced during the initial lockdown (Spicksley et al., 2021). The material presented in this chapter indicates that there may have been positives for children as well as for teachers, and therefore builds on our previous findings.

Education in England Before and During COVID-19

One of the unforeseen outcomes of the pandemic was the destabilisation of the high-stakes testing regime throughout all stages of compulsory education in England, from Phonics testing in primary schools to GCSEs and A-Levels in secondaries. The dominant media and political focus on the damage caused to children's health and wellbeing caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has the effect of backgrounding criticisms of the education system prior to COVID-19. In 2018, NatCen published data which revealed that emotional disorders had become more common in 5–15-year-olds, increasing from 3.9 per cent in 2004 to 5.8 per cent in 2017 (NatCen, 2018). The high-stakes testing regime in English schools has been associated with this rise in mental health issues amongst young people, with the House of Commons Select Committee arguing in 2017 that the English assessment system can 'negatively impact teaching and learning, leading to narrowing of the curriculum and 'teaching to the test', as well as affecting teacher and pupil wellbeing' (HC, 2017, p. 3). This testing regime has been criticised for its narrow focus on children's academic attainment, to the detriment of supporting their development as active citizens within a cohesive society (West, 2010). Furthermore, high-stakes testing has a significant impact on teaching and learning, as '[t]est readying promotes in pupils a necessary mimicry' (Yarker, 2019, p. 429) which not only damages pupils' knowledge and understanding, but also has a negative impact on teachers' commitment and motivation (Perryman & Calvert, 2020).

Concerns about the impact of high-stakes testing in England have been compounded by criticisms of National Curriculum content following reform in 2014. The discourse of Conservative education ministers post-2010 privileged traditional educational methods, concomitantly positioning progressive, child-centred pedagogical approaches as failing children, and particularly disadvantaged children (Exley & Ball, 2011). This emphasis on the mastery of core subjects as a route to social mobility generated a National Curriculum in 2014 which emphasised mathematics and English to the detriment of foundation subjects, such as music and art. In her role as Ofsted Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman wrote to the Public Accounts Committee in 2018, advising as follows:

> Where we do have clearer evidence of a decline in the quality of education are in the narrowing of the curriculum in schools and an endemic pattern of prioritising data and performance results, ahead of the real substance of education. (Spielman, 2018, p. 2)

Prior to the formation of the Coalition government in 2010, the Cambridge Primary Review—led by Robin Alexander—had called for a more holistic approach to primary education (Alexander, 2010). Alexander was fiercely critical of the emphasis on core subjects within the 2014 Curriculum, arguing that the reforms evidenced an 'impoverished take on culture, knowledge and values' (Alexander, 2012, p. 369). The emphasis on English and maths to the detriment of foundation subjects appears to go against the goals of education, as enshrined in Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:

> Education must develop every child's personality, talents and abilities to the full. It must encourage the child's respect for human rights, as well as respect for their parents, their own and other cultures, and the environment. (UNICEF, 1989)

Criticism of the 2014 Curriculum was not restricted to the primary phase of education. In a policy paper for the left-wing think tank class, Terry Wrigley (2014) argued forcefully for a 'richer vision' (p. 41) of education, with schools aspiring towards 'greater innovation' (p. 41) in their teaching and learning practices. As an example of how a world-class education system could thrive without high-stakes testing, Wrigley pointed to

Finland, where cross-curricular approaches to learning are emphasised, and there is no national testing of students until they reach the age of 19.

Increased high-stakes testing and a more traditional curriculum focus were also accompanied in Conservative policy by an emphasis on discipline (Exley & Ball, 2011; Cushing, 2021). Tom Bennett, who had worked as a nightclub bouncer before becoming a teacher, was hired as the government's 'behaviour tsar' to 'help teachers clamp down on disruptive pupils swinging on chairs, playing on mobiles and passing notes during lessons' (Dathan, 2015). Schools such as ARK King Solomon Academy and the Michaela Free School were repeatedly praised by government ministers for their emphasis on discipline and zero-tolerance approach to behaviour (Duoblys, 2017). Such policies built on entrenched discourses of state schools, and in particular inner-city comprehensives, as 'unruly places' (Reay, 2007, p. 1191). This discursive emphasis on behaviour not only positions children as unable or unwilling to self-regulate their behaviour, but also positions teachers primarily as managers of children who 'work within a system of surveillance, compliance, coercion and control' (Cushing, 2021, p. 23).

The Conservative emphasis on discipline, attainment in core subjects as a route to social mobility and high-stakes assessment methods are underpinned by a discursive reliance on the future as a disciplinary mechanism (Edelman, 2004). Political promises of future wealth and happiness act as a justification for increased discipline, a narrowed curriculum and the ubiquity of testing in the present. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, however, there was a growing awareness that increasing mental health problems in younger generations is a direct result of constructing 'childhood as the time to accumulate the skills and abilities necessary to compete in a tough adult job market' (Harris, 2017, p. 25).

The COVID-19 pandemic, however, had the effect of destabilising the future, which had previously felt so certain and immutable. As Gary McCulloch suggested:

> it may be that neoliberalism, the dominant social and economic influence of the past generation, will now face its greatest test. How can a free market contend with the forces set loose by a pandemic that respects no private interests? (Peters et al., 2020, pp. 3–4)

Rightly, the COVID-19 pandemic engendered much debate on educational futures (Peters et al., 2020; Tesar, 2021). Where previously there

was a sense of certainty, the rapid shifts brought about by efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19 created in many 'a rapid tension, insecurity, as well as predictions and ideas—looking back, analysing current conditions or contemplating the future' (Tesar, 2021, p. 1). While the COVID-19 pandemic caused some to experience 'emptiness and sadness about the loss of their normal lives, which can even lead to a loss of meaning in life' (de Jong et al., 2020, p. 1), for others, the interruption of COVID-19 led to significant reflection on the state of education in the present, and a renewed desire to improve education in the future (La Velle et al., 2020; Jackson et al., 2020).

In this paper, drawing from the voices of 30 teachers interviewed during March and April 2020, we show that alongside navigating the challenges imposed by the COVID-19 crisis, teachers were also encouraged to reappraise education during this period. This reappraisal was a result of the unexpected positive aspects of the crisis which emerged when remote teaching.

Methods

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design in order to provide detail of individual experiences, alongside an exploration of the collective professional and contextual issues affecting primary and secondary school teachers. This strategy facilitated the collection of rich, in-depth qualitative data presenting participants' perspectives on, and experiences of, lockdown-imposed changes to teachers' relationships and senses of identity while educating children remotely. The design also enabled teachers to share their views on how lockdown was affecting their pupils. The study involved 30 practitioners from primary and secondary schools over a three-week period during the first national lockdown in the UK (March–April 2020).

Sampling and Participants

Initially, personal contacts were used to raise awareness of the project, and this was followed by a snowball sampling strategy to achieve the required number of participant teachers. Potential participants were sent an email inviting them to take part in the research, which also included a participant information document outlining key aspects of the research, such as

Table 1 Characteristics of sample

School phase			*Gender*			*Leadership responsibility*		
	N	*%*		*N*	*%*		*N*	*%*
Primary	16	53	Male	12	40	Leader	10	33
			Female	4	13	Non-leader	6	20
Secondary	14	47	Male	5	17	Leader	9	30
			Female	9	30	Non-leader	5	17
Total	**30**	**100**		**30**	**100**		**30**	**100**

purpose, proposed schedule, time commitment, how the data will be used and ethical issues. They were also sent a consent form outlining issues related to confidentiality and anonymity, right to withdraw, avoidance of harm, data storage and disposal, and publication of material. Those willing to participate were asked to sign and return the consent form to the lead researcher. A sample of 30 participants was achieved (Table 1).

The teacher participants (13 female, 17 male) all worked in different schools across England and comprised 16 primary and 14 secondary practitioners. Those who taught in the secondary phase taught a variety of subjects including mathematics, English, modern foreign language and art. A total of 19 participants, across both primary and secondary phases of education, identified themselves as having leadership responsibilities.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to discuss aspects of their experiences in an open and supportive environment. They explored specific aspects of remote educating and teacher-peer relationships, including:

- Changes to roles since the partial closure of schools
  - Benefits to professional relationships, family dynamics, shared activities and enhanced learning opportunities
  - Challenges of peer relationships, stress, wellbeing, family dynamics, physical space, work-school balance and resources

- Influence of remote working on wellbeing
- Support given during the lockdown period from peers and school leadership
- Strategies for dealing with remote teaching

Interview questions were designed to capture teachers' perceptions and experiences of professional trust, collegial relationships, interpersonal dynamics and communication, as well as ways to seek help, exchange social resources and address instructional and emotional concerns. Interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams and lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. Adopting this approach enabled each participant and a single researcher, who carried out all interviews, to have a visual contact with each other, building a rapport prior to the interview itself.

Data Analysis

All interviews were recorded using the facility on Teams and then transcribed. Participant names were not used; rather, a unique code chosen by each teacher was added to the transcripts, providing anonymity. The first stage of analysis was focused on processing the large amount of data into a manageable dataset which all members of the research team could work with. Data were analysed using both inductive analysis (Saldaña, 2016) to reduce the extensive text into core units according to question and constant comparison methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to compare similarities and differences found between responses. Data and salient themes also underwent an iterative process of data reduction and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994), by using an analytical matrix.

After this initial stage, a process of holistic coding or 'lumping' was used, as a 'preparatory approach to a unit of data before a more detailed coding or categorization process' (Saldaña, 2016, p. 166). This approach to coding involves separating large chunks of data into sections organised by one overarching theme, rather than splitting text line-by-line or into individual sentences. During this stage of initial holistic coding, it became clear that perspectives on the COVID-19 pandemic were not entirely negative, which was 'surprising or puzzling, given what [we] expected' (Bazeley, 2013, p. 110). One of the strands of our data analysis therefore turned to 'investigate a puzzle' (Bazeley, 2013, p. 110), the puzzle being how and why—in this uniquely challenging and difficult time—teachers were able to reflect positively on their experiences. Two codes identified, *Benefits for children* and *Benefits for teachers*, were at this point revisited

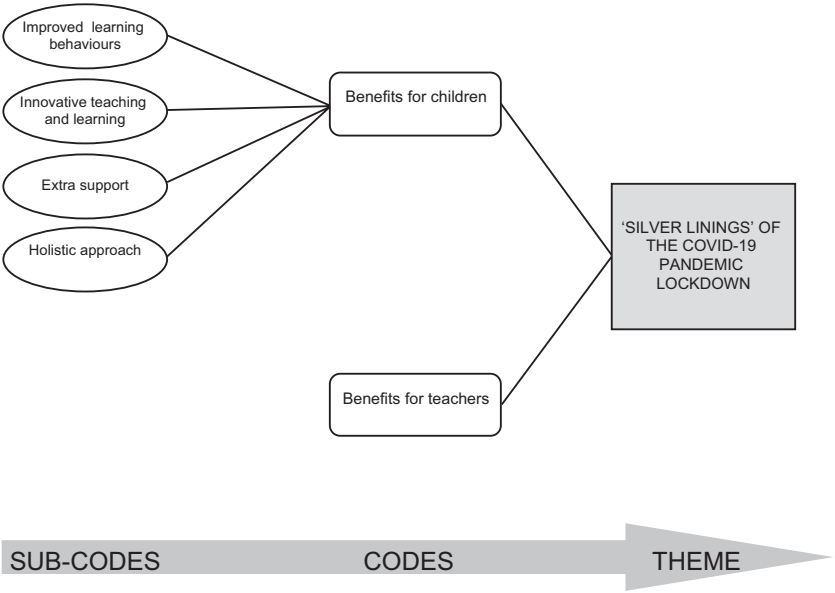

Fig. 1 Sub-coding and coding of the 'silver lining' strand of data analysis

and extensively sub-coded to identify patterns in the ways that teachers spoke about the benefits of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, both for themselves and for their students (Fig. 1).

Research Ethics

This study was reviewed and approved by the University of Worcester's Arts, Humanities and Education Research Ethics Panel, and ethical guidance from the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) and the University was followed throughout the study. Signed consent forms were required from all participants. If a teacher wished to withdraw from the study, they were able to contact the lead researcher and request this without explanation. All data were stored, and destroyed, in accordance with University policy and the GDPR (2018).

Findings

The structure of this section is aligned with the four sub-codes identified during analysis (Fig. 1) under the code *Benefits for Children*. The qualitative findings presented below indicate the different ways in which teachers constructed positive benefits for children during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in 2020. It should be emphasised that these findings are selective, as they only show findings from the analysis strand which explored the 'silver linings' theme, and focuses specifically on benefits for children, in line with the focus of this edited collection.

Improved Learning Behaviours

A number of teachers working in the primary phase of education noticed an improvement in their students' behaviour when the move to remote learning was implemented:

> It's quieter as I said and I feel calmer, happier, more in control. Some of the children seem to be focusing a lot better. Their homework has certainly been better than usual. (Harry, Primary Non-Leader (M))

> Pupil behaviour has improved. It's odd because we're not there to keep an eye on things, but we aren't getting anywhere near the same issues with behaviour as we used to. (Peter, Primary Leader (M))

This improvement in pupil behaviour came as a surprise to Lily, who had expected that more challenging behaviour would arise as a result of remote teaching:

> I was worried at first that they might all be messing around and I would be talking and no-one would be listening, but they have all kept up with their homework and must have listened to be able to do it in the first place. I teach Year 5 so they are the youngest year group to be taught in this way at the school and they're coping really well […] Some lessons centre on a video clip or some slides and then the children break away from the whole class into pairs to do some work, then they come back at a given time. It's been excellent for their organisational skills which will serve them well when they go up to the senior part of the school. (Audrey, Primary Non-Leader (F))

Instead of seeing a deterioration in pupil behaviour as a result of online learning, these teachers saw an improvement in their students' attentiveness and learning behaviours. Harry, Peter and Audrey's reflections suggest that for some children, working from home away from the busyness and distractions of school had a positive impact on their learning behaviours and concentration. Lily argued that the requirement to learn remotely would also ensure that students developed organisational skills which would be useful to them as they progressed into secondary education, which requires a greater degree of autonomy.

Innovative Teaching and Learning

The requirement to teach remotely enabled some teachers to develop innovative approaches to teaching and learning. Maria argued that under normal circumstances, such innovation would not be possible:

> It's a different model to the one we usually have but it's been good for us. It would have been too big a leap of faith in normal circumstances so we've used this as an excuse to try new things. (Maria, Secondary Leader (F))

A number of teachers spoke about how using online resources had enhanced their lessons in different ways:

> One positive of using the online resources is that we have been able to find similar tasks at varying levels of difficulty. This is important for the younger ones where we have a variety of academic levels in a class and the children are not put into sets. (Timothy, Secondary Leader (M))

> There have been lots of resources available free in lockdown from museums and other venues so we've made the most of those […] I was worried about using too much online resource at the beginning but I think we have found some really good resources. I don't know how much will be available after this but we would like to use it again. It's enhanced what we have teaching and we've had some 'specials' which have been recorded an available to all year groups. The best one was on World War I when we had some materials from a museum website and made it look as if we were in the trenches. (Grace, Secondary Leader (F))

> I'm proud of what I've done over the last few weeks but I don't think it enhances the learning as much as actually teaching in person. However, I do

> think that combining some of these things with the teaching in person might enhance the experience for some students. Not everyone can draw or paint but everyone should be able to appreciate art in some way and that's where I think the technology can play a part. (Christopher, Secondary Non-Leader (M))

> I think we have enhanced the learning as much as we can given the circumstances but the best thing for physics is to be at school, learning with other students and getting support from staff. I do think though that we have come up with some ways of delivering certain concepts which we will keep, like the use of video to enhance the text. (Ava, Secondary Leader (F))

Although there was often an acknowledgement by teachers that remote teaching could not provide a viable or sustainable long-term replacement for face-to-face teaching, these teachers indicated an increased appreciation for online resources and, in some cases, a desire to incorporate them into their teaching moving forward. In some cases, as Christopher suggested, the integration of technology with face-to-face teaching could increase student engagement.

Innovative approaches to teaching and learning during the COVID-19 lockdown were not, however, restricted to the use of online resources. Creative pedagogical approaches implemented by teachers in his primary school were encouraging children to learn outside and with their siblings:

> For some of the children I teach, they are getting something out of this that they never would have done if we had been in the classroom. They have had a chance to learn with their family, including older and younger siblings, they have used the outdoor space if they have one to enhance learning, and teachers have had to be creative about their lessons to facilitate learning. (Peter, Primary Leader (M))

> In some ways there has been enhancement from being able to work with family on their school work, learn from siblings in some cases, work outside rather than in a classroom. (Isaac, Primary Leader (M))

In one secondary school, older students had been paired with younger students, which enhanced learning opportunities for both age groups:

> We have also asked some of the A-level students, who are generally very good, to find tasks that they could use with the younger ones. We're work-

> ing on the basis that teaching someone else can consolidate what you already know yourself. It seems to work! We link up an A-level student with a small group of Year 7 and 8 students and they have group tutorials with them online. It's been great and we have given the older ones credit for this. (Timothy, Secondary Leader (M))

In another secondary school, the requirement to teach remotely had opened up opportunities for cross-curricular learning:

> I've done some really exciting tasks for some of the younger groups that involve cross curricular aspects … like maths, that's worked well, and English, and even some science which students have been able to do outside in some cases. There are the obvious links with geography, but I have done some more with art. So, how this works in practice, is that instead of having one piece of work for one subject, we have a bigger piece of work that covers more subjects and ticks the assessment boxes for a number of curriculum areas. Some students have loved this approach and have welcomed the opportunity to use skills across a number of areas and do something that they can really get into, but some would rather stick the more purist approach so they know where they stand […] I think it's worked well for the younger year groups but it's less possible as they get towards GCSE. (Susan, Secondary Non-Leader (F))

These teachers' stories indicate that rather than feeling restricted by the requirement to teach remotely, some teachers and schools had embraced the opportunity to revise taken-for-granted assumptions about teaching, learning and the curriculum. Under normal circumstances, such experiments may not have been possible.

Extra Support

Several teachers noted that some children had received specific, targeted support during lockdown:

> There are one or two students who are struggling and we've set up a peer mentoring scheme between older and younger children to give some extra support. (Grace, Secondary Leader (F))

> Some of the students are getting enhanced opportunities from the free additional tuition. (Aiden, Secondary Non-Leader (M))

It was not only targeted support which teachers believed enhanced teaching and learning for some pupils during this period. One teacher noted how children had benefitted from his school's asynchronous delivery of lessons during the lockdown:

> One way in which this situation has been a benefit is that students can access the lessons at any time so if they don't feel engaged when the lesson actually happens, they can always watch it again later when they're in the mood. (Camilla, Secondary Leader (F))

Asynchronous lesson delivery enabled students to access learning at a time which suited them, or to revisit learning if required, providing additional support to students who may need additional consolidation when learning new concepts. The specific circumstances of the lockdown had also enabled some parents to become more engaged in their children's learning and provide support:

> We have been using some online resources and they have been well-received. There are some students who have parents actively engaged in their education and they have probably benefited from extra support, but not everyone has that. I know of one family who go through all the material together at the end of the day to make sure it's all been covered and understood. In all subjects. (Lily, Secondary Leader (F))

Teachers who spoke about the additional support which some children received tended to emphasise that not *all* children benefitted from such support. Whereas some parents could provide support for their child's learning, as Lily noted, 'not everyone has that'. Decisions still had to be made in schools about how to allocate resources; Aiden added that such support was 'not given fairly to everyone'. However, it was clear from a number of interviews that not all children were suffering academically as a result of remote teaching being implemented.

Holistic Approach

One teacher, Mark, spoke about having the opportunity to take a more holistic approach to children's learning during the period of remote teaching:

> I feel a bit freer than before. The changes we have made during this time have made me think more about what life is about and that is coming through in my teaching. I'm not focusing as much on outcomes any more, which we were programmed to worry about, but more on the educational experience of the children […] I've re-focused my teaching on the enjoyment of the children and that has taken away much of the anxiety I felt about outcomes. I think this has taught me that there really is only so much that we can do, even when we try really hard, and so you have to remember that. I went into teaching because I wanted to help children and give them the opportunity to enjoy learning, as I did as a child. I have started to focus on that again now. (Mark, Primary Leader (M))

For Mark, the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown had a positive impact on his commitment and motivation, reminding him of why he became a teacher. His changed perspective on teaching, with a renewed commitment to enjoyment in learning, may also have benefitted his pupils at this challenging time.

Discussion

The findings presented in this chapter add to a growing field of research concerning the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education. In line with other educationalists (Peters et al., 2020; Tesar, 2021; La Velle et al., 2020; Jackson et al., 2020), our research has indicated that this unprecedented time led to reflections on education prior to the pandemic and reappraisals of what is possible within education.

Teachers' surprise that student behaviour improved during remote teaching points to students' capacity to self-regulate their behaviour and remain committed to learning even during challenging times. These findings may indicate that discourses on poor student behaviour—which had been evident within education policy and cultural discourse for many years (Reay, 2007), but had become arguably more entrenched since the formation of the Coalition government in 2010 (Exley & Ball, 2011; Cushing, 2021)—have been interpellated by many teachers as an immutable aspect of their professional identity, shaping the ways in which they develop relationships with children.

The pandemic challenged these assumptions for many teachers, highlighting the capacity, stoicism and resilience of the children they work with. Rather than constructing their students as unruly bodies to be

managed, teachers who reported an improvement in student behaviour instead pointed to the useful organisational skills which their students had developed as a result of the requirement to learn from home. They thereby constructed their students as dedicated, hard-working and able to take responsibility for their own learning and development. This reappraisal of students' attitude towards school could lead to improved teacher-pupil relationships in the future—relationships built on trust and respect rather than coercion and control.

