

Volume 26, Issue 1, 2020

SARE

Southern African Review of Education

Special Issue

Emergent Educational Imaginaries During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Editors: Azeem Badroodien and Aslam Fataar

**A Review of Comparative Education,
History of Education and Educational
Development**



SACHES

THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN COMPARATIVE AND HISTORY OF EDUCATION SOCIETY

Southern African Review of Education (SARE) is the journal of the Southern African Comparative and History of Education Society (SACHES). It was previously published together with **Education with Production (EWP)**, the journal of the Foundation for Education with Production.

Editor of SARE: Azeem Badroodien, University of Cape Town
Tel: 021 650 2774, e-mail: Azeem.badroodien@uct.ac.za

Associate Editors

Aslam Fataar
Peter Kallaway
Crain Soudien

Linda Chisholm
Yunus Omar
Mark Mason

Editorial Board

Martin Carnoy, Stanford University, USA
Cati Coe, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, USA
Wim Hoppers, Stockholm University, Sweden
Kenneth King, Edinburgh University, Scotland
Simon McGrath, Nottingham University, UK
Karen Mundy, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto, Canada
Joel Samoff, Stanford University, USA
Yusuf Sayed, University of Sussex, UK, and University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Gita Steiner-Khamsi, Teachers College, Columbia University, USA
Sharon Subreenduth, Bowling Green State University, Ohio, USA
Richard Tabulawa, University of Botswana
Leon Tikly, Bristol University, UK
Keith Watson, University of Reading, UK
Allan Wieder, University of South Carolina, USA
Willy Wielemans, CESE, Brussels, Belgium

SACHES Core Executive Committee: Dennis Banda, Charl Wolhuter, Eunifridah Simuyaba, Jo-Anne Koch, Azeem Badroodien (SARE Editor), Steve Azaiki, Claudia Koehler

ISSN 1563-4418

Production editor and typesetting: Moira & John Richards (mr@slashb.co.za)
Printing: Minit Print Hatfield (012 362 2807)

SARE

Southern African Review of Education

A journal of comparative education, history of education
and educational development

Volume 26, Issue 1, July 2020

Special Issue

Emergent Educational Imaginaries During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Editors: Azeem Badroodien and Aslam Fataar

Contents

Aslam Fataar and Azeem Badroodien <i>Editorial notes</i>	1
ARTICLES	
Crain Soudien <i>Systemic shock: How Covid-19 exposes our learning challenges in education</i>	6
Yusuf Sayed and Marcina Singh <i>Evidence and education policy making in South Africa during Covid-19: Promises, researchers and policymakers in an age of unpredictability</i>	20
Sara Black, Carol Anne Spreen and Salim Vally <i>Education, Covid-19 and care: Social inequality and social relations of value in South Africa and the United States</i>	40
Stephanie Allais and Carmel Marock <i>Educating for work in the time of Covid-19: Moving beyond simplistic ideas of supply and demand</i>	62

Shireen Motala and Kirti Menon	
<i>In search of the 'new normal': Reflections on teaching and learning during Covid-19 in a South African university.....</i>	<i>80</i>
Linda Chisholm	
<i>Corona, crisis and curriculum: History of health education in South Africa</i>	<i>100</i>
Shafika Isaacs	
<i>Every child is a national (playing) asset: A portrait of a Soweto boy's contradictory worlds of play and performance before and during the Covid-19 lockdown</i>	<i>116</i>
Doria Daniels	
<i>Reimagining parents' educational involvement during the Covid-19 lockdown.....</i>	<i>134</i>
Nick Taylor	
<i>School lessons from the Covid-19 lockdown</i>	<i>148</i>
Jonathan Jansen	
<i>Data or bread? A policy analysis of student experiences of learning under lockdown</i>	<i>167</i>
BACK MATTER	
<i>Contents of previous issues of SARE</i>	<i>182</i>
<i>Notes to Contributors.....</i>	<i>195</i>
<i>SACHES Membership form.....</i>	<i>197</i>

Editorial notes

Special issue: Emergent educational imaginaries during the Covid-19 pandemic

Aslam Fataar and Azeem Badroodien

On 17 May 2020, we issued the following invitation to a range of South African scholars who do work in the history, sociology, policy and comparative studies of education. We did this in our capacity as current (Azeem) and former (Aslam) editors-in-chief of this journal:

We are coediting a special issue of the *Southern African Review of Education* that features different angles and perspectives on Covid-19 and education. We are inviting you and a variety of colleagues to offer different insights into the pandemic and its effects/implications, as a way of offering direction and value to the work and thinking of our students and fellow academics.

Your article would need to be between 6,000 and 8,000 words, submitted by the due date of 15 June 2020. We insist on a quick turnaround because our intention is to produce the special issue by the end of July 2020. We are committed to an expedited double-blind peer-review process. Speed is essential, yet rigour will not be sacrificed.

What was essential for us was to create a venue for educational thinking about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on educational theory, policy and practice. The call for papers was accompanied by a think piece written by one of us (Fataar) and subsequently published as part of a long article compiled and edited by Fazal Rizvi and Michael Peters in the prestigious and respected journal, *Educational Philosophy and Theory* (Peters & Rizvi et al. 2020). This, we believed, would serve as a prompt for the different ways contributing authors might take into consideration when writing their articles. We publish the piece here in full:

Educational transmogrification and exigent pedagogical imaginaries in pandemic times

The Covid-19 pandemic simultaneously engages, intensifies and subverts existing educational inequity and iniquity. This begs the question of whether educational imaginaries can emerge in pandemic times that gesture towards significant educational equity, virtue and dignity. Gesture is important. It is a sign that insists on, yet, resists the deadness of our time. It signifies life left in the educational body, the body hoping to be educated, always available for educational resurrection.

As the coronavirus pathogen spreads roughshod across the world, it affects our 'right to breathe,' causing us finally to account for our own death (Mbembe 2020). Yet, pandemic times, on our death bed, allow us to fantasise, nay imagine, the rebirthing of life, a life yet denuded and repressed, squeezed of its last breath by the suffocation and destruction wrought by decades of neoliberal education reform, now corralled and transmogrified under pandemic conditions.

Transmogrification in South Africa has become manifest in the emergence of a pandemic pedagogy based on the rapid move to online education. This is a country where the right to breathe is vastly unequally distributed. Online education has rapidly come to authorise visions of a default educational life under the pandemic. However, only 20% of the country's educational institutions have managed to move their curricula online, with varying levels of efficiency. The most efficient institutions grafted their online offerings onto colonially and apartheid acquired privilege.

A deracialised and now middle-classed student body, the 20% elite surfaced by contemporary market-based assimilationism, is finally fulfilling the neoliberal dream of isolation from the barbarians. Locked down behind the barriers of pandemic isolation, these students are self-educating, staring into screens in a state of anguished comfort. What has emerged is a pandemic pedagogy accomplished through the modality of the machine and accompanying online learning platforms. The triumph of techne and instrumental reason has emerged as the victor in the early life of the pandemic. A maladapted vision of doing the new educational normal has been installed, circulating tropes of older knowledge exclusion, seamlessly, unquestioningly.

Despite its prominence in the curriculum imagination under the pandemic, online education is a minority experience. The majority of the country's students, black and poor, are experiencing pandemic lockdown without any meaningful education. Their schools, colleges and universities have been shut to prevent viral spread in decrepit and packed living quarters that make physical distancing unlikely.

Their educational institutions are unable to leverage robust online platforms for learning. These students are bereft of machines for learning and data for connectivity. Positioned in spaces of intense squalor, they exercise their desperate bodies as a type of soft infrastructure, plugging welfare gaps, looking after siblings and parents with co-morbidities such as tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS.

They engage in a 'pedagogy of care' to develop practices of survival. They invent ways of assuaging their family's food hunger that increased manifold under pandemic lockdown, securing clean water and obtaining medicines, masks and sanitising equipment.

Instead of isolation, the majority student experience is one of intense engagement with the existing resources and infrastructures of their environments. They are engaged in informalised, context-mitigating, and socially engaged processes of learning to survive, and to keep body, mind and soul together. They acquire contextually engaged critical literacies that are vital for their survival and adaptation. Their intellectual engagement and practices of mitigation have foregrounded intensified relational pedagogical engagement. Such a perspective holds lessons for resuscitating educational imaginaries in pandemic times. (Fataar in Peters & Rizvi et al. 2020)

In response to the call for articles on Covid-19 and education, we received and processed a number of articles. The ten assembled here made it through the submission, peer review, resubmission and publication process. All of them took up the challenge to respond to the call in different complementary ways, enriching our collective understanding of education during these pandemic times.

The lead article is by Crain Soudien who explores what the insights from the shock of Covid-19 might hold for educative learning; his focus is on individual learning in systemic context, and how

systems account for issues of individual difference among learners. The next two articles provide critiques of unequal education systems that have manifested deep inequalities during the pandemic along lines of race, gender, geography and the digital divide. Both articles place the role of disaster capitalism at the centre of such educational inequality. Sayed and Singh place the focus on the construction of the underlying policy discourse that informs governmental policy making, especially the merging of science and governance on the one hand, and complex interplay among research, punditry, interest groups and educational decision on the other. These led to questionable Covid-19 education policy decisions. Black, Spreen and Vally discuss the generative structures that have rendered educational institutions vulnerable during the pandemic and make an argument for an alternative educational imaginary.

The next three articles turn to the institutional and curriculum impact of the pandemic. Allais and Marock warn about the negative impact on skills formation in the country and call for the development of coherent skills development programmes to be offered in strengthened vocational educational institutions that move away from narrow market-led training. Motala and Menon discuss one university's attempt to take its curriculum online during the early stages of the pandemic lockdown. Chisholm provides insight into the historical development of health education in South Africa immediately after the Spanish flu of 1918. She discusses the take-up of health education in the colonial and apartheid curriculum and compares this with the health education emphasis in the postapartheid curriculum.

As a set, the last four articles discuss an intersection of issues around children's learning experiences during the lockdown. Isaacs focuses on the play practices of learners before and during lockdown, specifically offering a narrative of one learner's play practices. Daniels's article focuses on parental learning support, discussing the learning and social support practices in one domestic arrangement offered by surrogate parents to three children. Taylor focuses on the home educational practices of learners in their domestic environments and, finally, Jansen's article ends the special issue with his discussion of student experiences of online learning during lockdown.

What emerges from the ten articles is that whether at the conceptual, systemic, institutional, curriculum, or home level, as an educational community we are at a serious crossroads in how we approach schooling in South Africa, and how we respond to educational change in the post Covid-19 moment. In the past few months, we have come to vividly see the fault-lines of the country's inequalities, which, according to Arundhati Roy, were *brought plainly to the surface*. What surfaced were the fragile ecosystems of the poor being violently shocked into meltdown (Sayed and Singh), troublesome education trends being put into motion across different sectors and schooling spaces (Black, Spreen and Vally), pressure being placed on institutional and curriculum adaptation (Motala and Menon; Chisholm), skills formation systems coming increasingly under threat (Allais and Marock), and school and domestic learning circumstances being severely strained (as explained in the articles by each of Isaacs, Daniels, Taylor and Jansen). Teachers have come under severe fire both physically – when placed as service providers at the frontline of the pandemic – and professionally, where their commitment to their craft and their

ability to deliver have been questioned. Education, it would seem, is being made to answer for, and bear the brunt of, the collective inability of South Africa as a country to withstand the fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic on almost all fronts, with schools serving as a battleground for ideological control over a new educational nirvana.

Most worrying in the ‘new’ Covid-19-induced social order of South Africa has been how individual self-interest has been positioned in opposition to broader human inclinations to help struggling communities at a time of catastrophe. Neoliberal disdain has transformed these human inclinations into a language of private troubles, private pain, and private endurance detached from the broader public malaise. In doing so, feeding off dominant narratives of privatisation, consumerism, and atomisation, those that privilege a politics based on material pursuit and individual self-gain have gone into open conflict with an emergent politics keen on reimagining a world where the social is not completely hollowed out, and a more just and equitable society still remains possible.

Two different views are thus arguably at the centre of the ‘return to school debate’ as South Africans begin to reenvision their futures post Covid-19. One is a view about dominant power hierarchies and interest groups that see the return of learners to school as critical to their maintaining control over the narrative of schooling inequality in South Africa. The other is a view that sees the reorganisation of current education offerings as an important opportunity to shift dominant state and civil society educational discourses to recognise the severe limits to which the present education system is able to serve the needs of the majority in South Africa. While these views are borne of a simplistic binary, the Covid-19 moment has brought into sharp focus the need for us to collectively challenge our stances on reciprocity, human dignity, repair, and commitment to equal sharing. Soudien observes in the first article that we may not have quite arrived at the moment of world dissolution as captured in Atwood’s (2004) apocalyptic *Oryx and Crake*. But, what the morbid tallying of ‘dying and dead bodies’ on a daily basis seems to have cemented in the public imagination are foreboding images of capitulation and decay, where counting the numbers seemingly deadens feelings of loss and succumbing to the inevitability of what is to come. Moving forward, these images and dispositions will be difficult to psychologically reverse – both in the psyche of learning populations and as part of the psyche of the educational policy machinery. As such, while the next period will test new and emergent imaginaries, our responsibility is to ensure they are not stillborn.

References

- Atwood, M. (2004) *Oryx and Crake*. Anchor Books.
- Peters, M, Rizvi, F, McCulloch, G, Gibbs, P, Gorur, R, Hong, M, Hwang, Y, Zipin, L, Brennan, M, Robertson, S, Quay, J, Justin Malbon, J, Taglietti, D, Barnett, R, Chengbing, W, McLaren, P, Apple, R, Papastephanou, M, Burbules, N, Jackson, L, Jalote, P, Kalantzis, M, Cope, B, Fataar, A, Conroy, J, Misiaszek, G, Biesta, G, Jandrić, P, Choo, S, Apple, M, Stone, L, Tierney, R, Tesar, M, Besley, T & Misiaszek, L. (2020) Reimagining the new pedagogical possibilities for universities post-Covid-19. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1777655>

Roy, A. (2020) *The Pandemic is a Portal: An Online Teach-In With Arundhati Roy* [online]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QmQLTnK4QTA> [accessed 10 July 2020].

Editors

Aslam Fataar is Distinguished Professor in the Department of Education Policy Studies at Stellenbosch University. He is currently seconded to a research and development chair position in the university's Transformation Office. He is the former editor-in-chief of this journal.

Address for correspondence: afataar@sun.ac.za

Azeem Badroodien is Professor in Education Policy in the School of Education at the University of Cape Town and assumes the function of Head of School in January 2021. He is the current editor-in-chief of this journal.

Address for correspondence: azeem.badroodien@uct.ac.za



Systemic shock: How Covid-19 exposes our learning challenges in education

Crain Soudien

Human Sciences Research Council and University of Cape Town

Abstract

In this brief engagement, in which I draw on both my own work and the work of several commentators and scholars on the state of our contemporary condition, I ask what the shock of Covid-19 might mean for our ability to think of education and, particularly, for the task of learning in deeper and more inclusive ways. I begin with the argument that systems of education have as their main purpose the achievement of educative learning, and that the focus of this aim is the individual learner. In reflecting critically on how systems manage this objective, I look at how systems deal with issues of difference – what they seek to institute and protect, what they struggle with – and suggest that they have difficulty in holding the individual learner in view and in their practice. In closing, I explore the question of what new possibilities or insights the shock of Covid-19 might open for a system and how such a system might operate.

Keywords: Covid-19 and education, differentiated learning, universalism and individualism, equality and education, educational justice

Soudien, C. (2020) Systemic shock: How Covid-19 exposes our learning challenges in education. *Southern African Review of Education*, 26(1): 6–19.

Introduction

The idea of a ‘reset’ in thinking about a post Covid-19 future for our planet is now, to put it prosaically, commonplace. The world, one frequently hears, will never be the same again. It is true. The world will never be the same again. It never is, actually, from one simple moment in time to the next. Everything changes. Always. The change that Covid-19 has wrought, however, is extreme. It hasn’t quite shut the world down in the way the world organically dissolves, literally, in Margaret Atwood’s (2004) apocalyptic *Oryx and Crake*. There, we see new orders of sociality that are forced upon the world by uncontained viral contagion. Her survivor, Snowman, is almost the last standing human in a landscape of rampant genetic effluvium. The disease also hasn’t changed our world in the way portrayed by South African crime writer, Deon Meyer (2016), in his novel *Koors* (Fever). He draws for us there, a picture of terrified virus-free survival colonies struggling to hold on to life in the harsh South African scrub.

We are in neither Atwood’s nor Meyer’s end-of-the-world tragedy. Our social order, whatever one might think of it in terms of legitimacy, justice and freedom, remains in effect. It is under heavy attack though. Its political, economic, cultural and social certainties about humanness and human connection, human responsibility and human accountability are in serious question. The medium and modality through and with which these certainties find material expression – globalisation – has been fundamentally disrupted. While we remain in Held et al.’s (1999: 15) ‘time-space’ compression, Covid-19 has reconstituted our routines, rhythms and relationships. Conditions for both authoritarianism and agency have been rearranged. The terms of globalisation and hegemony have shifted. Whether they have shifted enough to bring the world structurally and consciously to new possibilities for democratisation and social justice, to a radical reset, however, is the question. Has the shock of Covid-19 altered the terms and criteria through which democracy, equality, social inclusion and social justice are understood, approached and worked with sufficiently to bring us to a new and better world? Or is the world just different – or, worse, simply destined for greater inequality and inequity?

In this brief engagement, in which I draw on both my own work and the work of several commentators and scholars on the state of our contemporary condition, I look at the idea of a systemic shock and reflect on what this manifestation of a shock – Covid-19 – might mean for our ability to think of education in deeper and more inclusive ways (see UNESCO 2020; Saavedra 2020; Reimers & Schleicher 2020; Reddy et al. 2020). I begin by asking what the systemic purpose of education is, look at how systems deal with issues of difference – what they seek to institute and protect, what they struggle with – and explore the question of what new possibilities or insights the shock of Covid-19 might open for a system and how such a system might operate.

The argument I make builds on work I have begun to address on the question of difference and learning (see Soudien & Harvey 2020 and Soudien 2020). Prompting the argument is the need to engage with the inherent impulse of systems to restabilise. There are, of course, multiple components, mechanisms and processes involved in stabilisation. I focus in this discussion on those elements in education systems that involve people, and, in this case, learners. The elements

of the stabilisation process I am interested in are those of standardisation and universalisation. I make the argument that these elements effect, through the idealisation of what is universal, often unknowingly, multiple-level injustices on who we are as sentient beings. They have the effects of homogenising and standardising our capacities and potentials. They have difficulty in managing our differences – in both their good and bad forms – however our dominant ideologies and cultures come to a determination of these. These are the ways, I argue, of normative orders. In managing difference, they cannot but oppress. When norms operate on global scales, the oppression is deep. How, against this, is a reset possible?

To come to a sense of how universalisms condition the education discussion, it is important to look briefly at the modalities through which education is experienced in the world today – through systems of education – and how systems understand their purpose.

Revisiting the question of the purpose of education

Obligatory in the process of training to be a teacher right up to the 1990s was a course in the philosophy of education (see Dewey 1965; Peters & Hirst 1970). A major focus of the course was understanding the aims of education. The most perceptive philosophers were at pains to hold back from categorical and once-and-for-all explanations. Straughan and Wilson, for example, arrived at a point in their deliberately pedagogical text, *Philosophizing About Education*, to acknowledge that education *could* be any of the following:

- having a certain minimum general knowledge, or,
- the *quality* of and depth of a person's knowledge, or,
- 'the art of arousing a child's mind from its repose,' or
- 'that which does a child good.' (1983: 11, 27, 29)

As the recent conversation of Johan Hattie and Steen Nepper Larsen (2020) makes evident, we remain, philosophically at least, at the point reached by Straughan and Wilson almost 40 years ago. What was that point? It was that it is extremely important to be conscious of our situational biases, social positions and social histories – we all have them – in the statements we make about what are better forms of education and what is in the interests of a child. Because of this sociological reality, Straughan and Wilson (1983) argued, it is hard to make truth claims about the aims of education. In all of their caution, however, they never hesitated to look for and to validate the importance of thinking in conscious and deliberative ways. This is what they implicitly argued needed to be in demonstration. In thinking about systems, their anxiety about bias and positionality, however, is critical. All their philosophic qualifications are about recognising self-, sectional, exclusionary interest in deciding what the purpose of education is. They leave us with the great difficulty of projecting and building systems of education that have built into them this self-awareness, of developing systems that are in the interests of all. *No Child Left Behind*.

As comparative educationists, we are familiar with the idea of a system of education. We are familiar with the thinking of early scholars such as Johann Amos Comenius who proposed the idea

of a single educational system for the world based on universal textbooks and common school forms (see Stone 1981: 50). We are also familiar with the debates in comparative education that arose out of Comenius' proposals, particularly those relating to similarities and differences between and among different educational systems around the world. Valuable in those debates was the attempt to distil the general and essential features that a system should have, namely, a structure with the purpose of facilitating effective learning, policies for guiding the activity of learning and supportive instruments, institutions and processes to enable learning to take place. The structure, in its allocation of differentiated responsibilities, had to be well thought out, and appropriately steered according to policies of enablement. And the people who came to function in the differentiated responsibilities that were identified had to be trained to nurture effective and meaningful learning. We learnt, too, from these debates that the central aim in setting in place these instruments and institutions was to secure educative teaching.

A logical next step in that discussion about educative teaching was the question of difference. Almost from its inception, the comparative education discussion had in view the reality that people as human beings were unique in and of themselves. A comparative education textbook of the 1980s, *The Education System: Theory and Practice* published in South Africa, interestingly and surprisingly given the ideology of apartheid that remained unaddressed in the text, captures the theoretical substance of that discussion well (van Schalkwyk 1988: 21–22):

The educationist must know and understand the particular, diverse individual and changeable manifestations of a matter such as the school, as it can vary from time to time and situation to situation. He must know what factors can contribute to particular forms, which the school can assume and what influence these factors can have on the events of education. This fundamental feature enables him to compare the various types of schools on the basis of their common and diverse features and hence arrive at a clearer understanding of the different educational milieus of the world so as to understand his own system better.

This fundamental feature also enables the educator to understand the educand/pupil better. It leads him to view a man as a species possessing a unique identity. Education can do no more than develop man's inherent attributes within the limits imposed by his potential as a human being (his universal aspect). The education system has a particular structure and aim because of what man is. Together with his universal human attributes, man is also a unique individual – a particular manifestation of humanity. . . . In a universal sense, everyone has certain functions, for example, an aesthetic function. In order to create sufficient scope for developing this particular function, the education system must make provision for tuition in, for example, art and music in an aesthetically pleasing environment. One child will have a greater aptitude for composing and understanding of literature where another will be better at sculpture, painting or music. . . . This fundamental feature also requires what can be termed total education. The educand must be seen as a complete/total being and all his qualities and abilities must be developed to the full.

As this account of the state of thinking about education demonstrates, the learning individual is a focus of much of the thinking about systemic development around the world. It was evident in the global, Education for All (EFA) movement that came out of the 1990 UNESCO, Jomtien, Thailand conference. There, 150 governments committed themselves to the World Declaration on

Education for All:

Every person – child, youth and adult – shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities to meet their basic learning needs. These needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy, and problem solving) and the basic learning content required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development . . . and to continue learning. (UNESCO 1990: Article 1)

This focus on the learner is also evident in the Sustainable Development Goals and, most recently, in the latest World Bank (2018) report, *The World Development Report* (WDR), which diagnoses the state of learning in the world today. The objective of the ideal system anywhere, the WDR says, is learning. Everything in the system is aimed at what sits at its ‘bulls-eye,’ as the WDR describes it – learning. The subject of that learning is the individual child.

Looking at systems around the world, the WDR concludes that the objective of reaching the individual child is not being achieved. It acknowledges that the world has,

examples of families, educators, communities, and systems that have made real progress . . . [but that globally] 12 million children are not acquiring functional literacy or numeracy, even after spending at least four years in school. . . . Across 51 countries, only half of women who completed Grade 6 . . . could read a single sentence. (World Bank 2018: 4, 71–73).

The WDR is conscious that there are big challenges in achieving basic literacy around the world. In making sense of the challenges, it correctly returns to the question of the ways in which systems work and concludes that the issues of alignment are at the heart of the difficulties. Systems, it says, consist of three-tiered structures composed as concentric circles, each of which is made up of a number of elements. An outer ring contains the most significant actors and stakeholders who might influence how learning occurs. These actors include peers/communities, civil society, politicians, bureaucrats, the private sector, international actors, the judiciary and other actors. The intermediate circle contains what it calls *immediate school-level ingredients*. These are prepared learners, skilled and motivated teachers, learning-focused inputs and school management. The inner ring is the activity of learning. Describing the purpose of these structures it says: ‘Imagine that a country has set student learning as a top priority and that it has in place reasonable learning metrics. It still needs to leap a major technical hurdle, however: ensuring that system elements work together’ (World Bank 2018: 11–12).

It is this question of the learning subject, what the system elements work together for, I am suggesting that the shock of Covid-19 forces us to return to. Central in this question is the imperative of building functional systems for learning. In this imperative, commit as systems do to supporting the individual learning subject (as the theory behind systems thinking indicates), in their operations they implicitly and insistently homogenise the learning subject. They do that, I argue below, through universalising the social identities of learners and through homogenising how they learn – everyone learns in the same way. There is awareness of the challenges with the ways in which social identity is managed in education in much critical commentary. It has become an issue, for example, with respect to class, gender and race and has led to, beyond simple political

correctness, important paradigm shifts in understandings of social inequality. And so, in terms of our theory, we are relatively speaking, not entirely as I argue below, on safe ground. The same cannot be said for learning. There is much less awareness about how human beings actually learn. Covid-19, I am suggesting, based on the preliminary evidence adduced by Reimers and Schleicher (2020) and the countless anecdotes one hears about how parents are managing their children's learning and of teachers discovering new insights into their learners in their online engagements, has brought us to the point of interrogating the question of the universal and the individual beyond our putative safe ground. It is the 'beyond' that is the focus of the remainder of the discussion.

The 'inclusion' discourse

So where are we in the discussion about inclusion and inequality? It is not incorrect to say that the education community and the social sciences in general have a fair sense of the nature of inequality and the challenges of injustice in terms of the educational experience. Social theory has advanced to the point where conceptual innovations have developed in approaches such as feminism, queer theory, critical race theory, disability studies, postcolonialism, decolonialism and decoloniality, *inter alia*, informed by established, existing and new understandings of humanness, sociality, solidarity and eco-citizenship to give us a fair sense of inclusion and exclusion and how they work.

Directly relevant for the discussion raised here is that significant elements of the advances that have been made in the social sciences are evident in the broad field of education studies. A literature review of this development would demonstrate its large scale and scope. An important example of this body of thought, somewhat surprisingly, is the WDR. While not uncritical of the WDR, Archer of the global nongovernmental organisation, ActionAid, says that it is the 'sheer existence' of the report that drew his attention (as quoted in Ginsburg et al. 2018: 277). He, for example, approves of the report's critique of the turn towards private schooling: 'This is bold stuff coming from the World Bank' whose President was, until recently, advocating for Bridge International Academies (*ibid.*: 278).

Other critics such as Barerra-Osorio describe it as 'an important source of information and ideas for scholars. More importantly, policy makers will find the Report a source of clear guidance in the difficult task of creating innovative and effective education policies' (in Ginsburg et al.: 280). Vally (*ibid.*: 281) describes the report with its 'critical approach to technology, the importance of early childhood, the affirmation of Sen's capability approach, and an epigrammatic nod to Emma Goldman' as a 'welcomed departure from previous World Bank policy statements.'