The political climate post-2010 has also led to a narrowing of the curriculum and an emphasis on traditional pedagogies, including a move away from cross-curricular approaches to teaching and learning (Exley & Ball, 2011; Alexander, 2012; Wrigley, 2014). High-stakes testing (the use of which has significantly increased since 2010) has been deployed as a disciplinary tool, which has the effect of suppressing innovation for fear of compromising attainment (Au, 2007; Yarker, 2019). For some of the teachers who participated in this research project, the requirement to teach remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown offered an opportunity to transgress these boundaries and experiment with more innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

The requirement to teach online increased a number of teachers' confidence using technology and encouraged them to incorporate technology into their lessons moving forward. However, as Grace suggested, the high-quality online resources which were made freely available during lockdown by prestigious museums, theatres and universities are likely to be put behind paywalls or made unavailable once the worst of the pandemic is over and these institutions return to a state closer to that of the pre-COVID world. This is an issue that was also noticed by Radhika Gorur, speaking about the role of the university moving forward:

> In a pleasing response to COVID 'lockdowns', many podcasts, articles, museum collections and research papers were freed from behind firewalls. Why are these not always freely available to the public? Universities should seriously consider making all their research open access post COVID–prioritizing society over publishing houses. This is another way for universities to demonstrate their commitment to equity and the health of the planet. (Gorur in Peters et al., 2020, p. 5)

The education white paper 2016, Educational Excellence Everywhere (DfE, 2016), was primarily focused on geographical inequalities, arguing

that the next priority for government must be to ensure that students living in areas of multiple deprivation receive the same educational opportunities as those elsewhere. Areas such as Yorkshire and the Humber were criticised for having a high percentage of schools with underperforming school leadership; the problem of unequal attainment across geographical areas was therefore reduced to a simple issue of management efficiency. London's recent educational improvement was attributed to the success of the London Challenge, an intervention which ran between 2003 and 2011, which supported school improvement in the capital. As such, the attainment differential between regions was assumed to be located within schools, an outcome of differential access to high-quality teaching and leadership.

Such an assessment belies the cultural inequalities between regions; in London and the South East, for example, there were 54 museums in 2011, compared with just 29 in central England (Newman & Tourle, 2011). Such inequalities could be partially addressed by making access to museum collections, theatre productions and university research and teaching more equitable. One of the positives of the COVID-19 lockdown was that it made evident the possibilities of increasing access to cultural artefacts and resources. The challenge moving forward would appear to be *retaining* this access for our children in the most culturally deprived areas of the country, once lockdowns are over and some sense of normality resumes.

Perhaps one of the most encouraging themes emerging from these research findings was the renewed commitment that some teachers appeared to feel towards their students' wellbeing and enjoyment of learning. This was most clearly expressed by Mark, who claimed to have refocused his teaching 'on the enjoyment of the children'. However, this holistic approach was also evident in the additional support afforded to some children through additional tutoring or the creation of peer support networks with older children, and through the emphasis in some schools on outdoor learning and on lessons involving siblings. The findings from this research therefore support those of Ferguson et al. (2021) and Beauchamp et al. (2021), whose research with school leaders during the pandemic indicated a re-orientation towards care and building supportive relationships within children and families.

There appears, therefore, to be a growing body of research which suggests that an effect of the pandemic has been to re-orient teachers away from attainment and towards wellbeing. Considering the well-documented

problems of mental health decline in children prior to the pandemic (NatCen, 2018), this reappraisal of the meaning of education amongst practitioner could have a highly positive impact on education moving forward.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused specifically and exclusively on *positive* benefits of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown for children, as constructed by teachers during the first school closures in England in March and April 2020. As such, the findings presented here are selective, and should not be considered representative of the entirety of teachers' responses to the pandemic identified in this research project. Alongside these positive statements made by teachers, many negative perspectives on the pandemic were shared—many worries about children's wellbeing, health and academic attainment, and criticisms of the way in which the pandemic was responded to at both a national level by the ruling Conservative government and a local level by school leaders (see e.g. Spicksley et al., 2021).

There are further limitations to this research study that should also be highlighted. This small-scale project employed a convenience sample; results should not, therefore, be considered as generalisable to the entire teaching population. The study was primarily focused on teachers' relationships with their colleagues, with the findings presented in this paper an unexpected puzzle which we chose to investigate further. If the study had more explicitly focused on the benefits and challenges experienced by children during the COVID-19 pandemic, different findings may have emerged.

Despite these limitations, it is worth emphasising that the findings presented in this chapter make a contribution to the growing field of research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children. Although it is clear that many children have been disadvantaged by the necessity to limit the spread of COVID-19, the silver linings that teachers foregrounded in these research interviews signpost the way to a more individualised, equitable and supportive education system in the future. The findings from this research study provide a springboard for debate about bold ways in which education could be reimagined, in a post-COVID world.

Much of the discourse concerning education during the COVID-19 pandemic has been negative, focused on how access to online learning has been stratified according to student income (Holmes & Burgess, 2020;

Baker et al., 2020), and how children's mental health has been damaged by a lack of social contact (Young Minds, 2020). However, by talking to teachers who were teaching remotely, some positive aspects of the lockdown were highlighted. Our findings have implications for educational researchers, policymakers and school leaders moving forward, as access to face-to-face teaching stabilises and as vaccines (at least in the UK) are increasingly enabling some sense of normality to resume.

Our findings suggest that for some children, forms of remote learning can improve learning behaviours and facilitate independence and responsibility; this raises questions about how best to incorporate blended learning opportunities into students' teaching and learning. The affective feeling of being released from the demands of high-stakes testing during the short window in which we researched (March–April 2020) also seemed to engender more innovative approaches to teaching and learning, including cross-curricular work and outdoor learning, which teachers reported as having a positive impact on both their students and their own sense of commitment and motivation. This finding raises questions about the long-term sustainability of the high-stakes testing regime in England. For all its challenges, for some children and teachers the very early days of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown offered a glimpse into an educational future with more freedom, and increased focus on the holistic development of the individual child. These findings suggest that a return to normality post-pandemic is, perhaps, not what is needed in education. Instead, the new normal should embrace some of the innovations which developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly as many of these innovations emerged from teachers' professional capacity and intent to offer high-quality learning experiences grounded in the needs of individual children.

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Holes, Patches and Multiple Hats: The Experiences of Parents of Students with Special Education Needs Navigating At-Home Learning During COVID-19

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Abstract In the spring of 2020, schools across Canada and beyond closed as a public health measure to address the growing COVID-19 global pandemic. The abrupt shift to at-home learning necessitated, for many children, significant engagement by parents and family members. This chapter

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brings forward the perspectives of 36 Canadian parents of students with special education needs as they supported the learning of their children during school closures. Analyses of in-depth interviews revealed interrelated influences of community, family and school supports, parent efficacy and mental health. Stories shared by parents highlighted the weaknesses of school systems that were exposed when the first wave of the pandemic hit. Lessons learned include the need to develop and sustain networks of support for families of students with special education needs, particularly working mothers, and the importance of building authentic and productive partnerships between families and schools.

Keywords Special education needs • Parent efficacy • Mental health • At-home learning • Support networks • Canada • COVID-19

In the spring of 2020, schools across Canada and beyond closed as a public health measure to address the growing COVID-19 global pandemic. Many schools developed remote learning options for students during the physical closures, ranging from paper-based work packages dropped off on porches to virtual sharing of schoolwork and synchronous, real-time instruction (e.g. Manitoba Education, 2020). In Canada, education falls under the mandate of individual provinces and so while many commonalities existed, each provincial ministry developed their own approach to continuing learning supports for children and youth. Within provincial guidelines, individual school boards, schools and teachers then created their own practices, resulting in a wide range of learning experiences for children and youth across the country.

The abrupt shift to at-home learning necessitated, for many children—particularly those who were young or who had needs requiring greater supports—significant engagement by parents and family members. Most teachers had never imagined the learning, socialisation and relationships of a six-year-old developing via an iPad. Teachers had a range of skills in using various types of technology to enable their pedagogical and assessment approaches and many also juggled the at-home learning of their own children, the concerns of parents of children in their classes and the challenges of life in a pandemic. Parents similarly negotiated employment, childcare, eldercare, at-home learning and myriad other responsibilities. For many parents of children with special education needs (SEN), some challenges were unique and/or more significant.

The term ‘children with special education needs’ is very broad and encompasses any child or youth who requires academic or social-emotional supports to be able to successfully navigate formal schooling (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017). Some, but not all of these students would identify as having a disability of some kind. Each province in Canada has their own inclusive and special education system which defines ways of identifying students in need of supports, determining appropriate services and funding those services. Common identifications include learning disabilities (e.g. dyslexia), autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disabilities, giftedness or visual impairments. Many students also receive services without a specific identification. Services include accommodations to grade-level work (e.g. spelling software or chunking of assignments) or human supports, such as speech language therapy or time with an education assistant. All provinces describe their approach as inclusive, and all prioritise regular education placements over congregated or segregated settings (Hutchinson & Specht, 2020).

Little is known about the ways in which services and supports available to students prior to the pandemic were offered or adjusted during physical school closures, when many students engaged with school learning virtually. In some school boards, schools organised individual sessions with educational assistants or resource teachers, differentiated materials sent home and collaborated with parents to find effective ways of continuing learning during closures. In other instances, class materials were posted online to be downloaded and completed independently by students with little adaptation or instruction. The term ‘emergency’ distance learning is important to keep in mind in considering the range of ways in which students were supported (or not). Certainly, most school systems did not have plans in place for the implementation of individual programmes and offering a range of human supports virtually. Everyone was caught off guard when the pandemic hit (Barbour et al., 2020; Gallagher-Mackay & Brown, 2021).

Research that has been conducted to date indicates that parents were largely dissatisfied with the academic and social-emotional supports received during school closures; this seemed to be the case for children with a range of special education needs (Masi et al., 2021; Neece et al., 2020; Rogers et al., 2021; Soriano-Ferrer et al., 2021; Yazcayir & Gurgur, 2021). Particular concerns have been noted by parents about academic offerings they believed to be inappropriate or a poor fit for their child

(Garbe et al., 2020; Greenway & Eaton-Thomas, 2020; Whitley et al., 2020).

As the profiles of students with SEN vary broadly, so too do the families in which they are situated. During periods of school closure, some single parents supported multiple children with learning disabilities in at-home learning with few other supports and other families accessed paid tutoring or respite workers. Some families were familiar with the curricular content and had skills and resources to be able to navigate the technology required by schools and others were new to the system or culture or language of instruction (Breiseth, 2020; Sugarman & Lazarín, 2020). The inequities that already exist in our school systems and broader society were thus magnified.

Our team, like many others around the world, took the opportunity to engage with families to understand their experiences during the pandemic. We are members of faculties of education engaged in research surrounding the inclusion of students identified with special education needs in school. We are aware of the issues for families and educators in the system and were interested in learning from parents and families about their experiences in navigating at-home learning during school closures. We believe that these insights can inform our post-pandemic planning, as we consider how best to support children, youth and families who have been impacted by disrupted schooling. Findings can also inform the literature that has long explored the ways in which families and schools can best engage in order to meet the needs of children and youth with SEN, particularly given the tensions and barriers that continue to be documented (e.g. Bennett et al., 2020). The current chapter brings forward the perspectives of Canadian parents of students with SEN as they supported the learning of their children during COVID-19 school closures.

Method

In order to deepen our understanding of the experiences of parents of children with SEN through a pan-Canadian lens, we conducted a mixed-methods study in the spring and summer of 2020. In the current paper, we report on the interview phase that explored the perceptions of 36 Canadian parents of children with SEN as they engaged in remote emergency learning at home.

Participants

Participants were eligible for participation if they were a parent/guardian of a child or adolescent enrolled in a school (e.g. not normally home-schooled) with a special education need. This was defined for potential participants as: 'they receive special education services and/or have a formal identification or diagnosis and/or have an individual education, program or behaviour plan'. Participants were recruited through paid ads on Facebook/Instagram, social media channels of the research team and through provincial advocacy organisations. Interested parents reached out via e-mail or indicated their interest in an interview once they completed the survey. In total, 36 parents took part in an interview. Of the participants 8% were fathers, 89% were mothers and one was an aunt with full custody. Most participants (86%) were from Ontario, the largest province in Canada, and the rest were from other provinces. Most of the children with special education needs were in Grades 1 through 6 (72%), with 22% in Grades 7 or 8 and the remaining 6% spanning Grades 9 through 12. Twenty-five of the families had one child living at home, 44% had two and 31% had three or more. Parents reported a range of identifications for their children, including intellectual disabilities, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, dyslexia, autism spectrum disorder and foetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

Data Collection

The interview guide began by asking parents to first talk about the educational journey of their child with SEN and then to reflect on the experience of COVID-19 school closures for their family, including engagement with at-home learning. Conversations were wide-ranging and loosely structured. Parents were interviewed virtually, either by Zoom or by telephone. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interviews lasted between 28 minutes and 2 hours, with an average of 55 minutes.

Analyses

The main purpose of the qualitative coding was to emphasise the voices and experiences of the participants related to at-home learning during the spring of 2020. Thematic analysis was utilised as it is an approach for

examining different perspectives in participants, finding similarities and differences in responses, and discovering unanticipated responses (Nowell et al., 2017). Our research team first divided the transcripts, reading and re-reading and noting initial codes that emerged. Approximately 40% of the transcripts were read by two or more team members. In an effort to improve the credibility and conformability of our data, analyses and interpretation (Elo et al., 2014), we next came together and discussed the codes and engaged in a collaborative, iterative process of identifying and naming themes emerging across the transcripts. Themes were identified by reading the coded segments and looking for patterns that existed in the collective stories of our participants. We were interested in the common experiences shared by all families. To illustrate the themes, we provide quotes from the transcripts of various participants.

Findings

Our analyses revealed five major themes that capture the experiences of parents during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in spring of 2020: (i) *Holes and patches in the support net*; (ii) *School and teachers: What do we want? What can they offer*?; (iii) *Choosing pandemic priorities* (iv) *I was a parent. Now I'm a teacher and a parent*; and (v) *Stress and hardship*. These themes are closely related to one another, and the stories families shared often wove together aspects of each. Thus, although we outline these themes in a linear fashion, they should be thought of as interconnected and reciprocally related. In describing our findings, we have given as much space as possible to the voices of parents by presenting their experiences in their own words that they shared with us in interviews. We have not paraphrased or interpreted meaning so that the reader can gain insight into the issues that they were facing during the early stages of the pandemic.

Holes and Patches in Support Nets

The first theme that emerged from the experiences shared by families relates to their perception of supports that they needed and/or were receiving. Examples were often related to caregivers or workers who, prior to COVID, had served as integral parts of the support net surrounding the children and their families. These individuals served many roles for the families including respite, to allow parents time for themselves or to take care of other children or responsibilities. The absence of respite was noted

in particular because of the school closures, resulting in parents being home with their children full-time. Some parents noted how the lack of respite they received was negatively affecting their wellbeing and those of their family broadly. One mother reflected:

> For a lot of typical parents but specifically parents with special needs kids, it's respite to have your children go to school and to be able to have that break and a lot of parents don't have that and people who are working from home or who are not working because of COVID or not working in general, they're now, let me use the word they're stuck at home 24 hours a day without the oftentimes proper training to deal with these behaviors of children. And there's going to be some huge breakdowns.

Some families were able to find and fund individuals to come to their home during the day while others spoke of these in terms of their absence and the impact that they had on themselves and their child(ren). One mother shared:

> So normally my daughter does have a caregiver. She does have quite a few physical limitations. So she's also quite tall and heavy for her age. So she needs basically, you know, one on one support all the time. But I didn't have any caregiving assistance. Like when I was home in the spring, it was just me and the kids until the summer.

Other families pointed to the supports that existed within their families and how essential these were to the ability of themselves and their family to function and to juggle the many responsibilities they had in the midst of a pandemic. One mother shared her experience in maintaining a demanding full-time position in the mental health field while also supporting her children with special needs during school closures. She described 'being isolated from my co-workers and from the support system as well. And educating two special needs children at the same time, and my husband works night shifts, so he was not able during the day to support'. For participants who did have spouses, these were commonly mentioned as essential sources of support, as parents navigated and negotiated the daily demands.

> Yeah, I mean, you know it's hard I mean we're—we're very fortunate because we're two. You know, we both have work, we have good resources we're both, you know we have—both my husband and I have graduate

> degrees, I think we, we really value education and we're prepared to put in the time and continue working with her. And I realise it's not, you know not every family is in that situation.

A few parents noted the support they felt from other parents, particularly those of children with special education needs. One mother started a Facebook group for parents to share views, experiences and strategies and was amazed at the 'incredible' response, with 120 members joining in two weeks. Others connected via virtual platforms, either personally or as part of established advocacy groups (e.g. autism or dyslexia-focused organisations). One mother of four, who was also teaching full time during school closures, shared her approach to garnering support.

> And I think I've learned through this whole experience that, you know, I've always tried to be strong, you know, and do things on my own. But I've gotten to that point during this time that I just realised I can't. Like I just can't like I literally could not. So I've reached like, I reached out to that friend and said, Listen, like you said, you want to help. This is what I need. I need a meal. Can you just bring me a meal, right? Anyways, the meal turned into three weeks of meals, right? So even though we're far apart, I realised I have to ask more, right? Like because people can't see you. So like, you could just be in your home and if you didn't reach out like it could just get bad, right? So the importance of really just reaching for help when you're really struggling and I guess I worry about the people that are just trying to be strong through whatever they're going through because you can't do it on your own right?

School and Teachers: What Do We Want? What Can They Offer?

Parents reported a wide range of interactions, communication, resources and supports that they received from schools while buildings were physically closed. The range was notable, given that many parents were in the same province or even the same school board. Stories shared by parents relating to schools and teachers often focused on the materials and resources they received, whether these were available, and whether they were a good fit with the learning needs of the child. These discussions tended to highlight the academic and curricular learning areas that were of concern for some parents.

> Unfortunately because of her learning disability, most of the resources that are online are not you know adapted to her and one of us still needs to be there with her to teach her how to use some of the online resources…her school has been a big disappointment—we've really not received a lot of support from her teacher, so that's—that's been a challenge.

Parents also spoke about the human aspects of supports from schools—whether the teacher checked in on them, communicated understanding and social-emotional support, and were viewed by the parent as caring about and understanding the child and family. Many families noted the efforts their child(ren)'s teachers made, while as many others noted the absence of communication, offers of help or clear expectations. One parent described how 'her teacher and her EA said that they were available anytime all the time for whatever she needed just call them and you know, and so that's nice because you know they did make themselves available to everybody a lot'.

Many parents believed that teachers were ill-prepared to support their children during school closures. Even those who noted the good intentions and efforts of teachers also expressed their dissatisfaction with the actual supports that were provided for their child(ren) and family.

> for kids with special needs a) to lose the routine and b) to lose the progress that they made during the year because her teacher is awesome. I'm so thankful she's at the school she's at. And the teacher…she's really been a lifeline in all this but again, virtually there's only so much you can do and she's connecting with them every day, from 12:00 to 1:00. So that's providing some consistency. But again, the rest of it is independent working. And that's really hard for kids with special needs.

The varied expectations of families, with respect to what they wanted from school, were evident throughout our interviews. Some felt that too much was being expected of children and families during physical school closures and were resistant to pressures they felt from school. These families felt supported by teachers and principals who let them know that the work being sent home was optional, and that they needed to make decisions that worked for their child and family. Other families were concerned about their children falling behind and described self-imposed pressures. These families sought direct supports from EAs, teachers or other school

support staff, as well as materials that were aligned with the level that their child was at currently.

As described in the Methods section, our sample had far more elementary-aged children than secondary-aged. The few parents of older youth described challenges unique to the structure and academic emphasis of high schools. The emphasis on grades and credit attainment weighed heavily for some. These parents highlighted the disparity between the approaches and skill sets of teachers. Their child might have synchronous instruction, rapid and detailed feedback on assignments, recorded video supports and frequent check-ins in one course with the opposite in the next. They also spoke about the difficulty of shifting a complex school support structure to a virtual environment.

> Yeah, I just find as soon as the school turns virtual, the resource room goes totally quiet, right? Because I just don't think they know how to manage it. Or how to support the kids. And yeah, it's really, really tough, to be a kid with a learning disability trying to learn remotely and you have ADHD and you can't focus and, you know. And now it matters because it's grade 11. You're feeling isolated and disconnected. It's a lot.

Choosing Pandemic Priorities

Through sharing their stories about supporting their children during the pandemic, priorities were revealed. Parents described having to make choices about whether or not to focus their time and energy on, for example, keeping up with their child's schoolwork, completing paid work hours, parenting effectively, protecting their own mental health and/or ensuring the social-emotional wellbeing of the family.

Many families decided that their efforts were not well placed on schoolwork. This decision often emerged following initial attempts to engage their children in synchronous classes, or in completing materials sent home. Some parents described how their children resisted the remote learning and in fact found that their child's mental health was being negatively impacted through the process of attempting to complete schoolwork in this way. Many questioned the value and the learning that were really resulting from the remote offerings.

> It's too much trouble for family to try and make something that doesn't work for him. Why are we going to do that to his teacher to make him go

> through something that's going to be a negative experience for all of them? And, isn't going to provide him with any real, like, educational opportunities? So, we're just not going to do that, because he's been having a really tough time the last couple weeks, and his self-injury is like through the roof. So, we don't want to struggle through that.

The decision about which areas to focus on and which to 'let go' also depended on the learning profile of the child and the parents' beliefs about areas most important to their development. In one example, a parent chose to focus on reading and English Language Arts, an area of difficulty for the child and one she felt was of major importance, and to 'not stress about French'. Another family prioritised intensive private tutoring for their child with dyslexia in place of Language Arts instruction, believing that it was likely to make the biggest difference in ensuring progress for their child. Yet another felt that 'things that are going to matter most for life skills' were priority, particularly core language and math applications.

Some parents went further to describe their resistance to the efforts of schools to continue offering schoolwork during the initial pandemic closures. One mother described how she was 'diametrically opposed to it. So like, I'm not taking part in it. Like, what are you going to do? Come after me for truancy? You closed the school'. Others resisted because of the needs of their child. One parent described attachment issues experienced by her adopted child and the necessity of her and her husband remaining firmly and exclusively as '"parents" period, like our job is kind of unconditional love'.

The pressure to continue to fulfil obligations for paid work, generally but not exclusively from home, was also described by many parents. Work often took precedence over engaging in remote learning. Parents also described the significant challenges of fitting their paid work and school support into each day. Some negotiated changes to their work schedule with employers or created alternating schedules with partners or other family members to be able to organise their days and meet all of their obligations.

> Being a single parent of three girls and two with special needs and working full time… If you're working full time, you just don't have…. like I kind of joked with all my friends and people that have a connection within the special needs world or just parents in general, when this whole thing happened and said, like, forget it. Like either your work is suffering or your kids are on

> screens or you know, you can't all of a sudden become a homeschooler to children when you're managing a full-time job, right?

In fact all of the parents talked about their expanding role—from parent, and perhaps educational advocate and homework coach, to that of teacher.

I Was a Parent. Now I'm a Teacher and a Parent

Parents described many ways that their role shifted during school closures, from partnering in the education of their child, to feeling significantly or entirely responsible for academic learning. 'So I was basically his EA, and his teacher and his mom. And it was super stressful'. This theme was also woven through all of the others. Supports mattered in relation to parents' efforts to ensure their children kept up with learning and development. Pandemic priorities determined how invested parents chose or felt pressured to be with their children's schoolwork.

The degree to which parents interacted with the education system and their child(ren)'s teachers prior to the pandemic varied, with most parents in our sample describing regular contact at a minimum. Some parents detailed extensive involvement, frequent communication, advocacy and co-planning in the years leading up to the pandemic. However, while many parents were already spending hours engaged in the education of their children, the role of teacher was new for them. Many felt unprepared for this. They struggled to engage their children in learning and to teach concepts and content knowledge, particularly if work sent home needed to be adapted or modified to suit their child(ren)'s ways of learning or readiness. They questioned themselves, their skills and their ability to maintain effective teaching, along with the rest of their responsibilities. Many parents also described the contrast between what they felt was required of them to support their child who had special education needs and the relatively independent learning of their other children.

> I haven't heard from the teacher. And we're literally just doing all of it. We're not even modifying it, which I guess maybe is why it's taking so long, but there's some times where 'll get a question and I just go, "we're just not doing that one". Yeah, if I think it's complicated. She has a hard time. Like I said, we've mostly done math, we do some writing. I try to scribe and it's pretty, like I don't know what the teacher is looking for, for her, for her

> level. So I don't know… hopefully it's okay. That's pretty much it. Like I'm pretty much deciding. Okay, is that enough? Do I think she should write more? Do I think, you know, is that what the teacher is kind of looking for? Did she get the point? So I'm kind of having to figure that out and like that I'm not a teacher. So I'm guessing.

Many examples emerged of creative approaches parents adopted, particularly those who had the time, a background in childcare and/or solid understanding of the content, as they figured out what worked for their child and their learning. Some developed schedules for the day, with work periods mixed in with outdoor breaks and independent screen time. Others realised that giving their child some choice in what work they did or how they completed it helped motivate them.

> One of the things that I tried to do and you know, I'm not a teacher, it's not a skill that I have. But realising, you know, perhaps if I link this to something that they're interested in, then maybe it will kind of enhance the learning a little bit. So you know, when I'm doing math with my kid, it's all like Lego Star Wars figures. So he's like adding and subtracting the number of figures that it will take to, you know, defeat Darth Vader or whatever. But H's learning at the moment. H's doing these things. And now he loves math. And I think that is helpful.

The few parents of high school students described efforts to master curricular content to be able to teach it to their adolescents and the tensions emerging within this role, particularly with respect to the long-term implications.

> Yeah, totally unrealistic to have to do this right. Because you work all day. You come home, you make dinner and you switch right on, until you go to bed. Right? It's not an ideal position to be in. I don't really know the curriculum. So I'm having to try and figure it out where we don't have access to textbooks. We weren't given any virtual access to textbooks. So you're trying to Google Khan Academy and figure things out, and then try and teach your kid about it. It feels really arduous. Right? And very unrealistic. And then I just worry, like, what is he getting out of this? And you know, should he just do a whole extra year of high school? Has he really learned how to learn? And like, you know, have I taught him right? I don't really know. Like, he's done okay. It's not even about the grades. It's about like, does he have the skills? And, what he missed out on during this time; socially

> and in terms of his ability to ask for help, and, you know, understand what he knows and what he doesn't know.

One by-product of adopting a teaching role noted by many parents was how much they learned about their child, their ways of learning and their skills and knowledge in various areas. Even those who described very high levels of involvement with school expressed surprise and a deepened understanding of where their children were at. For some, this actually shaped their vision for the future of their child(ren).

> It's allowed me to kind of, I guess, maybe come to terms with what the future will be like, and what I need to start planning now to make sure that it's successful for her. Which I think it sucks in some ways, but it's a really good thing for me to start thinking about.

Stress and Hardship: This Is Just. So. Hard

The unavailability of supports, juggling and balancing of priorities, and engaging in teaching or at least monitoring school-assigned learning compounded for many parents in ways that left them feeling frustrated, exhausted and overwhelmed. Not to mention that there was a global pandemic raging that required parents to keep themselves and their children safe and calm. The lack of respite or any breaks described in the first theme was raised by many parents as a barrier to them being able to better manage the stresses of supporting their children at home.

For parents who continued to work, stress was often associated with time and conflicting priorities throughout the day. One mother shared that '…my partner and I are working from home, and my partner put it best when he said that it's basically three jobs for two people'. Stress also emerged from the perceived lack of control and choices available to families. The school and societal shut-downs meant that options were limited and families' lives and movements were at the mercy of public health decisions. Those who needed to work for financial reasons felt the weight of trying to do it all—to maintain their identity as a reliable employee alongside a parent invested in the wellbeing of their child. Single parents in the sample noted the absence of a partner in sharing the load and felt that this added to their struggle and stress level and the lack of choices they had before them.

> So I don't have a choice but to continue working hard and overworking and burning myself out and all these things. Because like, I have a responsibility, I love my child, I need to keep my job, right. So I'm not in a position where I can make any choices.

Many parents shared worries they had during school closures. They worried about their child(ren)'s wellbeing—were they getting too much screen time? Too little math time? Too little interaction with other children or adults? Would missing out on occupational therapy mean less growth over their lifespan? Would COVID-19 mean that their child might not learn how to read? They also worried about their efforts as parents—were their teaching efforts jeopardising their relationship with their child? Were they doing the right things in teaching their child? Should they be doing more? Less? Should they be following their child's lead, the advice of teachers, their colleagues or the media? 'As a parent, you feel like it's your responsibility. So you do it but it's exhausting. And then you just worry, is it the right thing to do?'

> And this is what we worry the most of our, our kids I mean, people with Down syndrome, and I don't want to generalize but they thrive in social settings right and this is how I've seen my daughter grow and learn is with her peers with other kids age with, you know, mentors and then she, my daughter is very physically active so she knows a lot of extracurricular sports and activities and now that this is all gone. I personally don't worry that much about academics, I mean she's going to catch up eventually but what is the impact of her not having all these social interactions?

Discussion

Overall, the parents in our study point to a system for students with special education needs that was exposed for its weaknesses when remote emergency learning during the first wave of the pandemic hit. As we noted, no-one was expecting this pandemic nor the continued upset it has caused in the school system. However, there are a number of lessons that we can learn from the first wave. These lessons emerge from the themes presented. Understanding the holes in the academic and social support networks of parents, the differential response of schools and parent reactions to these issues helps us discuss the implications for families of students with SEN going forward.

Perceived Support and Parent Efficacy

Past research indicates a need for parents to feel supported in their role as caregiver of children with disabilities, in order to feel that they are capable in their role (Resch et al., 2010). While some research indicates that parents feel overburdened (Whiting et al., 2019), it is also the case that some parents do feel capable of coping with the day-to-day world of parenting a child with a disability (e.g. Dempsey et al., 2009; Woodman & Hauser-Cram, 2013). It is believed that these parents have the resilience to face adversity—similar to what one might expect in the population of parents in general (Gavidia-Payne et al., 2015).

In our research, when parents had the skills necessary to bounce back (e.g. understanding their emotions, knowing what tangible supports they need to cope, who they can contact to get those emotional and tangible support networks and taking care of themselves), their sense of confidence increased. The parents that we interviewed shared great understanding of their child(ren) and their needs, even going so far as to say that they weren't going to engage in the work sent home as it was too stressful and a poor fit for a child's needs. Those parents that had support from other family members or friends or who could afford to pay for it, discussed the ability to share the responsibilities. Unfortunately, for those that did not have these supports, they often questioned how they were doing as parents. As we move forward, it is important to continue to engage parents in networks that will help them to feel capable and confident in their role of parent of a child with a disability.

Parents' Mental Health

As has been reported in larger quantitative survey research (e.g. Masi et al., 2021), the mental health of parents was impacted by the pandemic. Mental health, including coping skills, depression and anxiety, has been identified for many years as a crucial variable affecting the ability of parents to manage, navigate and experience joy and optimism in life with a child with disabilities (Aunos et al., 2008; Bonis, 2016; Minnes et al., 2015; Wade et al., 2015). Parents in our study spoke of the isolation factor and the stress associated with being caregiver and teacher with the weight of both of those roles being heavy in the moment as well as worrying about the future of their children.

Although work has been found to have positive benefits to some parents of children with disabilities (Morris, 2014), parents can also experience stress when trying to balance the two, especially when employment is demanding or inflexible (Brown & Clark, 2017). Among the parents that we interviewed, efforts to manage both work and parenting effectively were more pronounced, as these roles took place simultaneously, often at the same kitchen table. The pandemic has focused attention on the heavy burden placed on women and mothers to juggle multiple roles, with concerns raised about the short- and long-term consequences (Collins et al., 2021; Halley et al., 2021; Linos et al., 2021). Our research makes clear the extensive efforts that mothers of children with SEN have undertaken in an effort to maintain their career path and ensure financial stability for their family, while trying to ensure that their children continue to learn and develop.

Parent Involvement

Parents have extensive knowledge about their children based on years of experience, see themselves as experts about their children and report both challenges and benefits associated with sharing their knowledge with educators (Boshoff et al., 2018). When parents are involved in their children's education, students achieve better academic outcomes (Ma et al., 2016). Parents who learn how to advocate for their children feel better able to work with schools (Cadieux et al., 2019). Unfortunately, it is also true that strained relationships can occur when children are struggling in school (Mautone et al., 2014).

What was very evident in our discussions with parents is that they had a great deal of sympathy for the teachers and the situation that remote emergency learning created for teaching with technology while they too were dealing with the ramifications of the pandemic in their own lives. Having to be both parent and teacher provided great insight into the work of teachers and how much it was missed when the parent had to try to be all things to their child. Parents who had built positive relationships with their child(ren)'s teachers prior to the pandemic still presented them in a positive way, even if school was not going well for their child currently.

Tensions still arose, however, in particular among parents who had other children without disabilities. These parents noted the contrast between the learning opportunities offered for their neurotypical child compared to the limited meaningful or appropriate offerings for their

child with SEN. Further tensions occurred when parents did not hear from the school at all. The issue of *us* versus *them* was presented by a few parents, who continued to be concerned about the lack of engagement for their children. It is not surprising that the experiences of school prior to the pandemic continue to play out during the pandemic, and that there are parents who feel schools are doing their best while others feel schools could be doing better. As always, the goal should be for schools and parents to work together for the benefit of the student.

Conclusion

Most of us are dreaming of a world post-COVID and hoping to leave memories of physical distancing, school closures, restricted travel and ever-present fears about health and safety behind. This unexpected and hopefully rare event has, however, allowed for a magnified focus on many of our social systems, including schools and the particular experiences of those with SEN.

The themes identified in our research were led by the voices of families who navigated at-home learning during the spring of 2020, and revealed the challenges parents faced, often in the face of support systems full of holes. Many of our participants described their increased understanding of the strengths, needs and learning preferences of their children as they adopted newly expanded and challenging roles as parent-teachers. These themes were interwoven in the stories of families and led to the discussion of lessons learned. Moving forward, we utilise these themes and lessons to raise new questions about the education of students identified with SEN especially surrounding collaborative relationships between school and home. Can parents who are able be more of a partner in their child's education? Can there be time and space for this in our often-overloaded school schedules? How can we create partnerships with those who are disengaged or without the capital to be able to navigate the pathways into and through school systems? How can educators and system leaders develop a real understanding of the complexities involved in parenting, working and supporting the learning of children with special education needs?

Hopefully, the spotlight forced on our schools, communities and support systems by the COVID-19 pandemic will inform efforts that support the learning, wellbeing and long-term success for students with SEN. Centring student and family voices in these efforts is a necessary first step.

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Opening the World During Lockdown: Multilingual and Multicultural Experiences for Learners in Wales Through Mentoring

Lucy Jenkins

Abstract The onset of the pandemic in March 2020 reset everyday experiences for children and young people across the UK. Despite best efforts, variable provision across schools and the wider ripple effects of the pandemic led to learning loss, with learners from socio-economically challenging backgrounds most acutely impacted. Concerned about the impact that the pandemic would have on an already precarious situation for language learning in Wales, MFL Mentoring launched the Post-16 Languages Recovery Project, to provide inclusive spaces for learners to engage in language and cultural learning opportunities.

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In this chapter, we will consider the global challenges facing education, illuminating key issues arising from the pandemic focusing in particular on the loss of learning. Secondly, we will consider the specific context for education in Wales and the impact of the pandemic on preparations for the Curriculum for Wales. We will analyse pre-pandemic trends in language learning in Wales in order to understand why languages are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19, above all amongst the most deprived learners. Finally, we will evaluate the success of the Post-16 Languages Recovery Project through analysing primary data collated from learners throughout the first lockdown period, April–July 2020, and from teachers July–August 2021.

Keywords Loss of learning • Language learning • MFL mentoring • Post-16 Languages Recovery Project • Wales • COVID-19

Introduction

The onset of the pandemic in March 2020 reset everyday experiences for children and young people across the UK. In a matter of days, young people were required to adapt to a radically different pace and space for learning, losing the structured routine of and location for schooling five days a week. As schools made substantial efforts to pivot to provide online support, it became clear that the robustness and cohesivity of this support would be mixed, not through lack of effort, but through lack of structural readiness, resources and skills (Schleicher, 2020). This rupture to the learning experience caused a variety of challenges for safeguarding the education and wellbeing of young people (Loades et al., 2020). Issues of safety and support for learners in the home, patchy access to technology, a disparity of education being offered across schools and a lack of digital skills (Kirschner & de Bruyckere, 2017) were all compounded by the psycho-social toil of being separated from friends and family for extended periods (Topping et al., 2020). It is therefore unsurprising that young peoples' experiences of learning throughout the COVID-19 pandemic have varied and are unique to each young person or child.

It was with foresight of these potential issues and challenges that MFL Mentoring launched the Post-16 Languages Recovery project to provide cultural and language learning opportunities to post-16 learners in Wales

from April 2020–February 2021. Funded by Welsh Government since 2015, MFL Mentoring supports the Welsh Government's Global Futures strategy which aims to increase the number of learners in Wales studying a modern foreign language (MFL) (Welsh Government, 2015). Since 2015, the project has provided mentoring to over 10,000 year 8 and 9 learners across over 130 secondary schools in Wales. The project trains university students from its partner universities, Aberystwyth University, Bangor University, Cardiff University, Swansea University and University Wales Trinity Saint David's (UWTSD), to deliver inspirational mentoring sessions to increase motivation and appetite for language learning. In recent years, the project has also extended to support languages and the transition to the new Curriculum for Wales, a radical overhaul of the primary and secondary curriculum in Wales, due for introduction in 2022.

These initiatives were developed in response to the protracted crisis in language learning in the UK (Bowler, 2020). The challenges facing languages are partly the result of structural issues such as unfavourable school timetabling of languages, reduced teaching hours and limited support and timetabling of languages at A-level (Blake & Gorrara, 2018). These structural issues, which will be explored in more depth in the chapter, impact on student motivation and compound wider negative attitudes towards languages resulting from social and political contexts such as Brexit in the UK (Gorrara, 2018). The effect is a student body with low aspirations towards languages and a lack of personal attachment to them.

These issues affect language learning across the UK, but most acutely in Wales (Gorrara et al., 2020). Wales alone has experienced a 40% decline in the numbers of young people studying a modern foreign language at GCSE in the last five years alone (Stats Wales, 2020c). In 2020, this meant that only 15% of learners in Wales sat a GCSE in an MFL (Stats Wales, 2020c) compared to 47% in England in 2019 (Lough, 2020). The challenges leading to this decline have been well-documented over many years by the British Council in annual *Language Trends* surveys (Board & Tinsley, 2016, 2017; Tinsley & Doležal, 2018; Tinsley, 2019, 2020; Collen, 2021). The situation has also attracted the attention of learned societies and national bodies such as the British Academy, who have called for a national and strategic response to the crisis (British Academy et al., 2020).

The Post-16 Languages Recovery Project was established to mitigate further deterioration in both attitudes and uptake of languages, whilst also broadening horizons during successive lockdowns. It was a subsidiary

project derived from the wider MFL Mentoring programme. It aimed to limit the 'inevitable loss of learning' (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020) and the potential short- and long-term impacts of this lost learning on uptake and attitudes towards languages. The evidence-based success of a near-peer mentoring approach as a way to inspire and motivate learners (Blake & Gorrara, 2019) suggested that a near-peer model could engage learners in meaningful learning experiences when confronted with reduced contact with peers and teachers and the attendant impacts on motivation for learning (Stringer & Keys, 2021).

The project mobilised mentoring methods similar to those underpinning the core activity of MFL Mentoring, which engages with 12–14-year-olds (year 8 and 9 learners). These methods centre on facilitating transformative experiences and supporting conversations and reflections on multilingual identities. Near-peer mentoring is defined as 'an interactive process' between people at different life stages (Caldwell & Carter, 1993) and, in the context of MFL Mentoring, this refers specifically to an interaction between a university student and a secondary school learner. The experience between mentor and mentee is constructed around a series of sessions with activities and discussions which are designed to challenge the mentees' perspective, making them more open to change and reflection in the short and long term (Mezirow, 2000). The aim is to create space for a learner to reflect on their own relationship with languages and cultures and in turn, consider how their identity is shaped by multiple languages and cultures. Forbes et al. (2021) state that the formation of a multilingual identity 'needs to be explicit and participative; learners need to engage in the active and conscious process of considering their linguistic and multilingual identities and to become aware of the possibility of change in relation to these identifications.' The dynamic, mentor-led sessions underpinning the Post-16 Languages Recovery Project therefore offered a space for that reflection and renegotiation.

In this chapter, we will consider the implementation and impact of the Post-16 Languages Recovery Project on the learners who engaged with it, considering to what extent it met its core aims to provide much needed learning opportunities; to grow learner confidence; and to support learner motivation. To do this, we will firstly consider the global challenges facing education, illuminating key issues arising from the pandemic focusing in particular on the loss of learning. Secondly, we will focus on the specific context for education in Wales and the impact of the pandemic on preparations for the Curriculum for Wales, as well as on learners from socially

and economically deprived communities. Here, we will focus on pre-pandemic trends in language learning in Wales in order to understand why languages are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19, above all amongst the most deprived learners. This chapter will also address teacher views on the impact of the pandemic on language learning. Finally, we will evaluate the success of the Post-16 Languages Recovery Project through analysing primary data collated from learners throughout the first lockdown period, April–July 2020, and from teachers between July–August 2021.

Context

A Global Challenge to Education

The challenges posed by the pandemic permeated all aspects of life and society throughout 2020 and 2021, impacting the economy, travel and healthcare, alongside education, and demanding widespread adaptation of our social norms (Anayi et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2021). Wholesale stoppages to in-school teaching disrupted learner access to education, arguably widening education disparities, increasing financial inequalities and potentially impacting the long-term prospects of affected learners (Sharp et al., 2020). Across the globe, organisations such as the OECD and UNESCO have made concerted efforts to document the extent and impact of school closures on learners, particularly in relation to lost learning. An Ofqual commissioned review of international research into learning during the pandemic highlights the inherent challenges in evaluation given the variability in approaches to measurement (Stringer & Keys, 2021).

Despite these challenges, there are clear trends across a broad and international research base which provide insight into the impacts of COVID-19 on learning. UNICEF, for example, identified that there were whole school closures across 188 countries in April 2020 and that digital methods of teaching were only accessible to approximately 25% of displaced learners (UNICEF, 2021). Research also shows that only 60% of countries implemented digital learning for pre-primary education, leaving many early-education learners with little to no learning resources (UNICEF, 2021), the impact of which is yet to be seen. However, research increasingly suggests that early modelling of learning loss often proposed worst case scenarios, and that to a large extent 'online learning had been reasonably effective' (Stringer & Keys, 2021), at least in the Western countries.