Developments such as these provide the kind of evidence for the important observation made by Charles Taylor (2005) about the state of the world's formal understanding of rights. His contention is that the world is in a significantly different place to where it was in earlier times: '[the] modern order gives no ontological status to hierarchy or any particular structure of differentiation' (Taylor 2005: 12). This sensibility he says has 'infiltrate[d] and transform[ed] our social imaginary. In the process what is originally an idealisation grows into a new and constantly developing imaginary

through being taken up and associated with social practices’ (ibid.: 28–29). The result, Taylor explains, has been a profound enlargement of *the social imaginary* – the very consciousness people have of themselves, of others and of their place in the world. The normative order is unquestionably more inclusive than it has ever been before. Looking at history. Taylor shows how ‘whole segments of our supposedly modern society,’ (ibid.: 28) right up until the late 19th century, such as the French peasantry and women in the family, ‘remained outside of this social imaginary’ (ibid: 28). He continues to explain that social and political developments made it not only possible but desirable for excluded and marginalised groups to be brought to visibility, to have voice and so be incorporated into the structures of power in most parts of the world.

But there are still problems . . .

Advance as we have, we remain blinkered. This blinkeredness is a product of hegemony. Hegemony – the social/political/economic order essentially embodied in the force field of modernity – has directed our thinking about the learning experience, and other facets of our contemporary lives, in very particular ways. In our analysis, we have come to focus on the social and separated it from other dimensions of what makes human beings come to be human. The cognitive is particularly relevant for our purposes. In this social, we focus on singular and disconnected elements of our identities and the attachments that go with them – gendered, raced, classed privileges on the one hand, and their comparative exclusions on the other. We struggle to see people beyond the social universe we have constructed for ourselves. The problem is twofold. It is about social analysis, which functions according to our ‘grand narratives’ about how the world is socially composed and, then, more problematically for what Covid-19 now puts in front of us, about how we as human beings learn. The first order of exclusion is about those whom we choose not to see. The problems in our self-accounting and the communities we describe as ‘my people,’ ‘our people’ – or, worse, ‘those people’ – lie in the normative and formative ways self and other have come to be configured in our dominant social orders. The second, perhaps similarly, is about those whom we don’t know about. Hence, we cannot see them.

The philosopher Ranciere (2010) is useful in helping us come to understand how our hegemony works as an explanatory framework. This hegemony (my term), he says, is underpinned by a ‘broad agreement,’ a consensus, for making sense of the world. This consensus, he says,

is not people’s agreement amongst themselves but the matching of sense with sense. . . . It claims to observe merely that which we can all see in aligning two propositions about the state of the world: one maintains that we have at last come to live in times of peace; the other states the condition of that peace – the recognition that there is no more than what there is. . . . But all too often the peace invoked evades its obviousness: a body of workers rejects the assertion that there is only what there is. . . . Consensus, therefore is the machine of vision and interpretation that must ceaselessly set appearances right, put war and peace back in their place. . . . All this goes to show that we are merely being asked to consent. . . . In [the] . . . play of oppositions, the very possibility of a specific conflict necessarily disappears without remainder: one which bears on what there is, which lays claim to *one* [my emphasis] present against *another* [my emphasis] and affirms that the visible, thinkable and

possible can be described in many ways. This other way has a name. It is called politics. (Ranciere 2010: ix-x)

Ranciere does not say so explicitly, but the point he could be argued to be making is that the opponents in the debate about the state of the world today are, actually, in agreement with each other about what they are looking at. They have composed the world in particular terms. They are either very happy and satisfied with the places and locations of each other in the picture they have composed for themselves, or they are unhappy and in disagreement. Even where they ask for the picture to be erased – the ‘burn-the-whole-thing-down argument’ – their intention is simply to repopulate it with the same people, socially placed differently, in order to be happier from their perspective. The same subjects. Same social descriptions.

Here then, is the provocation. We live in the consensus of grand narratives in the social sciences. They are the grand narratives of race, class and gender. To make the argument that these narratives are wrong leads one into cul-de-sacs. That argument can be made, but a more useful discussion is about how the narratives work. What their effects are. The effects they produce are material. The tragedy of gender-based violence and its patriarchal ubiquity, its naturalisation in our cultures, the extraordinary civilisational blight of contemporary racism, demanding of us the cry that ‘Black Lives Matter!’ and the shame that the average income of the richest 10 per cent of the population in economically developed countries is about 10 times that of the poorest 10 per cent, give our grand narratives obvious justification. These problems are real.

But they hide the different – the difference of the social and the multiple other ways in which we are different. With respect to the social, the categories of race, class and gender are, on the one hand, homogenised, fixed and standardised, and, on the other, privileged in relation to other forms of difference. Systems thinking, for example, operates with the categories in their idealised forms. Difference is a matter of difference from the ideal versions of the categories, whiteness, maleness, middle-classedness. This is where much of the discussion around the world is in relation to social difference. Where systems have to be fixed, they are generally conceived of and understood relatively in terms of the dominant narratives of whiteness, maleness and middle-classedness. It is these conditions that are either iconicised and reified, and so defended without any awareness, or criticised and vilified, and so completely rejected. Evident here, is a cost. Foucault describes this as the degree to which ‘individual or collective experiences [come to] depend on singular forms of thought, that is, on that which constitutes the subject in its relation to truth, to the rule, to itself?’ (quoted in Anderson 2006: xxii). Our representational strategies of who we are bring some of what is going on into view and leave a lot out – people with different gender orientations, different sexualities, different abilities, different cultural histories, different technological capacities, different desires. They are all norm-referenced.

There is more to the problem, however, and this brings us to other forms of difference. Choose, as we do, to leave out those versions of our social selves we don’t like; more problematic, and more critical, is the challenge we have in seeing the multiple other ways in which we function as knowing and feeling beings. In mind here, is the difference of cognition. It is this that Archer (in

Ginsburg et al. 2018), unwittingly perhaps, and now Covid-19, puts on our agenda. As the world rushed to online learning during the closure of schools and educational systems many teachers, parents and caregivers around the world came to the discovery of how much more there was to the learning experience of their children. They came to learn, quickly, the reality of the criticism the left wing of the grand narrative was making (see Fernando Reimers and Andreas Schleicher's 2020 report of the survey of developments around the world about how systems have responded to Covid-19). Without devices, internet connectivity and simply physically conducive environments in which to learn, their children could not easily learn (see Reimers & Schleicher 2020 and Reddy et al. 2020). As schooling systems shut down across the world, learning effectively stopped for 1.8 billion children (Saavedra 2020). But many also came to see, firsthand, how their children and their wards managed the learning experience. They came into the psychosocial zone of cognition. They saw how differently each of their children was positioned, located and enabled to manage their learning. In play for teachers, parents and caregivers was what we are now confronting in innovative fields of scholarship such as neuroscience – that our bodies, every single one of them, work differently. They saw that their children's learning was social, but it was also unavoidably individual. Much work needs to be done to have a better empirical understanding of this situation.

Towards a better understanding of the common–individual relationship in our systems, we have to come to terms with the enormity of the simultaneous presence of grand inequality in our lives in synchronous combination with our individual learning realities. We have in this what can be described as learning ecologies that are, in their macroelements, reflective of similarity but, in their micro forms, distinguished by difference. Understanding this better is now our task. We have to understand big sociology better, our biologies better and we have to come to a better awareness of our distinctive biologies in their social settings. All of this must be held together (see Youdell 2016).

The biology discussion is important to recover. We are fortunate to be on the upward momentum of extraordinary new insights into how our brains work (see Stern 2002; Heckman 2008; Daggett & Nussbaum 2014; Filatova et al. 2018; Frias-Lasserre et al. 2018). Biologists, Wang et al. (2019: 1), working with neural observations of the resting brain, discovered that every single subject they studied manifested interesting synaptic and chemical differences in the ways in which their brains worked: 'most previous large-scale circuit studies assumed that local circuit properties are the same across brain regions. Since different brain regions have distinct microscale and macroscale properties, assuming identical parameters across brain regions is overly simplistic.' Brains work differently, they emphasised.

It is not simply, however, studies of the brain as an organ, it is also about the brain in bodies that are in social settings. The field of study that takes us there is the field of epigenetics and the epigenome. Broadly speaking, epigenetics is the study of heritable phenotype changes that do not involve changes in our basic cellular structure, our deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), the substance in our bodies that carries our distinctive genetic information. The epigenome refers to the collection of marks on top of and around our DNA – our SNPs (single nucleotide polymorphisms; Mansuy &

Mohanna 2011: para. 3). Twins, for example, will carry and have very similar genetic histories but the ways in which their genes will express themselves will depend on the location of their SNPs. SNPs modulate how DNA works without causing any change in the structure of the DNA itself.

Of what relevance is epigenetics for understanding learning? It is relevant because we now know that our DNA does not on its 'own sustain all biological functions, and that another level of regulation is contributing' (Mansuy & Mohanna 2011: para. 2). This other level of regulation includes any factor outside the body that can influence what happens inside of it – diet, living conditions, exercise, emotions, stress, chemicals, drugs:

Both positive and negative factors can modulate the epigenome. For instance, positive factors such as enriched living conditions, like social interactions, physical activity and changing surroundings, can promote beneficial epigenetic marks, while severe stress or agricultural chemicals can permanently alter some marks. These modifications can impact various aspects of an organism's life during any phase of development. . . . Epigenetics provides support for another longstanding unresolved question: the contribution of nature versus nurture. . . . It provides a molecular basis to suggest that nurture has a strong impact on biological functions and behaviour, in some cases, perhaps a stronger impact than nature (genes). (Ibid.: paras 3–5)

As Mansuy and Mohanna (2011: para. 13) explain, this has profound implications for understanding our brains and how they work: 'several enzymes that modify DNA or histone proteins are essential elements of signalling pathways. This is because the formation of long-term memory requires that epigenetic processes induce lasting changes in gene expression in brain cells.' Work on fear conditioning has also revealed the impact of stress on learning and particularly the production of very particular kinds of acetylation – acetic acid – in the hippocampus in the process of the formation of memory (see Dias et al. 2016).

Much of the new science has been aimed at managing brain disorders – however those come to be defined – but it has a direct bearing on our discussion about learning, about executive functioning, those self-regulating processes in our brains that enable us to plan, focus our attention, remember and execute complex mental tasks. It brings us directly to the question of learning and its optimisation (see Heckman 2008 and McEwan 2015). How epigenetic marks work has to come much more directly into our thinking about learning and its management.

Where does this leave us?

In these new learnings, we have new political dynamics with which to contend. The psychiatrist Nikolas Rose (2019) gives us a sense of what these are. Talking of mental health, he says people inhabit a material world, an ecology that includes 'homes, shops, buildings, roads, countryside – intersubjective – communities of support or exclusion, discrimination, racisms, exposure to actual or potential dangers and hazards from others – social – forms of work, experiences . . . saturated with public and private meanings' (ibid: 194). What he is doing is take the clinical experience away from the psychiatrist's chambers and show the large social canvas on which psychologies depend. He could also, as he actually does elsewhere (see Rose 2012 and Mafoud et al. 2018), take

our epigenetic insights into consideration and bring the focus back to learning. He could have spoken of human beings living in the wondrous intricacy of individual bodies with brains that are, in every single instance, completely different. I have said elsewhere that we have here multiplicity, plurality and difference that is endless – ‘male’ brains, ‘female’ brains, ‘autistic’ brains, ‘artistic’ brains, ‘scientific’ brains, and much more, in a plurality of differently enabled bodies (Soudien 2020). In identifying the subjects of the brains, we still categorise in terms of our grand narrative analytics but, as Jantz (2014: para. 2) explains, ‘the differences between male and female brains in [the] areas [of processing, chemistry, structure, and activity] show up all over the world, but scientists also have discovered exceptions to every so-called gender rule.’ Scholars, such as Mikkola (2019: para. 49), have gone even further, arguing that ‘various critiques of the sex/gender distinction have called into question the viability of the category women.’ The politics is intense. We are in very new territory about how we understand what is happening inside our bodies and brains.

The most significant new learning about this politics is that difference is present in our lives in a plurality of forms. This plurality bears on our learning and understandings of our learning in new and demanding ways. Constructions of who our learners are have to recognise the multiplicity of factors that are active in young people’s lives – the big grand narratives on the one hand and, also, the multiplicity of distinctive realities that each of our sociobiologies represents.

Where to from here?

Our discussion has major implications for thinking about resetting the system of education. If we are to move our systems away from our normative markers with their idealised bodies and brains, we have to begin the process of seeing our learners in their radically different multiplicities. The WDR gives some pointers to a way forward. It says that

teaching strategies can deeply influence how students approach challenges in and out of school. . . . Intense stress or sustained negative emotions – such as those associated with crises or acute deprivation, where multiple stressors coexist – interfere with the brain’s ability to learn, retain and use information . . . programs that increase the availability of protective factors . . . can improve not only schooling but also overall life outcomes. (World Bank 2018: 70)

Earlier in the text, the WDR commented that

Just as with the construction of a house, the robustness of progressively more complex brain structures depends on the robustness of foundational ones. For example, the development of increasingly complex skills and functions builds on circuits formed earlier: linguistic development relies on visual and auditory functions that are dependent on neural circuits lower in the hierarchy which are most malleable in life; neural circuits that support higher cognitive functions. . . . Moreover, physical, sensory-motor, cognitive, and socio-emotional development are interlinked, constituting a web of dynamic links that ultimately determine a person’s ability to thrive. (World Bank 2018: 69)

What we have here is significant. It proceeds from the basis that we have advanced in our

understanding of our bodies and their learning dynamics. We still, however, struggle to broach the full complexity that is before us. The WDR is a few steps behind where we need to be. The bulls-eye of learning it has put before us is the product of systemic alignments that function around one-directional logics. The brain is the target of all the factors. It doesn't speak back. It is not, as it actually does in real terms, reacting to what it receives. And so, the WDR, with this modelling – a theory of change if you like – actually in the end leaves out the biological. It is still not able to see the full implications of what our new learning is putting in front of us and to locate the issues about bodies, brains and social spaces in their full entanglement and so to force us to think about equality, fairness and justice anew.

The point I am seeking to make here is that the learning subjects in their intersectional complexities are not visible in the developments that are in play in the new context of the pandemic. There are, to be sure, understandable reasons for the restabilising steps that governments and systems are taking to deal with the crisis. The logistical challenge of managing learner and student progression in the world's educational systems is a planning nightmare. But the disease has helped to underline the reality that children have different learning requirements and different capacities and different abilities to manage the process of learning. It is this complexity of what is actually taking place in the process that is not in sight. Stabilisation is a return to the conditions of dominance.

It is in coming to terms with every child's unique strengths and weaknesses that the idea of the sociologically and psychologically normative learner presents to us an important challenge. The homogenised learner of our education systems, either in their social identities of privilege or disadvantage, or their distinct learning realities, misrecognises the actual politics of the learning experience. Covid-19 is putting this reality in front of us in powerful ways.

In charting a way forward, a reset is possible but, and we must not be naïve about this, it will only happen with a new alignment of the affordances, mechanisms, institutions and support personnel that exist in the learning ecology of each child. This alignment is about resetting the infrastructural order, giving, for example, in the best of worlds, every child a device for being able to connect, and in more resource-challenged environments, the minimum that we deem necessary: qualified teachers, classrooms, nutritional support. In doing this we move towards our commitment to having in place the minimal essentials of a functional system. But it is also about getting to the more challenging requirement of addressing each of our children's needs and aspirations. We face here the question of personalised learning and the extraordinary reality that every one of us works our way to understanding and cognitive control in different ways. The enormity of what we need to face will lead us to the utterly pragmatic conclusion that personalised learning is neither possible nor practical. In acknowledging this, however, we take the just and moral step of recognising that our children, all of them, are different. In making that move we come face-to-face with the profound lesson that learning is complex – how can it not be so – and start the empowering journey, with our children (and they will take self-responsibility) of putting in place the ordinary and the special affordances of improving their opportunities to learn. How we will do this will

produce issues and challenges we haven't foreseen. But go in that direction we must. For justice's sake.

References

- Anderson, B. (2006) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso.
- Atwood, M. (2004) *Oryx and Crake*. Anchor Books.
- Daggett, W & Nussbaum, P. (2014) *How Brain Research Relates to Rigor, Relevance and Relationships* [online]. Available at http://www.leadered.com/pdf/How_Brain_Research_Relates_to_RRR-2014.pdf [accessed 26 June 2018].
- Dewey, J. (1965) *My Pedagogic Creed*. Teachers College Press.
- Dias, B, Maddox, S, Klengel, T & Ressler, K. (2016) Epigenetic mechanisms underlying learning and the inheritance of learned behaviors. *Trends Neuroscience*, 38(2): 96–107. doi:10.1016/j.tins/2014.12.003
- Filatova, E, Orlov, A & Afanas'ev, S. (2018) The relationship between prefrontal cortex neuron activity in the two hemispheres on performance of a choice task in a two-ring maze. *Neuroscience & Behavioural Physiology*, 48(1): 11–15.
- Frias-Lasserre, D, Villagra, CA & Guerrero-Bosagna, C. (2018) Stress in the educational system as a potential source of epigenetic influence on children's development and behavior. *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience*. doi:10.3389/fnbeh.2018.00143
- Ginsburg, M, Archer, D, Barerra-Osorio, F & Lake, L, Vally, S, Wachter, N & Ulrick, J. (2018) CER moderated discussion on 'World Development Report 2018: Realizing the promise of education for development.' *Comparative Education Review*, 62(2): 274–293. doi:10.1086/697292
- Hattie, J & Larsen, S. (2020) *The Purposes of Education*. Routledge.
- Heckman, J. (2008) Schools, skills, and synapses. *Economic Inquiry*, 46(3): 289–324. doi:10.3386/w14064
- Held, D, McGrew, A, Goldblatt, D & Perraton, J. (1999) *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture*. Polity.
- Jantz, G. (2014, February 27) Brain differences between genders: Do you ever wonder why men and women think so differently? *Psychology Today* [online]. Available at <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/hope-relationships/201402/brain-differences-between-genders> [accessed 24 May 2020].
- Mafoud, T, McLean, S & Rose, N (eds). (2017) *Progress in Brain Research*. Elsevier.
- Mansuy, I & Mohanna, S. (2011, May 25) Epigenetics and the human brain: Where nurture meets nature. *The Dana Foundation* [online]. Available at http://dana.org/Cerebrum/2011/Epigenetics_and_the_Human_Brain_Where_Nurture_Meets_Nature [accessed 12 July 2018].
- McEwan, B. (2015) Epigenetics and learning. *Trends in Neuroscience & Education*, 4(4): 108–111. doi:10.1016/j.tine.2015.11.002
- Meyer, D. (2016) *Koors*. Human & Rousseau.
- Mikkola, M. (2019) Feminist perspectives on sex and gender. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [online]. Available at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-gender/> [accessed 20 April 2020].
- Peters, R & Hirst, P. (1970) *The Logic of Education*. Routledge/Kegan Paul.
- Ranciere, J. (2010) *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Bloomsbury.

- Reddy, V, Soudien, C & Winnaar, L. (2020, May 5) The impact of school closures on education outcomes in South Africa. *The Conversation* [online]. Available at <https://theconversation.com/impact-of-school-closures-on-education-outcomes-in-south-africa-136889> [accessed 24 May 2020].
- Reimers, F & Schleicher, A. (2020) *A Framework to Guide an Education Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic of 2020*. OECD.
- Rose, N. (2012) The human sciences in a biological age. *ICS Occasional Paper*, 3(1) [online]. Available at http://www.uws.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/282484/ICS_Occasional_Paper_Series_3_1_Rose_Final.pdf [accessed 28 June 2018].
- Rose, N. (2019) *Our Psychiatric Future*. Polity Press.
- Saavedra, J. (2020, March 30) Educational challenges and opportunities of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. *Education for Global Development* [online]. Available at <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/educational-challenges-and-opportunities-covid-19-pandemic> [accessed 24 May 2020].
- Soudien, C. (2020) Complexities of difference and their significance for managing inequality in learning: Lessons from the Covid-19 crisis. *Prospects*. doi:10.1007/s11125-020-09486-x
- Soudien, C & Harvey, J. (2020) Trouble in our consensus: The politics of learning in the contemporary period. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*. doi:1080/14681366.2020.1716836
- Stern, Y. (2002) What is cognitive reserve? Theory and research application of the reserve concept. *Journal of the International Neuropsychological Society*, 8, 448–460.
- Stone, H. (1981) *The Common and the Diverse: A Profile of Comparative Education*. McGraw-Hill.
- Straughan, R & Wilson, J. (1983) *Philosophizing About Education*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Taylor, C. (2005) *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Duke University Press.
- UNESCO. (1990) *World Declaration on Education for All and Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs*. Adopted by the World Conference on Education for All Framework ‘Meeting Basic Learning Needs.’ Jomtien, Thailand: UNESCO, 5–9 March.
- UNESCO. (2020) *COVID Education Response* [online]. Available at <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse> [accessed 24 May 2020].
- van Schalkwyk, O. (1988) *The Education System: Theory and Practice*. Alkanto.
- Wang, P, Kong, R, Kong, X, Liegeois, R, Orban, C, Deco, G, van den Heuwel, M, Yeo, B. (2019) Inversion of a large-scale circuit model reveals a cortical hierarchy in the dynamic resting human brain. *Science Advances*, 5(1). doi:10.1126/sciadv.aat7854
- World Bank. (2018) *Learning to Realize Education’s Promise: World Development Report 2018*. World Bank.
- Youdell, D. (2016) A biosocial education future? *Research in Education*, 96(1) [online]. Available at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0034523716664579> [accessed 29 January 2019].

Notes on the author

Professor Crain Soudien is Chief Executive Officer of the Human Sciences Research Council and an Emeritus Professor at the University of Cape Town in Education and African Studies.

Address for correspondence

csoudien@hsrc.ac.za

Evidence and education policy making in South Africa during Covid-19: Promises, researchers and policymakers in an age of unpredictability

Yusuf Sayed

University of Sussex and Cape Peninsula University of Technology

Marcina Singh

Cape Peninsula University of Technology

Abstract

The effects of Covid-19 have impacted every aspect of social life in the Global North and Global South. The nature of the pandemic has exacerbated social inequalities and plunged fragile economies and the impoverished into disarray. The response to the pandemic globally has been premised primarily on advice from the science fraternity with little or no input from humanities or social science experts. The merging of science and government has led to some questionable policies, particularly in the education context. It is these contestations and contradictions that this article discusses, focusing on the complex interplay between research and policy making, and the notion of policy overreach. Further, it explores worrisome education trends that the pandemic has set in motion whilst pointing to gaps and omissions in the current education debate. It concludes by mapping an embryonic progressive education agenda in response to the pandemic.

Keywords: Covid-19, pandemic, education inequality, education policy making, SDG 4, curriculum, education privatisation, education quality, affective dimension of learning

Sayed, Y & Singh, M. (2020) Evidence and education policy making in South Africa during Covid-19: Promises, researchers and policymakers in an age of unpredictability. *Southern African Review of Education*, 26(1): 20–39.

Introduction

The effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the modern world is unprecedented. Whilst the pandemic has impacted all, it has thrown into sharp relief the fault lines of the world's inequalities. Experiences of the rich and the impoverished have always been significantly different. However, Covid-19 has added to the existing struggle and suffering of the poor by shocking their fragile ecosystems into meltdown. It has also simultaneously up-ended utilitarian social, political and economic market privileging dogmas that, a year ago, would have seemed unpalatable to the most ardent neoliberal.

The pandemic is not just a health crisis; it is a crisis of inequality and neoliberalism, a crisis of disaster capitalism and decades of austerity programmes and sustained attacks on fragile public systems and services provided by the state. The pandemic has forced governments to speedily develop economic and social policies that can guide citizens to the 'new reality' in order to minimise the spread and effects of current and possibly future threats, particularly in the social sectors of education and health. The urgency of the response required and the bewildering array of competing imperatives governments must reconcile in managing the egregious effects of the pandemic, call for critical scrutiny of the education policy choices made and the options that experts and pundits have put on the table.

This article reviews relevant public academic debates and literature to unpack the discursive policy imaginary of education policymakers and policy experts as they seek to navigate, calibrate and justify particular education responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, this article seeks to understand how education policies are conditioned by the uncertainty and unpredictability that accompany periods of global social upheaval and the attending information asymmetries.

Using critical policy analysis (CPA), the article critically reviews education policies and choices, both globally and nationally, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic with a particular focus on South Africa. CPA provides a useful lens to unpack the choices and consequences of education policies and 'the complex connections between education and the relations of dominance and subordination in the larger society' (Apple 2018: 1). Specifically, CPA enables a critical conversation of how existing global and national social inequalities are exacerbated in and through education as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. This article seeks to animate a discussion surrounding future progressive education agendas in times of crisis and uncertainty, as is the case at present.

Framed as a critical policy exploration of the effects of Covid-19 on education policy making and choices, this article begins with a discussion of the impact of the pandemic on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that seek to eradicate poverty, promote sustainable development and mitigate inequality. This first section pays particular attention to the education goal, SDG 4, exploring how the pandemic is likely to stymie its laudable ambition of the provision of equitable and quality learning for all. Global policy analysis of the SDGs in the context of the Covid-19 crisis brings into sharp relief the intersection of science and evidence for informing policy making

during crisis, globally and nationally. In problematising the manner in which science and evidence have been used – or misused – to inform education policy making in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the second and third sections of this article examine education policy choices in South Africa, and associated consequences. A discursive unravelling of the policy narrative from the global to the national level is incomplete without illuminating vital education policy gaps and silences, laying the groundwork for an embryonic progressive future education agenda in the concluding section of this article.

The SDG agenda in the context of the pandemic: Compounding inequalities

The Covid-19 pandemic emerged five years after the global commitment to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals agreed by all countries at the United General Assembly in September 2015. These 17 SDGs – including the eradication of extreme poverty (Goal 1), zero hunger (Goal 2), equitable and quality education (Goal 4) and reduced inequality (Goal 10) – seek to create a prosperous, peaceful and sustainable planet. However, the realisation of these goals, and in particular the education goal, is complicated by the Covid-19 pandemic for several reasons.

Without a doubt, achievement of the SDGs is challenged by Covid-19. Pandemics of health, like the degradation of the environment, are global in cause, consequences and effects, but the responses have not necessarily been so. Commitment to partnerships as key to achieving the SDGs seems, in some cases, to have been eschewed in favour of national interest resulting in narrow nationalist approaches to education policy making – particularly in some countries in the Global North. The withdrawal of the USA from the World Health Organization (WHO) is one such example. The USA is the WHO's biggest donor, contributing approximately \$900 million for 2018/19 through voluntary and assessed contributions (WHO 2020a). This USA withdrawal undermines global efforts to eradicate existing viruses and diseases and could undermine the world's ability to respond to other public health threats as well (Branswell 2020). Although the WHO still plays an important role in managing the pandemic globally by advising countries, including South Africa, there is tension between the global focus of multilateral agencies such as the WHO and the nationalist approach of some governments such as the USA. While Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General of the WHO, heralded this a 'time for all of us to be united in our common struggle against a common threat' (WHO 2020b: para. 13), this idea of a 'common global response' is under siege by some. If the SDGs are to be achieved, then sustaining progressive forms of multilateralism and coordinated global responses in a post-pandemic context is imperative.

Efforts to realise the ambitious agenda of the SDGs are made difficult in the midst of poverty, increasing inequality and economic disparity. The most recent assessment of SDG progress notes increasing inequality among and within countries; higher extreme poverty in rural areas than urban areas; rapid and increasing levels of environmental degradation and global warming; rise in global hunger; and increasing deprivation, violent conflicts and vulnerabilities to natural disasters (United Nations Statistics 2019). Persistent global inequalities predate the pandemic. The

simple reality is that even prior to the pandemic, ‘more than 820 million people regularly go to bed hungry of whom about 135 million suffer from acute hunger largely due to man-made conflicts, climate change and economic downturns’ (United Nations 2020: para. 1). Inequality and conflict have been features of many countries in the Global South such as Libya and Yemen, for example. In this already debilitating context, the current pandemic intensifies and accelerates effects of poverty and inequality. With this pandemic, achieving the SDG ambitions of equality and prosperity is a heightened challenge; the lives and livelihoods of the impoverished face ruin and the fragility of the global economy accelerates inequalities.

A further major concern for global education efforts to achieve the SDGs, and the education SDG 4 in particular, is that both domestic education resources and international aid may be redirected from education to respond to the pandemic. It is important to acknowledge that even before the pandemic, international aid to education was stagnating (UNESCO 2017), a trend that is likely to be intensified as governments focus on national economic growth priorities. The Global Education Monitoring Report highlights that ‘aid to education has been stagnant since 2010, and the aid that is given often does not go to the countries most in need, worsening the prospects for achieving global education goals’ (UNESCO 2017: 1).

In many ways, the Covid-19 pandemic, by accelerating inequalities and fraying the bonds of multilateralism, obstructs the SDGs. Further, it brings into question existing global priorities and commitments for tackling inequities given that many countries have redirected international aid for domestic needs. The Global North, for example, which is committed to providing 0.7% GNI for aid, is likely to redirect this for narrow national goals, as evident in the merger of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for International Development (DFID) in the UK.

The pandemic halts the attainment of the global development agenda through a potential retreat into narrow national concerns and a reprioritisation of international and domestic resources. The adverse impact of the pandemic on the global development agenda can be mitigated by ensuring that global efforts during and post pandemic are coordinated. An important starting point is to argue for debt relief for countries in the Global South as well as additional funds, as advocated for by the president of Rwanda (Uwiringiyimana 2020). The pandemic as a global health crisis must *not* also become a crisis of global efforts to eradicate poverty and inequality.

Science, evidence and education policy making: Assuming policy linearity and the danger of policy overreach

The previous section argued that the pandemic is a global concern requiring a global response. However, the effects of the pandemic are likely to be different between the affluent Global North and impoverished Global South. Countries in the Global South are more likely to be the ‘hardest hit by the virus [and] will also face a debt crisis’ (World Bank 2020a: para. 4). Furthermore, the World Bank has noted that ‘most countries are expected to face recessions in 2020 . . . and every

region is subject to substantial growth downgrades' with East and South Asia, the Pacific, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa being the hardest hit (World Bank 2020b: para. 5). Sanchez-Paramo (2020) asserts that the pandemic will hit poor countries the hardest because of existing social and economic problems, pushing upwards of 49 million people into poverty, and to whom she refers as the 'new poor.' This potentially undermines the progress that has already been made toward the SDGs. In this context, the response to the pandemic must factor in and sustain the existing global commitment towards the SDGs under worsening economic, social and political conditions. This section explores the relationship between science, evidence and policy making to better understand how governments globally, and in South Africa specifically, have responded to the pandemic and the attendant consequences for education policy. The South African government's policy response to the pandemic has been heavily influenced by advice from medical science and public health professionals, including the World Health Organization (WHO).

Scientists have featured prominently in the ways in which countries have responded to the pandemic, including in South Africa. Media briefings on Covid-19 in the UK, for example, typically present government ministers and the prime minister flanked by one or more science advisors who are members of the government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) committee. South Africa has similarly involved scientists and scientific advice as the basis for policy formulation, policy choices and policy decision making. President Ramaphosa, in his 23 April 2020 speech, distinctly noted that the policy approach of the government was 'guided by the advice from scientists' (South African Government 2020b: para. 38) repeating in May, that 'scientists are the ones who continue to lead our efforts in all of this' (News24Wire 2020b: para.3).

The preeminence accorded to science and the invocation to 'follow the science and scientific advice' has brought the ideas of science and evidence to the fore even in education, ostensibly reflecting an evidence-informed approach to policy making. This embedding of science in policy making in South Africa has been primarily in the form of the Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC) for Covid-19, comprising many members of the science fraternity: approximately 51 doctors, clinicians, public health academics, pathologists and other health care professionals (Department of Health 2020). However, as Paterson (2020) astutely notes, there are very few individuals on the committee with expertise about the broader societal impact of the virus. In response, the South African government has incorporated the work of social scientists into its deliberations of response to the pandemic.

There are several important observations about the linkage between science, evidence and policy making in general, and education in particular, in relation to the pandemic and how it has been dealt with globally and in South Africa. Whilst there is a global trend amongst governments to call upon the science fraternity to advise policymakers during times of crisis, as is happening in the current pandemic (Jasanoff 1998), scientists do not have all the solutions; as with social science, the orientation of their research varies, often leading to different and sometimes contradictory views (de Vos 2020). In a review of the epidemiology wars in the context of the crisis, Fuller (2020: para. 3) adroitly sums the debate between scientists by noting different and competing

scientific traditions in epidemiology that have been critical in decisions concerning virus trajectory and government response:

Answering these questions [questions about the epidemiology of the virus trajectory and spread] requires reconciling two competing philosophies in the science of Covid-19. . . . To some extent, public health epidemiology and clinical epidemiology are distinct traditions in health care, competing philosophies of scientific knowledge. In one camp are infectious disease epidemiologists who work closely with institutions of public health. [In another camp] are several clinical epidemiologists, who typically provide guidance for clinical practice – regarding, for example, the effectiveness of medical interventions – rather than public health.

And nowhere is the lack of evidentiary consensus and misuse of science more apparent than in the debate surrounding the (mis)use of hydroxychloroquine as a vaccine. It is telling that the application of this treatment promoted the cancellation of a trial and retraction of an article by the *Lancet*, a prestigious medical journal.

In South Africa, scientific evidence mixed with policy is most apparent in the case of Professor Gray, Chair of South African Medical Council, who publicly rebuked the government for its stance on the lockdown (Karrim & Evans 2020; News24Wire 2020a). Whilst much of the debate focused on issues of academic freedom in relation to Professor Gray's intervention (see Singh et al. 2020), less attention has been paid to critical exploration of where scientific research ends and the craft of policy making begins. In this specific case, Professor Gray overreached her role as scientist providing advice and, instead, chose to act as policymaker.

This illustrates the risk of placing uncritical faith in science as the sole basis of policy making in the time of a fast moving, dynamic and transmuting pandemic. There is insufficient rigorous data and information available at any one point in time in this pandemic on which to establish an informed and deliberative research consensus that is free of the risk of becoming outdated in a short span of time. As Grundman (2020: para. 3) observes: 'Being led by science evokes a linear model of policy making which is more a myth than reality. In reality, politicians use claims about scientific knowledge in order to justify a course of action.'

A particular intervention by researchers and their use of evidence in education policy is a statement by the South African Paediatric Association (SAPA) and academics van der Berg and Spaul (2020) broadcasting support and advocacy for school opening. The SAPA statement notes 'the relatively scant and weak quality of available evidence, particularly from resource-poor settings' and yet argues for schooling opening (2020: 3). Despite this dearth of evidence, the association claims it is 'necessary to make decisions about the return to school balancing the risks and benefits of any actions' (ibid.: 3). It is disconcerting that an eminent group of medical scholars can make sweeping 'prescriptions' about the opening of schools whilst noting that even though 'many measures [water sanitation, waste management, social distancing, etc.] are not available, SAPA's view is that educational activities should nevertheless commence as safely as is possible, while the government expediently attends to addressing any deficiencies' (Daily Maverick 2020: para. 25). The reality is that the 'deficiencies' in education in South Africa are deep and reflect structural

inequalities between the rich and the impoverished, as noted earlier.

These two examples of researchers advocating for school opening highlight several aspects of policy worth noting. First, it suggests a policy overreach that is premised on a direct link between science and education policy in the South African context, or globally, and notwithstanding the complexities and inequalities of the South African educational context. In other words, decision making based solely on science cannot be the basis of informed (evidence-based) decision making, especially if the science on which the evidence is based is contested, partial, incomplete and framed ideologically and politically by the very research community that generates it. The myth of a causal link is, as Weiss (1979) point outs, just that – a myth. Furthermore, there is a narrow conception that research advice is translated into direct policy choices of governments. In fact, Weiss (1979: 426) observes that although a mutual interest exists between social scientists and government, ‘it is important to understand what “using research” actually means.’ For example, just because research on Covid-19 suggests children are less affected by the virus, this does not mean that it is suitable or safe to reopen schools.

Second, the overreach of evidence in educational policy making assumes a particular ontology of the social world and school that is conceived of in numerical terms and in which potentially harmful experiential impact on the lives of the teachers, pupils and administrators who inhabit such institutional spaces is largely discounted. In the context of the pandemic, this has been manifest in the idea of *herd immunity*, which WHO spokesman Mike Ryan noted as problematic – ‘Humans are not herds’ (Forrest 2020: para. 4) – cautioning against a numbers approach for policy in which human lives, living and livelihood are not unequivocally at the centre of policy decision making (Damon 2020). Thus, a prescription about opening or closing schools is more than a matter of rate of infection or whether children are prone to the virus or carriers of it; it must have as its first, if not primary consideration, the human dimensions and consequences of policy, which organisations such as the SAPA ignore and discount. Policy choice cannot be viewed simply monocularly, it must be magnified binocularly – through the multidimensional prism embedded in the complexity of human experience.

Third, such examples reveal how the policy expert (an informed provider of advice) has strayed into the territory of the policymaker (a decisionmaker and implementer of advice, not all necessarily informed). In Bauman’s (1987) terms, it is important to be clear about *intellectuals as interpreters* and *intellectuals as legislators*. Policymakers in democratic societies are elected officials. Conflating roles runs a risk of misunderstanding the different knowledge bases and rationalities of researchers and policy experts on one hand, and government policymakers on the other. This is crucial to note because ‘research and policy actors are moved by divergent sets of values, norms and ideas about what is socially desirable or undesirable, effective or ineffective, when dealing with the articulation of research and policy’ (Solinis & Baya-Laffite 2011: 105). There is a particular risk of policy overreach in that researchers see their approach as providing the only basis for making decisions. This is not the case. Policy choice operates on the calculus in which science is just one important factor. In fact, Grundman (2020: para. 2) goes so far as to

claim, ‘scientific knowledge is often irrelevant to policy making.’ Whilst the case may be overstated here, Grundman’s caution echoes Rizvi and Lingard (2010), arguing that policy is about the authoritative allocation of values. Policy decisions are not purely technical and technocratic choices but matters of political choice:

What makes this an incredibly muddy debate is that every side views itself as being the proper practitioner of science-enlightened defence or critique – whether in pushing for the extension of some aspects of lockdown, or its relaxation. In weaponizing science, economics or mathematics, the assumptions are smuggled in and asserted as fact, when more often than not they are merely an opinion of this or that expert. But the question of what ends we seek is not answered by economics or science; it is a moral and political debate. (Shoki 2020: para. 6)

In a sense, this debate about listening to policy advice in making education choices suggests avoiding the risk of ‘high-minded, elite technocratic rationality’ that assumes that good research will magically resolve intense political debates about choice (Shoki 2020: para. 7). Governing by technocratic rationality is no better than governing through a flawed democratic system of elected representatives.

Unpacking common education policy choices as a response to the pandemic in South Africa

Policy making in education, requiring deliberative dialogue on education policy choices, should involve more than just the voices and perspectives of the research community (whether natural/medical scientist or social scientist). It is vital to consider citizens’ needs, particularly those in high-risk and impoverished communities (Bank 2020). That way it is possible to develop an education policy approach framed within a broadened notion of evidence-informed education policy making. In this section, we unpack two education responses to the pandemic that we argue offer a narrow vision of education, advocate for a solution that increases inequality, and increase the privatisation of public education provision.

Understanding the purpose of schooling and education: Where has the pedagogy and relationality of learning gone?

A remarkable feature of the debate about the impact of Covid-19 and education responses is the strong focus on educational content. Rearranging school timetabling, extending the school year and increasing teaching hours for each learning area focus education policy attention on the loss of learning content, measured by the amount of time children are expected to spend on learning. Underpinning this understanding of education in times of crises is the notion of learning as curriculum coverage. In other words, school closure as a response to the pandemic is understood as the loss of learning content due to insufficient time for covering the content specified in the curriculum. A narrow focus on the curriculum and content of learning (cognitive learning) is the current concern globally, with much talk about the ‘learning crisis’ and ‘learning poverty’ (Saavedra 2020). In South Africa, Reddy et al. (2020) have entered this debate by modelling learning loss arising from school closure (Figure 1). Figure 1 is a hypothetical model that considers

learning loss using a kernel density plot, modelling learning differences between fee paying and no-fee schools. Their argument, unsurprisingly, is that school closures will have far-reaching learning effects on different socioeconomic groups. This study suggests that inequities in learning measured by scores in mathematics using the full Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) data will be exacerbated.

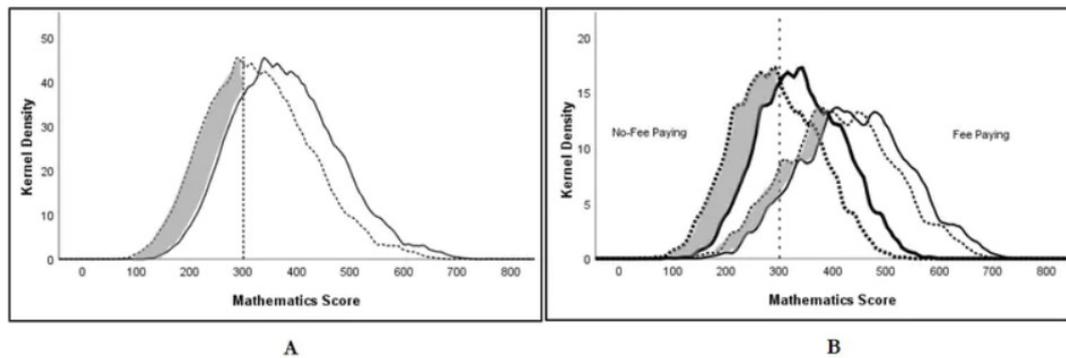


Figure 1: Learning averages between fee paying and no-fee schools (Reddy et al. 2020)

The notion of *loss of learning time* assumes that only content learning happens in school. This obsession with curriculum coverage suggests a narrow understanding of the purpose of schooling. While the concern with learning content is understandable, a narrow focus on the loss of learning and a learning gap approach limits the vision and purposes of education given that learning is much more than the learning of content. It is equally about socialisation, developing relationships and learning social and civic skills for navigating life in a democratic post-schooling context. Darling-Hammond et al. (2020: 97) echo this view, arguing that education and, more specifically, schooling should focus not only on the child as a vessel who needs to learn content but as a child to be developed holistically.

Sayed et al. (2018) argue that schooling is not only about learning subject content knowledge, but also about learning affective skills that develop critical thinking and knowledgeable citizens. Thus, the South African government's request that teachers keep learners engaged in learning content reveals an unnecessarily parochial understanding of schooling. Because this content-focused curriculum approach privileges the coverage of content and cognitive learning, pedagogy and the affective dimension of schools are rendered invisible and delegitimised. This content-focused approach ignores the ideas of education as socially relational, and learning as a socially constitutive activity occurring relationally between learners and teachers, and amongst learners themselves. Content-focused curriculum, on which much online learning relies, tends to instrumentalise education and learning, reducing the expansive notion of education quality to content mastery. The pandemic should provoke deliberative dialogues on the aims of education. A centre for international teacher education study investigating teaching in South Africa argues that the quality of learning experiences, including the affective dimensions of learning, have the greatest impact in learners' lives (Sayed et al. 2018).

Whilst much heat has been generated about school closure and school opening, the key issue that

has not received attention is the logic behind the phasing-in approach. It is noteworthy that there has been constant disruption in the phasing-in approach. At the time of writing, there is much discussion about the cancellation of the 2020 school year in South Africa. This throws in doubt the policy advice and advocacy for the opening of schools. Most countries, including South Africa and Somalia, have opened school for those at the terminal end of the different schooling phases. In a media statement on 1 June, 2020, the South African Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, discussed the operational plans for learners to return to school, initially prioritising the opening of school for Grades 7 and 12 (South African Government 2020a). Similarly in Somalia, schools will reopen for a short while in June before the end of the school year in July for the purposes of examination, suggesting an obsession with high stakes examinations consistent with a narrow obsession of curriculum coverage for learning.

Online learning: A solution seeking a problem to solve

A common global education response to the pandemic has been the move towards online education to offset the repercussions of school closures. Many advocates of '21st century skills' – online learning and the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) – in South Africa motivate for online learning as the solution for the learning lost (see Marwala 2020).

Advocacy of online learning masks the serious digital divide between and within countries. Research undertaken by the UNESCO Teacher Task Force (2020: para. 3) notes that in sub-Saharan Africa, '89% of learners do not have access to household computers and 82% lack internet access.' Further, 'while mobile phones can enable learners' access to information, connect with their teachers and with one another, about 56 million learners live in locations not served by mobile networks, almost half in sub-Saharan Africa' (ibid: para. 4). These variations in access exacerbate inequities in learning in which 'richer households are better placed to sustain learning through online learning strategies, although with a lot of effort and challenges for teachers and parents' (Reddy et al. 2020: para. 7).

Inequities in access to online learning platforms and software are compounded by differences in cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). Rich parents generally have the knowledge, competence, resources and skills to support online and home learning. Online learning also requires active mediation of learning, which is disproportionately unequal between rich and impoverished households. A study by the Human Sciences Research Council on early educational environments found that only a third of parents read books to their children or played with alphabets, numbers and word games and that there were stark differences reported between parents of learners in fee schools and no-fee schools (Isdale et al. 2015). The digital divide exacerbates already existing learning gaps in South Africa where 'online learning, tests and exams will only be enjoyed by the privileged few' (Bashman 2020: para. 10).

The creeping privatisation of public education: Home schooling and public-private partnerships

The lockdown that has seen schools closed in South Africa for at least three months has, in large

measure, shifted responsibility to parents for ensuring that their children remain engaged in academic learning. This has had three consequences.

First, the number of online education providers has surged to unprecedented levels. Online schools seem to be a suitable solution for parents who are working from home to engage their children in meaningful and structured learning. Li and Lalani (2019: para. 3) argue that even before the pandemic ‘there was already high growth and adoption in education technology, with global edtech investments reaching US\$18.66 billion in 2019 and the overall market for online education projected to reach \$350 billion by 2025.’ Although online learning has been increasing in the last 10 years, the pandemic has catapulted its growth and may very well completely disrupt traditional learning methods and what we understand as ‘schooling.’ However, only those learners who have access to technological infrastructure, typically dependent on financial resources, reap full benefits of these futuristic pedagogies.

Second, the number of parents choosing to home school their children has increased considerably. According to the Statistics South Africa (2011) census, between 1997 and 2011 the number of learners who were being home schooled increased from 2,000 to 57,000; this mode of education is rapidly becoming a viable option for parents. In South Africa, it is predominantly the middle class, mainly the white middle class, who are abandoning the public space of education by choosing to home school. Home schooling predates the pandemic, stemming from a reaction of many white Christian Right parents in the 1900s against the school curriculum changes then. As home schooling becomes more commonplace, with many keeping their children at home for safety concerns, it is likely that a number of learners will not return to public schools, ultimately deinstitutionalising schools.

The decision to close schools and keep school children at home has worsened inequalities for working mothers (Werber 2020). A study by the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge and Zurich on inequalities consequent of the pandemic relating to education and gender found that, as a result of the pandemic, women suffered the biggest setbacks because they generally do the bulk of the childcare including the home schooling (Adams-Prassl et al. 2020). In South Africa, just over 2.7 million children are enrolled in early childhood development (ECD) programmes (Ilifa Labantwana et al. 2020). However, the closure of almost 30,000 of these early childhood development centres, which employ around 175,000 adults serving many children, adversely impacts the poor, and women in particular (Cruywagen 2020). Not only are such centres vital sources of employment for women, but they support women’s participation in the labour market because ‘the ECD workforce is largely female and Black African’ (Ilifa Labantwana et al. 2020: 8). In the absence of child care support, many women are forced to stay at home rather than work, undermining progress towards gender equality in the country’s workforce. Further, ECD programmes perform an educational function supporting young children in developing the necessary literacy, numeracy and social skills.

Third, the pandemic has also resulted in an increase of public private partnerships (PPPs). The way in which a catastrophic crisis, whilst potentially offering the space for a progressive education

agenda, ends up reducing the idea and practice of public education is best illustrated in the USA after Hurricane Katrina demolished most of New Orleans in 2005. New Orleans initially took control of public schools, later turning them over to nonprofit charter schools and ending the union contract (Harris 2020). As government fiscal costs increase post pandemic, the fiscal space for state commitment to public education will be reduced and, by default, the privatisation of education becomes the ‘new normal.’

By way of conclusion: Identifying the gaps and mapping a tentative future education agenda

The two sections above have mapped how the pandemic impacts the global education SDG agenda, how a particular notion of evidence-informed policy making has been invoked and, consequently, how the kind of education choices being made not only exacerbate inequities but set in motion worrisome future education trends. This article concludes by identifying key gaps in these debates and providing a prospective future education agenda to turn the current crisis into a positive public good.

Neglecting teachers and the psychosocial

Public and policy discourse tends to frame teachers and teaching in deficient ways, with teachers presented as the education problem. This is revealed in the current discourse of teachers in the pandemic. Teachers are presented as unhealthy and with multiple comorbidities. At the same time, they are asked to service learners in the absence of adequate support systems, including teacher professional development. During lockdown, teachers were expected to shift to online learning without consideration of whether teachers had either the facilities (laptops, data and bandwidth) or pedagogical knowledge to facilitate learning online. Now that schools are reopening, teachers are required to teach using social distancing measures (SDMs). It is assumed that teachers will seamlessly adjust their teaching in accordance with new protocols. The experience of teachers is summarised in this analogy by Jacklin (2020: para. 13):

The dilemma in which teachers are placed can be compared to that of a surgeon who, having previously been asked to do heart surgery with no equipment other than a rusty pocket knife, is now asked to do this in the dark.

It is important, as Jacklin reminds us, that teachers and their representatives be integral to the making of policy choices. This is the case particularly for impoverished rural and township schools, where ‘the fabric of schooling is worn to a breaking point’ and further exacerbated by the pandemic (Jacklin 2020: para. 15). The Minister has called for schools to practice social distancing measures, but it is challenging for teachers to facilitate in classrooms lacking adequate infrastructure. Poor sanitation, a dearth of desks and limited classrooms all militate against quality teaching that incorporates SDMs.

A focus on learning as content ignores the psychosocial needs of learners and the idea of schooling as more than just an institution for learning the basics (literacy and numeracy). More than 13

million learners have been directly affected by pandemic school closures. The lockdown has had both physical and psychological effects on learners, especially the poor. UNICEF (2020a) reports that when schools closed, crucial social services such as school meals were no longer available to vulnerable children. The closure of schools has affected the nutrition of approximately 350 million learners worldwide (UNICEF 2020b).

The lockdown has also contributed to an increase in abuse and neglect, gender-based violence, sexual exploitation of children and terrible anxiety (UNICEF 2020a). For many learners, schools are a safe haven that protects them from exposure to abuse. Impoverished learners, not the wealthy, have borne, and continue to bear, the brunt of this closure.

Rethinking education dogmas and orthodoxies

The current ostensibly science-led, evidence-based education approach sees a return to the old as possibly the best way forward to establish a new normal with multimodal, blended and online approaches sprinkled in. This Covid-19 pandemic presents the opportunity to rethink orthodoxies and long-held education dogmas in diverse ways and opens possibilities for reconfiguring society and education in new ways. For example, who would have imagined that hardened neoliberals obsessed with GDP-to-debt ratio and growth-at-all-cost would permit untrammelled public spending, including providing work security? The way that schools in New Orleans adapted after Hurricane Katrina makes this point: the state of New Orleans ‘took over almost all the city’s public schools’ and ‘attendance zones, which assign students to the schools they attend based on where they live, were eliminated so that families had a chance to choose any schools they wished’ (Harris 2020: para. 7). However, this has not been the case post crisis, as noted below.

The manner in which a society adapts during and after a crisis is critical; it can help inaugurate positive changes and developments. India provides an example of how Covid-19 may effect change. There, the pandemic disrupted the significant Grade 10 and 12 board exams that have been integral to their education since colonial times:

All important matters relating to school such as prescribing the curriculum, fixing the academic calendar, use of textbooks and most importantly, conducting examinations to assess students’ learning went out of the humble local school master’s control to an elaborate bureaucratic apparatus. (Nawani 2020: para. 3)

The exams were not primarily about learning, but rather about control. Simply because we have been ‘doing education’ a certain way for a long time does not mean it is suitable for now.

Creeping surveillance, authoritarianism, and demonisation: The rise of the nationalist surveillance state

The current pandemic has stirred discussions of key questions, including the interface between hard science and social sciences. At the same time, attention needs to be paid to the negative trends set in motion with this pandemic such as the growing trend towards centralisation, with decision making in South Africa being centralised in the National Coordinating and Command Council. Centralised oversight needs to be balanced with public deliberation and engagement in dealing

with crises.

Crucially, media and policy discourses have been silent on how the pandemic has revealed the Janus-like nature of disaster capitalism. On the one hand, certain groups are demonised and othered as responsible for the spread of the pandemic. Historically, scapegoating has long been orchestrated towards minorities: Jews blamed for the outbreak of the Black Death in Europe (McNeil Jr. 2020), Haitians blamed for AIDS in the USA (Yong 2016), Irish immigrants blamed for the spread of cholera in the USA (Mihm 2020). In India, state discourse and right-wing fascism have crafted an Islamophobic narrative in which Muslims are responsible for the spread of the virus. As Slater and Masih (2020: para. 4) in the *Washington Post* report, ‘the search for scapegoats during the Coronavirus pandemic has focused squarely on the country’s sizable Muslim minority, a community of 200 million that felt under threat even before the advent of Covid-19.’ The physical violence perpetrated towards Muslims in India has also taken place through social media. Hashtag #CoronaJihad, trending on social media sites, has been circulated by officials from the country’s ruling party. China and Chinese people have also been vilified as the point of origin of the virus.

The ethno-nationalism that has surfaced in this pandemic belies the fact that, in many countries, the impoverished and vulnerable minorities have been most adversely affected. For example, in the UK, the black and minority ethnic (BAME) community has been the most adversely impacted. A public health report released by the UK government notes that those from the BAME community are more likely to suffer infection and die from Covid-19 (Public Health England 2020). Yet members of this very same BAME community work diligently on the frontline of the UK’s health care system. Ironically, on the first day of celebration for NHS Day in the UK, newspapers all carried images of NHS staff with barely a single image of a person of colour.

Second, allied to the process of othering has been a strong chauvinistic nationalism pervading the discourse surrounding the virus. Individual states have turned obsessively self-interested in terms of national needs such as vaccines, ventilators and protective personal equipment (PPE). A global pandemic has provoked a return to narrow versions of nationalism, including ‘vaccine nationalism.’ The pandemic has unleashed a policy response that is a retreat from the idea of collective public global good and threatens the achievement of the SDGs. Multilateralism as a way of dealing with global problems is increasingly brittle in this pandemic but not broken and resists, when possible, the narrow nationalism of some countries in the Global North.