As we move past the immediacy of the crisis and the rapid pivot to remote learning, research turns to consider the effectiveness of online learning in comparison to face-to-face. Whilst Ofqual's commissioned review concludes that online learning is generally associated with 'poorer outcomes than traditional classroom teaching', it also acknowledges that effectiveness is highly dependent on the way it is mobilised to support learning and, that when used well, can compete with face-to-face teaching (Stringer & Keys, 2021, p. 6). The Post-16 Languages Recovery Project aimed to provide inclusive and accessible learning opportunities designed for an online space and not a mere replacement for face-to-face learning. This meant designing sessions that were interactive; that encouraged student agency; that maximised the benefit of synchronous and asynchronous learning and where the instructor was visible and active (Veletsianos, 2020). Sessions were largely discussion-based and mentor-led, mobilising the mentoring expertise of past and present mentors from MFL Mentoring. With both university students and school students struggling with similar learning displacements and adaptations, the natural similarities in experiences bred points of contact and connection. Despite this, given the number of learners without access to technology, there were a proportion of students that were not able to access the project.

Research is now also considering the potential long-term impacts of the pandemic on learners and learning. The impact of lost learning is estimated to be so severe that years of progress made in improving education access and quality will be lost (Engzell et al., 2021). Whilst some major bodies argue that this creates opportunity to reset education and ensure that we create a fairer education system going forward (United Nations, 2020), concerns remain that the negative impacts of the learning lost will stifle efforts. For instance, early research indicates that university students from lower income backgrounds lost more teaching hours as a result of the lockdown than those from the highest income groups (52% compared to 40%), and that state school pupils were far less likely to benefit from full school days during lockdown than those in private schools (38% compared to 74%) (Major et al., 2020). This highlights the differential impacts of lost learning across economic groupings, which it is argued could act to depress social mobility of young people from poorer families (Major, 2020). Further research has also projected negative impacts on the earning potential and social mobility of children from poorer socio-economic backgrounds (Sibieta, 2021). The impacts are expected to be especially pronounced for those from lower socio-economic groups who do not go on to university after school (Halterbeck et al., 2020).

Education in Wales Before and During COVID-19

Whilst the situation for education in Wales is not vastly different from the global trends identified above, the impact on learners and teachers in Wales needs to be understood within the context of Wales, as a devolved nation of the UK. Both education and health are devolved powers where Welsh Government controls decisions for Wales from the Senedd Cymru. This has meant that decisions on education and health in relation to the pandemic have differed across the four UK nations.

Welsh schools vary in medium of education from Welsh-medium, to varying types of bilingual, to English-medium. Importantly, Wales is in a period of curriculum reform, with the Curriculum for Wales due to be rolled out from September 2022. This new curriculum has been devised in response to a review conducted in 2015 by Professor Graham Donaldson and the subsequent report, *Successful Futures* (Donaldson, 2015), which outlined a radial programme of reform to teaching, learning and assessment in Wales. The impacts of the pandemic are therefore particularly pertinent in the Welsh context, not least because the pandemic arrived during a crucial preparatory period for the curriculum reforms, which have since been delayed in their rollout.

The Curriculum for Wales is configured around four purposes. These are intended to support learners to become 'ambitious, capable learners who are ready to learn throughout their lives'; 'enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work'; 'ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world'; and 'healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society' (Welsh Government, 2020a). The achievement of these four purposes is underpinned by the core skills of creativity, innovation, critical thinking and personal effectiveness. The achievement of these aims is linked to the creation of six new Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs) which group the learning and teaching of different subject areas into clusters (Gatley, 2020). The six AoLEs are: Expressive Arts; Health and Wellbeing; Humanities; Languages, Literacy and Communication; Mathematics and Numeracy; and Science and Technology.

At the heart of the Curriculum for Wales is the individualised approach where a school's curriculum is designed by the school for their specific learners. Welsh Government guidance on curriculum design emphasises this learner-centred approach: 'As schools develop their vision to support their learners to realise the four purposes, learner voice should be central to this' (Welsh Government, 2019). The process of designing a curriculum

is multi-dimensional, as well as both time consuming and highly skilled (Fullan, 2016). Herein lies the challenge posed by the pandemic to education in Wales. Whilst the onset of whole-scale remote learning necessarily forced schools to consider new ways of delivering learning, for many it has hindered and delayed efforts to prepare for the transition to the Curriculum for Wales and displaced the centrality of student voice in the creation process.

Instead, schools necessarily focused on pivoting to remote learning and focused resources on supporting learner wellbeing and essential provisions such as providing food. For example, rapid efforts were made to provide learners entitled to free school meals in school, with a range of ways to access food when learning from home (Welsh Government, 2020c). This is particularly crucial given recent evidence of poverty rates in Wales. In 2019, around 29% of children were estimated to live in relative income poverty, and approximately 18% of young people aged 5–18 were entitled to free school meals (Wales Centre for Public Policy, 2021).

This is significant when considering the differentiated impact of learning loss on those from socio-economically deprived backgrounds. In 2018, there was already an educational attainment gap in Wales between children from richer and poorer backgrounds with an estimated 16% gap in attainment at age 11, which increases to 32% by GCSE level (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2020). While the gap at age 11 has narrowed since 2004–05, when it was 26%, it is expected that the economic impact of COVID-19 will undo recent progress. All of this to say, COVID-19 will likely worst affect the most vulnerable learners in Wales.

The Post-16 Languages Recovery Project aimed to provide inclusive spaces for all learners to engage in language and cultural learning opportunities, by *not* following curriculum themes which would perhaps accentuate the lost learning particularly amongst students from more socially and economically challenged environments. Rather it focused on developing skills central to the Curriculum for Wales, such as curiosity-driven learning and critical thinking (Welsh Government, 2015). Given the variability of provision and disparities in engagement with learning across learner groups, the project team felt it was important *not* to assume prior knowledge. In doing so, all learners began sessions on an equal footing, regardless of any prior learning or learning loss. The project provided learners with opportunities to discover new languages and cultures. This intervention therefore took a crucial step towards supporting the

multilingual ambitions of the new curriculum at a time of high vulnerability for language learning across schools which was already at an all-time low before the pandemic struck.

Languages Education in Wales

Across the UK, the most commonly taught Modern Foreign Languages (MFLs) are French, Spanish and German, with some schools offering also Mandarin Chinese and Italian (Tinsley, 2019). All learners in Wales study a MFL throughout Key Stage 3 (ages 11–14), except for those who are disapplied (these are learners exempt from this compulsory requirement due to their individual circumstances). In contrast, Welsh is studied throughout primary education up to and including Key Stage 4 (ages 14–16) and the GCSE qualification. The fact that MFL is optional for most Welsh secondary schools at Key Stage 4 (across 93% of schools according to *Language Trends Wales 2018*; Tinsley, 2018) has had a drastic effect on languages uptake at Key Stage 5 and the A-level qualification (ages 16–18), with numbers of students opting to study languages at Key Stage 4 declining by 40% in the last 5 years (Stats Wales, 2020c). A similar trend can be seen in the number of learners opting to study Welsh A-level (Stats Wales, 2020a, b), suggesting that overall attitudes towards language learning at higher levels are generally negative amongst learners in Wales.

The overall scale of the decline at GCSE level in Wales is severe and continues to worsen year on year, with an average annual attrition rate of 2% (Stats Wales, 2020a). Only 18.6% of all entrants to GCSE in Wales studied a MFL in 2017–18 (Stats Wales, 2019) and this fell further in 2020 when only 15% of learners in Wales took an MFL in French, German, Spanish or an 'other language' at GCSE (Stats Wales, 2020a). This is compared to 47% of students in England entered to complete a GCSE in MFL in 2017 (Tinsley & Doležal, 2018).

As this data demonstrates, MFL teaching has been experiencing decline across the UK, and particularly in Wales, for nearly 20 years. According to Tinsley (2019), the reasons cited by teachers for the decline include: limited option slots linked to the Welsh Baccalaureate and compulsory Welsh, as well as the perceived difficulty of MFL in general and of the GCSE in its reformed syllabus compared to other subjects (Tinsley, 2019). Other reasons cited by Tinsley (2019) are linked to recruiting too few students to make a course viable, less teaching time in Key Stage 3 and option

choices being brought forward to year 8. Such reasons are recurring themes across all *Language Trend Wales* reports (see Board & Tinsley, 2015, 2016, 2017).

The rate of continuation to study an A-level modern foreign language is also declining. In *Language Trends Wales 2019* (Tinsley, 2019), 39% of responding schools indicated either no take-up or no provision for post-16 MFL. In 2019, half of schools with post-16 MFL students said that numbers had declined over the last three years (Tinsley, 2019) and on average, only 6% of those who completed a GCSE in French, German or Spanish continued to take it at A-level (Stats Wales, 2020a). The rate of decline has also accelerated in the last five years with a decline of 40% in the number of students studying an MFL at A-level (Stats Wales, 2020a). It is clear therefore that, even before the pandemic, the rate of decline at A-level for MFL was increasing.

Research also shows a correlation between GCSE MFL uptake and socio-economic background (Roberts, 2018). This is primarily because learners and parents struggle to ground the experience of learning different languages in the everyday, instead perceiving the value of languages via their transactional or functional purpose, largely related to travel. In *Language Trends Wales 2019* (Tinsley, 2019), school responses show that students eligible for free school meals are under-represented in 46% of MFL classrooms, whereas students who are not eligible for free school meals are over-represented in 27% of MFL classrooms in schools. A similar pattern emerged in *Language Trends Wales 2018* (Tinsley, 2018) and *Language Trends Wales 2015/16* (Board & Tinsley, 2016) where schools with a higher proportion of their students eligible for free school meals were more likely to have low uptake levels for MFL at Key State 4. Importantly, research shows that 'throughout children's language learning journey, there is strong evidence of a link between FSME percentages and levels of uptake at key transition points' (Henderson & Carruthers, 2021). The full impact of COVID-19 is not yet clear. Uptake data at GCSE and A-level for 2022 and 2023 will provide greater insight into the short-term impact on learner uptake.

Teacher Views on COVID-19 and Language Learning in Wales

As part of its research programme, the MFL Mentoring project surveyed teachers in the project's partner schools about the immediate impacts of the pandemic on language learning. Research conducted with teachers across 93 secondary schools in Wales during the period June–August 2021 provides early insights into the impact teachers perceive COVID-19 to have had on attitudes of Key Stage 3 learners and GCSE uptake of languages. This sample represents 46% of secondary schools in Wales and drew on responses from across all types of Welsh school: Welsh-medium, bilingual and English-medium schools across Wales. Teachers participated in the survey anonymously and were asked to comment on attitudes towards languages via both qualitative and quantitative questions.

When asked 'What impact has the COVID-19 pandemic had on Key Stage 3 learner attitudes in your school?', 17% of teachers said a 'very negative impact', 62% said a 'negative impact' and 15% said 'no impact', with only 1% stating a 'positive impact'. Teachers' responses overwhelmingly suggest that COVID-19 will have a negative impact on learner attitudes at Key Stage 3 (Fig. 1).

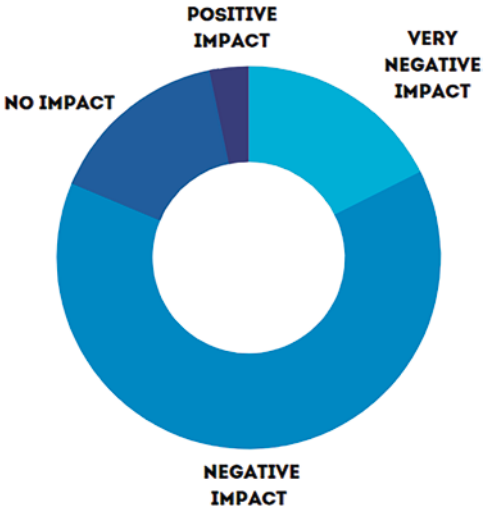

Fig. 1 Teacher responses to 'What impact has the COVID-19 pandemic had on KS3 learner attitudes in your school?'

When asked 'What impact has the COVID-19 pandemic had on uptake for MFL at GCSE?', 25% opted for 'very negative', 47% reported 'negative' and 20% report 'no impact' and 3% state a 'positive impact' (Fig. 2).

This self-reported data from teachers highlights significant negative impact at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 levels. Free-text comments from secondary school languages teachers across Wales also highlight the challenges of engaging with learners from more socially and economically deprived backgrounds during the pandemic:

> *It entirely depends on the individual pupils. Also massively hit by outside events of the last 16 months. Our pupils are mostly from socio-economically deprived backgrounds and many of the families have little or no aspiration. Lockdown has hit our pupils especially hard in terms of deprivation, isolation and educational attainment.*

This comment confirms the research referenced throughout this chapter which notes the disproportionately poor representation of learners from socio-economically depressed communities amongst language learning cohorts, and the potential deterioration of this through the further effects of the pandemic. The comment speaks also to the challenges faced in particular in communities with high levels of poverty, indicating the greater severity of the wider impacts of the pandemic on such learners.

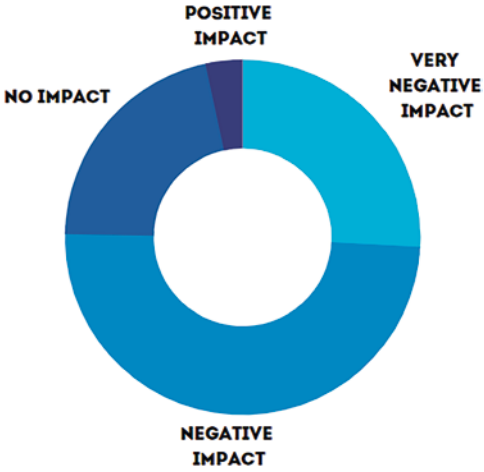

Fig. 2 Teacher responses to 'What impact has the COVID-19 pandemic had on uptake for MFL at GCSE?'

A number of teachers also made free-text comments which highlighted existing issues facing languages education. The following comments focus specifically on GCSE option choices being made in year 8, the number of 'free' choices learners have to make for GCSE and the limited number of teaching hours for languages at Key Stage 3:

> *The introduction of options in year 8 has resulted in a year on year decline despite broadening the language offer considerably. We were a high MFL uptake school for many years but have declined from an average of 55% take up to less than 20% over the past four years.*
>
> *Pupils often show great enthusiasm following careers talks, participation in clubs, etc., but when it comes to actually choosing options, they have very difficult decisions to make. They have 4 option columns, but only 3 option choices, as ICT is compulsory in one of them. French is in only one option column, and has to compete with popular, and for most pupils, easier subjects, like Geography. Our numbers have always been comparatively good, but September's numbers are particularly worrying—7 pupils. We only have 9 pupils in the current Y9 too.*

The above comments highlight the multiplicity of the challenges being faced by language learning in Wales. Not only do teachers face the reality of the challenges brought about the pandemic, but they continue to struggle with those factors that have contributed in a large part to the current landscape for languages. Of particular concern is the rate of attrition which seems to have accelerated in recent years causing further anxiety about the impact that the pandemic will have.

The impact of COVID-19 also paused all international visits. International visits had already been negatively affected by the logistical challenges of Brexit and the increasing costs of such exchanges (Tinsley, 2019). The connection between language learning and the possibility to travel is an important one for learners and their parents who can struggle to see the wider benefits of language learning beyond transactional exchange. For many students, it can also be a source of inspiration, a confidence boost and provide an opportunity to see the language in context. Teachers commented the following:

> *I have been at the school for 2 years and in this time have not managed to take a trip abroad, although we have 1 planned. I have not been able to input any new initiatives due to COVID. Currently uptake is very low and we need something to support. I am the only teacher of MFL in the school.*

We always have a boost in GCSE numbers after a trip! However, COVID has negatively impacted on us this year.

With attrition rates between GCSE and A Level already high and declining, we can hypothesise that without adequate support to overcome the existing and additional challenges brought about by the pandemic, such as lack of exposure to languages in context and continued timetabling challenges, even greater attrition might unfold.

Implementation and Impact of the Post-16 Languages Recovery Project

Given the array of issues already facing languages before March 2020, and the additional challenges prompted by COVID-19, MFL Mentoring launched the Post-16 Languages Recovery Project to support learners throughout the first lockdown period in Wales (April–July 2020). The project supported the Welsh Government's Continuity of Learning Project (Welsh Government, 2020d) which aimed to ensure that no pupil was disadvantaged as a result of school closures, in particular attempting to minimise learning loss amongst cohorts of more economically deprived learners.

The project was developed in a three-week period. In total, 80 sessions were delivered over a 12-week period between April and July 2020, with over 400 instances of attendance from learners across colleges and schools in Wales. A further project was delivered between November 2020 and February 2021, which also delivered a week-long festival and a weekend conference. For the purposes of this chapter, we focus only on the project delivered between April and July 2020 and the data collated from learners and teachers during this period.

Research Design

Research to evaluate project outcomes took a mixed methods approach, using a blend of quantitative and qualitative methods. By collating both types of data, we hoped to understand the impact of the intervention, as well as why and how any impacts had occurred. Learners were encouraged, but not obliged, to complete a structured survey at the end of each session. Surveys were anonymous and learners did not have to specify any

personal details including gender or name. This limits the nuance of the analysis, but nevertheless allows for the emergence of broad trends which might indicate wider sectoral shifts. Learners had to agree to a privacy notice before they could complete the survey. MFL Mentoring had ethical approval for its work from Cardiff University, School of Modern Languages.

To evaluate the impact of the first cycle of the project, this chapter uses data collated from participating learners at the end of their sessions. In total, 441 instances of learner engagement occurred over the 12-week period. A total of 80 sessions were delivered with 11 sessions delivered asynchronously via pre-recorded videos and 69 synchronously. The project received 202 instances of feedback from pupils via structured surveys and 35 schools from across Wales engaged in the project.

Multilingual and Multicultural Experiences

Each week of the 12-week project was structured around a theme that was selected in partnership between the project team and the session leader. Selected titles included: Brazilian Politics, Language Policy in Wales, Contemporary Women in Europe and City Spaces in Spain. These themes did not relate formally to any part of the post-16 curriculum and specifically aimed to engage learners in new discussions that would complement, and not replace, other learning provision available. Alongside each theme, language conversation classes were delivered at post-16 standard and at beginners' level. Themes were designed to expand understanding of languages and demonstrate the political, cultural, psychological, social and linguistic dimensions of language study. All lectures and seminars were conducted in English in order to ensure that all post-16 students could access the content, regardless of which language they were studying at school and to encourage learners to explore languages and cultures to which they had not previously been exposed.

The diversity of the subject matter was intended to appeal to a broad audience, accounting for the variability of languages and cultures spoken across schools in Wales, and to disrupt expectations. Free-text comments from learners suggest that the variety of subject matter grew learner curiosity both during and after the project. The following comments from learners indicate this:

I'd never even heard of some of the topics so it has definitely increased my curiosity. For example, I'd never heard of or learnt Catalan before and now I'm really interested in furthering my learning. I'd also never been taught about Arabic cultures because that's not a part of any of my studies so that has really interested me.

The project has opened my eyes towards languages and cultures I've never really experienced before, so I'm starting to research into various topics more.

Because the project has offered so many different subjects, my curiosity has grown a lot after taking part in various lectures, seminars and language classes.

The above comments highlight the far-reaching impact that the experiences had on some learners who, without prompting, use terminology commensurate with a change in thinking and an increase in awareness and motivation, in particular: 'opened my eyes', 'increased my curiosity', 'my curiosity has grown a lot'. This is particularly significant as it suggests that the intervention of the project could have both short- and long-term impact on learner attitudes towards languages and potential further study.

Near-Peer and Discussion-Based Learning

Each theme was initially developed via a lecture delivered either by a mentor or an academic. Lectures were generally pre-recorded to ensure maximum accessibility to pupils and released at the beginning of the week. Lectures lasted between 20–50 minutes and were structured as university lectures. Whilst watching the lecture, learners were asked to complete an independent learning task that would form the foundation of the follow-up 'live' seminar. These tasks were devised by session leaders and asked learners to identify, analyse and evaluate information provided in the lecture. Session leaders were encouraged to provide reflective pauses in their lectures to actively encourage learners to conduct independent research and learning and they were also tasked with encouraging learners to create personal connections with the content. Each lecture was followed later in the week with a synchronous seminar which lasted up to one hour. Seminars were focused on further exploring the content of the lecture and giving learners the opportunity to ask questions and interact with the session leader as well as each other.

The project aimed to transform perspectives and open minds to the multiplicity of languages and cultures. It took a learner-centred approach to this, aiming to embed learner agency in the design of the sessions and

in particular within the activities, which were largely discovery based and discursive. Many students commented specifically on the discursive nature of the sessions, highlighting the benefit of active participation in live sessions with mentors. When asked what the best thing about the sessions were, learners commented:

> *the discussion and hearing from other pupils in Wales about their experiences with languages at school*
>
> *Being able to contribute opinions about topics*
>
> *discussion of ideas and the different opinions and perspectives expressed.*

Learners benefited from working synchronously with university students and peers to build a sense of connection and collaboration. This could be, at least in part, because academic success is linked to a sense of belonging and purpose, the possibility to engage with quality materials and the opportunity to build meaningful connections with peers and teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). The availability of synchronous sessions was crucial to achieving this, by providing learners with live interactions and opportunities to engage with near-peer role models. This was particularly important for ensuring that learners were motivated to engage in continuous learning, lessening the potential risk of complete disengagement from learning and therefore reducing the short- and long-term impact on the learners engaged.