An embryonic progressive education agenda

This article concludes by sketching a progressive agenda for the pandemic with social justice at its core. It is evident that what needs protection in the pandemic is an expanded view of quality education. Sayed and Moriarty (2020) argue that quality education equally privileges the affective dimension of learning as much as the cognitive. This affective dimension includes learning that tackles racism, xenophobia and prejudice of the kind that the pandemic has stoked, often deliberately inflamed by political leaders. It will also emphasise psychosocial learning, supporting both learners and teachers. In this way, it will contribute to overcoming the chauvinistic

nationalism and national identities that have come to characterise this pandemic. Importantly, quality education requires a teaching and learning environment free from fear and anxiety, a condition that cannot be guaranteed in the current context in many countries.

Such a model of education must be aligned with a progressive political agenda that tackles the most egregious effects of disaster capitalism and neoliberalism. Countries that have coped well with the pandemic socially, politically and economically have been those that are anything but neoliberal. Their success has come from their sustained investments in public education and public health and by promoting egalitarian and inclusive forms of economic growth, as the cases of Cuba and Vietnam make clear:

[They throw] the deadly incompetence of neoliberal Western governments, led by the United States and the United Kingdom, into harsh relief. . . . These governments, particularly those of its Anglo-American heartland, are caught in a scissor crisis: there is a widening gap between the mounting challenge and limited capacities – public health, governmental and political – whittled down by four decades of neoliberalism. (Desai 2020: paras 3–4)

Core to this belief of an expanded education vision and progressive political order is a strong commitment to a common public good, active citizenry, global collectivism and solidaristic sharing. The solution to the current global pandemic – a crisis of globalisation – is global. This means opposing the narrow insular approach to education and the social order in which education is reduced to instrumental ends. In particular, education policy needs to counter the growing privatisation and ‘uberisation’ of education in which the idea of a common public education is deinstitutionalised and delegitimised. For this to happen, there should be political will, collective mass action, mutual trust and a state that is responsive to the needs of the majority, particularly the marginalised and the poor. In this regard, Badat’s (2020: para. 8) critique of the 4IR notes: ‘The decisions that we make as a country, the policies and strategies we adopt are all in the realm of political and social choices. Choices that citizens and societies must make in any democracy worthy of its name.’ To this could be added policy choices that do not read science narrowly but elicit democratic and public debate – because how evidence informs policy choices made during the pandemic shapes the present as well as the future.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the National Research Foundation (NRF) for the financial support provided to the South African Research Chair in Teacher Education located at the Centre for International Teacher (CITE), Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT). We would also like to thank Professor Azeem Badroodien, Professor Aslam Fataar and the reviewers for their support and incisive critical feedback. However, we take full responsibility for any omissions and gaps in the final article.

References

- Adams-Prassl, A, Boneva, T, Golin, M & Rauh, C. (2020) *Inequality in the Impact of the Coronavirus Shock: Evidence From Real Time Surveys* [online]. Available at <https://www.inet.econ.cam.ac.uk/working-paper-pdfs/wp2018.pdf> [accessed 15 June 2020].

- Apple, M. (2018) On doing critical policy analysis. *Educational Policy*, (33)1: 3–15.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904818807307>
- Badat, S. (2020, June 1) The 4IR super-highway: A dangerously technocratic utopia. *Daily Maverick* [online]. Available at
<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2020-06-01-the-4ir-super-highway-a-dangerously-technocratic-utopia/#gsc.tab=0> [accessed 19 June 2020].
- Bank, L. (2020) Beyond a bio-medical fix: The value of ‘people’s science. *University World News* [online]. Available at <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200429151310413> [accessed 15 June 2020].
- Bashman, L. (2020) Online learning punishes the poor. *Independent Online* [online]. Available at <https://www.iol.co.za/news/opinion/online-learning-punishes-the-poor-46963674> [accessed 27 June 2020].
- Bauman, Z. (1987) *Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Post Modernity, and Intellectuals*. Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P & Passeron, JC. (1977) *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. SAGE.
- Branswell, H. (2020) *Experts Warn of Dire Global Health Consequences if U.S. Withdraws From the World Health Organization* [online]. Available at <https://www.statnews.com/2020/05/30/who-withdrawal-dire-consequences/> [accessed 15 June 2020].
- Cruywagen, V. (2020, May 5) Early childhood development sector faces major closures as parents scramble for fees. *Daily Maverick* [online]. Available at <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-05-05-early-childhood-development-sector-faces-major-closures-as-parents-scramble-for-fees/#gsc.tab=0> [accessed 26 June 2020].
- Daily Maverick. (2020, May 31) Paediatricians support move to reopen schools. *Daily Maverick* [online]. Available at <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-05-31-paediatricians-support-move-to-reopen-schools/#gsc.tab=0> [accessed 13 June 2020].
- Damon, A. (2020) The murderous pseudoscience of ‘herd immunity.’ *World Socialist Web Site (WSWS)* [online]. Available at <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/05/16/pers-m16.html> [accessed 15 June 2020].
- Darling-Hammond, L, Flook, L, Cook-Harvey, C, Barron, B & Osher, D. (2020) Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development. *Applied Developmental Science*, 24(2): 97–140. doi:10.1080/10888691.2018.1537791
- de Vos, D. (2020, April 28) COVID-19 in SA: The science, the politics and suspension of rights. *Daily Maverick* [online]. Available at <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2020-04-28-covid-19-in-sa-the-science-the-politics-and-the-suspension-of-rights/#gsc.tab=0> [accessed 13 June 2020].
- Department of Health. (2020) *Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC) on COVID-19 Terms of Reference: List of Sub-Committees and Chairs* [online]. Available at <http://www.health.gov.za/index.php/component/phocadownload/category/636#> [accessed 16 June 2020].
- Desai, R. (2020) *Political Hope Rises Defend Democracy Press* [online]. Available at <http://www.defenddemocracy.press/political-hope-rises/> [accessed 16 June 2020].

- Forrest, A. (2020) Coronavirus: WHO condemns idea of herd immunity for Covid-19 as 'dangerous.' *Independent* [online]. Available at <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/coronavirus-herd-immunity-who-uk-matt-hancock-a9510231.html> [accessed 14 July 2020].
- Fuller, J. (2020) *Models v. Evidence* [online]. Available at https://bostonreview.net/science-nature/jonathan-fuller-models-v-evidence?mc_cid=b3888e1229&mc_eid=3717605ac9 [accessed 15 June 2020].
- Grundman, R. (2020) Coronavirus: Do governments ever truly listen to 'the science'? *The Conversation* [online]. Available at <https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-do-governments-ever-truly-listen-to-the-science-134308> [accessed 13 June 2020].
- Harris, DN. (2020) How will COVID-19 change our schools in the long run? *Brown Centre Chalkboard* [online]. Available at <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2020/04/24/how-will-covid-19-change-our-schools-in-the-long-run/> [accessed 16 June 2020].
- Ilifa Labantwana, BRIDGE, NECDA, Nelson Mandela Foundation, Smartstart, SACECD (2020) *The Plight of the ECD Workforce: An Urgent Call for Relief in the Wake of COVID-19* [online]. Available at <https://ilifalabantwana.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Final-report-The-plight-of-the-ECD-workforce.pdf> [accessed 26 June 2020].
- Isdale, K, Reddy, V, Juan, A & Arends, F. (2015) *TIMSS 2015 Grade 5 National Report: Understanding Mathematics Achievement Amongst Grade 5 Learners in South Africa: Nurturing Green Shoots* [online]. Available at <https://www.hsrcpress.ac.za/books/timms-2015-grade-5-national-report> [accessed 13 June 2020].
- Jacklin, H. (2020, June 5) Reopening schools is an ill-considered move: Ask the teachers, not the economists. *Daily Maverick* [online]. Available at <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2020-06-05-reopening-schools-is-an-ill-considered-move-ask-the-teachers-not-the-economists/#gsc.tab=0> [accessed 12 June 2020].
- Jasanoff, S. (1998) *The Fifth Branch: Science Advisers as Policymakers*. Harvard University Press.
- Karrim, A & Evans, S. (2020) Covid-19: Another top scientist says experts are being sidelined. *News24* [online]. Available at <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/covid-19-another-top-scientist-says-experts-are-being-sidelined-20200524> [accessed 14 July 2020].
- Li, C & Lalani, F. (2020) The COVID-19 pandemic has changed education forever: This is how. *World Economic Forum* [online]. Available at <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/coronavirus-education-global-covid19-online-digital-learning/> [accessed 12 June 2020].
- Marwala, T. (2020, May 28) COVID-19 has forced us into the fast lane of the 4IR super-highway. *Daily Maverick* [online]. Available at <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2020-05-28-covid-19-has-forced-us-into-the-fast-lane-of-the-4ir-super-highway/#gsc.tab=0> [accessed 12 June 2020].
- McNeil Jr, DG. (2020, January 9) Finding a scapegoat when epidemics strike. *The New York Times* [online]. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/01/health/01plague.html> [accessed 9 June 2020].

- Mihm, S. (2020, February 16) The ugly history of blaming ethnic groups for outbreaks. *Bloomberg* [online]. Available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2020-02-16/coronavirus-fear-and-racism-reawaken-an-ugly-history> [accessed 13 June 2020].
- Nawani, D. (2020) Impasse caused by pandemic offers room to rethink board exams, find alternatives. *The Indian Express* [online]. Available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/board-exams-coronavirus-pandemic-students-education-6393932/> [accessed 14 June 2020].
- News24Wire. (2020a) *I Did Not Criticise the Lockdown, but the Regulations: Prof Gray After Mkhize Slams Her Criticism* [online]. Available at <https://www.polity.org.za/article/i-did-not-criticise-the-lockdown-but-the-regulations-prof-gray-after-mkhize-slams-her-criticism-2020-05-21> [accessed 16 June 2020].
- News24Wire. (2020b) Scientists advised Cabinet to go to Level 1, govt chose middle ground – Ramaphosa. *Polity* [online]. Available at <https://www.polity.org.za/article/scientists-advised-cabinet-to-go-to-level-1-govt-chose-middle-ground--ramaphosa-2020-06-01> [accessed 14 July 2020].
- Paterson, M. (2020) COVID-19 response: Where are the social scientists? *University World News* [online]. Available at <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200429090356725> [accessed 12 June 2020].
- Public Health England (2020) *Disparities in the Risk and Outcome of COVID-19* [online]. Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/892085/disparities_review.pdf [accessed 15 June 2020].
- Reddy, V, Soudien, C & Winnaar, LD. (2020) Impact of school closures on education outcomes in South Africa. *The Conversation* [online]. Available at <https://theconversation.com/impact-of-school-closures-on-education-outcomes-in-south-africa-136889> [accessed 10 June 2020].
- Rizvi, F & Lingard, B. (2010) *Globalizing Education Policy*. Routledge.
- Saavedra, J. (2020) Educational challenges and opportunities of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. *Education for Global Development* [online]. Available at <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/educational-challenges-and-opportunities-covid-19-pandemic> [accessed 16 June 2020].
- Sanchez-Paramo, C. (2020) COVID-19 will hit the poor hardest: Here's what we can do about it. *World Bank Blogs* [online]. Available at <https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/covid-19-will-hit-poor-hardest-heres-what-we-can-do-about-it> [accessed 27 June 2020].
- Sayed, Y, Badroodien, A, Omar, Y, Ndabaga, E, Novelli, M, Durrani, N, Barrett, A, Balie, L, Salmon, T, Bizimana, B, Ntahomvukiye, C & Utomi, J. (2018) *Engaging Teachers in Peacebuilding in Post-Conflict Contexts: Rwanda and South Africa Synthesis Report*. University of Sussex.
- Sayed, Y & Moriarty, K. (2020) SDG4 and the 'education quality turn': Problems, prospects and possibilities. In Wulff, A (ed.). *Grading Goal 4: Tensions, Threats and Opportunities in the Sustainable Development Goal on Education Quality*. Brill Open, 194–213.
- Shoki, W. (2020) *Masks Off. Africa is a Country* [online]. Available at <https://africasacountry.com/2020/05/masks-off> [accessed 10 June 2020].

- Singh, JA, Habib, A & Jansen, J. (2020) Freedom of speech and public interest, not allegiance, should underpin science advisement to government. *News24* [online]. Available at <https://www.news24.com/news24/columnists/guestcolumn/opinion-freedom-of-speech-and-public-interest-not-allegiance-should-underpin-science-advisement-to-government-20200526> [accessed 27 June 2020].
- Slater, J & Masih, N. (2020) As the world looks for Coronavirus scapegoats, Muslims are blamed in India. *The Washington Post* [online]. Available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/as-world-looks-for-coronavirus-scapegoats-india-pins-blame-on-muslims/2020/04/22/3cb43430-7f3f-11ea-84c2-0792d8591911_story.html [accessed 14 June 2020].
- Solinis, G & Baya-Laffite, N (eds). (2011) *Mapping out the Research Policy Matrix: A Report on the Outputs From the First International Forum on the Social Science-Policy Nexus*. UNESCO Management of Social Transformations Programme.
- Statistics South Africa. (2011) *Census 2011* [online]. Available at <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P03014/P030142011.pdf> [accessed 15 June 2020].
- South African Government. (2020a) *Minister Angie Motshekga: Coronavirus Covid-19 Readiness for Re-opening of Schools* [online]. Available at <https://www.gov.za/speeches/minister-angie-motshekga-coronavirus-covid-19-readiness-re-opening-schools-1-jun-2020-0000> [accessed 14 July 2020].
- South African Government. (2020b) *President Cyril Ramaphosa: South Africa's Response to Coronavirus COVID-19 Pandemic* [online]. Available at <https://www.gov.za/speeches/president-cyril-ramaphosa-south-africas-response-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic-23-apr-2020> [accessed 14 July 2020].
- South African Paediatric Association. (2020) *Position Statement: Return of South African Children to School* [online]. Available at <https://wcedonline.westerncape.gov.za/documents/BackToSchool/SAPA%20School%20Return%20Position%20Statement.pdf> [accessed 14 July 2020].
- UNESCO. (2017) Aid to education is stagnating and not going to countries most in need: Policy Paper 31. *UNESCO* [online]. Available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000249568> [accessed 13 June 2020].
- UNESCO. (2020) Startling digital divides emerge in distance learning. *United Nations* [online]. Available at <https://en.unesco.org/news/startling-digital-divides-distance-learning-emerge> [accessed 13 June 2020].
- UNICEF. (2020a) *UNICEF Global COVID-19 Situation Report No. 2* [online]. Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-africa/south-africa-covid-19-situation-report-no-2-1-15-may-2020> [accessed 11 June 2020].
- UNICEF. (2020b) Mitigating the effects of COVID 19 pandemic on food and nutrition of school children. *United Nations* [online]. Available at <https://www.unicef.org/media/68291/file/Mitigating-the-Effects-of-the-COVID-19-Pandemic-on-Food-and-Nutrition-of-school-children.pdf> [accessed 12 June 2020].
- United Nations. (2020) Sustainable development goals: SDG 2, No hunger. *United Nations* [online]. Available at <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/hunger/> [accessed 13 June 2020].
- United Nations Statistics. (2019) The sustainable development goals report. *UNSTATS* [online]. Available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/> [accessed 27 June 2020].

- Uwiringiyimana, C. (2020) Rwanda in talks to delay debt payments as coronavirus hits economy: President. *Reuters* [online]. Available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-rwanda/rwanda-in-talks-to-delay-debt-payments-as-coronavirus-hits-economy-president-idUSL5N2CF5SY> [accessed 27 June 2020].
- van der Bergh, S & Spaul, N. (2020) *Counting the Cost: COVID-19 Impact on School Closures in South Africa & Its Impact on Children*. RESEP, University of Stellenbosch.
- Weiss, C. (1979) The many meanings of research utilization. *Public Administration Review*, 39(5): 426–431.
- Werber, C. (2020) The choices working parents make now will shape the future for women. *Quartz* [online]. Available at <https://qz.com/work/1853196/will-covid-19-worsen-inequality-at-home-for-working-mothers/> [accessed 12 June 2020].
- World Bank. (2020a). *Debt Service Suspension and Covid-19: Fact Sheet 11 May 2020* [online]. Available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/factsheet/2020/05/11/debt-relief-and-covid-19-coronavirus> [accessed 27 June 2020].
- World Bank. (2020a) *The World Bank Moves Quickly to Help Countries Respond to Covid-19* [online]. Available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/04/02/the-world-bank-group-moves-quickly-to-help-countries-respond-to-covid-19> [accessed 14 July 2020].
- World Bank. (2020b) *The Global Economic Outlook During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Changed World*. *World Bank IBRD- IDA* [online]. Available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/06/08/the-global-economic-outlook-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-a-changed-world> [accessed 27 June 2020].
- World Health Organization. (2020a) *Contributors* [online]. Available at <http://open.who.int/2018-19/contributors/contributor?name=United%20States%20of%20America> [accessed 15 June 2020].
- World Health Organization. (2020b) *Director General Media Briefing* [online]. Available at <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---15-april-2020> [accessed 14 July 2020].
- Yong, E. (2016) *How One Man Was Wrongly Blamed for Bringing AIDS to America* [online]. Available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2016/10/how-one-man-was-wrongly-blamed-for-bringing-aids-to-america/505412/> [accessed 15 June 2020].

Notes on the authors

Yusuf Sayed is Professor of International Education and Development Policy at the University of Sussex, United Kingdom, and the South African Research Chair at the Centre for International Teacher Education, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa.

Marcina Singh is a research associate at the Centre for International Teacher Education, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa.

Addresses for correspondence

y.sayed@sussex.ac.uk

sayed.cite@gmail.com

Education, Covid-19 and care: Social inequality and social relations of value in South Africa and the United States

Sara Black, Carol Anne Spreen and Salim Vally
University of Johannesburg

Abstract

Education has not been spared during the Covid-19 pandemic that has exposed deep inequalities across the world along lines of 'race,' class, gender and geography, as well as the digital divide. However, many of the policy responses and solutions proffered to mitigate the crisis fail to address the generative structures that made public education institutions so vulnerable to shocks in the first place. Using the work of Nancy Fraser and social reproduction theory (Bhattacharya 2017), we argue that understanding the prevailing capitalist social institutional order, and the relations it generates between spheres of production and spheres of reproduction (including education), is fundamental to theories of change that not only respond to the Covid-19 moment justly, but also avoid reproducing and deepening the conditions that made Covid so cataclysmic to begin with. By analysing the conditions of public education across South Africa and the United States comparatively, a case is built for distinguishing between affirmative responses that leave inequitable structures intact and transformative responses that seek to address the root causes of injustice and violence amplified by the pandemic.

Keywords: Covid-19, education, crisis, social reproduction, social justice

Black, S, Spreen, C & Vally, S. (2020) Education, Covid-19 and care: Social inequality and social relations of value in South Africa and the United States. *Southern African Review of Education*, 26(1): 40–61.

Introduction

For us as a sector [education], the coronavirus is mainly a health problem, then a social, economic and political problem – Angie Motshekga, Minister of Basic Education, South Africa. (SABC News, 2020: 1:43)

The Covid-19 pandemic has jolted a restless world out of uneasy slumber and into confrontation with its own precarity. Contrary to the quote from the South African Minister of Basic Education above, social, economic and political problems are the crux of the coronavirus problem, a messy knot of racialised, classed, gendered and geographied inequity and deprivation that has forced open the eyes¹ of those who have too long looked away from the violence inflicted by prevailing social arrangements on marginalised communities.

This paper suggests that the Covid-19 moment has shone a spotlight on the relations of capitalist production with the other spheres of life and living that it predates, and sounded a clarion call for a reconsideration of the entire institutionalised social order that perpetuates inequality and violence. By deploying theoretical lenses that foreground the relations of narrowly defined economic production to the social spheres of reproduction (Bhattacharya 2017; Fraser 2017), education crises prior to and during the Covid-19 moment are analysed across two countries, namely, South Africa and the United States, to suggest that prevailing responses to these crises will further exacerbate inequalities if left unchecked.

We outline the preexisting situations in both contexts before Covid-19, and then examine the effects of the pandemic to exacerbate these. Particular attention is given to technophilic² and technocratic responses (both of which affirm inequalities rather than transforming them), and further raise caution about the possibilities for disaster capitalism (Klein 2007) should policymakers uncritically accept ‘commonsensical’ offerings from profit-seeking interests.

Finally, we suggest that the Covid-19 moment presents an opportunity to transform the current unsustainable relations between narrowly defined ‘productivity’ and all other spheres of life-making, including social reproductive activity – calling for transnational political organisation and revitalisation of relations with the natural environment upon which we all depend (the abuse of which has been hypothesised to precipitate the emergence of the novel coronavirus). We argue that noticing these relations cannot but question the prevailing status quo as unfit for human flourishing for all.

¹ Cf Stanley Kubrick’s (1971) *A Clockwork Orange*.

² Here we mean ‘technophilic’ to refer to proposals and solutions that assume technology to, at worst, be neutral, and – more often than not – to be intrinsically ‘good,’ without consideration of its unintended negative social consequences (e.g., Bridle 2019). This is not to be confused with a rejection of technology outright, or as a suggestion that there is a strong case to be made for making access to the internet a universal human right (see Berners-Lee 2020).

Holding complex axes of inequality: Fortified or exposed?

An intersectional perspective requires holding in view ‘race,’ class, gender, space, language, sexuality and other forms of oppression produced by the drawing of boundaries and the delineation of some as ‘more worthy’ than others inherent in a capitalist ‘institutionalised social order’ (Fraser & Jaeggi 2018).

With the caveat that binaries loosely represent the world and are not the world itself, we suggest here the terms ‘fortified’ and ‘exposed,’ repurposed from Teese and Polesel’s (2003) work on schooling (dis)advantage. Fortification stands as a placeholder for plural, mutually reinforcing forms of advantage: fortified institutions have access to ample material resources, attract students and staff able to supplement the institution with their own reserves of social, economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986), produce and reproduce hegemonic cultural and linguistic forms and knowledges, and enjoy spatial positionings within flows of power and prestige. Exposed institutions, on the contrary, present clusters of multiple forms of disadvantage: peripheralised materially, spatially, linguistically and culturally, and produced by and productive of the marginalisation of those who have no choice but to seek education opportunities therein. Institutions are dialectically, but not deterministically, produced by and productive of their members’ concomitant social power.

The binary fortified/exposed is far from neat: specific individual institutions might have localised forms of fortification within sub-circuits of power, yet still be relatively exposed when considered in the broader frame of socioeconomic and political influence. What does characterise relative fortification or exposedness are institutions’ capacity to weather shocks and knocks, the stability of their planning horizons, and their relative dexterity in adjusting surface features to prevailing winds of change while sustaining a stable, adapted core (Black 2020a). These characteristics of fortification and/or exposedness are particularly useful for considering the impact of Covid-19 on education institutions.

Firing up the x-ray: Lenses to look through

In a recent webinar, famed author Arundhati Roy likened the pandemic moment not only as a moment of transition (‘the pandemic is a portal’) but also as a moment of surfacing, wherein the deep intersectional fault lines of inequality are laid bare as if by an x-ray on the social body (Roy 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic has stripped bare the relations between the narrowly defined realm of economic production and those of socially reproducing human life, including housing, food, education, health, safety, transport, and the natural environment. The prioritisation of the economy over these critical spheres of life-sustaining activity along with the retreat of those responsible for sustaining systems of life-making (the state and the public), has rendered those most marginalised and most exposed unable to sustain themselves or their families (Fraser 2016; Bhattacharya 2017).

Dismantling the forces that have hollowed out social systems and safety nets, while responding to (and after!) this pandemic moment, requires thinking collectively at multiple scales – a

challenging task under the single biggest global abrogation of the right to move and assemble in living memory.

Firstly, the grammar of solutions, responses and logics cannot be confined to the level of the nation-state: Covid-19 is simultaneously a local, national, regional and global concern, as are the forces and forms of political economy that rendered it so deadly.

Secondly, transgressive, pro-poor, feminist and antiracist responses to the Covid-19 moment require not only thinking on multiple spatial scales, but also on multiple time horizons. Capitalist economic arrangements are no stranger to crises, and hard lessons have to be learned regarding how forces in favour of markets and privatisation might utilise a moment such as the pandemic to deepen even more brutal neoliberal approaches to social arrangements (Klein 2007). Such responses must not only mitigate the ravages of the pandemic in the immediate future, but also build towards disrupting and transforming social and economic arrangements towards a more just social, political and economic system capable of weathering future disruptions and shifts. Climate change has progressed irreversibly, with temperature increases locked in at the global level: thinking about social change cannot be limited to ‘returning to normal’ when pre-pandemic society was on a trajectory of environmental devastation. All this while accelerating strides in digital technology and machine learning challenge human subjectivities and power flows in the Global North (Wark 2019), as the digital divide excludes the marginalised from participating in these new forms and flows of wealth and power (Gurumurthy 2020). The very conception of what being human, and being with the more-than-human, means must be interrogated (Christie 2020) if genuinely just and sustainable social formulations are to be imagined and forged.

Fraser: Boundary struggles and frames of justice

The work of Nancy Fraser provides multiple tools with which to think through Covid-19 and its multiple effects and entanglements. Beyond her own work relating to Bhattacharya’s social reproduction theory vis-à-vis boundary struggles (e.g., Fraser 2016, 2017; Fraser & Jaeggi 2018), Fraser’s influential writing on the framing of social justice issues is also fruitful to deploy.

Matters of the frame

Perhaps the best known work of Fraser is her normative typology of social justice (Fraser 1995, 2000, 2005, 2008). This theorising attempts to hold multiple axes of justice in conversation – namely, economic, cultural and political – and defines justice as parity of participation for all affected by, and subjected to, particular issues of (mal)distribution, (mis)recognition and (mis)representation.

But beyond the substance of justice, Fraser also raises concern about the frame of justice that designates the who and the how when adjudicating those affected, and the mechanism by which justice should be pursued. By troubling what she terms the *Keynesian-Westphalian* frame as the assumed unit of justice (i.e., nation-states and their justice systems), Fraser (2008) highlights the difficulties of pursuing justice in a globalising world and abnormal times. Increasingly, nation-states are not autonomous to make policies or arbitrate justice concerns outside of regional

and international flows of power, nor are they sensitive enough to be seen to do justice to local concerns and issues. In a financialised, globalised capitalist economy, foreign investors hold sway and influence over nation-states through debt structuring and liquidity controls while, simultaneously, concerns regarding the natural commons as a planetary sink for human waste foregrounds how pollution and environmental decimation ignore humans' arbitrary political boundaries. Fraser also offers productive terms by which to describe the degree of a justice remedy, referring to superficial redress as an affirmative form of justice, and deep structural change as transformative (2005, 2008).

Covid-19 is one such phenomenon that has shown up nation-state borders as both the default unit of organisation and control for pandemic policy making, as well as being porous and flimsy for containing quasi-natural disasters that show scant regard for nationality. It has also thrown sharp light on how the sphere of social reproduction also escapes nation-state moorings, with both cooperation to share Covid-19 intelligence, and competition between states for scant supplies of testing equipment and personal protective equipment (PPEs), putting paid to the myth that any country could tackle Covid-19 alone. Transformative responses to Covid-19 require interstate cooperation at a scale previously unimagined, leaving affirmative responses as the weaker recourse of governments who are themselves vulnerable to the vicissitudes of international markets and upheavals.

Crisis of care: On social reproduction contradictions in contemporary capitalism

Fraser has written extensively about the need to conceptualise a capitalist moment as a totalising *institutional social order* (Fraser 2014, 2016, 2017; Fraser & Jaeggi 2018) encompassing more than just the economy but, in fact, structuring and shaping all facets of human society:

This crisis [of social reproduction] is one strand of a general crisis that also encompasses other strands – economic, ecological, and political, all of which intersect with and exacerbate one another. The social reproduction strand forms an important dimension of this general crisis, but it is often neglected in current discussions, which focus chiefly on the economic or ecological strands. This ‘critical separatism’ is problematic. The social strand is so central to the broader crisis that none of the others can be properly understood in the abstraction from it. (Fraser 2017 *Crisis of Care?*: para. 2)

Expanding the concept of class struggle to what she terms boundary struggles, Fraser calls forth multiple intersecting axes of exploitation, expropriation and extraction in gendered, raced and ecological forms. Doing so foregrounds the divisions capital and capitalist modes of production rely upon to deny the true cost of production, thereby disavowing the real source of ‘surplus value’ as a shifting of value from those who produce it in multiple spheres (whether monetised or not) to those who accumulate it at the top of the social pecking order.