Curiosity-Driven Learning

Alongside the theme-based lectures and seminars, learners were able to sign up to language taster sessions, which often linked to the theme of the week, for example, Japanese, Catalan, Taiwanese or Nepalese. Each taster class lasted 45 minutes and was led by a mentor or academic. These sessions were designed to introduce learners to a new language and culture. Learners were asked to complete a series of activities to encourage use of the language but also to get a flavour of a new culture.

The impact of these sessions is well summarised by a learner comment:

> *Because I've had the chance to learn the basics of new languages and cultures, I have realised that I want to learn more about cultures and the world has grown a lot during the project.*

This comment demonstrates the success of the project in opening the world during lockdown through multilingual and multicultural experiences. Although this learner does not explicitly redefine their own multilingual or multicultural identity, their comment speaks to the project generating space and appetite for self-reflexivity. Although this may not be sufficient to prompt a complete renegotiation of their multilingual identity, it does show that learners can 'relate the new knowledge to themselves and their lives and so potentially transform their identifications' (Forbes et al., 2021). This is particularly important if we consider the identified disconnect between those from socially and economically deprived communities and negative attitudes towards languages. By encouraging self-reflexivity, we make languages more relevant, and therefore more accessible. This was particularly crucial at a time when engagement in learning was low.

In addition, over 90% of survey responses indicated that participation in the project was effective in increasing their curiosity to explore other languages and cultures beyond their areas of study. In total 58% of survey respondents said that lockdown had 'increased their motivation for language learning'. In qualitative responses to explain why this was the case, students cited the following reasons for this:

> *There isn't as much pressure to learn topics for exams, I can learn just because I enjoy it.*
>
> *I have become more independent and actually find the things I am interested in and therefore are researching/pursuing are more interesting than the CBAC [GCSE] syllabus.*
>
> *It has given me time to study at my own pace and in my own interest areas.*

The focus here on the lack of external pressures (exams) and the empowering nature of independent study speaks to the success of the design of the project which aimed to give learner agency.

That said, there were limitations to the project design. Learners had to sign up independently to the sessions or through their teacher, which meant that learners that were engaged already had a degree of self-motivation or pre-disposition towards active learning. These limitations are an important consideration in the framing of the types of learners who accessed the project.

Aspiration

The broad focus on languages and cultures also aimed to support learners to think towards the future with aspiration and hope whilst also broadening learners' understanding of study at university, particularly in relation to languages. Many learners were surprised by the diversity of the programme particularly in terms of what it revealed about studying at university level. When asked for comments as to how much participation in the project had influenced attitudes towards university, learners provided the following comments:

The project has introduced me to new subjects I've never learnt about before, so it's made me very excited about what I'll learn in uni

It's shown me the range of subjects I could study in university, so it's caused me to become very excited

By attending these online classes/seminars I am being introduced to new themes and ideas concerning languages that I have never studied before and I am excited by the idea that I can pursue these during my degree

The chance to attend lectures, seminars and language sessions has made me really look forward to going to university, because the range of topics that have been provided makes me excited to learn much more

Being in year 11, there's not much being set for us to do and my friends were really interested in the idea of participating in university style programmes such as this one.

It's clear from the comments that learners benefited from the university-style learning that shaped the design of the programme. In particular for post-16 learners, the disruption to learning had potential to affect attitudes towards university. Many learners expressed anxiety about what their university experience might look like, and preferred the idea of deferring for a year whilst the situation with COVID-19 stabilised:

I have always wanted to go to University, however, I cannot directly access visits to those and so it has got harder to choose which facility.

If COVID is still around and Uni isn't like what it would have been if COVID wasn't a thing then I will probably take a gap year. I might not have if COVID wasn't around.

I haven't had enough time in school to find subjects that I really like and would consider doing in the future.

The opportunity therefore to work in partnership with those studying at a university offered tangible connections to the space itself, demystifying the university experience and broadening understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on learning experiences in higher education.

Confidence

Finally, the project offered A-level conversation classes delivered by mentors. These classes focused on a variety of contemporary issues and aimed to encourage learners to speak spontaneously and develop confidence and competence in the language being studied. They were delivered nearly entirely in the target language and were the only sessions that required any prior knowledge. They were offered at two levels, based on how confident learners felt to speak. The first part of the session allowed learners to ask questions and socialise, whilst the second part focused on a theme. A recurring theme that learners wanted to tackle was the impact of COVID-19 on young people in different places around the world.

This links to learner confidence. It was anticipated that confidence would drop due to a lack of language exposure during lockdown. In total 89% of respondents indicated that participating in the language sessions offered by the project was either 'effective' or 'very effective' in improving their confidence in their language skills. Having the opportunity to discuss and use language skills with peers supported learners to grow their confidence at a time when opportunities to use languages were reduced. However, for some learners, the issue of confidence and motivation extended beyond language learning, with one pupil stating that: 'It's [lockdown] made me lose the motivation to do anything in general.' The impact on pupil wellbeing, and its effect on the ability to learn, needs to be more thoroughly understood, particularly for future instances of lockdown.

Conclusion

The pandemic has posed problems to education across the globe with widespread school closures and variability in the remote provision provided. Above all, it is clear that the impacts of the pandemic on education are not felt equally across all learners. Instead, the most acute short-term impact is experienced by learners from socio-economically deprived communities, and longer term impacts will surely be most severely felt amongst

this group too. In Wales, high rates of poverty and the connections between languages uptake and socio-economic status indicate that language learning in Wales will be affected in the long-term by the pandemic. Loss of learning will exacerbate existing issues within languages education, such as lack of teaching time, and could result in an even greater lack of equity of access to languages education for learners from deprived backgrounds.

As outlined in this chapter, language learning has been in crisis for many years with an accelerating decline in the numbers of learners studying an MFL at GCSE level. Evidence from teachers in particular suggests that the trends seen in Wales over the last 20 years will continue in the shadow of COVID-19, such as the ongoing decline in the number of learners who engage with consistent learning, an important factor in language learning. These additional challenges will likely further complicate systemic issues which have impacted on languages uptake at GCSE for many years, creating further challenges across the languages sector in Wales. It was with these challenges in mind, that MFL Mentoring established the Post-16 Languages Recovery Project, to provide continuity and support for multilingual and multicultural learning experiences throughout remote schooling.

Learner engagement with the Post-16 Languages Recovery Project offers hope. Learners enjoyed the diversity of subject matter and the multilingual ethos underpinning the project. Learners benefited from working closely with near-peer mentors and gained confidence when given the opportunity to use their languages. Learners enjoyed the diversity of subjects that they encountered through the project, comments showing such discoveries impacted on learning ambitions in both the short and long terms. Many learners commented on their enjoyment of the university format of the sessions, and in particular how the project showed that languages at university were not what was expected. With Welsh schools still in their preparatory phases for the rollout of the Curriculum of Wales the learner responses to this project suggest that the multilingual and interdisciplinary approach of the Curriculum for Wales offers hope for reinvigorating learner curiosity and enthusiasm for language learning.

The purpose of this project was to support learners at a time of great need. Building on established methodologies, MFL Mentoring responded to a crisis in education, reflecting the project team's determination to open the world to learners at a time of isolation and loss. The Post-16 Languages Recovery Project concluded in March 2021. However, MFL

Mentoring continues to deliver its intervention at Key Stage 3 and is currently developing teacher resources to support curriculum rollout and to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19. Such a project is needed now more than ever to support our young Welsh linguists.

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The Lessons of COVID for Climate Pedagogy with Young People: Learning to Navigate Urgency

Catherine Heinemeyer

Abstract Young people are currently emerging as political citizens into a world dominated by intersecting global crises, from the COVID pandemic to the quintessentially 'wicked' problem of climate change. The rapid response of governments and education systems to the pandemic, once sufficient consensus built on the urgency of the threat, demonstrated that it is both possible and necessary to reorient education around supporting young people and their communities to thrive in crisis situations.

Yet the very urgency of climate action has generated pedagogical approaches which can disillusion, frustrate and overburden young people. I draw on both educational literature and my own experience as an educator in schools, universities, youth theatres and activist spaces to identify four paradigms of climate education—'Do Your Bit', 'Apocalypse Soon', 'Manifestos and Microcosms' and 'Emotionally Reflexive

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Pedagogies'—and examine what each might learn from the 'crisis pedagogies' of the COVID pandemic.

Emotional literacy, active hope, systems thinking and comfort with uncertainty emerge as more important aims than immediate behavioural change. I also propose that story should take on a much greater role within learning, as a central pillar of a 'thing-centred pedagogy' which brings adults and children together around the problem of building community resilience.

Keywords Crisis pedagogies • Active hope • Systems thinking • Emotional literacy • Urgency • COVID-19

COVID, Climate and Crisis Pedagogies

The chapters in this volume give a rich overview of what might be called the 'crisis pedagogies' of the COVID-19 pandemic: an urgent restructuring of learning around a radically altered situation beyond the education sector's control. Schools worldwide have been compelled by circumstance to change: to refocus their attention on students' basic needs in a time of crisis, to reimagine learning environments and relationships between pupils and schools, to confront the impacts of disadvantage and scarcity and to deprioritise assessment and other external drivers in favour of compassion, community and emotional resilience. No such rapid response has yet emerged in relation to the far greater systemic challenge of climate change; yet the parallels are striking and the lessons valuable.

The interactions between the pandemic and the climate crisis are multilayered. Firstly, for many young people (and indeed adults) the pandemic is their first embodied experience of being subject to an entangled ecological and health crisis. This experience has made it clear in the starkest terms that humanity is not master of its own destiny, but an animal species within an ecosystem, at the mercy of other species such as the COVID-19 virus. Simultaneously, it has highlighted the increasingly untenable nature of our role in that ecosystem, in that the structure of the global economy and society caused the pandemic, or at least created the conditions for it to flourish. The encroachment of humans on wildlife habitats, and the reliance of poor communities on exploiting wild animals, remains the most plausible route for viruses like coronavirus to make the species leap (Grehan & Kingston, 2021); the frenetic rate of global trade and travel facilitated the virus' spread; the inequality, poor health, overcrowding and

fragile economies of many human communities confounded attempts to contain the virus and incubated new variants (Dorling, 2021).

Secondly, the pandemic has also marked young people's political identities in a manner that unavoidably intersects with climate change. Indeed, for many young people the two are tightly interlaced, dominating the landscape of their political maturation and offering lessons on the nature and challenges of human agency in the face of global crises:

> *I think before COVID, like I…we only saw the parts of world, the world we were told about—but when they were reporting the COVID across the world, they will also report in the way cities and countries are changing, like, the thing people saw most is like the wildlife back in big cities and things, like you didn't realise how damaged some countries were like up to that point. I think that now, like, people already think it's too big of an issue to fix, I think it's gonna be even harder to try and be like, yes it's the entire world, you're all in the same boat so we all need to help solve the thing.* (Student D, focus group participant in research study on ecological justice in education, York St John University, July 2020)

Young people are currently emerging as political citizens into a world dominated by wickedly intertwined global crises: the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic recession, gaping racial and class inequalities highlighted by social movements like Black Lives Matter, growing political polarisation and resulting threats to democracy. Perhaps most critical of all, acting as a multiplier of all other threats, is the climate and ecological crisis. The scientific consensus articulated by the International Panel on Climate Change is that the window for economic and social transformation to minimise the risk of runaway climate breakdown is only a few short years (IPCC, 2019; Harvey & Tremlett, 2021). Ainscough et al. (2021) highlight that these risks are 'held together by a sinew of racial, gender, economic and political inequalities that simultaneously exacerbate each threat and block potential action to address them'.

Finally, the pandemic has demonstrated the scale and speed of transformation that is possible for human societies, once a situation has been defined as a crisis—challenging the idea that our response to climate change must be incremental and 'affordable'. Although the UK government's response to COVID has been widely criticised, it is impossible to ignore that sacred cows fell like a row of dominoes. Austerity, business as usual, the primacy of individual freedom, the relentless educational assessment system, were abandoned one after another. Long-term homeless

people were housed overnight. Millions of people were granted a state income that did not depend on their work. Hundreds of thousands signed up as volunteers to bring complete strangers their shopping. In Neil Howard's words, 'the very system-logic of profit has temporarily been suspended; even more radically, it is being replaced by a system-logic of care' (2020, p. 7). This astonishing pivot to care in so many countries gave the lie to the idea that there was anything inevitable or necessary about neoliberal economics, or indeed about any of the tenets on which society is built—all were revealed *as having been choices all along*. The inadequacy of the policy response to the climate crisis—a far greater threat to humanity than COVID-19, on any metric—was thus thrown into stark relief. It became clear that, as Greta Thunberg told world leaders at the 2021 Austrian Climate Summit, 'The climate emergency has never once been treated as an emergency'.

The pandemic and the climate crisis are different issues—or 'hyperobjects', to use Timothy Morton's (2016) term for super-complex, global phenomena which interact with every other feature of human existence—but they share certain key characteristics. Both require urgent, systemic responses which involve making unprecedented demands on all organisations and individuals. Both have complex dynamics, entail unpredictable costs, hit the most vulnerable hardest and render the long-term future more uncertain. All of these factors make them challenging territory for educators, but perhaps the most problematic is that of *urgency*. Education is a quintessentially slow, long-term process which many educators acknowledge to be inherently 'weak' in the face of achieving concrete, immediate outcomes (Biesta, 2009). Yet the need for urgent action on climate has meant that climate education often starts from the imperative to bring about rapid change. In responding to this urgency, climate education has therefore much to learn from the pandemic response.

Crisis Response and the Curriculum

The sense of urgency generated by climate change and parallel crises can lead to a sense among many young people of a future that is very nearly foreclosed:

> *We saw online that people in Iceland held a funeral for a glacier today, but who is going to do that for us? Don't they see that we will be underwater soon and our country will be gone? No one cares. How can you grieve for ice and ignore us?* (Teenager, Maldives, in Hickman, 2019)

> *It's normal for us now to grow up in a world where there will be no polar bears, that's just how it is for us now, it's different than it was for you.* (10-year-old, UK, in Hickman, 2019)

> *I think that for me, it massively affects like my health and my wellbeing just purely from like worrying about it. […]It makes me feel so bad that we're doing this to our planet. […]And I think it's so scary and worrying that we're actively doing it.* (Student D, focus group participant in research study on ecological justice in education, York St John University, July 2020)

The 'ecological grief' and 'eco-anxiety' of young people, explored by Hickman (2018, 2019), are increasingly widely recognised within education. However existing approaches to education for sustainable development in the English National Curriculum largely confine themselves to a factual understanding of the greenhouse effect and the pros and cons of different potential remediation policies. For youth-led climate campaign Teach the Future, this falls far short of meeting either these emotions or the urgency of the ecological crisis:

> All students should learn about the climate and ecological emergency regardless of the subjects they choose. Sustainability should be treated as a key principle in education (like Equality), woven throughout all subject areas. Learning about the climate emergency should be liberated from its current subject siloes (e.g. optional Geography and a small bit in science at GCSE). (Teach the Future, 2020)

It is vital to recognise that many UK schools, recognising the importance of climate education, are going far beyond the National Curriculum's minimum requirements. Calls for systemic integration of 'sustainability as a golden thread through education' (Teach the Future, 2020) pose, however, profound philosophical and pedagogical challenges to educators. Teach the Future's own research found that 75% of UK teachers feel inadequately trained to educate young people about climate change. Even in Australia where climate change is rendering many areas uninhabitable (Nogrady, 2020; McGuire, 2020), as late as 2014, 80% of teachers were either unaware of Education for Sustainability or lacked understanding of it (AESA, 2014, p. 14). Indeed 'training' seems a very small word to cover the kind of reassessment of priorities, goals and practices that might be commensurate with preparing children for lives in a time of great unpredictability—for a time in which crisis is normal. There is tension between

ecological crisis, young people's sense of identity and the core beliefs which education seeks to promulgate, for example, that working hard brings a bright future (Verlie, 2019). The resulting cognitive dissonance, and responses of justifiable grief and anxiety, can make ecological crisis almost 'unspeakable' for many educators.

In determining how the education system can transform itself on a scale commensurate with the scale of the climate emergency, the 'crisis pedagogies' of COVID may offer some crucial lessons. The effects of the pandemic, which are still working themselves through the education system, are complex, multi-layered and often contradictory. Yet despite the overwhelming challenges the COVID crisis has presented to schools, the dramatic situation enabled many to place compassion and basic needs at the centre of their practice, as articulated by Matthew and Barry Carpenter's 'Recovery Curriculum' (2020). Chapters in this volume mirror some of the above observations in relation to schooling: some teachers have felt themselves liberated from the constraints of assessment (Spicksley et al.); many educators have discerned the potential of the COVID moment to reimagine the purpose and organisation of education in partnership with young people, local civil society and social movements (Ralls et al.).

Generating Paradigms of Climate Education

The remainder of this chapter braids together educational literature with my own 18 years of storytelling and drama practice and research in youth theatres, schools, youth activist groups and universities to discuss the considerable learnings from the COVID-19 crisis for climate education. I will trace four paradigms which can be discerned in educational responses to climate change and examine the additional layers of understanding the pandemic has brought to each.

This typology of paradigms is offered as a point of departure; it is an unavoidably situated attempt to distil a large body of thinking and practice into a tool which teachers and other educators can use to reflect on their practice. The boundaries between paradigms could be drawn differently, and many educators will blend them in complex ways. While they draw on practice in a wide range of educational settings, my own educational career has been limited to the North of England, and readers working and researching within other contexts will certainly identify gaps and alternative perspectives. Indeed, as the climate crisis deepens over coming years,

further work will be needed across all levels and sectors of education to strengthen educators' understandings of the models and discourses which shape their approach to teaching about it. These four paradigms represent a range of relationships between the 'hyperobject' of climate change and the processes which take place with a classroom community of human adults and young people.

Our starting point is the behaviour change approach which I call (after an influential government campaign) the 'Do Your Bit' paradigm, by now deeply embedded in climate communication and education. As the youth climate movement has responded angrily to such individualist and incrementalist approaches, particularly since the school strikes from 2018 onwards, a radically truthful but often problematic 'Apocalypse Soon' paradigm can be seen influencing some schools' climate education. Teachers seeking to give pupils a more immediate and encouraging access point to climate and ecological issues may de-emphasise the alarming global picture in favour of building children's agency through 'Microcosms and Manifestos', using school life as the main vehicle for learning. In certain innovative pockets of the education system, such approaches are being developed and amplified into 'Emotionally Reflexive Pedagogies' based on the practices of social movements for building healthy and sustaining cultures of change.

The four paradigms are ordered not historically but in the order of increasing emotional literacy and systemic thinking. These explorations help me build the argument that, while the urgency of the climate crisis should motivate schools to re-order substantially their educational priorities, their guiding aim should not be rapid behavioural change but nurturing in pupils a meaningful, active hope, comfort with uncertainty and ability to contribute to their resilience of their communities. In conclusion I will look at the particular role of *story* in this task and argue that it needs to be the heart of crisis pedagogy.

The practice experience on which I reflect to inform my perspective includes:

- Working as advisor for a local authority on schools' environmental practices (2003–2007).
- Freelance practice as a storyteller in education, working with schools, teacher training institutions and other educational settings on projects related to environmental and community issues (2007–2015).

- Intensive doctoral practice-based research on storytelling with adolescents in secondary schools, youth theatres and mental health settings (2013–2017, see Heinemeyer, 2020).
- Drama projects on climate change in four different youth theatres (2018–2020).
- Involvement in arts and community outreach with youth climate activist groups (2018–2021).

As supplementary evidence I draw on focus groups conducted by myself and colleagues Clare Cunningham, Jude Parks, Silvia Szilagyiova and Ana Castaneda Martin with 23 York St John University students in July 2020, enquiring into their expectations and emotions with regard to ecological justice. As young adults reflecting back articulately on their experiences of both school and university primarily during the 2010s, their insights may help us to discern the outlines of the dominant recent paradigms in education, and their emotional impact on young people.

Four Paradigms of Climate Education and the Lessons of COVID-19

Do Your Bit

Since the late 1990s, many UK schools have participated in campaigns to promote everyday 'behaviour change' towards actions with less impact on the climate and environment. High-profile examples include the schools programme of the UK government's 'Are You Doing Your Bit?' campaign (1998–2000) (Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions, 2000), Northern Ireland's 'Being Greener At School' campaign (NI Direct, n.d.), the Woodland Trust's Green Tree Schools Award (Woodland Trust, n.d.) and the Green Schools Initiative (GSI, n.d.). Schools are provided with resources and activities to involve their pupils in recycling, energy saving habits, walking and cycling to school, tree planting, food growing and paper use reduction.

Such campaigns owe their theory of change to what Elizabeth Shove (2010) calls 'the holy trinity of 'attitude, behaviour and choice'' derived from social psychology (Shove, 2010). The assumption is that people's attitudes drive their behaviours and choices, conditioned by their social context and limited only by factors such as cost or awareness. Much social science research on attitudes to climate change carries 'an implicit

assumption that people *lack* something, be it motivation, care, or concern; and the key is to uncover the *barriers* that may magically unleash the kind of responses we so urgently need' (Lertzman, 2018, p. 27). Indeed a sense of urgency certainly does underlie this paradigm—a desire to see immediate change in the immediately visible arena of lifestyle and individual behaviour.

The premise behind the UK government's high-profile 'Are You Doing Your Bit?' campaign was public attitudes research, which found that a high percentage of people felt distanced, confused, helpless and apathetic in relation to climate change and the green movement (DETR, 2000). These were articulated by the campaign as 'barriers to change', which could be overcome through an inclusive, friendly, practical and simple message. Indeed, this and subsequent campaigns have undoubtedly given more people a starting point from which to consider their own involvement in combating climate change.

Nonetheless, the campaign's core proposition to the public, that 'Every little thing I do makes a difference' (DETR, 2000), which has taken a firm grip on educational campaigning on climate, needs to be critically evaluated. It can give rise to a sense that the only levers at people's disposal to mitigate climate change are at the level of individual consumption decisions, such as which form of transport to use, or which product to buy. Further than that, Ryan Myhill (2021) highlights the role of industry in constructing discourses of personalised responsibility for environmental problems which are in fact largely effects of their own business models (e.g. funding and development of anti-plastic-littering campaigns by companies who created the disposable plastic packaging industry). For example, the popularity of the compelling idea of the personal 'carbon footprint' owes partially or largely to marketing campaigns by fossil fuel company BP in the early 2000s (Kaufman, 2021), a rhetorical shift that places the onus for change on the individual consumer rather than on industry.

Students in the 2020 focus groups, in accordance with this discourse, did locate much of the responsibility at their own doors. Yet they frequently articulated their frustration and lack of faith in this lifestyle approach to achieve the necessary change:

> *During the Covid [pandemic?] I've been setting up litter picks with me and my mates because we've had nothing else to do. […] And you're just doing it over and over again and then you start seeing information about, you know, plastic bottles—you know it's ultimately going to landfill anyway, that's what, that's*

> *what I think confuses me mostly is, is my own kind of annoyance that—that affects me more than confusion. Every time that I do try and do something to help, it doesn't seem like it's helping. And it just kind of grinds you down.* (Student D)

> *I know there's loads of little things that you can do by just getting rid of plastic straws but sort of at the same time because like I just said it doesn't have much of an impact. […] I don't know what I can do now that will change even my lifestyle or the lifestyles around me.* (Student M)

> *What difference does it make when the person next door is just going to chuck stuff in the normal bin. Even if it was like 5000 of you, etc etc, if you think about it doesn't really make a difference. Everything is just too big now. Any, any small thing to do won't make a difference. A big initiative might make a small difference, but the majority don't care enough to make a difference.* (Student Y)

Such feelings of helplessness, confusion and disillusionment were also identified in the DETR's (2000) research and interpreted as 'barriers to action'. An alternative interpretation, however, is that they are rational responses to people's perception that resolution to the climate crisis is impossible without fundamental reform of global economic and political systems. Several York St John students in the above study talked of the need for change to come from wealthy elites and business interests:

> *It's that, it's the 1% of people that are being extremely selfish because they don't want to lose out, that is causing a lot of people to think, Oh well, there's nothing I can do, so therefore, why should I care. It's not coming from—it's not coming from the majority of people, it's something that is put in place by people who are driven by greed, who have no kind of empathy for anything else.* (Student D)

> *I think everyone has a basic understanding of environmental issues and it's kind of you either believe the world is flat or you will understand that it is boiling. Yeah. The difference is the people that then go, Well, what needs to happen to stop the Earth from boiling is we shouldn't use plastic straws. Like, you could eradicate the world of plastic straws and it won't make a bit of difference compared to what companies are doing.* (Student A)

That this is a widespread view among young people is evidenced by the vast scale of Fridays for Future (n.d.) and other school climate strike movements, in which school pupils demand rapid government and corporate

action. An estimated 1.6 million children worldwide took part on a single day on Friday 15 March 2019 (Marris, 2019).

The pandemic has acted as an object lesson in the relationship between individual behaviour and systemic phenomena. During the COVID pandemic, young people were asked to change significant aspects of their behaviour: to wash their hands carefully, wear masks, distance from their friends and stay at home when they had symptoms. These actions, however, were not invested with the ability to end the pandemic; by and large, it was explained to young people by schools and the media as a 'wicked problem', replete with complex global interdependencies and impossible tradeoffs (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Young people became aware of the different levers within governments' control: imposing travel restrictions and lockdowns, paying furlough so people could stay at home. Young people connected to social movements active during this period have also learnt that class and race inequalities undermined efforts to limit viral spread, that many people suffered from lockdowns, and that community solidarity and redistribution were essential to combat this suffering. In short, they have had a lesson in systems thinking.

By analogy, it is clearly valuable that children learn behaviours which, if adopted by most individuals, will help to some extent to mitigate climate change. But by presenting these to children as 'the solutions' to climate change, we treat environmental degradation as a side effect of our economic system rather than the very core of it. We deny them the opportunity to understand the 'wickedness' of the problem and set them up for disempowerment and confusion. We cannot ask children to 'do their bit' to restructure just-in-time distribution systems, regulate hedge fund investors, strengthen emasculated international institutions, end fast fashion or manufacturing practices of planned obsolescence, challenge the grotesque levels of inequality and corruption which force people to exploit their land unsustainably, or reverse the global economy's dependence on endless growth in consumption. Children may lack this vocabulary, but most have some awareness of the complexity of the system which generates climate change, and the inadequacy of individual behaviour change in the face of this. To begin an honest dialogue with young people about climate, we need to find developmentally appropriate ways to teach systems thinking and seek routes to agency which focus on developing alternative systems, even if in microcosmic forms.

The rarely questioned language of 'sustainable lifestyles' and 'doing your bit' has become one of what Arran Stibbe (2021) calls the 'stories we

live by' in relation to climate action. Its dominance within many educational initiatives is, at best, an inadequate response, and at worst a slap in the face to young people who are grappling to understand what system change might look like.

Apocalypse Soon

Partly as a justified counter-reaction to such incrementalist approaches, some educators have responded to the urgency of the climate emergency, and the system failure it represents, by embracing the darkest fears of the climate movement as their key focus.

In 2019, the headteacher of one of my local primary schools decided to show David Attenborough's scientifically rigorous and deeply alarming documentary, 'Climate Change—The Facts', made to jolt an adult audience into action, to all pupils from age 4 to age 11. On one level, this was a sincere and well-motivated answer to the climate movement's first demand: Tell The Truth (Extinction Rebellion, n.d.). On another, it was a potentially traumatic experience for very young children, which suggests an educator somewhat adrift from her usual pedagogical principles. It presented them with an unmanageable burden of knowledge about their possibly blighted futures and offered them no avenues for action which seemed proportionate to the situation. The initiative was not embedded in any long-term process of reorienting the school curriculum around environmental resilience or exploring pathways to alternative futures on a local or global scale.

Challenging this approach is not to disagree with the rigorous scientific basis of the information presented. Even the central projections of climate models show that significant tipping points are imminent or have already been reached, and the 'runaway' phase of climate change may be commencing (Ripple et al., 2021). Nonetheless, it is hard to imagine seasoned teachers taking this approach to any other important issue—showing children graphic footage of people dying of COVID to persuade them to maintain social distancing measures, say, or images of brutal racist attacks to persuade them of the importance of antiracism. On these issues, the truth is told to children in a developmentally appropriate manner, integrated into their experience of school life, on a scale which they can comprehend and in pace with their emotional intelligence. The stark contrast should tell us that we are dealing with an issue about which the adult practitioners involved have not worked through their own feelings and

opinions, and are rather firing truth cannons into the next generation in the hope that this will catalyse them to somehow solve the problem.

The narrative of the 'Apocalypse Soon' paradigm is near-future-focused and might be boiled down to:

- A terrible event may happen in the near future
- Afterwards everything will be different
- It's adults' fault
- Young people will have to solve it/learn to survive
- Be very angry about it while there's still time

This is a caricature in several important ways, suited to a placard but not to a pedagogy. Firstly, climate breakdown is not an event which either will or will not happen in some future moment, but a complex spectrum of processes which are already well underway. Its severe consequences are already being experienced by Black and Global Majority communities in particular (Miller, 2017; Adekola et al., 2015; Serdeczny et al., 2017). Secondly, rather than being the fault of 'adults', the responsibility for climate crisis is complexly divided between over 7 billion intertwined human actors, with some powerful individuals and groups having a great deal of agency and some very little. In our research with York St John students, most of the 23 respondents were well aware of these complexities; indeed none blamed 'older generations' for the climate crisis, more commonly attributing responsibilities to 'corporations' and governments. Thirdly, while the climate and ecological crisis will continue to transform societies, bringing great conflict, insecurity, suffering and upheaval, the transformation is not uniformly catastrophic and may bring positive change in places. Young people's creativity, interests, talents, cooperation and sense of purpose will be called upon in ever greater measure and they will, to varying degrees, create new structures and ways of being on scales from the hyperlocal to the global.

Within youth theatre practice, with its focus on giving voice to youth movements, the catastrophic paradigm is widespread. Many currently available playscripts for young actors, such as *Don't Worry Be Happy* by Kevin Dyer (2010) and *This Changes Everything* by Joel Horwood (2015), dramatise the demands and fears of the youth climate movement, featuring groups of young people trying to ward off an apocalyptic event or navigate dystopian near-futures. While these are wittily scripted and dramatically compact, they can cement the impression of the future as a

rapidly closing tunnel. Youth theatre practitioners may need to undertake a process of reconciling themselves to the gravity of the situation and its implications for their own lives and identities, before they can provide sensitive guidance to young people.

There are limits to people's ability to engage constructively with visions of a foreclosed future. A glimpse of one likely consequence of the local primary school's approach was given by Student F in the YSJU research, when she recalled a similar experience involving Al Gore's 2006 climate documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*:

> *I mean we all watched the Al Gore thing in school, I remember, and after half the class walked out saying that it was a load of rubbish. And we had all the facts, given in front of us. It was because they weren't willing to learn it. They didn't see it as a real issue.*

Another interpretation of this response was that Student F's classmates couldn't afford to see climate change as a real issue—that they could not spare the emotional energy to cope with it.

Another way I have frequently observed such resistance to manifest itself in youth theatre practice is through a 'brittle' form of dystopian humour. Young people confronted with the climate crisis and asked to 'make theatre about it' often create satirical sketches of hopeless situations, parodies of despair. On one memorable occasion, a group of 13-year-olds portrayed a group of discarded plastic bottles in a gully. Like characters in a Samuel Beckett play, they talked in a desultory way about the millennia they had watched pass by them and the humans that no longer inhabited the earth. These are valid emotions to explore in youth theatre, but it would be irresponsible pedagogy to leave young people in that moment of futility.

The 'Apocalypse Soon' discourse is certainly an appropriate *call* for young people to make of the education system, but it is an inadequate *response*. It remains stuck within the limited thinking that treats the climate emergency as a terrible but bounded problem to be averted, leaving the rest of the curriculum more or less untouched, rather than acknowledging with Perpetua Kirby and Rebecca Webb (2021) that 'the subject-matter of climate change is intrinsically unbounded, reaching into every fissure of human experience, including our co-existence with the non-human'. Like the COVID pandemic, the climate crisis must be allowed to affect not just the curriculum—what is taught in schools—but also modes of learning and the very shape and purpose of school life.

Kirby and Webb (2021) describe a conversation that arose in their research on climate pedagogy in UK schools, in which nine-year-old Sophie asks her teacher, 'Is it true we've only got ten years to save the planet?' They call for a 'thing-centred' pedagogy which takes seriously questions like Sophie's—indeed, which makes such questions the jumping-off point for re-centring education around the subjectification of children as citizens in a time of enduring deep uncertainty. A 'thing-centred' pedagogy, as opposed to a 'child-centred' or 'teacher-centred' one, pivots around issues and questions of absorbing mutual interest and enquiry. Proceeding from this, Kirby and Webb envisage that responding to the urgency of climate change will in fact entail a wholesale reorientation of schools' main drivers (e.g. subject boundaries, rigid curricula, league tables, competitive assessment), which are themselves bound up in destructive late-stage capitalism:

> An unbounded thing-centred pedagogy must therefore enable Sophie to engage with the multiple ways in which she experiences climate change, including how it extends deep within and beyond her. This allows her to embrace the ontological uncertainties of it. Paradoxically, this requires Sophie and her teacher to slow down in order to respond swiftly to rapid climate-related changes in the twenty-first century. Sophie's subjectification therefore extends beyond the pedagogical to the political, where she (and her teachers) are enabled to take up further transformational possibilities to reconfigure an existing order of things, with the option of saying "no" to orthodoxies of practices, including those of the school, that induce climate change. (2021)

Once more it is salutary to learn from how many quarters of the education system have dealt with the pandemic. In a situation of deep uncertainty, with no clear sense of when or if 'normality' would return, it was impossible to ignore the consequences of prolonged disruption for young people's wellbeing, and so there was little pretence of trying to keep things as they had been before. The stringent assessment system was deprioritised in favour of supporting young people's basic needs and maintaining community resilience: a UN report (2020) notes that it has catalysed rapid developments in many countries in flexible learning, inclusive and blended learning methods, and innovative assessment approaches.

The education system may need to make a subtle shift, from asking, 'How can we educate to prevent the impending disaster of climate change?' to 'How can we help young people to design new ways of coexisting,

working, collaborating and thriving in an era of climate change and resulting social upheavals?' This does not, of course, mean abandoning learning about basic sustainability measures; everything we do to mitigate the climate crisis will improve our chances, and many of the same measures which will limit climate change will also increase people's ability to adapt to it. Putting solar panels on the school roof and establishing a floodwater-absorbing, food-growing school garden will both reduce emissions and increase the community's resilience to shocks in the energy, weather and food systems. Even more importantly, it will act as a living laboratory for young people to practise the skills their lives may demand of them. We need to learn from existing climate-frontline communities so as to equip young people with skills for the long haul, to live well in times when crisis is normal.

Manifestos and Microcosms

A desire to integrate learning about sustainability more systematically into school life, in a way that empowers pupils and builds what Jensen and Schnack (1997) call their 'action competence', has motivated many educators to use schools' own environmental performance as a focus of learning. Within such initiatives, the school site acts as a microcosm of wider society and staff attempt to engage students collaboratively in developing and enacting a manifesto for change. This approach is relatively well established, but in the current moment it particularly resonates with Powers et al.'s (2020) contention that the pandemic has proved the value of project-based, multi-age and collaborative learning as a way of cultivating community, developing self-directed learners and addressing their social and emotional needs.

The archetype for such approaches is the Eco-Schools accreditation initiative of the international Foundation for Environmental Education, initiated in the aftermath of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, which now operates in 70 countries and claims to engage 19.5 million young people worldwide (Eco-Schools, n.d.). Its UK branch was founded in 1994. Eco-Schools put heavy emphasis on the democratic or steering role of the eco-committee of students and staff, formed to audit the school's environmental impact, develop an action plan for improvement, engage staff and fellow pupils and monitor the project's progress. Such initiatives have the potential to be a collaborative, multidimensional, positive and age-appropriate approach for young

people and to act as a powerful learning experience in relation to system change.

The limitations of the approach perhaps lie, ironically, in its resolutely positive focus on quick, achievable change. As the UK Eco-Schools website acknowledges, a single member of staff known as a 'champion' is often pivotal to the implementation of an Eco-Schools project (Eco Schools, n.d.). While the school's action plan is instructed to incorporate 'curriculum links', it rarely involves any challenge to the fundamentals of what most teachers teach and how they do it, which would be a much longer term and more politically controversial task. Therefore, teachers guiding Eco-School Committees are understandably motivated to use the limited time available to them to give children hope, by focussing on those areas of consumption where observable impact can be achieved, rather than through investigating the complex and 'wicked' nature of climate and ecological crisis. Thus Salome Hallfredsdottir finds that in Icelandic schools accredited as Eco-Schools, children are more likely to engage in 'sustainable behaviours' such as recycling, but that there is little or no impact on their 'understanding of environmental issues as conflicting interests' (2011, p. 2).

This presentation of environmental problems as readily solvable can, in my experience working with young people, lead to rapid and crushing disillusionment. As a facilitator at a 'Student Conference' in 2019, I witnessed group after group of children aged 9–14 discussing their experiences of participating in environmental initiatives at school. The issue of greatest concern to many, and one where they felt their school ought to be able to make a difference, was the use of disposable plastic. Having watched documentaries about this issue, they were aware of its vast magnitude and devastated by its impact on wildlife. 'We will just be drowning in plastic by the time I am an adult, there will be hardly any animals left', said one little boy, to vigorous nodding around the circle. Yet their eco-committees' efforts to eliminate plastic from school had rapidly hit against brick walls: catering contracts into which the school was locked, special offers on bottled drinks at local shops, the inability of many classmates with low-income families to persuade their harassed parents to buy less packaged food. One girl described standing in tears beside the playground bin, after spending a term of making awareness-raising posters and newsletters, watching fellow pupils throw handfuls of plastic into it. She knew the school's actions could at most be a drop in the ocean, and even that drop had slipped out of her fingers. This feeling of failure had not been contextualised by any

lessons investigating the packaging industry or government waste policy, or any exploration of action the children might take to challenge such factors.

Such experiences raise profound questions in relation to schools' eco-initiatives: does the rhetoric around 'empowering' children often mask a shifting of the burden for change onto them? The tendency of policy responses to societal crises to impose the greatest costs on the young has been suggested by the COVID pandemic's disproportionate impact on children's mental health (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2021), education (Ofsted, 2020) and financial wellbeing (Child Poverty Action Group, 2020). In the case of climate change the intergenerational injustice involved is likely to be much starker. For whose benefit is the framing of environmental issues as discrete from structural forces? Are teachers committing sufficiently to walking the hard road of changemaking alongside children, of providing emotional and intellectual support to them at every step of the way?

Student N expressed a frustration with the siloing of climate change in her university education. She felt it had done little to prepare her to help build a more sustainable community or society:

> *We just did a module about like, you know, climate change, activism in theatre, you know, so we do talk about it, but I still feel that I don't feel any more equipped on how to help the issue or, you know, I just feel… We did talk about it and I know a lot more of its effects. But still, you need more knowledge than 'don't produce plastic, don't shop as much'.*

Student D put it more strongly:

> *This university is very 'all talk no action', every time they put up a nice pretty poster about something, but they don't do anything about it. Say we support you and then don't do anything.*

What the 'crisis pedagogy' of COVID may have to offer those adopting 'manifesto' approaches is the image of teachers sometimes literally pounding the pavements of their local communities during lockdowns, bringing food parcels, worksheets and courage to children isolated in struggling households. One in five UK schools set up a food bank during the pandemic and schools became key providers of support services to local families (Butler, 2021). When people were suffering the impacts of global

crises and national policies, many schools put their own communities' needs first, investing not what the government dictated or the curriculum stipulated, but what was *necessary* to maintain people's resilience. Their actions seemed to reach towards what Deborah Ralls and colleagues (in this volume) call a 'social solidarity urban economy'. Similarly, schools' approach to climate needs to start from an understanding of the intersection between the local and the global, and a readiness to leave their comfort zone and do what is necessary rather than what the curriculum appears to make possible. The relational pedagogy which might build children's ability to create local solutions to climate change requires forms of collaboration that are as high-stakes for the adults involved as the children.

Emotionally Reflexive Pedagogies

In response to some of the myriad challenges explored so far, a developing area of climate pedagogy is taking inspiration from what Jo Hamilton (2019) calls 'emotionally reflexive methodologies' for approaching the issue of climate change in groups:

> By "emotional reflexivity" in this context, I mean developing an embodied and relational awareness of how people engage with and feel about an issue, how this influences the actions they take, the stories they inhabit and perceptions of their individual and collective change and agency. (pp. 154–155)

Hamilton's research finds that the psychosocial understanding underlying such approaches as Joanna Macy's 'The Work That Reconnects' (WTRN, n.d.) or the Transition Network's 'Inner Transition' (Transition Network, n.d.) can enable people to sustain and deepen their engagement with climate change for the long haul. Many of these groupwork approaches are aimed at adults involved in climate issues as professionals, scientists or activists. Yet they follow several principles of great relevance to education.

Firstly, they involve an emphasis on emotional honesty and emotional literacy. There is a direct parallel with children's need for open discussion around their challenging questions and fears about how the COVID pandemic might unfold, not just information about individual action they could take to protect themselves (Bray et al., 2020). As Bray et al. (2020) found in their research with 7–12-year-olds during the pandemic, 'empty reassurances without appropriate facts and information can result in

children being left to "fill in the blanks", using their imagination and snippets of information gleaned through different channels'. Cambry Baker et al. (2021) highlight the need for parents and teachers to have empathic, validating, supportive, action-oriented conversations with children in relation to climate, in which negative emotions such as despair or grief are not denied or silenced. Their study of teachers, parents and young people found that this resulted in more resilient children less likely to engage in climate denial, experience distress or other uncontrolled emotional responses, and more likely to feel what Ojala (2012) calls 'constructive hope'—'a motivational force that occurs through positive reappraisal and trust in others (meaning-focused coping), rather than hope based on denial' (Baker et al., 2021, p. 688). Constructive hope may be a vital resource to children in the face of 'long term, hard to solve stressors' (Baker et al., 2021, p. 688), whether pandemics or climate-induced crises.

Secondly, they allow space for uncertainty and dissensus, recognising the 'wickedness', tensions and conflicts that any responses to climate change entail. Kirby and Webb (2021) emphasise that schools need to resist the temptation to offer children pat solutions; rather they need to accommodate dissensus, explore the diverse ways in which children's lives intersect with the climate crisis and become comfortable with their own uncertainty. Indeed, teachers who can admit to not knowing the answers to some problems will be much better situated to implement an authentic 'thing-centred' pedagogy that helps children to develop as democratic subjects.