This contradictory extraction and flow of value accumulation is intrinsic to capitalistic arrangements and can be identified in different guises and forms throughout different epochs of capitalist history (Fraser 2017). But constant throughout is the tendency for ‘capital’s accumulation dynamic [to] effectively [eat] its own tail’ (ibid. *Social Contradictions of Capitalism*

‘As Such’: para. 6), although perhaps this could have been phrased in reference to Goya’s Black Paintings – capital’s unceasing appetite for accumulation effectively eats its own children:

Every form of capitalist society harbors a deep-seated social-reproductive ‘crisis tendency’ or ‘contradiction.’ On the one hand, social reproduction is a condition of possibility for sustained capital accumulation; on the other hand, capitalism’s orientation to unlimited accumulation tends to destabilize the very processes of social reproduction on which it relies. (Fraser 2017 Crisis of Care?: para. 4)

Education institutions – although differentiated in their perceived social value from ECD to universities – share a common position in the intersection of production and reproduction. On the one hand, capital is keenly interested in the production of workers, particularly their docility and their skills profile that matches demand in the labour market; on the other, education – as social reproductive labour – is feminised, under-resourced and not seen worthy of adequate provision by the state in a financialised neoliberal form of capitalist arrangements unless it speaks to its productivist function.

On describing the specific dynamic between production and reproduction in the neoliberal, financialised era (i.e., the current instantiation of capitalistic arrangements), Fraser notices that such social arrangements

externaliz[e] care work onto families and communities while diminishing their capacity to perform it. The result is a new, dualized organisation of social reproduction, commodified for those who can pay for it and privatized for those who cannot [our emphasis], as some in the second category provide care work in return for (low) wages for those in the first. (2017 Social Contradictions of Financialized Capitalism: para. 3)

As we shall explore later, it is this contemporary dualised organisation of education that differentiates fortified institutions, (i.e., supplemented through fees by families who can afford them) from exposed ones (those institutions under-resourced by the state that serve families who bear the burden of social reproduction alone), and hence shapes differentiated responses to, and framing of, the Covid-19 pandemic (and particularly, decisions about whether and how to return to school).

Inequality, Covid-19 and education in South Africa and the United States

We begin by briefly sketching the pre Covid-19 contexts, outlining the well-documented preexisting challenges and inequalities – or what we call ‘societal comorbidities’ – which the pandemic exacerbated. Systemic concerns of inequality, funding and governance, spatial justice, and curriculum are laid out for the reader to appreciate as well as the uneven terrain onto which an international health crisis descended.

We then outline the actions taken in the wake of the pandemic’s unfolding, and how these preexisting inequalities articulated with national lockdown and the closure of education institutions. Affirmative responses to these challenges included online learning, the efficacy and

fairness of which was questioned on multiple fronts.

Finally, we critically evaluate what a just response to these plural crises might entail, not only for immediate relief from the vagaries of Covid-19, but to prioritise life making over profit making now and into the future. Different proposed responses belie theories of change rooted in fundamentally antagonistic political positions, characterised by whether the institutionalised social order of capitalism is considered viable or not. Cautions are also raised regarding forms of opportunism that arise for new avenues of profit seeking in the Covid-19 moment, and that naive technophilic responses risk amplifying existing problems.

The state of education pre Covid

South Africa

No society that systematically undermines social reproduction can endure for long. (Fraser 2017 Crisis of Care: para. 1)

Fraser's observation could well apply to the unravelling of the South African social fabric, particularly regarding basic education. Schools sit at the nexus of South Africa's knot regarding social reproduction: they are – in addition to supposed places of teaching and learning – also places of childcare, feeding and nutrition, safety and health provision (with over nine million out of 13 million children receiving meals at school). This situation is particularly the case for the vast majority of South Africans whose families are so poorly compensated for their labour – or without earnings at all – as to be unable to provide these basic necessities in 'the domestic space.'

Paradoxically, as sites of public social reproduction, schools are also unable to muster the minimum basics: safe scholar transport has remained a huge obstacle to many school-attending children, both urban and rural (Equal Education 2016; Portwig 2018); schools are also not places of guaranteed safety, positioned as sites of gang recruitment in urban areas, or built to unsafe specifications in rural areas (Equal Education 2018); and, ironically – burdened as the majority of poor schools are with these additional responsibilities – schools are also unable to establish meaningful rhythms of teaching and learning in the face of more pressing issues (Jacklin 2004; Black 2020a). 'Opening the doors of [quality] learning' has remained elusive for the vast majority of school-attending children in South Africa since the dawn of democracy in 1994 (Christie 2008, 2020), and opportunities for meaningful education on any terms remains slim for those on the wrong end of material, linguistic and spatial inequities, all of which closely align with race through sedimented apartheid balkanisation and enduring spatialities.

South Africa has also not escaped global trends regarding the de-valuing and de-professionalising of teachers and their work. Increasingly prescriptive standardised curricula, a focus on standardised assessment, and a prevailing discourse of teachers being framed as 'unfit' for their work have all led to a loss of social status for the profession, along with a crisis of teacher supply (Green et al. 2014) and alienation amongst the teaching workforce (Chisholm et al. 2005; Reddy et al. 2010). A neoliberal 'ideal subject of learning' is enshrined in SA education policy (Silbert 2012), further (re)producing the hegemonic ideal of students as individuals engaged in

meritocratic schooling, and concomitantly obfuscating structural forces that perpetuate the prevailing (highly unequal) institutionalised social order.

Over this vastly unequal landscape, where 8% of students attend fortified schools heavily supplemented by state provision and the remaining attend exposed schools who cannot (Mlachila & Moeletsi 2019, cited in Christie 2020), sits a bifurcated governance structure that divides responsibility for redress and administration across provincial and national spheres of government. Even during ‘normal’ times, responsibility for addressing schooling issues is parried between these two spheres of decision making, depending on the theory of change presented (Black 2020b), or offloaded onto schools at the local level (Karlsson et al. 2019).

The United States

As the global epicentre of the Covid pandemic, the US provides a stark example of the many layers of inequities of a hyper capitalist society – built on the legacy of imperialism and slavery, the violence of capitalism with its logic of extraction and exploitation deems some people essential and others disposable. The pandemic has exposed these multiple axes of exploitation, expropriation and extraction in gendered, raced and ecological forms not only revealing, but also deepening injustices.

The US has not only been the epicentre of the pandemic, but also the epicentre of neoliberal education reform. This view of education is one of competitive markets where students, teachers, and other education professionals are ranked against each other using high-stakes standardised tests as the primary metric for comparison. Teacher unions are seen as a barrier to improving education, teaching is controlled through test-aligned curricula, and the teaching profession is deregulated through fast-track teacher training or use of unqualified teachers. Public schools must compete for students with deregulated charters or academies run by for-profit or nonprofit management organisations – run by appointed boards – to be compared, judged, and potentially closed or expanded based on test scores and profitability. Education is designed to produce ‘human capital’ and ‘add value’ to the economic needs of society, instead of, for instance, serving the social good, meeting the collective needs of communities, or preparing students to reimagine a regenerative society required for human thriving on the planet. Governance is shifted from democratically elected officials to unaccountable private bodies – eroding the idea that informed citizens should make decisions about their own welfare.

The US has one of the most unequal education systems due to its largely decentralised funding structures and the fact that schools are financed from local property taxes. State and local governments cover nearly 90% of local school budgets and because education is the single largest component of every state budget, it will be especially targeted for the cuts that accompany both revenue loss and redirected spending on medical care, unemployment insurance, and other critical needs during the pandemic. The national government has a significant role to play to reallocate funding where needed, and the recovery acts that have been debated in the US Congress will largely determine the extent to which the education recovery goes beyond providing more computers and minimal relief for the hardest hit communities (for example the \$2 trillion CARES

Act sent only \$14 billion to public schools – far less than 1% of the total allocation). Caution is also raised regarding forms of opportunism that arise for new avenues of profit seeking in the Covid moment, and that naive technophilic responses risk amplifying existing problems.

Even prior to the Covid crisis, the US Education Secretary Betsy DeVos had been calling for dramatic cuts each year in her proposed education budget, attempting to eliminate billions of dollars for primary and secondary programmes across multiple areas and programmes (Strauss 2017).

The prevailing policy ideal is an education marketplace where each parent competes for ‘the best deal’ for their own child, diverting billions away from public institutions to charter schools, voucher programmes, private schools and online virtual schools, all underpinned by a new managerialist logic that privileges supposed ‘competition’ as a simultaneous route to ‘efficiency’ and ‘quality.’ From the Choices in Education Act to the creation of Education Savings Accounts, the goal is to divert public school funding to private entities, despite damning evidence of the failings of this approach (Spren 2019).

Ensuring families have access to quality public schools that are adequately resourced to serve the students in their communities, including integrating neighbourhoods, fully funded public schools, lower class size, and supported teachers are not policy priorities of the current US regime. In states that embrace corporate reform, there are parallel school systems that do not serve all students well, and squander limited public resources. In ‘choice’ and charter states like Florida, Arizona and Nevada, conflicts of interest and fraud are rampant, while laws for profiteering have been bent towards private investors’ interests at children’s expense (Spren 2019).

Budget cuts and reallocation come on the heels of the largest wave of teacher strikes in decades, and 2019 was a watershed year for teacher struggles against austerity and private interests in U.S. schools. Teachers have cited the lack of resources, low salaries and the spread of charter schools as some of the challenges they face.

As in South Africa, the US has millions of children who are homeless, food insecure, and without health care. Schools serve critical social reproduction functions for the vulnerable beyond their core role of advancing learning, by providing feeding schemes, computers and connectivity to those without, and – in many cases – childcare for essential workers.

Pandemic: Effects of Covid-19 and inequality on education

Unsurprisingly, the effects of Covid-19 amplified the inequalities described above. Not only do these differentiated circumstances play out in people’s material abilities to physically distance, stay home and follow guidelines to reduce transmission but, in the words of one medical specialist:

Increasingly, it appears that someone’s positionality on the uneven playing field of life will determine her prognosis in addition to biological factors for Covid-19 . . . there is a growing body of evidence pointing to the intersectional stressors of living with inequality, racism, classism, marginalisation or being ‘othered’ *that act at a cellular level even in the presence of adequate medical care* [our emphasis]. (Baldwin-Ragaven 2020: 34)

These inequities both material and embodied have come down most harshly on poor, black communities in both the United States and in South Africa.

Education institution closures in SA

The arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic to South Africa re-centred schooling inadequacies again – as well as excavating the problematic role of schools as (fragile) centres of public social reproduction. Once all schools were closed to contain the pandemic, those few schools able to supplement state provision through private fees continued learning online (with mixed success and increasing precarity as parents' ability or willingness to pay fees for closed schools waned). Students in middle-class homes with digital devices, data, connectivity, appropriate spaces for learning and adult mediation, continued to try to cover the normal curriculum even while the country went into one of the world's harshest lockdowns.

Meanwhile, the vast majority of exposed schools had no such option and most children in South Africa not only had their learning disrupted by Covid-19 but also struggled to access more basic needs such as food. That children began going hungry during lockdown led to concerns about the social costs of keeping schools closed, with some calling for schools to reopen for feeding, while others (e.g., the C19 People's Coalition 2020a) called for a decoupling of the provision of basic necessities from schooling, teaching and learning operations. That the Department of Social Development struggled to provide food parcels for families outside of schools without significant efforts from philanthropic civil society further exposed the weak reach of the state for effecting basic social support across a broad diversity of contexts (Mbovane 2020a, 2020b). Pressure thus mounted for schools to be open – not as schools, but as sources of food.

Additional concerns regarding gender-based violence (GBV) also began to arise as a country wrought with femicide and domestic violence found itself confined to the sphere of the home, economically stressed and without recourse to conflict de-escalation strategies: reports of domestic violence were reported to treble in the five weeks of 'hard' lockdown during late March and April (IOL 2020). With this came concern particularly for the safety and well-being of female school-age students who were argued to not only be more at risk of GBV when outside of school, but also less likely to be able to sustain efforts to do school work at home under increased levels of domestic labour.

Decisions regarding when and how to reopen also became fraught with framing issues, with provinces differentiated in preparedness in line with historical inequities; the legacy of perpetual under-provision of infrastructure in what were the Bantustan territories (Jacklin & Graaff 1994, Equal Education 2018) – and the absence of meaningful redress of this legacy – meant that over 3,000 schools were still without access to water and basic sanitation required for containing the contagion. While infrastructure is a provincial competence in South Africa, constrained budgets (a shared administrative sphere) posed serious limitations to what individual schools or provinces could do without national support in response to the pandemic.

Despite significant centralisation of control and power during the State of National Disaster

declared by Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, education bureaucrats still continued to devolve decision making along traditional lines,³ with the provinces exercising relative autonomy and the national Department of Basic Education refusing to annex powers in order to better coordinate Covid-19 responses.

Nowhere were framing issues more stark than in decisions made about teachers and their safety. During public engagement Q&A (ENCA 2020), the Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, dismissed queries and concerns about teachers' working conditions and safety on returning to work as a labour issue that should be taken up with the provincial education departments, who are the official employers of public sector teachers. Concerns about teacher safety and school readiness galvanised a rare moment of unison between the five dominant teaching unions and the three main school governing body alliances, who all called for school readiness before schools could be reopened. However the subsequent gazetted regulations outlined norms and requirements that only fortified schools could meet, once again indicating the hegemony of such institutions as the 'ideal school' in the policy imaginary of decisionmakers.

Education institution closures in the US

In-person classes were cancelled across the United States from March 2020 onwards to contain the spread of the coronavirus. In many states and districts, school buildings were closed for the remainder of the school year, and distance learning replaced in-person learning for approximately 45 million public school students.

Most educational leaders have been operating from the premise that they should aim to transfer business-as-usual schooling into homes as much as possible, with scant regard for the effects of this on social inequalities and how students and their families are positioned:

Although the concern about educational inequities has focused on access to laptops and internet access, there are much deeper inequities at play in the move to recreate school at home. When we assume that the learning that matters only happens at school, we are not only ignoring a robust body of research about life-long learning, we also continue to approach families, especially those from Indigenous or communities of color, as inherently lacking or deficient. (Ishimaru 2020: para. 6)

Contradictions about when and how to reopen schools safely, while still mitigating the expanding contagion, means state and district leaders need to go beyond addressing health concerns to consider how to systematically address the social inequalities that the virus has laid bare. In addition to the mobilisation of local and state government support, a wide range of organisations, teacher groups and social movements are stepping forward to provide everything from tutoring and legal advocacy, free Wi-Fi and devices for students who lack them, to meals for families and support for health and childcare. As structural inequities are more sharply exposed in this time of

³ In the Western Cape, the single province run by the opposition political party (the Democratic Alliance), the Minister for Education, Debbie Schäfer, in fact ignored the second school opening delay as instructed by the national Department of Basic Education on 31 May. At the 11th hour, a 1 June opening was delayed by a week due to school unreadiness: however, the Western Cape declared itself ready and proceeded to readmit students on 1 June, despite all other provinces delaying until 8 June 2020.

crisis, this moment also holds the possibility that, with purposeful action, these needs can be more fully addressed when schools (and society) return to a post-Covid reality, rather than a return to the inequitable status quo.

As education leaders make decisions that they consider to be in the interests of young people and families, the question remains as to what youth and families need and want, and how to ensure decisions are not based on assumptions and policies that reproduce inequalities. As the current #BlackLivesMatter protests against police violence and racism have shown, youth, parents, families, and communities may be struggling to manage the multiple impacts of the pandemic, but they are not voiceless – rather, systems routinely ignore or disregard their insights and expertise.

The limits of online learning across both contexts

While online learning was touted by pundits as the ‘solution’ to school closures (e.g., Grootes 2020; Watson & Calland 2020), most of these technophilic responses ignored significant limitations to meaningful online engagement (Black 2020c). Moving online was only an option for a small minority of fortified public primary and secondary schools,⁴ despite only 11% of South African homes having an internet connection into the home, and the vast majority of people relying on (expensive) mobile data solutions for access (Stats SA 2016). Once again, access to devices, time and space, data and support is deeply classed and raced.

Information on South African students’ ability to ‘keep up’ with the pace and volume of academic work while at home is still unfolding, but the early indicators suggest that learning disparities fall along the lines of inequality as expected. Anecdotal and synthesised reports from the US indicate that the predictors are similar (class as imbricated with race, access to material conditions etc., Carey 2020). In both cases, it is the care done in person and through human-to-human relationships that gets lost in online, asynchronous formats (Black 2020c; Deming 2020). That this pedagogical, relational component of teaching and learning is invisible to metrics and technocrats is unsurprising, given that these aspects of education fall into the realm of social reproduction and not production; as Fraser cautioned, the extractive relations between the narrowly economic ‘productive’ sphere and the sphere of social reproduction must necessarily disavow this reliance to avoid tallying the true costs involved. Narrowly economic measures of educational ‘value’ rarely – if ever – include open-ended soft labour in the form of counselling, psychoemotional support and relationship building upon which meaningful teaching and learning depends.

Another silence in the online discussion has been the intensification of work for teachers and lecturers (cf Almeida 2017; Cronin 2020). Marx (1976, 2005) theorised the role of technology in production processes as a mechanism for increasing ‘relative surplus value’ in the face of the

⁴ While online learning was clearly inappropriate for the vast majority of schools, it was seen as a broad systemic solution for higher education institutions. The discourse regarding higher education in South Africa has been dominated by universities, ignoring the 50 TVET colleges and their severe challenges with moving online (see Mafolo 2020). Strong opposition to continuing academic programmes online arose (Bangani 2020; Black Caucus at UCT 2020; C19 People’s Coalition 2020a, 2020b; HSRC 2020), even while the official line from the South African Department of Higher Education has embraced the shift as the ‘new normal’ (see Universities South Africa 2020). The irony of the DHET’s mantra ‘No Student Left Behind’ was not lost on those aware of its origins in the second Bush administration’s neoliberal education policy framework.

universal rate of falling profit (Harvey 2019). Given the plethora of neoliberal policy discussions about how to make education ‘more efficient’ in light of decreasing public expenditure and increasing access and enrolment, it is not surprising that technology is seen as a panacea to assist education to scale-up access through online and blended learning formats, often under the auspices of open education interventions (see, for example, the South African Department of Higher Education and Training’s draft Open Learning Policy Framework 2017). But the potentials for such shifts in mode for the working conditions of pedagogues have been largely ignored. Again, anecdotally, lecturers and teachers seem to be experiencing moving online during the pandemic as a significant increase in work volume, both in materials preparation and student support. Those institutions whose students and teachers do have online access might experience a hyper accelerationism produced by the new demands of the mode (e.g., Mathabane 2020), while those who cannot access are left farther and farther behind.

In addition, caution has been scarce regarding shifts to online learning as a form of privatisation of public education by stealth. Given that the digital platforms in use (MySakai, Google Classroom etc.) are all proprietary software – some of which are also heavily involved in machine learning, data scraping and commodification – this is no small concern. We will return to discussing these potentials for disaster techno-capitalism when analysing the proffered theories of change as responses to the pandemic moment.

Beyond the portal

While it would seem there have been multiple responses and approaches to the education-Covid crisis, the lens of social reproduction theory suggests that there are two clear families of responses: one with a telos of returning to the pre-Covid institutionalised social order, and one that recognises that pre-Covid order as unsustainable and intricately implicated in the production of the pandemic crisis in the first place. Using Fraser’s justice lexicon, the former will be referred to as affirmative responses, which seek to leave the pre-Covid order in place but temporarily alleviate extreme suffering, and the latter as transformative responses, which seek to leverage the Covid-19 moment for radically reimagining the roots of social relations.

Prior to and after the reopening of schools on the 8th of June 2020 in South Africa, discussions and debates around the impact of Covid-19 on schooling largely pivoted around the issues of online and remote learning, school feeding schemes, school readiness in the form of personal protection equipment (PPEs), adequate sanitation, water, class sizes and the possibilities for physical distancing⁵ at schools. Assessments and the national department’s intention to ‘save’ the academic year also featured prominently. These issues, often cast in technical terms, mask how the virus has exacerbated existing inequalities, as conveyed by Jacklin’s (2020: paras 16–17) observation that there exists a:

Consensual recognition among teachers that this Covid-19 moment has not only exposed

⁵ We choose to use the term ‘physical distancing’ and not ‘social distancing’ because we regard the current moment as requiring social solidarity, not distancing. The term ‘physical distancing’ expresses more accurately, what the pandemic requires.

inequalities in the schooling system: it has also exacerbated and legitimated these in a way that must be challenged. The dilemma in which teachers are placed can be compared to that of a surgeon who, having previously been asked to do heart surgery with no equipment other than a rusty pocket knife, is now asked to do this in the dark.

While in the US most schools are now closed for the summer holidays, dramatic school funding cuts are happening at the same time that schools will be facing increased expenses due to Covid-19-related needs, including access to devices and connectivity for distance learning, additional food and social services for students from low-income families, and expanded learning time to deal with learning loss caused by school closures. Schools will also need to increase investments to meet the social, emotional and mental health needs of their students who will be struggling with the stress and trauma of this pandemic and who have been largely isolated from their peers and other adult support systems for some time (Darling-Hammond 2020).

Further observations include how affirmative calls to reopen the economy and send kids back to school foreground the articulation between spheres of production and spheres of reproduction, revealing the ways in which daily and generational reproductive labour of households, schools, hospitals and elsewhere, also sustain the drive for accumulation (Bhattacharya 2017) and economic growth – often at the cost of precious life. The enthusiasm and simplistic mania for remote and online learning (Watson & Calland 2020), both at school and post-school levels, without educators and pedagogic processes ignores the need for social relations in the interest of democratic education, critical citizenship, the commons and the public good. Technology can be an effective complement to teaching, particularly in these times, but never a long-term substitute. The latter approach will merely entrench already existing elitism, inequality and a two-tier education system.

Understanding the present pandemic as mostly a health issue, as shown in the epigraph, ignores both countries' history with the HIV/AIDS pandemic. As with that disease, Covid-19 too should not be couched solely in a biomedical framework and, instead, must be contextualised and linked to historical and socioeconomic dynamics. Most importantly, Covid-19 has further exposed the fissures and fault lines of our societies with growing evidence showing how vulnerable, immunocompromised populations (Baldwin-Ragaven 2020) with precarious working and overcrowded living conditions correspond to racial, class and gender categories. The present reality brings social reproduction theory in a constructive dialogue with intersectionality approaches. In a blog titled, 'The Prospects for Just Schools in the Wake of Covid-19 Responses,' Ishimaru (2020: para. 2) writes of the United States:

Black, Native, and Latinx communities have been hit disproportionately hard by coronavirus; many working class immigrants have been forced to remain in frontline labor or have lost their jobs; those without documentation live with limited access to healthcare, few governmental supports, and constant fear . . .

These racial inequities profoundly shape how children, youth, and families experience the pandemic. While some privileged families demand online instruction and grades for their children

to maintain their academic competitiveness, others experience trauma upon trauma as they care for elders or siblings, respond to rapid shifts, and juggle work, anxiety, and multiple forms of insecurity. Though schools have mobilized to try to address basic needs, the links between educational inequities and food insecurity, housing and job instability, poverty, healthcare and racism are more evident than ever.

Similarly, Jamelle Bouie writes for the New York Times (2020: para. 1) that:

In Louisiana, blacks account for 70 percent of the deaths but 33 percent of the population. In Alabama, they account for 44 percent of the deaths and 26 percent of the population. . . . The pattern exists in the North as well, where African-American populations in cities like Chicago and Milwaukee have high infection and death rates. . . . *Today's disparities of health flow directly from yesterday's disparities of wealth and opportunity* [our emphasis]. That African-Americans are overrepresented in service-sector jobs reflects a history of racially segmented labor markets that kept them at the bottom of the economic ladder; that they are less likely to own their own homes reflects a history of stark housing discrimination, government-sanctioned and government-sponsored. If black Americans are more likely to suffer the comorbidities that make coronavirus more deadly, it's because those ailments are tied to the segregation and concentrated poverty that still mark their communities. . . . What's important to understand is that this racialized inequality isn't a mistake – it isn't a flaw in the system. It reflects something in the character of American capitalism itself, a deep logic that produces the same outcomes, again and again.

The societal comorbidities mentioned in these excerpts exist in South African schooling too, and are complicit in reproducing these inequalities. In a statement issued by the C19 People's Coalition (2020a: paras 18 & 28), the Coalition, despite the existing inequalities, sounds an optimistic note:

Education should enable and enrich life, learning, and life-making, together for all. It is not just about ensuring that the minority of learners who matriculate have a certificate for an inequitable and unjust job market. . . . Covid-19 has shown us how violently unequal our schools are. During the democratic transition we had an opportunity to create a unified education system that serves all our children justly, freely and equally. We squandered that opportunity. Covid-19 has given us a precious second chance. For the sake of our children and those who have yet to come, we dare not squander it again.

The virtues of affirmative responses to the pandemic have tended to be offered by those whose focus is on production. In tacit forms, this is underpinned by the assumption that spheres of production are, in fact, the base upon which all other spheres depend (see van der Berg & Spaul 2020), although in more explicit messages it might be interpreted as an explicit prioritisation of money over well-being – see John Steenhuisen in South Africa (EWN 2020), and Donald Trump in the US (NPR 2020). But affirmative responses, as Fraser outlined, are concerned with surface redress while leaving deeper structures that produce and sustain inequality intact. In the context of Covid-19, these responses emphasise continued production, and the role of open schools in supporting this, while simultaneously positing the contemporary prevailing institutionalised social order as both necessary and sufficient for human life (despite ample evidence that this prevailing institutionalised order does not, in fact, allow for fulfilling the human potential of most people). In South Africa, such lobbying has been strangely motivated by a tacit admission that the vast

majority of homes and families are, in fact, unable to bear the burden of their own reproduction without assistance, particularly regarding food provision.

Contrary to narratives from proponents of affirmative responses, the policy options available are not reducible to ‘restore pre-Covid conditions’ or ‘shut education institutions indefinitely.’ Noticing school’s entanglement with other spheres of life sustenance such as feeding, safety and health, while remaining concerned for school rejuvenation so as to fortify exposed schools, presents an imperative to imagine policy responses to these concerns that do not place school opening as the only mechanism of relief. Some posited suggestions include maintaining feeding schemes while school infrastructure is addressed, with the added benefit of using feeding scheme for community infection monitoring; creative deployment of distance education via broadcast media, supported with distributed print material;⁶ utilising closures as opportunities for developing multilingual, locally relevant learning materials for students (amongst others – see the C19 People’s Coalition 2020a). To reiterate Fraser’s words from earlier: “‘critical separatism’ is problematic. The social strand is so central to the broader crisis that none of the others can be properly understood in the abstraction from it’ (2017 *Crisis of Care?*: para. 2). Affirmative responses cannot help but caricature transformative suggestions, given their necessary tacit premise on ‘critical separatism’ and the consequent abstraction from – and invisibilisation of – the relations that are of central concern to transformative imaginaries.

Despite the pandemic, the gross irresponsibility of corporate interests determining public policy continues, and genuine social solidarity as expressed by the axiom, ‘the free healthy development of each conditions the free healthy development of all’ across local, regional and national boundaries is lost on those making economic and policy decisions at a nation-state level. Clearly there are no bold radical moves, in either the US or in SA, to suggest a reevaluation of past practice and certainly scant indication of questioning the underlying structural characteristics that have given rise to the crisis of neoliberal economic and social policies. The effects of the latter policies can be seen not only through the lens of the present pandemic but in the more enduring longer term attributes of the social stratification brought about by patriarchal, racial capitalism that is increasingly propelling inequality, food insecurity, environmental degradation, racism and xenophobia, egregious levels of unemployment and the wide scale psychosocial trauma of marginalisation leading to a process of more or less continuous conflict in society.

A transnational response for a global problem

The Covid-19 pandemic has made manifest Fraser’s critique of the nation-state as the base unit of social justice (Fraser 2009). Fraser reminds us that we cannot

forget political questions, about, for example, the hollowing out of democracy by market forces at two levels: on the one hand, the corporate capture of political parties and public institutions at the level of the territorial state; on the other hand, the usurpation of political decision-making power at

⁶ Given that schools were inevitably likely to reopen and close repeatedly as the pandemic deepened, such non-contact methods were far more likely to sustain some form of learning for the vast majority of children during the crisis.

the transnational level by global finance, a force that is unaccountable to any demos. (Fraser & Jaeggi 2018: 3)

Both these sets of forces, at the national and transnational levels, have shaped the unfolding of the Covid-19 pandemic in multiple ways.

The first is through absent or inadequate preparation for what was, by many accounts, a predicted pandemic. Despite intelligence forecasting Covid-19 or a similar viral outbreak, nation-states such as South Africa and the United States opted rather to gut public services (most notably, but not limited to, health) in favour of market forces and profit seeking in spheres of public social reproduction, rendering ailing hospitals, care homes and schools unable to respond to a crisis appropriately. As Bourdieu (2003: 35) pointed out, health is particularly hard hit by the prevailing neoliberal policy zeitgeist:

The most exemplary case is that of health, which neoliberal policy attacks from two directions, by contributing to an increase in the incidence of illness and the number of sick people (through the correlation between poverty and pathology . . .) and by reducing medical resources and the provision of care.

Secondly, whether originating internally or externally – and in spite of mounting evidence that contradicts the approach’s efficacy – austerity politics has dominated, even in the face of the pandemic, clipping the fiscal wings of governments to respond to the pandemic with fiscal policy targeted at the most vulnerable.

And thirdly, through profit seeking – even in the moment of pandemic (what Klein 2007 refers to as *shock politics*), whether through large corporate tax bailouts in the United States, or massive price increases for PPE materials and water provision to protect students in South African schools. In particular, caution is required regarding Trojan horse affirmative proposals that – while superficially seeming to address an immediate need – in fact, exacerbate existing crises, whether deepening inequalities premised on class, race or gender relations, or by pursuing practices that exacerbate environmental degradation (including increased activity online – see Tarnoff 2020).

Stepping through to a more just world: What needs to change?

This crisis will not be resolved by tinkering with social policy. The path to its resolution can only go through deep structural transformation of this social order. (Fraser 2017 Another Mutation?: para.3)

There are limits to what the current system can achieve . . . it’s basic design has limited capacity to address apartheid injustices, overcome the deep inequalities in schools, or provide equal quality for all in terms of experiences and outcomes. (Christie 2020: 201)

Transformative strategies to reopening schools will require both a denaturalising of the institutionalised social order, along with equitable collaboration and listening to the ‘deliberately silenced or preferably unheard’ youth and families in our systems (Roy 2004: para. 4), and not assuming privileged parents and middle classes speak for all families, or that only policymakers or education reformers know what’s best for them. Transformative imaginaries must dispel austerity

logics rammed with a TINA (there is no alternative) rationale, be vigilant against disaster capitalism strategies and remain awake to the social nature of the existing institutional order – that such systems are of people’s making, and hence within the realm of people’s unmaking. In all this, the temptation to seek localised private solutions must be resisted because to truly dismantle usurious relations between production and reproduction, ‘abandoning the public mandate of the state is not an option’ (Vally 2020: 3). Only with incisive analysis of the structures and systems that brought the world to such inequitable conditions can we truly step through the Covid-19 portal to a more equitable, sustainable and just society.

References

- Almeida, N. (2017) Open educational resources and the rhetorical paradox in the neoliberal univers(ity). *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies*, 1(1). doi:10.24242/jclis.v1i1.16
- Baldwin-Ragaven, L. (2020) Social dimensions of COVID-19 in South Africa: A neglected element of the treatment plan. *Wits Journal of Clinical Medicine*, 2(SI): 33–38.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.18772/26180197.2020.v2nSIa6>
- Bangani, Z. (2020) The digital learning divide. *New Frame* [online]. Available at <https://www.newframe.com/the-digital-learning-divide/> [accessed 21 June 2020].
- Berners-Lee, T. (2020) Covid-19 makes it clearer than ever: Access to the internet should be a universal right. *The Guardian* [online]. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jun/04/covid-19-internet-universal-right-lockdown-online> [accessed 10 June 2020].
- Bhattacharya, T (ed.). (2017) *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*. Pluto Press.
- Black Caucus at UCT. (2020) There are alternatives to pushing emergency remote learning at universities. *Mail & Guardian* [online]. Available at <https://mg.co.za/article/2020-05-01-there-are-alternatives-to-pushing-emergency-remote-learning-at-universities/> [accessed 20 June 2020].
- Black, S. (2020a) The tyranny of timespace: Examining the timetable of schooling activities as the interface between policy and everyday rhythms. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Cape Town.
- Black, S. (2020b) Conceptualising school overcrowding: Exploring relations between (mal)distribution and (inadequate) provision at different scales. Unpublished working paper.
- Black, S. (2020c) The problem with Stephen Grootes’ views about online learning. *Daily Maverick* [online]. Available at <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2020-05-11-the-problem-with-stephen-grootes-views-about-online-learning/> [accessed 11 June 2020].
- Bouie, J. (2020) Why coronavirus is killing African-Americans more than others. *New York Times* [online]. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/14/opinion/sunday/coronavirus-racism-african-americans.html> [accessed 1 July 2020].
- Bourdieu, P. (1986) The forms of capital. In Richardson, J (ed.). *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. Greenwood, 241–258.
- Bourdieu, P. (2003) *Firing Back: Against the Tyranny of the Market 2*. New Press.
- Bridle, J. (2019) *New Dark Age: Technology and the End of the Future*. Verso Books.

- C19 People's Coalition. (2020a) No! To just opening schools. Yes! To opening schools justly. *ECD & Basic Education Working Sub-Group* [online]. Available at <https://c19peoplescoalition.org.za/media-statement-no-to-just-opening-schools-yes-to-opening-schools-justly/>
- C19 People's Coalition. (2020b) "Public Universities with a Public Conscience: A Proposed Plan for a Social Pedagogy Alternative in the Time of Pandemic" Media Statement: Post-school Working Sub-group. <https://c19peoplescoalition.org.za/statement-plan-for-a-social-pedagogy/>
- Carey, B. (2020) What we're learning about online learning. *New York Times* [online]. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/13/health/school-learning-online-education.html> [accessed 15 June 2020].
- Chisholm, L, Hoadley, U & wa Kivulu, M, Brookes, H, Prinsloo, C, Kgobe, A, Mosia, D, Narsee, H & Rule, S. (2005) *Educator Workload in South Africa* [Report prepared for the Education Labour Relations Council]. HSRC Press.
- Christie, P. (2008) *Opening the Doors of Learning*. Heinemann.
- Christie, P. (2020) *Decolonising Schools in South Africa: The Impossible Dream?* Routledge.
- Cronin, C. (2020) Open education: Walking a critical path. In Conrad, D & Prinsloo, P (eds). *Open(ing) Education: Theory And Practice*. Brill, 9–25. doi:10.1163/9789004422988
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2020) *A New 'New Deal' for Education: Top 10 Policy Moves for States in the Covid 2.0 Era* [online]. Available at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/lindadarlinghammond/2020/05/19/a-new-new-deal-for-education-top-10-policy-moves-for-states-in-the-covid-20-era/#38c095376266> [accessed 1 July 2020].
- Deming, D. (2020) Online learning should return to a supportive role. *New York Times* [online]. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/09/business/online-learning-virus.html> [accessed 1 July 2020].
- Department of Higher Education and Training. (2017) *Draft Open Learning Policy Framework for Post-School Education and Training*. Government Gazette 40772. Government Printer.
- ENCA. (2020, April 30th) *Livestream: Basic Education and Higher Education Briefs Media* [online]. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Z-1HntUZwc&feature=emb_title [accessed 13 June 2020].
- Equal Education. (2016) *Scholar Transport Campaign* [online]. Available at <https://equaleducation.org.za/campaigns/scholar-transport/> [accessed 13 June 2020].
- Equal Education. (2018) *School Infrastructure Campaign* [online]. Available at <https://equaleducation.org.za/campaigns/school-infrastructure/> [accessed 13 June 2020].
- EWN. (2020) Steenhuisen: Reopening of economy about six weeks too late. *EWN* [online]. Available at <https://ewn.co.za/2020/05/26/steenhuisen-reopening-of-economy-about-six-weeks-too-late> [accessed 1 July 2020].
- Fraser, N. (1995) From redistribution to recognition? Dilemmas of justice in a 'post-socialist' age. *New Left Review*, 1(212): 68–93.
- Fraser, N. (2000) Rethinking recognition. *New Left Review*, 3: 107–118.
- Fraser, N. (2005) Reframing global justice. *New Left Review*, 36(77): 11–39.
- Fraser, N. (2008) *Scales of Justice*. Polity Press.
- Fraser, N. (2014) Behind Marx's hidden abode: For an expanded conception of capitalism. *New Left Review*, 86: 55–72.
- Fraser, N. (2016) Contradictions of capital and care. *New Left Review*, 100: 99–117.

- Fraser, N. (2017) Crisis of care? On the social-reproductive contradictions of contemporary capitalism. In Bhattacharya, T (ed.). *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentring Oppression* [Kindle]. Pluto Press.
- Fraser, N & Jaeggi, R. (2018) *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory*. Polity Press.
- Green, W, Adendorff, M & Mathebula, B. (2014) 'Minding the gap?': A national foundation phase teacher supply and demand analysis, 2012–2020. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 4(3), 2–23.
- Grootes, S. (2020) Online learning to the rescue. *Daily Maverick* [online]. Available at <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-05-06-online-learning-to-the-rescue/>
- Gurumurthy, A. (March, 2020) In a new world order driven by AI, we need to rewrite the rules of data capitalism. *Open Democracy*. [online]. Available at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/oureconomy/new-world-order-driven-ai-we-need-rewrite-rules-d-ata-capitalism/> [accessed 12 June 2020].
- Harvey, D. (2019) *Anti-Capitalist Chronicles* [online]. Available at <http://davidharvey.org/2018/11/new-podcast-david-harveys-anti-capitalist-chronicles/> [accessed 15 June 2020].
- HSRC. (2020) *Public Universities With a Public Conscience: HSRC Youth Day Seminar* [online]. Available at <https://www.nrf.ac.za/events/public-universities-public-conscience-hsrc-youth-day-webinar> [accessed 19 June 2020].
- IOL. (2020) 1st for Women steps up to help. *IOL* [online]. Available at <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/western-cape/gbv-centre-calls-triple-during-lockdown-1st-for-women-steps-up-to-help-45995727> [accessed 20 June 2020].
- Ishimaru, A. (2020) *The Prospects for Just Schools in the Wake of COVID-19 Responses* [online]. Available at <https://www.tcpress.com/blog/prospects-schools-wake-covid-19-responses/> [accessed 1 July 2020].
- Jacklin, H. (2004) Repetition and difference: A rhythm analysis of pedagogic practice. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of the Witwatersrand.
- Jacklin, H. (2020) Re-opening schools is an ill-considered move. *Daily Maverick* [online]. Available at <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2020-06-05-reopening-schools-is-an-ill-considered-move-ask-the-teachers-not-the-economists/> [accessed 10 June 2020].
- Jacklin, H & Graaff, J. (1994) Rural education in South Africa: A report on schooling in the Bantustans. Unpublished report.
- Karlsson, J, McPherson, G & Pampallis, J. (2019) A critical examination of the development of school governance policy and its implications for achieving equity. In Motala, E & Pampallis, J (eds). *The State, Education and Equity in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Routledge, 139–177.
- Klein, N. (2007) *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. MacMillan.
- Kubrick, S. (1971) *A Clockwork Orange* [film]. Polaris Productions.
- Mafolo, K. (2020) TVET colleges left behind with e-learning. *Daily Maverick* [online]. Available at <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-06-18-tvet-colleges-left-behind-in-e-learning/> [accessed 21 June 2020].
- Marx, K. (1976) *Capital* (Vol. 1, B. Fowkes, Trans.). Vintage. (Original work published 1864/72.).
- Marx, K. (2005) *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*. Penguin.

- Mathabane, O. (2020) Completing the academic year is important but the welfare of all students comes first. *Daily Maverick* [online]. Available at <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2020-04-20-completing-the-academic-year-is-important-but-the-welfare-of-all-students-comes-first/#gsc.tab=0> [accessed 9 June 2020].
- Mbovane, T. (2020b) Covid-19: SASSA runs out of food parcels in Uitenhage. *GroundUp* [online]. Available at <https://www.groundup.org.za/article/covid-19-sassa-runs-out-food-parcels-uitenhage/> [accessed 20 June 2020].
- Mbovane, T. (2020a) Covid-19: One day I will get my own food parcel. *Ground Up* [online]. Available at <https://www.groundup.org.za/article/hungry-kwanobuhle-residents-wait-all-night-food-parcels/> [accessed 20 June 2020].
- NPR. (2020) President Trump wants to reopen economy despite CDC warnings. *NPR* [online]. Available at <https://www.npr.org/2020/05/06/851631806/president-trump-wants-to-reopen-economy-despite-cdc-warnings> [accessed 1 July 2020].
- Portwig, C. (2018) The impact of learner transport on Grade 3 learners' physiological, emotional and educational well-being: A case study of a rural primary school in the Cape Winelands, South Africa. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Cape Town.
- Reddy, V, Prinsloo, C, Netshitangani, T, Moletsane, R, Juan, A & Janse van Rensburg, D. (2010) *An Investigation Into Educator Leave in the South African Ordinary Public Schooling System*. Research commissioned by UNICEF for the Department of Basic Education, South Africa. HSRC Press.
- Roy, A. (2004) *Arundhati Roy: The 2004 Sydney Peace Prize Lecture* [online]. Available at <https://www.sydney.edu.au/news/84.html?newsstoryid=279> [accessed 10 June 2020].
- Roy, A. (2020) *The Pandemic is a Portal: An Online Teach-In With Arundhati Roy* [online]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QmQLTnK4QTA> [accessed 5 July 2020].
- SABC. (2020) Basic Education Department media briefing on readiness for the reopening of schools: 07 June 2020 [online]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dqLNo4LhGLs> [accessed 1 July 2020].
- Silbert, P. (2012) The imagined learner in neoliberal times: Constructions of the South African learning subject in education policy discourse and school practice. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Cape Town.
- Spreen, CA. (2019, September 18) Cruella DeVos' privatization plan: Proposed budget cuts for public schools and more money for failing charters. *Education International Blog* [online]. Available at <https://www.unite4education.org/global-response/cruella-devos-privatization-plan-proposed-budget-cuts-for-public-schools-and-more-money-for-failing-charters/> [accessed 1 July 2020].
- Stats SA. (2016) *General Household Survey* [online]. Available at <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0318/P03182016.pdf> [accessed 15 June 2020].
- Strauss, V. (2017) Here are K-12 education programs Trump wants to eliminate in 2018 budget. *The Washington Post* [online]. Available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2017/05/18/here-are-k-12-education-programs-trump-wants-to-eliminate-in-2018-budget/> [accessed 15 June 2020].
- Tarnoff, B. (2020, May 21) The internet is a fossil fuel industry. *Progressive International* [online]. Available at <https://progressive.international/blueprint/d0b51aca-6c19-4216-b836-1974b74ee21f-ben-tarnoff-covid-19-and-the-cloud/en> [accessed 20 June 2020].

- Teese, R. & Polesel, J. (2003) *Undemocratic Schooling: Equity and Quality in Mass Secondary Education in Australia*. Melbourne University Publishing.
- Universities South Africa. (2020) *Public Universities Have Either Embraced Emergency Teaching/Learning, or are Getting Ready for the Inevitable, in the Covid-19 Era* [online]. Available at <https://www.usaf.ac.za/universities-coronavirus-covid-19-updates/> [accessed 20 June 2020].
- Vally, S. (2020) Between the vision of yesterday and the reality of today: Forging a pedagogy of possibility. *Education as Change*, 24. <https://doi.org/10.25159/1947-9417/6984>
- van der Berg, S. & Spaul, N. (2020) *Counting the Cost: Covid-19 School Closures in South Africa & Its Impacts on Children* [online]. Available at <https://resep.sun.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Van-der-Berg-Spaul-2020-Counting-the-Cost-COVID-19-Children-and-Schooling-15-June-2020-1.pdf> [accessed 20 June 2020].
- Wark, M. (2019) *Capitalism is Dead: Is This Something Worse?* Verso Books.
- Watson, A. & Calland, R. (2020) What Covid-19 teaches us about future of school education. *The Scotsman*. [online]. Available at <https://www.scotsman.com/education/what-covid-19-teaches-us-about-future-school-education-andrew-watson-and-richard-calland-2879486> [accessed 20 June 2020].

Notes on the authors

Sara Black is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Centre for Education Rights and Transformation at the University of Johannesburg.

Carol Anne Spreen is a visiting professor at the Centre for Education Rights and Transformation (CERT) and an Associate Professor of International Education in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development at New York University.

Salim Vally is the director of the Centre for Education Rights and Transformation (CERT), and a professor in the faculty of education at the University of Johannesburg. He is also DHET-NRF SARChI Chair in Community, Adult and Workers' Education.

Address for correspondence

svally@uj.ac.za

Educating for work in the time of Covid-19: Moving beyond simplistic ideas of supply and demand

Stephanie Allais and Carmel Marock
University of the Witwatersrand

Abstract

This article describes how the Covid-19 pandemic has been particularly negative for skill formation in South Africa but, at same time, there are high expectations for the technical and vocational education and training system to support economic recovery and individual livelihoods. We argue that many policy recommendations for how education can meet these expectations are trapped in a narrow and mechanistic notion of supply and demand. The knowledge and skills required to do work are not developed somewhere outside of the economy, and then ‘supplied’ to meet labour market ‘demand.’ Skill formation is embedded in a range of different economic, social, and political arrangements and systems. Policy notions of ‘supply and demand’ of skills also underestimate how the ability of education to prepare for work is shaped by the ways in which work is organised. We argue that both researchers and policymakers need to think about vocational skills development programmes within industry sector master plans that drive economic recovery. We provide ideas of how policymakers can think about education and work more holistically, and argue that the key move is away from market-based regulatory models and towards models focused on building institutional capacity.

Keywords: Technical and vocational education and training, vocational skills development, skill formation, Covid, supply and demand of skills

Allais, S & Marock, C. (2020) Educating for work in the time of Covid-19: Moving beyond simplistic ideas of supply and demand. *Southern African Review of Education*, 26(1): 62–79.

Introduction

This paper considers the implications of Covid-19 for transitions from education to work and for thinking about the provision and acquisition of skills for work in South Africa. Our focus is on the whole system of educational preparation for work – what some literature refers to as the *skill formation system* of a country (Busemeyer & Trampusch 2012; Bosch 2017). We also use the term *vocational skills development* to signal the inclusion of formal college or school-based provision, formal workplace-based provision, and informal learning. This broad focus is important because the weaknesses of vocational skills development in South Africa (despite small pockets of excellence) are further weakened by dislocation and lack of integration across what is offered in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges and the offerings of what the Department of Higher Education and Training (forthwith, the DHET) calls *skills development providers*. The latter term is a catch-all that includes a wide range of institutional forms including large private colleges, workplace-based training centres, and small providers of focused skills: essentially, any organisation that is not a public TVET college and which offers some kind of vocational or, in the South African parlance, occupational educational programme. As in many areas, in the area of vocational skills development the Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced and made more visible underlying fault lines that have been present in our system for decades.

But despite the wide array of weaknesses in the system, TVET is still looked to for solving labour market crises – and the language of urgency, immediacy, and agility is being used by key stakeholders and role-players in this regard. TVET is seen as key to teaching new skills for a changing economy, as well as to ‘reskill’ the many who have lost their jobs or will lose them in the months to come. One problem with this is that high expectations from weak systems can lead to negative cycles of endless policy reform and stigmatisation. Even more concerning is that many of the recommendations for how TVET could play this anticipated role seem to be using this moment to entrench positions that have been pushed in TVET reform for many years – using market mechanisms to ensure more responsive, agile, demand-led TVET, as well as using policy interventions such as ‘micro-credentials.’ This is succinctly captured in a World Bank report on the role of TVET globally: ‘A great opportunity is opening up that should not be wasted to accelerate TVET system reforms that reinforce the demand-orientation of programs so they can respond quickly to shifting patterns of skill demand’ (World Bank 2020: 2).

The Bank also argues (ibid.: 9) that

as skills needs during and after the pandemic require an urgent response, there is likely to be increased demand for shorter and more modular training with stacked micro-credentials, particularly for students who need to compensate for family income loss and for firms that need to scale up very quickly.

Notions of agility, short-term responsiveness, and micro-credentials are very much part of the logic of reform that has been implemented around the globe in the past 30 years – what Simon McGrath (2012) describes as a global ‘TVET toolkit’ that has been used to reform systems, particularly in developing countries. The toolkit includes systemic reform focused on giving more

power to employers, often through competence-based qualifications and/or qualifications frameworks; quality assurance systems; outcomes-based and 'institutionally-neutral' funding; and managed autonomy for public providers. These are all mechanisms through which governments and donors have attempted to create and support regulated markets in TVET in the hope of creating demand-led, responsive, flexible provision. On top of all this is a push for online and distance learning, which has obviously grown at this time.

In this paper, we argue that the market-led funding models as well as qualification-led reform (micro-credentials) which claim to support demand-based TVET provision, and which are regaining prominence because of the Covid-19 pandemic, will not make provision more responsive and agile. They will have the opposite effect because they work against the building of strong, robust, healthy institutions. A focus on institution building, we argue, is essential for responsive provision. We need to build and support institutions that are capable of meeting demand. This means institutions that can offer broad TVET qualifications that include components of general education and components of locally needed skills, and shorter accredited programmes that are recognised by employers and professional associations, as well as less formal, responsive short courses. Building institutions that can offer this range of programmes in dynamic and meaningful partnerships with employers and communities requires long-term funding and a focus on institution building as opposed to regulating and quality assuring. A reliance on market mechanisms in the form of simplistic and short-term demand-based funding has failed in the past and will be worse now.

Arguing against a narrow approach to course-based and enrolment-based funding does not negate the importance of partnerships with employers to strengthen provision. On the contrary, we emphasise the role of employers because skills are built and developed in the economy and society, not supplied exogenously to the economy or to the labour market by education institutions. We therefore argue for a deeper and more holistic notion of relationships between colleges and employers. One specific aspect of this is the ways in which TVET provision can be embedded within industrial policy and industrial strategies within sectors.

Thinking beyond a narrow supply and demand model also does not mean neglecting labour market analysis; we argue for better systems and mechanisms for developing insight into existing labour market demand (in terms of what knowledge, skills, and qualifications are really in demand in the labour market) as well as in terms of where the Covid-induced changes are likely to be. But we also argue for the importance for the state to focus on supporting and creating demand through industrial policy if we want to build an effective skills system. This requires more insight into the relationship between decisions about work organisation, technology and new products, and skills, if we are to take steps towards developing virtuous cycles of skills development and industrial transformation. Finally, while technology can obviously assist learning in many ways, it is clear that a reliance on online and distance education is completely unrealistic in the TVET college sector.

The paper starts with a descriptive overview of how TVET colleges have been hard hit by

Covid-19; few have the necessary facilities for online learning or the prior educational background that makes this viable. Workplace-based provision, which is a long-standing challenge in South Africa, is even harder hit and seems very unlikely for some time to come. This section draws on a series of engagements with donors, senior government officials, business representatives, and other stakeholders, organised by the Project Management Office (PMO) in the Private Office of the President, the GIZ (the development agency of the German government, in full, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) and SECO (State Secretariat for Economic Affairs) to engage with colleagues working in TVET in South Africa and elsewhere. These engagements provided insight into what is happening in the system in the immediate aftermath of the Covid-19 lockdown. We also draw on our involvement in work that is taking place nationally with social partners about ways to collectively grow employment, the sectors in which this growth could take place and those that will require significant intervention to rebuild so as to prevent job loss – and the implications that these have for skills. This includes the work being done as part of the refocusing of the Presidential Jobs Summit and in the context of the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention. (Note: all opinions expressed here are those of the authors, as participant observers, and not of any named organisations or initiatives.)

We then consider likely trends in TVET reform, and provide an analysis in light of well-established findings in the literature, as well as our research currently underway in South Africa and five developing countries (Bangladesh, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Laos, and Vietnam), which aims to explore the contribution of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes to inclusive industrial transformation and growth (<https://phzh.ch/en/Research/skills-for-industry/>).

Educational preparation for mid-level work is the weakest part of our education system, and the hardest hit by Covid

Prior to the health and economic crisis of the Coronavirus and the associated devastating illness of Covid-19, South Africa had a weak TVET system (Gamble 2003; Badroodien 2004; Kraak 2004; Young & Gamble 2006; McGrath 2010; Allais 2013a, 2020b; Ngewangu 2014, 2015; Vally & Motala 2014; Kruss et al. 2019; Allais & Wedekind 2020). The research cited above is a selection from a body of research that has pointed to persistent weaknesses despite many years of reform and despite an extensive range of donor initiatives to support projects, policy reforms, and institutional reform. The South African TVET is relatively small – the vast majority of students who are still in senior secondary education choose to stay in school rather than select vocational education. The majority of students in TVET colleges have completed matric despite the fact that they are mainly enrolled for secondary level vocational qualifications. Colleges were instructed to dramatically increase enrolments between 2010 and 2015 but this was not accompanied by a concomitant increase in the funding base (Singizi 2020). In fact, the DHET reported to the Presidential Commission on Higher Education that, based on the fully costed funding norms, only 429,638 of the 664,748 enrolments in the TVET College subsystem were funded at that time

(DHET 2016).

The apprenticeship system is tiny and full of serious challenges (Wedekind 2018; Singizi 2020). Obtaining workplace experience is a serious problem and there are many challenges with integrating theory and practice despite a few areas of good practice. The qualification system has been in churn for over 20 years. There is a huge range of projects and initiatives that include those supported by the European Union (EU), which focus on 'Education for Employability,' 'Teaching and Learning' as well as a Capacity Building Programme for Employment Promotion; the GIZ, which supports a range of initiatives under the auspices of the Skills Development for a Green Economy; SECO, which focuses on small and medium enterprises (SMEs); Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), which is supporting Artisan Development; and the United Kingdom, which through British Council and the Prosperity Fund supports interventions to build partnerships and provide access to workplace opportunities.

This fragile system has been put under extreme pressure by the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the DHET (2020a), TVET colleges closed for an early recess on the 18th March with a view to reopening on the 15th April 2020. Examinations that were scheduled to start on the 30th March for the engineering students who are enrolled for the Nated qualifications, were postponed. The Nated, or national education qualifications, are the oldest qualifications offered in the TVET colleges. Known as N1 to N6 courses, they were originally designed as the theoretical component of apprenticeships; these qualifications were scheduled for demolition some 15 years ago but have recently been supported by policy and funding tools, and have had increased enrolments over the past few years (Allais 2013b; DHET 2019). Students were advised to continue preparing for examinations, and lecturers were requested to issue assignments and tasks for students to complete during the recess to equip them for the examinations upon their return. But these examinations had not taken place at the time of writing in late June, and very little teaching and learning took place in the three months prior.