Within formal education in the UK, these influences have manifested in new resources such as ThoughtBox's Climate Curriculum for primary and secondary schools, an emotionally literate, interdisciplinary, in-depth scheme of work 'for the climate strike generation' (ThoughtBox, n.d.). There is great resonance between the honest and vulnerable stance which ThoughtBox suggests teachers might take to climate, and the 'Recovery Curriculum' developed by Barry Carpenter and colleagues (Carpenter & Carpenter, 2020) to help children come to terms with the losses, developmental setbacks and traumas of COVID. In both cases there is an invitation to teachers to interact with their students as rounded individuals, with families and worries of their own, unable to give concrete answers as to how the crisis can be ended, but ready to share wisdom and experience which might guide young people through it. Indeed, the most frequent call from students interviewed in the York St John focus groups was for informal 'spaces' in campus life for students and lecturers to come together

as citizens of the university, explore their knowledge and feelings around climate and justice issues, reshape the curriculum together and share opportunities for learning and taking action. The precise form they suggested varied from one student to another, but they seemed to reach towards ways of facilitating forums for emotional honesty, mutual enquiry and the development of active hope.

As educators we have been 'gathered around the thing' of COVID for some time now—accepting that we need to simultaneously do what we can to combat it, cultivate solidarity, create new forms of sociality and learning, and learn to live with its impacts. We need to take the same approach to climate. In a time of deep uncertainty, education needs to develop a crisis pedagogy which is, itself, deeply comfortable with uncertainty. In the words of journalist Katherine Wilkinson (2021):

> So, what can I do? I wish I could counsel my 16-year-old self that the only simple answer is to form a relationship with the question, let it work on and with you, and begin to live life as a response.

Conclusion: Stories and Active Hope

The COVID pandemic gave rise to 'crisis pedagogies' based on a greater sensitivity to young people's emotional and developmental needs in most quarters of the education system, and a readiness to turn normal practice upside down to meet them where possible. In contrast, the urgency and overwhelming nature of the climate crisis can provoke responses in educators ranging from a false briskness, to despair and guilt, to a desire to pass on the mission to somehow 'solve' the problem. In turn this can generate responses of anxiety, grief, denial, frustration and disillusionment in young people.

This article has rather made the case for learning from the educational experience of the COVID crisis to develop a 'long-haul' pedagogy, starting from an open-ended readiness to walk alongside young people and reshape school life around building their collective resilience. A key task is to pass on our wisdom about how to live well in a world in crisis, replacing narratives of inexorable destruction with narratives of alternative possible paths. Wisdom acquired both from our own experience of adapting to challenge, and that of others whose experience at the climate frontlines (primarily in Global Majority countries) can light the way. Active hope will not arise from abstract principles, but through exposure to real examples—stories—of solutions and alternative futures.

Stories, with their ability to embed information, ideas and conflicting motivations within an emotionally engaging context, are also widely recognised as a gateway to understanding of complex issues (such as climate change). In a long-term collaboration exploring the humanities curriculum through storytelling with three secondary classes including young people with a range of learning needs, teacher Sally Durham and I found the students to be 'cleverer within the story' (Heinemeyer & Durham, 2017).

> (O)ur observations of the pupils' responses support the arguments made by Bruner (1986, 1996, 2006), Daniel (2012), Goodson et al. (2010), Prentice (1998), Roney (2009), Rosen (1988, 1993), Ryan (2008) and Zipes (1995, 2004) for storytelling, ranging from the higher level of language pupils employed during storytelling, to the expression and thinking skills it generated, to its ability to engage even usually unmotivated young people, to improved relationships and communication between teachers and pupils, to the nourishment of pupils' imaginations and empathy, to the value of narrative communication as a life skill.

It is for these reasons that we might want to consider *stories* as a central pillar of our teaching, and the learning and cultivation of new stories as a form of continuing professional development. For example, we can share (and base our teaching around) the stories of communities who are already innovating ecologically restorative ways of producing food and energy in conditions of drought and extreme weather (Practical Action, n.d.); the stories of local economies transforming themselves from the ground up through cooperative sustainable businesses (TASC, 2020); and the stories of environmental defenders successfully challenging unjust and destructive industries and creating alternatives (Mothers of Invention, n.d.). Such stories of hope are often exceptions to wider global trends, and honest dialogue requires that the full picture be explored with young people. Thus, equally importantly, we can work with stories which honour and mourn what is lost through ecological change and degradation, and make sense of what these losses mean for communities—such as 'Insecure', the elegiac short film made by an intergenerational group on the rapidly eroding Yorkshire coast (Parsons et al., 2021).

ThoughtBox's Climate Curriculum and similar emotionally literate resources draw extensively on such true stories. Drama practitioners could move on from playscripts about dystopian scenarios in favour of the more

complex and challenging work of creatively exploring the bumpy pathway to imperfect utopias. Simultaneously, we can curate lived 'stories' in pupils' lives, through active engagement in the microcosms of school and local community, not as added extras but as key formative experiences to which teachers and pupils are equally committed. The success of the enquiry-based, multi-age, collaborative learning model developed by the elementary school SPARK (Powers et al., 2020) in maintaining a lively learning community throughout the COVID pandemic illustrates the relevance of such approaches to weathering disruptive crises.

Not all of these stories need to be directly related to climate. We can view the whole curriculum through an ecological lens, considering both the social ecology of the classroom community and the wider ecology within which it is embedded. This is simultaneously a formidable pedagogical challenge, and a very basic human gift, requiring not expert knowledge but a readiness to engage in the mutual curiosity and enquiry central to a 'thing-centred pedagogy' (Kirby & Webb, 2021). It also calls on a strong sense of commitment to the task; while the enforced switch to isolation and online learning made the crisis backdrop of COVID impossible to ignore in education, letting the climate crisis reshape education requires a much more conscious effort of will and reflexivity.

Just as the 'emergency children's literature' of the pandemic (Duckels and Ryder, this volume) helped narrativise and thus make sense of the 'chaos narrative' of the early months of the pandemic, children will need support to narrativise their experiences of multiple crises as climate change accelerates. Their sense of purpose and identity, and their ability to contribute to climate solutions, depend on it, which makes emotionally literate climate education just as fundamental to climate adaptation as ensuring clean water supplies or building well-insulated homes. A key challenge is perhaps that not all teachers are comfortable in the role of storyteller (Heinemeyer & Durham, 2017). A storyteller may present herself to her listeners as a rounded human being who has experienced and perhaps suffered, and is thus a vulnerable figure. She chooses which stories to tell based on the needs of her listeners, rather than following a set of externally imposed learning objectives or schemes of work. The slowness and open-endedness of such processes may run counter to some educators' instincts as to how to respond to an urgent problem. Teachers may even, at times, need to work under the radar of school policies and accountability structures—but the task is, indeed, an urgent one and cannot wait for permission to be granted.

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Emergency Children's Literature: Rapidly Representing COVID-19 in Digital Texts for Young People in the United Kingdom

Gabriel Duckels and Amy Ryder

Abstract This chapter investigates the appearance of picturebooks and stories which sought to rapidly mediate the first waves of COVID-19, circulated online to reflect a suddenly socially distanced and locked-down world. We conceptualise this ad hoc archive as an "emergency children's literature" to signify the pedagogical, ritual, and remedial role of storytelling during times of disease and disaster. In this chapter, we introduce this concept and historicise the role of children's literature across 2020. We analyse the international focus of these texts, such as those sponsored and cross-translated by the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY), before conducting a critical content analysis of approximately thirty picturebooks and stories circulated online for free within British contexts between March 2020 and January 2021. These British-associated texts are mostly self-published, while some are published by mainstream publishers or literacy charities and other educational and official

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organisations. Building on existing scholarship on the trope of the hero as a health promotional strategy for representing COVID-19 for children, we theorise the aesthetic and formal strategies of these representations, heeding the socio-political contexts which they both emerge from and help to construct in young people's lives.

Keywords Emergency children's literature • Picture books • International Board on Books for Young People • The hero trope • Strategies for representation • COVID-19

Introduction

Children's literature is a space in which young people can both escape real life and see it reflected in useful and entertaining ways. In disasters and crises, this potential is particularly charged, with children's literature bearing an obligation to authentic and bibliotherapeutic narratives in response to urgent realities. It is out of this context that many dozens of stories and picturebooks appeared online in response to the COVID-19 pandemic: downloadable multimodal visual narratives that offer information, entertainment, and support for families and young people. Although bound up in longer conversations regarding children's literature's didactic purpose, these texts emerged within a hyper-specific biblio-techno-social context. Their production and dissemination were initially predominantly digital and free to reflect a world flung into mandatory self-isolation. This had the effect of creating an instantly accessible body of unstable texts which henceforth became a collatable corpus. The most prominent collation of these representations is hosted by the New York City School Library System online database (New York City, n.d.)—today a powerful archive of how COVID-19 was at first constructed in texts for young people and with what pedagogical effects. Browsing this archive reveals common tropes and themes within a heterogenous and tumultuous field of representation, upending various hierarchies between children's literature and health promotion, bringing together hundreds of texts as a collective endeavour and shared resource across numerous publishing, linguistic, and cultural contexts. We call this body of texts an "emergency children's literature" to describe the urgency of their emergence and the biopolitical emergencies to which they respond.

All the texts collected by New York City School Library System are downloadable stories and picturebooks which were created by an eclectic,

spontaneous cohort of professional and non-professional authors and illustrators, all working within the charged and time-sensitive first months of COVID-19, offering narratives themed around handwashing, social distancing, staying at home during national lockdowns, and managing mental health. This chapter proceeds as follows: we investigate the context of this archive and examine children's literature's utility as remedy, metaphor, and humanitarian tool within the first months of the pandemic. We consider international contexts, such as the picturebooks promoted by the International Board on Books for Young People, before undertaking a critical content analysis of around thirty texts listed as British on the database. Our analysis builds on existing scholarship on representations of COVID-19 by adult creators for assumed child readers. Recent scholarship in childhood and children's literature studies finds some common tropes across representations of the pandemic: the strategic heroification of the child and frontline workers to promote healthy behaviours (Glasheen, 2020–2021; Moruzi et al., 2021); and the cartoonification of SARS-CoV-2 to make the virus understandable for children and the future-facing aspect of this body of representations (Duckels, 2021; Falcus & Caldwell, 2021). Our analysis works to develop these findings within a larger conceptualisation of emergency children's literature and within a British epidemiological context. We suggest that these texts emerge out of mainstream, organisational, and self-published contexts of authorship to therefore reflect the seismic impact of COVID-19 on the usual hierarchies of children's textual production. While our survey finds a heterogeneity of aesthetic and stylistic responses to the pandemic, and the depiction of multicultural groups of children, it should be foregrounded that essentially none of the British representations depicts children of colour as main characters in their depictions of young people's experiences of COVID-19. Instead, anthropomorphic characters or white-coded characters are central throughout, in ways which demonstrate the structural racism and inequality that experiences of COVID-19 continue to compound (see "CLPE Reflecting Realities", 2020; Razai, 2021).[1]

[1] An exception here is Helen Patuck's *My Hero is You* (2020) which centres a girl with brown skin. While Patuck is based in the UK, the title was produced on behalf of the United Nations and so is not assigned to the UK on the New York City School Library System database.

Conceptualising COVID-19 and Childhood: Theoretical and International Contexts

If COVID-19 undermined the dominant narrative of health security in countries like the United Kingdom, then the act of creating stories about it (most of which were assembled rapidly in the spring of 2020) symbolises an attempt to find order and meaning in a society thrown into chaos and uncertainty. We adapt "emergency children's literature" from Helen Patuck, author of *My Hero is You*, a picturebook commissioned at the start of the pandemic by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, affiliated to the UN. Patuck is the co-founder of Kitabna, an organisation which uses storytelling to support children living in countries and communities impacted by war—another emergency children's literature, of sorts. Patuck described *My Hero is You* as "an emergency children's book" during a panel at the *Rainbows in Our Windows: Childhood in the Time of Corona* conference, which was hosted on Zoom by the University of Warwick in July 2020 ("Rainbows In Our Windows", n.d.). Her coinage inspired our concept of "emergency children's literature" to bring together and examine texts for young people made in response to crises and disasters. By emphasising emergency, we seek to highlight the social value of storytelling and visual narratives in responding to children's experiences of distressing situations. We intend the term to transcend the usual division between pedagogical versus aesthetic dimensions of children's literature found in the differing approaches to children's literature from the fields of literature and educational research (see Nodenstam & Widhe, 2021), instead understanding these representations as cultural and emotional artefacts worthy of critical appraisal in every instance (Fig. 1).

Established criticism drawn from disability studies and sociological approaches to disease and illness is pertinent to understanding the scope of emergency children's literature and its function as an early response to COVID-19. Charles Rosenberg argues that the emergence of disease provokes fear and mystery in the population that tends to be conceptualised through narrative and ritual. He argues that 'accepting the existence of an epidemic implies—in some sense demands—the creation of a framework within which its dismaying arbitrariness may be managed' (1989, pp. 4–5). In other words, the frightening randomness of a new epidemic is mitigated by the cultivation of order and meaning in place of incomprehensibility. Often, this order arises through representation, insofar as to represent a painful experience is to recognise and de-mystify it; through

Fig. 1 Helen Patuck/Inter-Agency Standing Committee, from *'My Hero is You'*

this act of recognition, then, it becomes possible to imagine optimal alternative outcomes. From a disability studies perspective, the disruption and disorder at the start of the pandemic resembles Arthur Frank's classic notion of the "chaos narrative", in which chronic illness defies clear narrative as 'an incessant present with no memorable past and no future worth anticipating' (1995, p. 99). Frank's theory points to narrative as not only an expression but also a *route out of* chaos. The desire to understand the first months of COVID-19 as finite—a blip, an aberration of a soon-to-be resumed normal—points to the pandemic's role as a sort of collectively experienced chaos narrative. The social body of the populace was rendered potentially if not actually ill through government actions to arrest the mass contagion of the population.

In the first months of 2020, the new pandemic came into signification as it spread from country to country like a shadow; no vaccines or treatments were available and ignorance about the transmission and symptoms of COVID-19 was not only commonplace but unavoidable. In this context, representations of COVID-19 for young people constituted a direct

intervention as urgent health promotion, and more holistically, sought to interrupt the chaos of the present by investing in the child-centred future. For this reason, early examples often suggest a closure from social distancing measures which in reality was not, and is still not at our time of writing, forthcoming: 'Don't worry', assures a character in the anthropomorphic *Piperpotamus learns about coronavirus*, 'this won't be forever' (Watts, 2020a, n.p.). Emergency children's literature might thus be constitutive of *adult* fears and desires more than, or as well as, the expectations of any real-life child—fears that drum up deep-rooted links between illness, innocence, sin, and the future which the child so easily comes to represent.

With this in mind, we locate emergency children's literature within the larger repertoire of rituals that defines early social responses to COVID-19. In the first wave in the United Kingdom, these rituals included the banging of saucepans and clapping in the street every Thursday evening ("Clap for carers") and the displaying of children's drawings of rainbows in windows to show gratitude for care workers and the National Health Service—ritual which often drew upon romantic investment in childhood which created a normative and obfuscatory model of the middle-class, white pandemic child (Mukherjee, 2020). These moments of theatre and ceremony highlight atavistic impulses in a twenty-first century context, as Wald's work (2008) on the SARS epidemic would remind us. The social construction of COVID-19 resonates with Rosenberg's assertion that an epidemic 'takes on the quality of pageant—mobilizing communities to act out proprietary rituals that incorporate and reaffirm fundamental social values and modes of understanding' (1989, p. 2). Emergency children's literature circulated as part of this pageant—a ritual and a remedy for adult creators and gatekeepers as well as the intended child.

Perhaps the most obvious example of emergency children's literature is the "Picture Books about COVID-19 for Children Around the World" project, which was initiated by Mingzhou Zhang, the president of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) at the time. IBBY is a global organisation which seeks to 'promote international understanding through children's books' since being founded in the aftermath of the Second World War (see IBBY, 2021). IBBY raises funds for and awareness of the role of children's literature in crises and disasters, such as its recent work with refugee children on the Italian island of Lampedusa, so its active role in the production of emergency children's literature is appropriate. As part of the "Picture Books about COVID-19 for Children Around the World" project, dozens of picturebooks were commissioned in the first

months of the pandemic, initially by Chinese authors, illustrators, and publishers, to be hosted on Life Tree Books, a non-profit platform. As an example, one of these titles, *Waiting for Dad to Come Home* (Ying, 2020), is a realistic depiction of a child's fear as their father works on the frontline of the outbreak in a Wuhan hospital and they learn to cope in the rapidly changing world around them. The picturebook was created in seventeen days between January and February as the outbreak impacted the region in real-time, symbolising the high stakes of the emergency that shaped its production. All the picturebooks hosted by Life Tree Books were subsequently translated by over two hundred volunteer translators into various other languages, including English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Nepali, Persia, Portuguese, Russian, Sinhala, Spanish, Tamil. This act of translation signifies a sort of solidarity of experience among children around the world even as the responses of individual governments to COVID-19 amplified aggression and anxiety about national sovereignty.

These picturebooks and their international circulation not only evoke international solidarity and responsibility but help to construct this ethos as a legitimate goal. Just as doctors share their findings across borders to help new knowledge, IBBY shares its texts across languages and countries as a bibliotherapeutic symbol of common experience, hope, and ultimately restitution. Remarking on the texts distributed and translated by IBBY, Björn Sundmark suggests that COVID-19 'has become the common global denominator, something that we all share'. He asks: 'Maybe coronavirus children's literature can be that too, a shared literature?' (2020, p. 84). His words evince the utopian impulse that shaped the start of the pandemic, an idealisation of the era as begetting solidarity from calamity, or even as an intervention in the neoliberal present. This utopian impulse might be a sort of macro variation of what Frank calls the quest narrative of illness, in which 'the teller has been given something by the experience, usually some insight that must be passed to others' and which can be seen to instil meaning and purpose into the otherwise calamitous experience of illness (p. 118).

As well as invoking the idea that the COVID-19 can create a "shared literature" in terms of the content and messages of children's texts about the pandemic, Sundmark also takes an aesthetic approach to the representation of COVID-19 in texts for young people. Sundmark argues that other examples of COVID-19-related children's literature—such as those we go on to analyse in this chapter—'are not as artistic or interesting […] even if one can understand that they have been made for a good cause'

(p. 85). In other words, Sundmark invites us to consider the emerging field of children's literature about COVID-19 as having aesthetic and literary dimensions—rather than, or indeed as well as, the didactic associations of plain health promotion. Furthermore, Sundmark's words are a useful reminder that the paratextual aspects of these texts are important to the context of their emergence; they were first intended not only to be read by young children but to be shared on social media and reported upon by regional and national websites and newspapers as proof of the possibility of goodness and social cohesion even amid the disruption, isolation, and uncertainty of COVID-19.

To sum up, the ad hoc archive of children's books about COVID-19 put together and shared online across 2020—especially in the first six months—demonstrates not just the utility of storytelling for health promotion but also its role in managing a collective experience of fear and uncertainty amid a new and unfolding pandemic. The legacy of emergency children's literature which emerged in and beyond the IBBY picturebooks therefore *historicises* the first period of the pandemic, in which stay-at-home mandates, disrupted supply chains, and widespread internet access created an environment in which stories and picturebooks about COVID-19 could be created and shared rapidly. The circulation, translation, and mediation of emergency children's literature highlight the unique biopolitical and technological moment in which it first appeared—a time which is now already the recent past, as the pandemic rumbles on, seemingly ever more entrenched, at our time of writing in the summer of 2021 (Fig. 2).

Methodology

We conduct a critical content analysis (Short, 2016) which scrutinises this emergency children's literature through a theoretical perspective developed out of disability and epidemic studies, as discussed earlier in this chapter. As part of this critical content analysis, we undertake three routes of enquiry into the discursive construction of these texts:

- Identifying their informational content (e.g. their role as health promotional narratives amid a British crisis context)
- Their stylistic context (the aesthetic and formal features used to shape the former, inseparable from ideology or pedagogy)

Fig. 2 Chen Ying (陈颖), from *Waiting for Dad to Come Home (等爸爸回家)*

- Extra-textual and other contextual features (e.g. considering the circulation of these texts in the world beyond the plot and including their authorship and regional specificity)

We understand the pandemic as a global disaster which is socially constructed through its mediation and representation. The archive of emergency children's literature therefore points to the world-making potential of texts for young people and their role in imagining a present and future both with and beyond COVID-19.

The New York City School Library System database contains hundreds of representations arising from a myriad of linguistic and cultural contexts, in the United States and around the world. Our analysis focuses on texts attributed to British cultural contexts—although almost are associated with England specifically—not only for practical reasons but also because it enables us to generalise regarding the British experience of COVID-19. Primarily, this involves two contexts: firstly, the fact of the National Health Service as a venerated institution, and the devoted attitude of the British public that surrounded it at the start of the pandemic, despite the British government's failure to protect frontline staff, a negligence which arguably contributed to the COVID-19-related deaths of a thousand NHS and care staff, primarily Black and Asian people (Ford, 2021). Secondly, the production of emergency children's literature about COVID-19 in

British contexts corresponds chronologically and narratively to each period of national lockdown, with the first announced by Prime Minister Boris Johnson on 23 March 2020. This lockdown began to be lifted from 10 May, with schools reopening from 1 June and non-essential shops resuming business on 15 June (Institute for Government, 2021). Focusing on British rather than international representations helps to situate these texts within this chronology and its socio-political implications, although it should be acknowledged that the devolved Welsh, Scottish, and Northern Irish governments at times advised policies in contrast to that of the British government.

After demarcating British from non-British representations on the New York City School Library System database, we identify thirty-four applicable texts, almost all produced in England, rather than other countries in the United Kingdom. To be clear, this is not an exhaustive analysis of digital and print books; we do not consider print picturebooks, several of which emerged later as a symbol of the entrenched presence of COVID-19 in children's lives. Rather, we gather together relevant titles hosted from this database to comment more generally on the discourses at work in these first examples. Three of these thirty-four texts were discarded for too closely resembling health promotional materials rather than story-based, narrative, bookish approaches. Of the remaining thirty-one texts, 91% were created between March and July, within the contingent chronology of the first British lockdown period, while the remaining 9% were created between November and December, within and at the end of the second national lockdown, announced by Johnson on 31 October. In total 19% of these texts can be considered mainstream insofar as they were published online for free by prominent children's publishers such as Nosy Crow, Andersen Press, or Oxford University Press. A total of 26% were created by local bodies, charities, and literacy professionals, such as pre-existing initiatives and organisations that work to support children's mental health. The largest type of text to appear were self-published titles, which encompass the remaining 51% of representations of COVID-19 produced within British contexts, pointing to the potential of digital creation and access. The initial turbulence of the pandemic and the impact (or impasse) of lockdowns and stay-at-home mandates on traditional routes to literacy created an aperture in which mainstream, organisational, and self-published stories and picturebooks circulated in tandem (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3 Kes Gray, from *The World Has Turned Upside Down*

Critical Content Analysis

Mainstream Titles

The appearance of mainstream titles is particularly indicative of this temporary state of disruption in which COVID-19 first seemed to suspend industry, pause capitalism, and threaten education. For example, Nosy Crow published *Coronavirus: A Book for Children* (Jenner et al., 2020) in April 2020 after Kate Wilson, managing director, decided to commission it while leaving her office in the week before the first lockdown. She explained her rationale for the book as follows:

> We could do it digitally. We would have to make it free, and we would have to make it quickly. We would have to respond to the needs of children now. (Wilson qtd. in Wilson & Jenner, 2021, p. 22)

The book was published three weeks later during the first lockdown on 6 April and was downloaded over a million times and translated into sixty languages, including Rohingya and BSL (p. 24). The nonfiction picturebook is structured around a series of questions and answers about COVID-19, accompanied by the familiar style of Axel Scheffler, perhaps

one of the most immediately recognisable British children's illustrators working today. As a sign of the shift towards understanding COVID-19 as a definite shift in contemporary culture rather than momentary aberration, a print copy was published in late July, priced to cover production costs and raise money for NHS charities. Speaking in July 2020, Wilson noted that the company 'will make nothing from this' and suggested that 'the free digital version is the one that will have the most value to the most people' (qtd. in Wilson & Jenner, 25). Her words emphasise the crucial humanitarian context of emergency children's literature, while also pointing to larger issues of national health services being recast as a charity (rather than public service) during the worst of the pandemic.

Along with *Coronavirus: A Book for Children*, other mainstream titles published for free online such as *Stay at Home* (Haig, 2020) and *Everybody Worries* (Burgerman, 2020) demonstrate the value of texts of young people in providing health information in the extreme situation of the start of the pandemic. More holistically, the production of children's literature as a form of humanitarian action is in evidence in other mainstream titles. *The Book of Hopes* (Rundell, 2020) features contributions from nearly one hundred well-known children's writers, most of which do not directly address or show any explicit connection to the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, contributors were asked during the first British lockdown to write or draw something which would make the younger reader 'laugh or wonder or snort or smile' (p. xiv). This example of emergency children's literature is not so much about the representation of COVID-19 but an affirmation of the wider value of literary experience in a lockdown environment. The inclusion of established names worked to provide young people with familiar faces—and familiar brands of children's literature—in unfamiliar times; indeed, the contents page resembles a sort of "who's who" of British children's writing and illustration. In the context of lockdowns and the heightened stress, unfamiliarity and the loss of routine they imposed, it is notable that traditional publishers turned to their most established characters, illustrators, and authors to feature in their responses to the pandemic.

The use of familiar characters who are then placed, alongside their pre-existing readers, into the unfamiliar context of the pandemic and its lockdowns, occurs in another mainstream title, *Winnie and Wilbur Stay Home* (Thomas & Paul, 2020). This title brings the long-running *Winnie the Witch* series into the time of COVID-19 as the eponymous witch and cat stay at home together. The pair are depicted practising handwashing and

social distancing, undertaking home learning and exercise, and participating in "clap for carers" and painting rainbows, although COVID-19 is never directly named. The picturebook models risk-reduction behaviours juxtaposed with "new normal" activities that seemed abnormal to young children within the disruptive changes of the first lockdown, such as online school, and the communal rituals that gave the general public a feeling of control and community cohesion in out-of-control times. The picturebook is an excellent example of the ephemeral and contextual aspects of this corpus, with its references to British realities potentially reducing its reception within international audiences and making it explicitly anachronistic. Moreover, it represents the tactile dimensions of the traditional children's picturebook, in that it attempts to offer children physical as well as digital experiences through material, multimodal, and playable modes of reading. The endpapers list 'five reasons why we think you'll love this book' which include an invitation to 'print off the story and have fun colouring in the backgrounds' (n.p.) and look out for 'a very special rainbow' in the narrative. These instructions designate what Robin Bernstein would call the book's "script" (2011), which suggests its uses in real children's lives and the pedagogical intentions therein. This script moves us beyond the word and image that make up the main narrative to consider its material utility as a prop to engage children within the sudden confines of the first British lockdown.

Organisational and Charity Titles

Some of the first responses to COVID-19 in children's literature and culture arose out of pre-established digital and print book series and focused on helping children work through issues and problems. *Don't Worry, Little Bear* (Kelly, 2020) is the latest title of the Memory Box Collection, a series of didactic short story-books marketed to childminders and nursery workers, themed around understanding different emotions and religious holidays. The intention of the series, according to its website, is to help 'children to believe in themselves, to love & accept themselves, to manage their feelings & to be well-rounded little humans who shine from the inside out' [sic] (Early Years Story Box, 2021). The aspirational tone of this spiel points to the explicitly rather than implicitly bibliotherapeutic purpose of the series. *Lucy's in Lockdown* (Duke & Bartolini, 2020) is another example, emerging from the *Lucy's Blue Day* series, a set of picturebooks about a young girl whose hair changes colour with her

emotions. Each picturebook is essentially structured around supporting metacognitive awareness of different emotional states, to provide children with tools to name their feelings and thereby avoid being overwhelmed by them.

Lucy's in Lockdown applies this premise by putting the character into the experience of self-isolating away from school and her friends during the first British lockdown. Her hair becomes dark blue because 'it's so frustrating being home all day' even though she recognises that 'it's to make the virus go away.' Her hair then turns red in anger because her brother 'is annoying and is ALWAYS there' (Duke & Bartolini, 2020, n.p.). The conclusion of the picturebook shows the family gathered together with an omniscient narrator instructing Lucy (and therefore the reading child) that *everyone* in the family is feeling conflicting emotions within the turbulence and discomfort of lockdown: 'Don't bottle them up, but always show it' because you'll 'be back to school before you know it' (n.p.). The final page is an interactive worksheet—to be printed out and completed by hand, or interacted with on a tablet or smartphone. The sheet encourages the reader to write what they are learning in their home-schooling, what they miss, and what they are looking forward to 'when it's over' (n.p.), hence encouraging the reader to take an active role in the text. The follow-up title, *Lucy Goes Back to School*, further emphasises the pedagogical importance of the haptic and playable dimensions of the text that help children cope with the socially distanced, screen-dominant context of the first British lockdown—as a colouring-in book, the title is intended to be printed and handled, engaging children in the stimulation of play and touch as well as literacy and emotional response.

Texts created by charities and organisations speak to the experiences of particular groups of children and young people. For example, the charity Ambitious about Autism worked with children's writer Kes Gray and illustrator Chloe Batchelor to make *The World Has Turned Upside Down*, released in May 2020 and intended to reflect and support the experiences of autistic children in lockdown. It therefore carries several other features associated with bibliotherapeutic picturebooks intended for children with autism (see Azano et al., 2017) such as seeking to respectfully reflect challenges with communication. The picturebook is notable because unlike the majority of lockdown narratives, it expands its narrative beyond the experience of being at home and visually, even cinematically, represents the impact of COVID-19 on the nation more generally. It visually represents airplanes on a holding bay accompanied by text stating that 'there

are no aeroplanes in the sky anymore' because 'all the countries are closed' (Gray & Batchelor, 2020, n.p.). The following page shows abandoned-looking roads, with text saying they have 'turned noisy quiet' because 'no one drives cars now, unless they really have to go somewhere' (n.p.). Indeed, this example of emergency children's literature is one of the only to acknowledge some of the political contexts of the pandemic and the panic that it brought about, depicting empty supermarkets and asserting that people took more than they needed. While other texts focus more on the consequences of the pandemic that impact the child most directly (such as school closures and not being able to visit grandparents), in confronting these pressures that affect the child more indirectly and from which adults might generally wish to shield children from, the approach taken by *The World Has Turned Upside Down* is therefore notable in this corpus.

Self-Published Titles

The self-published titles make up the largest component of the database at the New York City School Library System and, although nebulous in some ways, constitute around half of the British representations considered in our findings. Self-published examples of emergency children's literature exemplify the broader impulse which structured the rapid cultural production in the first months of COVID-19. Each text is explicitly and seemingly spontaneously an attempt by a non-professional writer and illustrator to respond 'to the needs of children now' (Wilson qtd. in Wilson & Jenner, 2021, p. 22). They hence spotlight the real and sudden "gap" in provision for children which COVID-19 created; a gap which emergency children's literature (of all kinds) worked to fill. Without the backing of mainstream publishers, charities, or organisations, the popularity of self-published texts encapsulates a key context of early attempts to represent COVID-19: the democratising role of digital literacy and computer access. These are not only fundamental to children being able to *read* these online texts away from schools and libraries during the austerity of lockdown, but also, to the artistic experimentation of non-professional, volunteer authors and illustrators. Moreover, the command to stay at home (and work from home) disrupted a time-poor, neoliberal present, arguably creating a context in which some people had more time to create. We say this without wishing to elide the many for whom this was not the case. The circulation of self-published texts in particular constitutes a sort of network of

"participation" (Jenkins et al., 2015) in new provisional digital publics that—somewhat ironically—affirmed the role of the local, in the context of lockdown's emphases on regional and neighbourhood communities.

Interestingly, the majority of self-published texts in our findings were created by authors and illustrators working in professions on the frontline of the pandemic, or employed or studying in medical or educational contexts. Texts by medical-related authors tend to have a greater focus on health promotion, whereas texts by education professionals tend, unsurprisingly, to be more invested in education and well-being. The occupations of authors related to medicine are medical students (Watts, 2020a; Tedder & Noyes, 2020), intensive care nurses (Cochlan & Tkachenko, 2020), paediatric intensive care nurses (Watts, 2020b, 2021), and public health researchers and general practitioners (Standley et al., 2020). Those authors working in education are all teachers (Forde, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c; Matthews, 2020; Millington & Armstrong, 2020; Moonen & Johnson, 2020), with these texts initially created for use in their own classrooms. The virality of these texts online—on social media and websites such as the New York City School Library System database—hence extrapolates the local, classroom-specific pedagogy of a teacher-authored text to potentially provide a teachable moment in far broader, even international, terms.

Mike Forde, for example, authored the *Parsley Mimblewood* series (2020a, 2020b, 2020c) in direct response to the impact of COVID-19 on his school in North Yorkshire. The series depicts the thoughts and feelings of the eponymous Parsley in a situation reminiscent of the first British lockdown but does not name COVID-19. Each chapter, writes the Lancaster Guardian of the locally written series, 'explores an issue that might be weighing on children's minds at the moment such as dealing with emotions, missing friends and feeling cooped up' (Rouncivell, 2020). Forde's first title went viral at the start of the pandemic, amassing a hundred thousand downloads from his website in a few weeks after its release in April 2020 and finding its way from the north-west of England to the New York City School Library System database. Similarly, Kezia Matthews' *Coming Back to School in a Bubble* (2020) was written for practical use with children in her own classroom to align with schools reopening in July 2020 but thereafter became used in multiple schools around the country as a standalone pedagogical text.

For these authors, storytelling becomes an extension of their duty on the educational frontline of the pandemic; a vital and viral (so to speak!)

symbol of their dedication to the children in their classrooms and the futurity of the child in general. Showing appreciation for these stories—by downloading them, or by sharing news articles celebrating them on social media—provided a way to show appreciation for children's well-being and frontline workers in a time of social isolation and widespread confusion. The paratextual afterlives of these stories and picturebooks (through author websites and coverage by local and national charities, for example) therefore contribute to a political mythology of the "national effort" at the start of the pandemic.

Finally, there are some outliers in the texts we designate as self-published. *What Happened When We All Stopped* (Rivett-Carnac & Rivett-Carnac, 2020) was published online in June 2020 with a YouTube rendition read by environmentalist Jane Goodall. The manifesto-like story was written as a poem to consider lockdown as a chance for reflection on environmental damage and climate crisis, encapsulating a collective need to find value in the attrition and instability of the pandemic. Without negating the importance of the message of the story, its emphasis on a stopped world is layered with idealism and privilege. *Simon and Rosie* (Moonen & Johnson, 2020), meanwhile, uses an alternative tactic when representing young people's experiences of COVID-19 through a narrative told from the perspective of a park bench, named Simon, who misses the presence of Rosie, a little girl who is unable to come to the park during lockdown. Arguably, the premise of this picturebook became anachronistic and pedagogically unhelpful as lockdown continued, because local parks quickly became recognised as crucial in supporting the mental health of children and adults alike, thus opening up contentious political implications of who in society has access to green space.

Discussion

Our analysis focuses on informational, stylistic, and extra-textual aspects of these examples of emergency children's literature. Broadly, the typical informational content across our survey includes staying at home as a heroic strategy or exemplar of active citizenship, health promotion (social distancing, handwashing), managing difficult emotions, new educational challenges (home learning, school bubbles), and reassurance that the pandemic and/or lockdown will be over soon (the realities of the pandemic and lockdown are conflated into one collective experience).

This informational content can be divided into three categories: health promotion info-narratives, such as *My Name is Corona* (Tedder & Noyes, 2020) or the *Nurse Dotty* books (Watts, 2020b, 2021); fictional representations of the impact of lockdown on children and families, such as *Staying Home* (Nicholls, 2020) and *Stuck Inside* (Allman et al., 2020); and outlying texts, such as *What Happened When We All Stopped* (Rivett-Carnac & Rivett-Carnac, 2020), or indeed, *The Book of Hopes* (Rundell, 2020). Without wishing to entirely state the obvious, an alternative way to classify these texts would be to acknowledge that the majority are led by an extremely pronounced pedagogical imperative to help children cope with or understand COVID-19, which transcends their classification as either fictional or nonfictional. It is worth noting, also, that these texts essentially represent COVID-19 outside of the urgent biopolitics that nevertheless structured the pandemic from the beginning. Surprisingly often, COVID-19 (or the outdated "coronavirus") goes unnamed, or referred to only through euphemism, such as "the Big Problem" in *The Stay Home Superheroes* (Marsh, 2020). The most politically salient examples of this emergency children's literature are the environmentalist credentials of *What Happened When We All Stopped* and references to panic-buying in *The World Has Turned Upside Down*. Political figures tend to be absent, although an address from Boris Johnson is captured in *Stuck Inside*, from the perspective of a child watching the TV with his family.

If the informational content of this emergency children's literature is consistently a sort of depoliticised health promotion produced in reaction to the extreme demands of a turbulent and diverse present, the stylistic features which shape it are comparatively heterogeneous. The role of the hero and superhero tropes is well-established, although we would add that their use arguably sidesteps more militaristic associations of the fight against disease (see e.g. Sontag, 1978; Wald, 2008), and so the role of the superhero contributes to an overall effect of un-interrogative political neutrality. Furthermore, Moruzi, Chen, and Venzo note the ubiquity of anthropomorphism as a device to represent COVID-19, which we note also in several texts (Kelly, 2020; Millington & Armstrong, 2020; Nicholls, 2020; Watts, 2020a, 2020b, 2021). Cutesy animal characters are used to provide a gentle, one-step-removed way to thematise the pandemic and dress up the more didactic health messaging (see also Duckels, 2021). The use of anthropomorphism and cute aesthetics to deliver child-friendly and accessible information can be attributed to the larger value of cartoons and comics in the provision of clear, trustworthy, and unproblematic health

promotion (McAllister). Across the corpus, there are also realistic narratives, such as *Susie the Childminder and the Pandemic* (Smith & Murphy, 2020), and more overt descents into fantastical imagery, such as the Welsh dragons in *How to Be a COVID-19 Superhero with The Talac Gang* (Cully, 2020), the dinosaur in *The Coronasaurus Rex* (Millington), or indeed, the implicit magic and witchcraft of *Winnie and Wilbur Stay at Home* (Thomas). Realistic narratives tend to include multicultural children and families, although none prioritise the experiences of children of colour or diverse families in broad terms. The ubiquity of animal characters might work to counter cultural and ethnic differences in realistic representations of children's experiences, although this does not account for the paucity of children of colour-centred stories and picturebooks. Indeed, the lack of central children of colour is an example of the structural racism, which contributed to the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black and South Asian communities in particular (see Razai, 2021).

Although a handful of these emergency children's literature are text-dominant stories rather than picturebooks, the visual is generally supreme. For example, images of suburban detached houses emphasise the sovereignty of the individual household and the subsequent ideology of 'social atomization', which Henry Giroux attaches to neoliberal responses to the pandemic. Texts which depict their characters living in or looking out at blocks of flats, as in *Coronawho?* (Standley et al.), arguably centre the interdependence of communities in lockdown rather than the sovereignty of the individual. In other words, the aesthetic choices made by creators of these texts point to the ways in which ideas of "home" were socially constructed at the start of the pandemic. The instructional quality of these picturebooks can be evinced from the representation of children learning to have fun and make up new games while staying at home during lockdown with their families. Picturebooks often model games and ways to pass the time, for real-life children and their families to imitate. Indeed, some picturebooks are designed to be printed or interacted with on a tablet, containing additional colouring-in sheets or incorporating interactive elements into their narrative composition. For example, *Pip's Guide to Coronavirus for Early Years Children* (A Better Start Southend, 2020) includes an empty face which comes at a central point in the narrative, with the reader being asked to draw on their own feelings in response to their experience of COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, while this corpus emerged as a distinctively contemporary digital assemblage of representation, indicative of widespread digital literacy and computer access, several of its texts

actually work to intervene in children's reliance on digital devices during the pandemic, by providing offline, tactile forms of recreation.

In general, multimodality and transmediality are integral to emergency children's literature, pointing to the malleable, unfixed context of their online circulation. Several (Keay, 2020; Rivett-Carnac & Rivett-Carnac, 2020; Gray & Batchelor, 2020) also circulate as YouTube read-along versions, while others (Smith & Murphy, 2020; Thomas & Paul, 2020) include sing-along songs or other game-like, playable aspects as part of the narrative. Moreover, the paratext provides an important space to consider the social context of an individual text, such as assurances of the philanthropic context of its production. For example, Sally Nicholls notes on her website that neither she, the illustrator, or the publisher 'are making any money out of this—it's a free gift to families struggling with lockdown' (Nicholls, 2020). The picturebook's value as a sort of ritual or remedy for the psychological impact of the pandemic hence points to the larger value of emergency children's literature as a social coping mechanism. The contingent reality of the pandemic is reflected through the use of series in which the same characters undertake new experiences, such as returning to school. As Lucie Glasheen (2020–2021) notes, however, these representations inevitably risk becoming immediately or even dangerously anachronistic, as attempts to reflect a rapidly changing and overall unstable pandemic. Interestingly, none of these texts seeks to help British children to navigate the death of a loved one due to COVID-19, despite the likelihood of this scenario. References to mask use are uncommon across our corpus, which retrospectively seems surprising; however, their absence is because mask use was not mandated by the British government until the middle of July 2020, over a month after the majority of these stories and picturebooks had been made.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have examined the abundance of texts for young people created in rapid response to the unfolding pandemic as an emergency children's literature. Some of these texts have already disappeared and appear as deadlinks on the New York City School Library System database, pointing to the spontaneous, precarious, and ultimately finite context of this heterogeneous archive of free, downloadable representations. Produced by unconventional, unprofessional, and volunteer creators, this emergency children's literature shows how the pandemic undermined

children's usual routes into literature and representation, such as through schools, libraries, and bookshops, and points to an international context of digital access and literacy to intervene in a period of physical mass isolation. The practical context of these representations thus emerges from their social value as ways to secure collective narratives amid and about the chaos and uncertainty of COVID-19.

Pedagogically, these texts tend to instruct young people about health awareness, which includes not only risk-management but lockdown-related mental health. Surprisingly, none of the texts surveyed here thematises children dealing with COVID-19-related loss in their own families, despite the likelihood of this tragic impact. The disproportionately high number of self-published books in this corpus written by paediatric nurses, teachers, and other educational and healthcare professionals highlights the central role of storytelling in children's day-to-day experiences of their own education and health. Written and circulated online with urgency, these texts reflect the gaps in children's well-being created by the initial impact of the pandemic, and so point to the importance of spontaneous storytelling for children in the face of the scary and the unknown—a dispersed, mostly digital storytelling thence consolidated into a recognisable body of individual texts. As work on COVID-19 in education continues and as new representations for young people emerge to construct the pandemic as a fixed event in the recent past, rather than a contingent present, these first examples of emergency children's literature should be understood alongside other rituals and remedies undertaken by national and local communities, as well as an archive of the first political contexts of COVID-19.

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