A major focus of the DHET during the lockdown period has been intensive work with colleges through regional offices to get them ready to receive students under the new conditions required by the Covid pandemic. In terms of this work, by early June the DHET was confident that all colleges were at least 70% ready (DHET 2020a). The DHET revised the calendar repeatedly in an attempt to manage a fluid and unpredictable environment, including accepting the reality of the loss of one semester intake and one trimester intake (the Nated qualifications are offered on a trimester basis, and the other qualifications offered by TVET colleges, in particular the National Certificate Vocational, is offered on a semester basis). The revised calendars include the cancellation of almost all vacation time and much later examination dates. It was then agreed that the first cohort of students would return on 10th June, starting with Nated engineering students enrolled for N3 and N6. At the time of writing this had started. A gradual phase-in of other students is being planned, with the last cohort scheduled to return on the 27th July for NCV Level 2. These students would have missed almost four months by then.

About 10 colleges have learner management systems that enabled some online teaching and

learning. There were some initiatives in making tutorials available on radio, YouTube and even Facebook, while some lecturers attempted to engage with students on WhatsApp. The DHET website is zero-rated for data, and the DHET engaged with publishers who made all online learning material available freely for three months. But, according to the DHET's analysis, many students were not able to access the material because they don't have devices and data (DHET 2020a).

TVET students are, in the main, the poorest students in our formal education system – with perhaps the exception of community college students, an even smaller and weaker sector – (Powell & McGrath 2019). Few students have the necessary facilities for online learning or the prior educational background that makes this viable. This is similar in many countries, especially poor countries; TVET students tend to come from relatively disadvantaged households compared to pupils in similar levels of general education:

In Ghana and Kenya, for example, those who attend TVET, compared with those who enter a general education track, tend to come from families with lower socioeconomic status (although they are not among the poorest in the overall population), as measured by educational level of the parents. (World Bank 2020: 4)

The Bank report goes on to acknowledge that these students are likely to struggle with the connectivity 'that is essential for remote learning and with managing without any social support that is usually provided through schools' (ibid.: 4).

Workplace experience and workplace-based training have been long-standing challenges for South Africa. They now seem increasingly unlikely for some time to come. Here again, extreme difficulties prior to the Covid pandemic are now highly visible. In employer-based programmes, including apprenticeships, there has no teaching and learning during the lockdown period. Initially, most employers were closed under the 5-week strict lockdown. As the economy has slowly opened up, employers have not taken on trainees because they have restrictions on the number of workers allowed in different work spaces. This applies to the programmes offered through the relatively stronger parts of the TVET college system in a project called Centres of Specialisation. Through this project, the DHET has attempted to build relationships between identified departments within colleges and employers in different economic sectors. Programme offerings through centres of specialisation have a heavy reliance on employers and, therefore, very little teaching and learning took place during the lockdown.

One difference between students in the centres of specialisation and college students more broadly, is that all the Centre of Specialisation students were given devices at the start of their programmes (DHET 2020a). However, even in these cases, the DHET has found that the challenges for these students are extensive. These include that networks are not stable enough for learning, especially in remote areas; that tablets or laptops are damaged; that students don't have smart phones; that students don't have a calm or quiet space to work in; and extreme personal difficulties in households, exacerbated by Covid. According to the DHET's engagement with colleges, about 30% of Centres of Specialisation lecturers have had some engagement with

students to support some degree of engaging with the theoretical components of the courses. Students have textbooks for some courses and were encouraged to go through them on their own. About 24% of colleges said that some assessment has taken place digitally. But in the majority of cases, little teaching and learning has happened. And almost no practical activities have taken place – a crucial part of any TVET programme.

According to the DHET (2020a), centres of specialisation have made attempts to reach out to students – 43% of these centres reported to the DHET that they have been in contact with all their students. However, 80% of apprentices are paying for their own data, and even college lecturers reported difficulty with data and connectivity. Some 57% of colleges reported that they had no contact with employers during the lockdown. All of these numbers would be much smaller for the entire college system because the centres of specialisation are the most resourced parts of the system. This picture highlights the simple practical difficulties with online education and the serious practical challenges faced by the formal TVET system in South Africa. These challenges are exacerbated by weak prior educational experience of many college students – throughput rates are very low under ‘normal’ circumstances. Again, this is not atypical. According to the World Bank (2020: 4), ‘TVET closures affect many students who, in many countries, tend to be more vulnerable than those in secondary general education or universities.’

Lecturer capacity is an ongoing problem. The DHET has been supporting universities to upgrade the pedagogical capacity of lecturers for some years – based on the belief that there are serious weaknesses with lecturers’ capacity in general. Nearly all of lecturers have had no training or support in online teaching although emergency measures are being put in place in this regard, supported by the South African College Principals’ Organisation (SACPO) and donors.

The funding and support of workplace-based training, work experience, and other vocational skills development programmes is also going to come under severe strain. The skills levy was suspended at the beginning of May as part of tax relief for companies for four months (DHET 2020b). The skills levy institutions (the Sectoral Education and Training Authorities, or SETAs, and the National Skills Fund, as well as the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations) are estimated to lose R6.1 billion over the period. As job losses increase, even after the skills levy resumes, the income to the system will be much lower – DHET anticipates that it could be less than half of what was budgeted for the year.

The hope was that while companies would obtain skills levy relief, employers would open workplaces for current and new beneficiaries over the short to medium term. During the lockdown period, the Minister issued a guideline to SETAs that learners should continue to receive stipends for two months, to be supported by proof of learning taking place during the period. Subsequently, there has been an additional three months’ provision for learner stipends. However, until workplaces are able to take back learners, and until the skills levy has stabilised, the continual payment of stipends will become increasingly difficult. This is in a context where reskilling is seen as the solution to rising unemployment. The challenge is continuing to reach beneficiaries of the system, and offering training to the unemployed and newly unemployed in this environment. The

DHET anticipates that at least five SETAs may no longer be a going concern beyond a 2-month period, four of them in critical or essential sectors.

The complexity of the qualification system has also been thrown into stark relief by the Covid-19 pandemic. What has not been achieved to date is a balance between shorter training programmes and a long-term vision of formal qualifications – and advocates of micro-credentials are suggesting them as the solution to this lack of balance (Keevy et al. 2020). The Quality Council on Trades and Occupations has recently engaged in a process of reconfiguring occupational qualifications – including revisiting the formal requirement for workplace experience, which learners now simply cannot get (and most could not get before Covid). It has also introduced new regulations to address the need for short programmes. These suggest that short programmes can only be accredited as a ‘part qualification,’ which is constituted by credits within a full qualification. Full qualifications are now defined in terms of number of credits. This step seeks to address the proliferation of part qualifications that do not lead to a full qualification, as well as qualifications of varied sizes. However, it creates the unintended consequence of negating the possibility that industry associations can determine the need for a short programme that is accredited and that enables the graduate to access a specific opportunity in the workplace. Thus, the organising logic is based on where qualifications exist rather than on where demand is emerging.

Expectations and policy directions for TVET after Covid-19

The general emphasis from employers, employer associations, and government officials with whom we have interacted is on the need for agility and short-term relevance, meeting the new needs of the economy, and being responsive to employers and labour markets. This is in line with the World Bank (2020: 2) which makes a strong call for the potential of TVET to contribute to the recovery of both economies and individual livelihoods: ‘TVET can contribute to the economic recovery by ensuring that it is prepared to rapidly identify and respond to such skill needs.’ The same report argues that,

Considering TVET’s emphasis on work-readiness and its shorter cycle of education compared to tertiary education programs (with shorter and possibly modular training programs), it may be particularly well positioned to support the quick reskilling/upskilling of workers in critical sectors. (ibid.: 7)

And the Bank goes on to list a range of ways in which TVET systems may need to respond in order to play a role in economic recovery:

There could be a strong increase in demand for training to cater both to the cohort whose training was interrupted by Covid-19, and to demand from pupils who were unable to finish general education. In addition, there is likely to be increased demand for training services to support workers who have lost their livelihood during the pandemic. For laid-off formal workers who receive unemployment benefits, participation in training is often mandatory during longer unemployment spells. For students whose families lost income sources due to Covid-19, part-time

training may be needed to allow them to generate an income while continuing training. This also includes the many households that need to compensate the income lost from interrupted remittances, as international migrant workers are restricted from travelling or working abroad. (ibid.: 9)

Some researchers even argue that TVET institutions can contribute to production (Majumdar & Iñigo Araiztegui 2020).

But how should all this be achieved? The main policy idea seems to be more of the same policy thrust that has been tried, with very little success, in many countries around the world over the past 30 years: marketisation and linking funding to allegedly demand-based educational provision, through small pieces of qualifications (or competence-statements). The logic that has dominated policy in this regard was summed up at an international TVET conference last year in Ethiopia, by an economist (somewhat ironically from China, where the limitations of a narrowly market-led approach to development are well understood) who argued: ‘Keep them hungry’ (Yang 2020: n.p.). This logic underpinned the reforms of the English TVET system undertaken under Margaret Thatcher, later imitated by Australian policymakers, and which then spread to many countries under the name of competence-based training (Wheelahán 2010, 2015; Young 2011; Allais 2014). The basic logic is that employers should specify the skills (or competences) they require, and education and training institutions should be given funding against their courses that lead to these specific competences.

This is a logic about deepening markets: creating separate educational competences as goods or services that can be delivered through the market. It should, according to advocates, enable education institutions to provide only the required competences and thereby enable ‘consumers’ – employers or individuals trying to equip themselves in labour markets – to purchase only the ‘bits’ that they want without having to sit through long educational programmes. This is in line with an approach to public sector reform, new public management that has been influential since the 1980s, which focuses on the state as a creator and supporter of market-based provision of services (Hood 1995; Allais 2007). In relation to TVET provision, the idea has been that this approach will ensure that curricula are decentralised and therefore responsive, employers can specify their needs, and both public and private providers can be held accountable as their programmes can be measured against the competences delivered.

The overarching logic is improve our ability to understand the labour market – what is the demand – and then fund programmes that will supply skills to meet this demand. As the World Bank (2020: 9) argues,

Finally, for the skill development system to contribute to the economic rebound, it will be important that the system can begin to rapidly assess emerging skills needs as early as possible. Otherwise, these needs may become bottlenecks for the revival of economies and reduce opportunities for (higher) earnings, especially for the poorest in the population. Preparing labor market information systems to carry out rapid skills demand surveys and creation of an engagement strategy with employers and professional associations might be a first step in this process.

It seems so simple and straightforward. But unfortunately, this simplistic supply and demand notion, and policy reforms based on it, takes no account of how skills are actually developed for work in real countries and economies. A growing body of research literature looks at skills formation as embedded in a range of different economic, social, and political arrangements and systems (Ashton et al. 2002; Busemeyer & Trampusch 2012; Allais 2020a). The research literature shows that you can't make interventions in education and training institutions, only, and expect skill formation to change. Constant attention to reforming education and training provision (the so-called supply side) in fact undermines education provision by creating a constantly shifting policy environment. Instead, researchers and policymakers need to look at vocational skills development as embedded in society and the economy as well as within the education and training system as a whole.

Rethinking supply and demand during and post Covid-19

Provision of education and training, and supporting the development and acquisition of the knowledge and skills required to do work well, to do well at work, and to do work that does good, are far more complicated than a simple supply and demand model implies. One reason for this is that the supply of education – the kinds of education that are provided and the level at which they are provided – shapes the ways in which education is sought after in labour markets over time (Carnoy 1972, 2019). Another is that most education policies that are described as 'demand-led,' and here competence-based training is a key example, have very little to do with demand in the economy and are really focused on changing education and training (Allais 2020a). Thirdly, the ways in which work is organised, the ways in which collective bargaining is organised, the ways in which workplaces are structured, all shape the ways in which skills can be developed and utilised in any economy (Busemeyer & Trampusch 2012; Streeck 2012). The different components of the education and training system affect each other, as do the different parts of the economy and institutional configurations and rules and practices. The nature of the manufacturing sector and the pace and nature of industrialisation is another factor (Ashton et al. 2002; Oliver et al. 2019; Allais 2020a). And, the nature and structure of the labour market shapes the skill formation system in a country.

The relationships are complex but there are concrete examples that demonstrate ways in which thinking about education and work more holistically can make a difference. For example, in recent GIZ work with the plumbing association, it became clear that many providers were running plumbing training programmes but people were not accessing employment that was said to be in demand. What became apparent was that there was not a grade in the plumbing labour market for a plumbing assistant. The professional association therefore reviewed their levels and created a new level that allowed these graduates to enter the labour market. This is a small example of a project that looked at the education side and the labour market side. It created the space for plumbing assistants to legally undertake certain types of work and a pathway in the industry for these graduates to access the experience required to become artisans.

Another issue that questions simplistic notions of supply and demand is that the ability of education to prepare for work is shaped by the ways in which work is organised. Initial findings from research currently underway that looks at the role of skills in supporting companies in industrial sectors (Allais et al. 2020), suggest that there seems to be successful skill formation where there are strong relationships between institutions, decisions on programmes, and the broader industrial strategy and direction of the sector, including with regard to workplace organisation. One implication for policymakers is not taking as given the way firms operate. Further, both researchers and policymakers need to think about vocational skills development within the TVET, higher education, and skills development strategies into industry sector master plans as well as more informal, sectoral strategies. This requires a focus on the development of national strategies for TVET and higher education (particularly universities of technology) that are informed by the industrial strategies and that these industrial strategies, in turn, consider the demand for technical and vocational skills within the context of decisions about work organisation and technology. Sectoral strategies can then create a basis for DHET and the SETAs to develop appropriate mechanisms for planning and resource allocation. We need to shift away from a model that reduces supply and demand to a list of qualifications required, based on retrospective analysis of labour markets towards a focus on skills formation (including qualifications and the nature of provision) as part of the development of the industrial strategy.

At a sectoral level, what is also required is building effective relationships between TVET (public/private and workplace providers), universities, and companies. This would require flexible provision arrangements including the recognition of the value of workplace providers that can offer a significant component of learning programmes, as well as programmes that accommodate or support changing technology and workplace requirements. All of this implies a need for supporting and building colleges to deliver programmes and qualifications in a flexible and quality manner. Innovative and responsive provision of vocational skills development programmes cannot happen without building the institutional capacity of TVET institutions.

The demand-led funding model, together with the other arms of the global toolkit mentioned above, focuses on short-term funding that rewards institutions meeting short-term demand. This approach to funding makes it impossible to build any kind of institution, and is particularly unsuited to education. It makes responsiveness impossible. It also tends to divert funds into complex qualification and credential systems with very limited evidence of any value produced. Designing a curriculum takes time and needs expertise. Offering it takes time. Engaging with industry and local communities to determine needs requires dedicated staff time. Doing lecturer training and upgrading and retraining requires dedicated time. When institutions are entirely dependent on short-term funding linked to demand, it is impossible for them to be responsive. They simply have no spare capacity for curriculum design or research, no time for lecturers to teach themselves something new, no or few permanent staff who can sit down and plan, no staff with capacity to engage with industry and communities – each staff member has a salary that is narrowly tied to a specific course.

The idea that lecturers who have been teaching in one area can simply switch to another because there is a new demand in the economy is unrealistic, and lecturer subject matter expertise is essential for any quality teaching. If we want TVET institutions that are agile and responsive, we need to build them, support them, pay their staff on permanent contracts, give them working conditions that allow time for professional development and learning, and pay for staff who do community and industry engagement. Good institutions take time and resources to build up. Further, we need a regulatory system that supports institutions but allows for flexibility with respect to the deployment of staff as well as in the offering of the programme against the qualification.

Serious work on innovation in industrial production and technology emphasises the need for strong institutions – often working in clusters – and patient funding. Mariana Mazzucato (2013), for example, shows how venture capital has not been the key factor in many major industrial and technological innovations but, rather, patient capital through nation states (including in the military industrial complex in the United States) has played this role. Kattel et al. (2019) use the term *agile stability* to emphasise the combination of strong and stable institutions and innovative partnerships in organisational agility.

Government and development partners thinking about allocation of funding are, understandably, concerned with results and want accountability from institutions and, of course, it is possible for long-term patient funding to be misused. However, the Covid pandemic has highlighted that the social economy, and provision of social goods, is a far more crucial part of the economy than has been understood by economists narrowly focused on GDP. Putting funds into building education institutions that can offer social engagement, sustained learning, partnerships with employers, and a sense of purpose to young people, may prove in the long term to be of value to society. We also know that a broad and general education makes people more able to be retrained and more flexible and able to transition. TVET offers education to people who have not succeeded in general education. This broader function of TVET provision must remain in focus, and is also a crucial part of institution building.

None of this means that there is no longer a need to determine the occupations that are in demand across the economy in order to inform enrolment planning and shape provisioning. The DHET has developed a methodology to understand this demand through a large ‘labour market intelligence project,’ which has been implemented over the past five years and now has a new set of projects in this area that aim to move towards a more responsive system (www.psetresearchrepository.dhet.gov.za). However, whilst this research has allowed for some insight into the occupations in demand, what is evident is that we don’t yet have a full picture in terms of the impact of Covid-19. It is clear that the labour market consequences will be devastating and, almost certainly, will get worse for months if not years to come. We will see not only a terrible loss of jobs, but also more hidden phenomena such as reduction in hours of work, job security, quality of work, and salaries. The overall patterns to date suggest that the negative impact of the shocks is larger for workers with lower educational attainment (South African Treasury 2020).

Treasury points out the ways in which Covid will aggravate structural faults in the economy and anticipates that employment, household consumption and investment will continue to be constrained and that GDP per capita will fall – further exacerbating social pressures and fragmentation (South African Treasury 2020).

These challenges and opportunities highlight the limitations of ‘manpower planning’ as the pace of change is considerably faster than the duration that it takes to complete the research. However, while the short run will be dominated by uncertainty and many labour market challenges that will undermine skills development, there is also a possible silver lining in the opportunity to build skills development into thinking about economic recovery in ways that are more integrated and holistic than current practice. Over the past 30 years, the South African state has not played an effective role in shaping demand in the economy or in looking at both skills utilisation and needs in workplaces. Supply and demand are dichotomised: demand is in the economy, supply of skills is exogenous and must simply meet the needs of economy. Covid has forced more focus on economic planning – in terms of supporting economic sectors that are in distress or support local innovation. To the extent that skills development can be seen as a broader package in this regard, there could be positive results.

There are also emerging areas where demand is being created, such as the digital economy, which opens up a range of different opportunities as well as the agricultural value chain and global business services. Efforts are also being made to address disruptions in the supply chain through local procurement, and mechanisms are being put in place to track the commitments made by companies to increase their spending within the local economy. For example, the Manufacturing Circle is supporting the local production of medical equipment. One project is the national ventilator project, which is a joint collaboration between industry labour and health and has involved developing specifications for locally manufactured products and concerted effort to work with partners in terms of determining what sort of product is required and what expertise is required. A totally different project looks at the local manufacture of fabric masks. Here, industry, labour, and government developed joint specification for masks that large-scale manufacturers and small-scale home operations could then produce. Both focused on understanding where the blockages in the local supply chains are. Government is also working closely with the private sector to roll out multiple infrastructure projects in order to both create an environment for economic recovery as well as in response to the need to stimulate demand.

Finally, supporting transitions from education to work means building institutions that can play this intermediary and supportive role. For example, the Pathway Management Network, a key pillar of the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention, uses technological platforms to attempt to support young people to build their profile, and aggregates work opportunities available. This intervention, through Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator, is working with employers to change hiring practices towards inclusive hiring, and emphasises the responsibility of companies to induct new entrants and to support new entrants to successfully transition into the workplace. The business service industry, through demonstrating to employers a consistent supply of labour,

has been able to attract global business and thereby increase the demand for labour. There is also some preliminary evidence that through the combination of work experience and a small stipend offered by the Presidential National Youth Service Programme, some young people have successfully started their own small businesses. Building systems and institutions includes institutions that play a role as labour market intermediaries.

Conclusion and research agenda

This is not the moment for reintroducing the failed market dogma of TVET reform in the hope that it will lead to the desired agility and responsiveness with the hope, in turn, that this will somehow ensure economic and job recovery. Instead, it is a moment for starting to develop a more holistic and integrated way of thinking about skills, thinking about all the moving parts of the economy, and the institutional configurations and systems that shape skill formation as we move forward with Covid-19 overlaid on a weak economy. Our research (Allais et al. 2020) provides some indications of how skills can be thought of inside the industrial policy process instead of as an add-on or something exogenous. It highlights the need to think about the quality of work and organisation of workplaces as well as skills development inside industrial policy and inside different economic sector strategies. Part of this is thinking about how formal providers and provision in general need to be embedded inside the industries. One implication of this is that we can't have general strategies – they have to be specific to each industry and sector. A generalised 'partnership' model is unlikely to succeed.

This requires a better balance between coordination and supporting a flourishing of provision. Our current regulatory system does not ensure coordination but does stifle initiative. We have to move from both of these negatives to a more flexible system that also supports institution building. We need more holistic TVET that focuses on occupational streams and clusters (Wheelahan et al. 2015) with strong qualifications that allow for some local flexibility rather than only narrow job preparation, at the same time as supporting companies to develop highly specific skills and supporting TVET institutions to *also* offer short focused training programmes. This needs to be in line with an economic recovery focused on jobs.

The increased focus on coordination across development partners and varied government departments offers some hope for a systemic response that focuses on institutional development to meet immediate and long-term needs. As part of this process there will be a need for more research into the ways in which TVET can be embedded into industrial strategy and translating this into sector-specific vocational skills development strategies – considering what this means for institutions, partnerships and the balance between different types of programmes. We also need insight into how to adjust regulatory frameworks to realise the balance of ensuring strong coordination whilst allowing and encouraging innovation. We need to understand how learners can access practical and workplace experience given the current constraints and the implications that this has for the TVET institutions, qualifications, and programmes. Most importantly, we need far more insight into how to support and build education and training institutions on the one hand

and, on the other hand, into relationships between decisions about work organisation, technology and new products and skills – if we are to take steps towards developing virtuous cycles of skills development and industrial transformation.

References

- Allais, S. (2007) Education service delivery: The disastrous case of outcomes-based qualifications frameworks, *Progress in Development Studies*, 7(1): 65–78.
- Allais, S. (2013a) Understanding the persistence of low skills in South Africa. In Daniel, J, Pillay, D, Naidoo, P & Southall, R (eds). *New South African Review 3*. Wits University Press, 201–220.
- Allais, S. (2013b) What is college lecturers' work? Possibilities for professionalizing college lecturers in South Africa. In Seddon, T & Levin, J (eds). *World Yearbook of Education 2013. Educators, Professionalism and Politics: Global Transitions, National Spaces, and Professional Projects*. Routledge, 133–153.
- Allais, S. (2014) *Selling Out Education: National Qualifications Frameworks and the Neglect of Knowledge*. Sense.
- Allais, S. (2020a) Skills for industrialization in sub-Saharan African countries: Why is systemic reform of technical and vocational systems so persistently unsuccessful? *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*. doi:10.1080/13636820.2020.1782455
- Allais, S. (2020b) Vocational education and inequalities in transitions from education to work in three African countries. In Francis, D, Valodia, I & Webster, E (eds). *Inequality: Studies From the Global South*. Routledge, 141–160.
- Allais, S, Schöer, V, Marock, C, Kgalema, V, Ramulongo, N & and Sibiyi, T. (2020) TVET, Skills, and Company Transformation and Growth Insights From a Company Survey in Three Manufacturing Sectors in South Africa: . *Skills for Industry Working Paper No R2*. The Centre for Researching Education and Labour and Zurich University of Teacher Education.
- Allais, S & Wedekind, V. (2020) Targets, TVET and transformation. In Wulff, A (ed.). *Grading Goal Four: Tensions, Threats and Opportunities in the Sustainable Development Goal on Quality Education*. Brill Sense, 322–338.
- Ashton, D, Green, F, Sung, J & James, D. (2002) The evolution of education and training strategies in Singapore, Taiwan and S. Korea: A development model of skill formation, *Journal of Education and Work*, 15(1): 5–30.
- Badroodien, A. (2004) Technical and vocational education provision in South Africa from 1920 to 1970. In McGrath, S, Badroodien, A, Kraak, A & Unwin, L (eds). *Shifting Understandings of Skills in South Africa: Overcoming the Historical Imprint of a Low Skills Regime*. HSRC Press, 20–45.
- Bosch, G. (2017) Different national skill systems. In Warhurst, C, Mayhew, K, Finegold, D & Buchanan, J (eds). *The Oxford Handbook of Skills and Training*. Oxford University Press, 424–443.

- Busemeyer, MR & Trampusch, C. (2012) The comparative political economy of collective skill formation. In Busemeyer, MR & Trampusch, C (eds). *The Political Economy of Collective Skill Formation*. Oxford University Press, 3–38.
- Carnoy, M. (1972) The political economy of education. In LaBelle, T (ed.). *Education and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean*. UCLA Latin American Centre, 177–215.
- Carnoy, M. (2019) *Transforming Comparative Education: Fifty Years of Theory Building at Stanford*. Stanford University Press.
- Department of Higher Education and Training. (2016) *Submission to the Presidential Commission on the Feasibility of Fee-Free Higher Education and Training*. DHET.
- Department of Higher Education and Training. (2019) *Statistics on Post-School Education and Training in South Africa: 2017*. DHET.
- Department of Higher Education and Training. (2020a) *Saving Lives/Saving the Academic Year: Impact of COVID-19 on Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges*. DHET.
- Department of Higher Education and Training. (2020b) *Skills presentation to the Workshop on Covid 19*. Workshop on the impact of Covid-19, 5th June 2020, Pretoria.
- Gamble, J. (2003) *Curriculum Responsiveness in FET Colleges*. HSRC Press.
- Hood, C. (1995) The ‘new public management’ in the 1980s: Variations on a theme, *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 20(2/3): 93–109.
- Kattel, R, Drechsler, W & Karo, E. (2019) *Innovation Bureaucracies: How Agile Stability Creates the Entrepreneurial State*. Working Paper Series (IIPP WP 2019-12). UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose [online]. Available at: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/public-purpose/wp2019-12> [accessed 19 June 2020].
- Keevy, J, Hazell, E & Matlala, L. (2020) *Towards an Agile Credentialing Scheme for South Africa: Recommendations*. Report by Yellowwoods and JET Education Services as a contribution to both the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention and the DHET Ministerial Task Team. Yellowwoods and JET Education Services.
- Kraak, A. (2004) Rethinking the high skills thesis in South Africa. In McGrath, S, Badroodien, A, Kraak, A & Unwin, L (eds). *Shifting Understandings of Skills in South Africa: Overcoming the Historical Imprint of a Low Skills Regime*. HSRC Press, 212–268.
- Kruss, G, Wildschut, A & Petersen, I. (2019) *Skills for the Future: New Research Perspectives*. HSRC Press.
- Majumdar, S & Iñigo Araiztegui, T. (2020) *Technical Vocational Education & Training: Reflections on the Issues Facing TVET and its Potential in the Time of COVID-19* [online]. Available at: www.linkedin.com/in/shyamalmajumdar [accessed 2 June 2020].
- Mazzucato, M. (2013) *The Entrepreneurial State: Debunking Public vs. Private Sector Myths*. Anthem Press.
- McGrath, S. (2010) Beyond aid effectiveness: The development of the South African further and training college sector, 1994–2009. *International Journal for Educational Development*, 30, 525–534.

- McGrath, S. (2012) Vocational learning for development: A policy in need of a theory? *International Journal for Educational Development*, 32(5): 623–632.
- Ngcwangu, S. (2014) Skills development in post-apartheid South Africa: Issues, arguments and contestations. In Vally, S & Motala, E (eds). *Education, Economy, and Society*. Unisa, 244–264.
- Ngcwangu, S. (2015) The ideological underpinnings of World Bank TVET policy: Implications of the influence of human capital theory on South African TVET policy. *Education as Change*, 19(3): 24–45.
- Oliver, D, Yu, S & Buchanan, J. (2019) Political economy of vocational education and training. In Guile, D & Unwin, L (eds). *The Wiley Handbook of Vocational Education and Training*. Wiley Blackwell, 115–136.
- Powell, L & McGrath, SA. (2019) *Skills for Human Development: Transforming Vocational Education and Training*. Routledge.
- Singizi. (2020) *Analysis of PSET Trends Towards NDP 2030: Final Report to NPC*. Singizi Consulting Africa.
- South African Treasury. (2020) *Briefing by National Treasury on Financial Implications of Covid-19 on both the Economy and Budget*. Joint Standing Committee and Select Committee on Finance and Appropriations, 30th April 2020, Cape Town.
- Streeck, W. (2012) Skills and politics: General and specific. In Busemeyer, MR & Trampusch, C (eds). *The Political Economy of Collective Skill Formation*. Oxford University Press, 317–352.
- Vally, S & Motala, E (eds). (2014) *Education, Economy, and Society*. Unisa.
- Wedekind, V. (2018) The idealisation of apprenticeship. In Allais, S & Shalem, Y (eds). *Knowledge, Curriculum, and Preparation for Work*. Brill Sense, 104–126.
- Wheelahan, L. (2010) *Why Knowledge Matters in Curriculum*. Routledge.
- Wheelahan, L. (2015) The future of Australian vocational education qualifications depends on a new social settlement, *Journal of Education and Work*, 28(2): 126–146.
doi:10.1080/13639080.2014.1001333
- Wheelahan, L, Buchanan, J & Yu, S. (2015) *Linking Qualifications and the Labour Market Through Capabilities and Vocational Streams* [online]. Available at <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2782.html> [accessed 6 April 2016].
- World Bank (2020) *TVET Systems' Response to COVID-19: Challenges and Opportunities*. World Bank.
- Yang, P. (2020) *Development of Financing System for TVET*. 2nd International TVET Conference: Making skills work for economic transformation. UN Conference Centre, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 29–31 July, 2019, Addis Ababa.
- Young, M. (2011) National vocational qualifications in the United Kingdom: Their origins and legacy. *Journal of Education and Work*, 24(3–4): 259–282.
- Young, M & Gamble, J (eds). (2006) *Knowledge, Curriculum and Qualifications for South African Further Education*. HSRC Press.

Notes on the authors

Stephanie Allais is the SARCHI Research Chair of Skills Development at the Centre for Researching Education and Labour, at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Carmel Marock is a research associate of REAL and the coordinator of the Presidential Jobs Summit.

Address for correspondence

Matseleng.allais@wits.ac.za (corresponding)

carmelmarock@singizi.co.za

In search of the ‘new normal’: Reflections on teaching and learning during Covid-19 in a South African university

Shireen Motala and Kirti Menon
University of Johannesburg

Abstract

On 15 March 2020, all tertiary institutions in South Africa began to implement measures to meet the social isolation and lockdown mandate of the government, while continuing with their core business of teaching and learning. At the University of Johannesburg (UJ), a public higher education institution, an urgent review of all activities to support and enable the academic project was conducted to make provision for the national lockdown measures. What was apparent was that there was a ‘new normal,’ with all teaching and learning activities taking place fully online, and academic staff having to rapidly prepare and capacitate themselves for this. Using a qualitative methodology, this article uses institutional theory and equity and social justice frameworks to critically reflect on how societies have dealt with such pandemics and shocks, locating our South African experience in a global and comparative context. It provides an institutional case study of UJ, critically reviewing how its vision of accessible excellence and equity was mediated by current events and its agility, highlighting some of the challenges and tensions that emerged. Finally, it examines what the new normal will mean for tertiary institutions in South Africa as preparation is made for a post Covid-19 world.

Keywords: Covid-19, tertiary institutions, teaching, learning, equity, social justice, students, agility

Motala, S & Menon, K. (2020) In search of the ‘new normal’: Reflections on teaching and learning during Covid-19 in a South African university. *Southern African Review of Education*, 26(1): 80–99.

Introduction

Unimagined, and akin to movies on pandemics, fiction became reality with the unprecedented global impact of Covid-19. Close parallels are the First and Second World Wars, times of intensive conflict, and the HIV/AIDS and Ebola outbreaks. Other crises have come from major incidents in the USA like 9/11 or shootings on campuses but, with these, the duration of disruption was contained with a clear start and defined end to the period. Garcia (2015) iterated that in a sample of universities in America affected by either climactic conditions or shootings, crisis management requires a comprehensive, clearly defined plan. Covid-19 is a global pandemic with no end in sight. It brings with it a prolonged period of disruption with a possible continuation of these levels of disruption prevailing in the foreseeable future.

Following the World Health Organisation's announcement of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, President Cyril Ramaphosa declared a national disaster in South Africa on 15 March 2020. The declaration saw all tertiary institutions in South Africa implement measures designed to ensure the social isolation mandate while continuing with their core business. From a week before the formal declaration of the national disaster, various mechanisms were put in place to manage the anticipated lockdown (which took effect at midnight on 26 March 2020), many hurriedly. At the University of Johannesburg (UJ), an urgent review of all business continuity plans (BCPs) in domains across the university was conducted to make provision for the national lockdown measures. This crisis review at UJ and other institutions resulted in the rapid containment of on-campus risk. Daily monitoring of emerging conditions, both globally and nationally, was established, and ongoing interpretation and solutions tailored for risk management were devised and reviewed across the post-school sector. The overarching objective remained the completion of the academic year and the safety of students and staff.

The authors¹ of this article, two senior managers/academic leaders with responsibility for academic planning, staff development and postgraduate studies, offer critical reflections on experiences during Covid-19. The multilayered roles of insider, co-authors of plans, co-problem solvers, and co-implementers provide the space to critically reflect on teaching and learning strategies at a large university across a range of considerations drawing on events as experienced and lived, actions taken, and plans and documentation developed to counter the crisis.

There are four areas addressed. First, the article offers analysis of how societies have dealt with pandemics and disruptions, locating our South African experience in a global, comparative context. Secondly, it provides an institutional case study of UJ, reviewing how its vision of accessible excellence and equity was mediated by current events. Thirdly, the article highlights some of the challenges and tensions emerging with specific reference to teaching and learning at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Finally, it examines what the 'new normal' will mean for tertiary institutions in South Africa and globally. The methodology involves a secondary literature

¹ The authors want to acknowledge the senior leadership team at UJ, academics and support, including the Centre of Academic Technologies (CAT), who contributed to the implementation plans for, and delivery of, remote teaching and learning. Much of this is available and updated on <https://www.uj.ac.za/coronavirus/>.

review and critical reflection on the case of UJ. The institution is the unit of analysis – with reference to the drastic changes to the physical realities brought by Covid-19. Accordingly, the article examines the institutional understanding, analyses, decisions/strategies/plans, responses, monitoring and reflections, as well as the agility to respond to change.

Institutional analysis that arises from institutional theory is relevant. This focuses on the reciprocal relationship between social institutions, individual agency, and social practices (Thornton & Ocasio 1999). The theoretical framework in the article also includes the concepts of inclusiveness, social justice, and equity (Rawls 2001; Mgqwashu 2016).

Understanding the global and local context of teaching in higher education during Covid-19

Times of war, conflict and system shocks have brought widespread changes to societies, and questions are being raised about whether Covid-19 will transform universities as the Black Death did in the Middle Ages. The plague swept through Europe in the late 1400s, claiming the lives of half of Europe's population, leading to a shift from a worldview centred on theology to one that valued science (Stanmore 2020). This shift was reflected in higher education with both uneven enrolments in higher education and a changed disciplinary focus. Of course, it is too early to anticipate how far-reaching the impact of Covid-19 will be on higher education.

The current pandemic has added a new layer of complexity and uncertainty to an already volatile and contested higher education sector, evidenced by protests on fees, decolonisation and affordability amongst other concerns (Motala 2020). In South Africa, the education and social purposes of the higher education system have been in the spotlight, especially in respect of the possibilities and limits of the role of artificial intelligence, 4IR, and digitisation. Higher education, specifically, is tasked with preparing graduates for society and economies that are experiencing tumultuous shifts. Universities in Africa, as with their counterparts globally, are required to contribute to the development of their societies. Such advancements need to be underpinned by teaching and learning strategies that create well-educated, socially conscious citizens equipped with the knowledge, skills and attributes for a rapidly changing era. Menon and Castrillon (2019: 12) argue for 'an aggressive disruption of current thinking, existing methods and processes, if higher education and universities are to achieve real change to the way in which teaching and learning pedagogies are framed.' Disruptions of the kind envisaged are usually planned with clear 'as is' and 'to be' scenarios. The gravity of the current disruptions is unplanned and the structural, systemic and long-term seismic shifts are yet to be gauged.

The pandemic has brought into sharp focus several questions that are not new but acquire a different dimension given the current circumstances. For example, what needs to shift in how lecturers teach and how students learn? What does the blurring of the lines between the physical, digital and technological mean for social relationships and for student learning? What do these shifts mean for different countries? Is learning in an environment with peers in a class better than

learning online? And how does online learning equip students with relevant skills for newly configured workplaces?

Across the world, examples abound of tertiary systems being disrupted, delayed and sometimes destroyed by natural disasters and conflicts. Syria, for example, has been in danger of losing a generation to conflict and violence. Due to continued disruptions, some of the options explored have been to provide students with the right to defer modules to the following year, and the reorganisation of examinations and additional supplementary exams (Al Hessian et al. 2016). Elsewhere, the Covid-19 pandemic has necessitated a ‘slow down [of] Somalia’s emergence from decades of civil war that decimated its institutions, including tertiary education institutions, and left an estimated 2.6 million people displaced’ (Rajab 2020: para. 6). Czerniewicz (2020) draws parallels, regarding the impact on teaching and learning, between the disruptions from #FeesMustFall at South African universities between 2015 and 2017 and the current pandemic. The argument made is that whilst the lessons for higher education, given the rapid responses to student protests in the past, remain relevant, the same inequalities persist. The end goal then was, similarly, to complete the academic year.

UNESCO (2020) has estimated that the pandemic has resulted in the physical shutdown of education institutions globally and that, at a conservative estimate, at least 50% of the world’s students both in school and higher education – 890 million in 114 countries – have been affected. Forecasts for the long-shadow implications of Covid-19 range from a 5-year disruption to one of six months. Forecasts predict anywhere from a 15% to 25% decline in enrolment, depending on the part of the world in which the calculations are made (ICEF Monitor 2020). For example, it took higher education two years to recover from the impact of the SARS epidemic in 2003.

A debate in June 2020, critically engaged with how we prepare for the new normal in tertiary institutions, demonstrates the key tensions. Marwala (2020) suggests that new developments in knowledge, science, technology and ways of economic production are the probable trajectory of the future. Badat (2020) argues for caution in respect of how we engage with the 4IR, noting that tertiary institutions should not use the pandemic to initiate and institutionalise reorganisation, restructuring and changes that are desired by proponents of the 4IR without open debate about their desirability generally. Williamson et al. (2020: 108) rightfully assert that ‘the need remains for critical reflection on the planetary pivot to digitally mediated remote and distance education.’ It is envisaged that there will be a pressing need for an unambiguously critical evaluation and monitoring of higher education’s responses to the lockdown, especially in relation to teaching and learning remotely.

Keep calm and carry on: Business unusual and adaptation of teaching and learning

As the country entered a total lockdown in the face of the pandemic, UJ began gearing itself to ensuring continuity in its teaching and learning activities. Like other universities nationally and

internationally, the teaching and learning project took centre stage with consideration of the scale of the shift needed, whether in terms of student numbers, disciplinary differences, the absence of time for staff training or the need to galvanise and equip all role players in the university. The teaching and learning philosophy of UJ includes the primary aim of dissemination of knowledge (learning about), and the practices in the knowledge domain (learning to be). The different domains of knowledge and their interconnections, and the difference between anecdotal understandings and a deeper knowledge based on a thorough conceptual understanding, are important outcomes. Achieving these through remote teaching and learning is a challenge for both the academics and students.

Table 1 provides a high-level overview of the student population at UJ by Classification of Education Subject Matter (CESM) categories (Department of Higher Education and Training, DHET 2008) and the split between postgraduate and undergraduate headcounts for 2020. With approximately 94% of the student population classified as black, and female headcounts being approximately 53%, the university has a representative demographic profile.

Profile of UJ Headcounts

Table 1: UJ HEMIS Data (2 May 2020)

Business/Management	2 420	15 445	17 865
Education	1 123	3 081	4 204
Other Humanities	1 732	7 553	9 285
Science, Engineering, Technology	3 876	12 506	16 382
Grand Total	9 151	38 585	47 736

The university set up governance structures to actively steer its activities at the outset of the pandemic and lockdown. The goal was to retain normalcy amid unusual circumstances and continue to deliver teaching and learning through a variety of online platforms. The move required a veritable 'Marshall Plan' given that the university's primary mode of delivery was contact teaching.

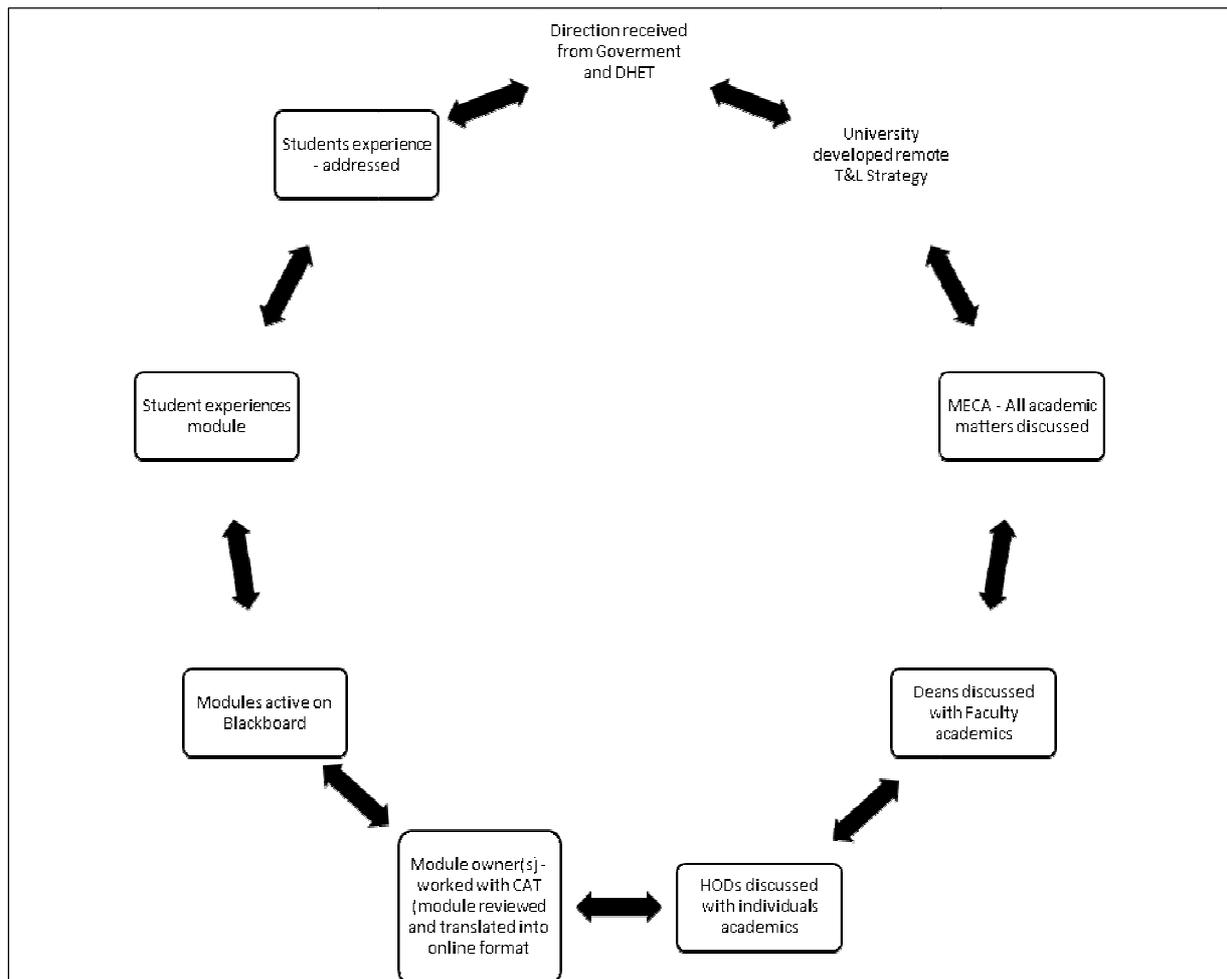


Figure 1: UJ's decision-making processes

Figure 1 demonstrates the iterative process of translating the university's plans, and the inclusive nature of the process. The dual direction arrows indicate the feedback loops established. The university had to refine and revise its strategy in accordance with feedback from students, academics, faculty and various other divisions. An example was the expediting of data bundles for students and staff, based on feedback.

Coombs (2007: 2–3) describes the term 'crisis' as 'the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organisation's performance and generate negative outcomes.' Higher education in South Africa is no stranger to crises, having experienced several of these at different junctures in its history. During the #FeesMustFall protests, UJ did not lose a single day of academic activity although other universities were closed for long periods. However, the lockdown necessitated by the pandemic has precipitated an unprecedented crisis. In this situation, all staff had to rapidly begin to work remotely, and the university's immediate priority was to discharge its responsibility to students, while taking into account the inequitable conditions of their lockdown like housing and food

security, for example.

The lockdown took place just before the March/April 2020 university break and, overnight, the entire complex organisation of the university was on high alert. Leave arrangements were cancelled, a Covid Coordinating Committee was established that met weekly and, together with the Management Executive Committee Academic (MECA), planned the shift to remote teaching and learning. For an institution with 50,000 students, this was a mammoth task. In the leadership of this were members of the Management Executive Committee, the most senior leadership group in the institution. Committees were replicated across all support structures and within faculties. There was a sense of urgency and purpose, with the goal that no student or staff member should be left behind. Within a fortnight from the commencement of lockdown, the building blocks and pillars of the university response were in place. A centrepiece in the university strategy of management was to ensure that academics and students were represented in the processes of planning the response. The complexity of the organisational response was not to be under-estimated. In hindsight, more time for reflection and coherence would have been valuable.

Julius et al.'s (1999) discussion of ways in which institutions can be 'change orientated,' resonates with how the UJ management engaged with the change process. This includes linking the committee system to the strategic position of the formal or bureaucratic structures of the university to enable, support and drive the change. Follow-through was critical because the committee's work does not end with decision, but involves reinforcing through action, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The frontline implementers of any teaching and learning strategy were the academics and it was vital that both the voices of academics and students were heard. Illustratively, academics raised the very real issues of clinical practice for health sciences students, psychology, education and social work. This required complex manoeuvring between professional bodies, the DHET and academics. Frustrations were encountered because there were lockdown regulations that prohibited students from completing the statutory requirements for the degrees, and the very real health risks. Students were similarly worried and anxious because the completion of degrees could be threatened.

In recounting the response of a Chinese University, Wu et al. (2020) refer to the success of the transition to online teaching and learning being predicated on 'organisational agility.' The agility of business processes and technology worked favourably for the university. Given the abrupt nature of the lockdown, a critical strategy adopted by the university was to boost communications through a multiplicity of tools. In the mix of its messaging was a plethora of matters that had to be dealt with urgently and, as the university discovered, this had to be done continuously and consistently. An early innovative feature was to establish a dedicated section on the UJ website (<https://www.uj.ac.za/coronavirus>) to post relevant communications. Communication was critical for multiple reasons. There was no template that the university could work off, and the absence of well-established processes and procedures required constant communication to all sectors. An essential step was also 'listening' and responding. Communication had to be informative, repeated and, at the same time, pastoral. Given the sequence of planning at the university during this period,

there were some decisions that could have preceded others. The most salient aspect of Figure 2 is the reflection of decision making on weighty matters in a reduced and short time frame. For example, data and devices surfaced in mid-April as an issue to be managed post decisions on transitioning to remote teaching and learning.

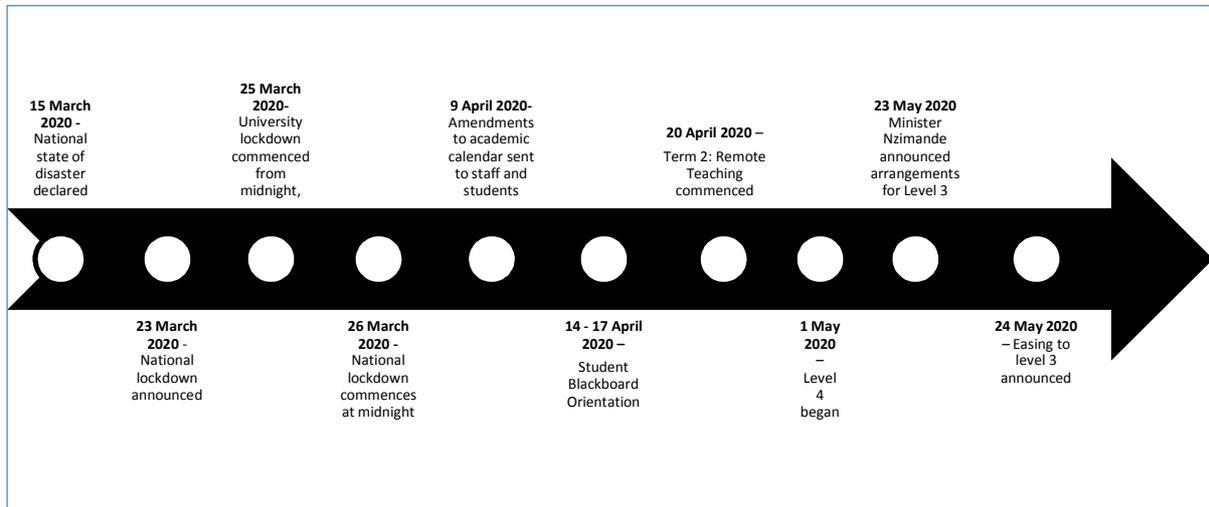


Figure 2: Timelines of activities

The initial phase (i.e., once campuses were ‘closed’ with limited or no physical presence of staff and students) can be characterised as academic governance on the go to ensure the continuity, quality and integrity of teaching and learning. A plan for remote teaching and learning itself had to be developed remotely because all staff were required to be off site.

In order to achieve this, several academic considerations had to be factored in to continue the academic year. The timeline denotes that within two months of the commencement of the 2020 academic year, it was disrupted by the physical lockdown of the campus. In planning to transition to remote teaching and learning, the university had to undertake the following given the disruption to contact teaching and learning:

- Revision of the academic calendar;
- Making available guides and toolkits for remote teaching and learning for both staff and students;
- Creation of a week for student orientation (how to learn remotely using Blackboard);
- Revision of modules to take into account deferring of practicals, laboratory sessions or clinical training;
- Assessment of which modules were online and how best to transition all undergraduate modules for Semester 1;
- Revision of assessment for remote learning;
- No summative assessments for first two weeks to allow students time to settle;
- Ensuring that all academic changes to modules including assessments were submitted through faculty governance structures and to Senate.

None of the changes described above would have been necessary in the absence of a disruption.

Online teaching requires planning, understanding of curriculum demands and assessing strategies for teaching and learning, assessing technologies to be deployed, determining the assessment regime taking into account the need for robustness, integrity and validity of assessments, and review and evaluation (Baran 2011; Wang & Torrisi-Steele 2015). While the preceding account is true for contact teaching as well, the speed of transition to online teaching required the sequential processes described above to be collapsed into one strategic manoeuvre.

The immediate migration to remote teaching and learning required the UJ Centre for Academic Technologies (CAT) to become a pivotal node. The purpose of CAT is to stimulate the use of academic teaching, learning and assessment technologies at the university. With the strategy to recover the academic year, the staff of CAT methodically reviewed approximately 1,500 undergraduate modules to check for online readiness using the following markers: (a) a structure students can easily follow, (b) a learning guide, (c) evidence of activities in Week 6 of Term 1, (d) presence of assignments, and (e) presence of online assessments. Capacitating academics for the new normal was the key component of curriculum delivery under vastly changed conditions. Academics responsible for these modules, heads of department, and faculty staff worked together to ensure that remote teaching could commence on 20 April 2020. Other divisions and departments in the university rallied in support of this, with academic development sessions targeting areas such as online teaching and learning, redesigning assessments appropriate for online taking into account patchy student connectivity and data issues. Useful guides and quick-help toolkits were designed to help academics think through difficulties with teaching and learning. Fortunately, at UJ there were already pockets of online development expertise, mainly in the Faculty of Education, FEBE and the College of Business and Economics. There was also special expertise in niche areas of excellence – in accounting, for example. The deliberate and strategic building of in-house capacity over a period at UJ, especially in CAT, paid off in this pandemic period.

Critically enabling teaching and learning in the weeks that followed the lockdown was a rigorous monitoring of students' participation on Blackboard (the primary learning management system [LMS]) with high-level data presented for analysis to the management of the university, deans and faculty members. The role of big data was foregrounded as never before, as students' log-in times, log-in frequency, and the when, where and how are monitored, shared, diagnosed and acted upon – especially where there was an absence of academic engagement with the online platforms. Analysis led to action and in some cases the revision of individual academics' teaching and learning strategies as well as the university's plans.

The strategy described above operates from the assumption that all students are equipped and primed for online learning, including optimal access to the requisite technologies. Assumptions were constantly challenged, for example, the successful translation of modules on the LMS for remote learning and teaching did not mean that students were equally accessing the platform and the provision of a device or data did not mean that learning was taking place. The dramatic speed of the South African lockdown propelled the university to move rapidly to focus on the recovery of

the academic year. The strategy included multiple steps taken simultaneously and, in some cases, sequentially. Predicated on ensuring that access and success were prioritised, the focus was a 2-week period concentrating on transitioning from traditional contact to the online format. This was not a simple task because time constraints on the period for transition did not allow for reflection on the development of an online pedagogy.

The internationalisation strategy of the university also had to be reviewed for the short and medium term. UJ has 2,500 international students and approximately 30% returned home. With forces extraneous to the university and out of its control, innovative ways had to be devised to maintain contact with students and to continue with the academic project. The International Office commenced with virtual town hall meetings, surveys of students and detailed tracking of the physical location of students and their needs.

At UJ, 62.3% of undergraduate students are funded by the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS is a government entity with the function of allocating bursaries and loans to students) and a further 2,401 receive some form of funding from an internal UJ Missing Middle fund (i.e., for students who are above the threshold for NSFAS funding). If NSFAS is used as a proxy for disadvantage, then it is clear that the teaching and learning strategy accompanying the shift to remote learning would have to take into account the needs of this group of students as well as other students simply not in ideal learning environments. A number of issues became evident, both in terms of access to learning and the broader societal context in which this is taking place. Reflecting on the university's response, factors that compromised student learning included:

- No access to a device inclusive of a laptop or smartphone (impacts on how to learn if the medium or means to learn is absent);
- Either no network coverage or limited coverage;
- Cost of data;
- Limited bandwidth;
- Living conditions not conducive to studying;
- Other psychosocial factors.

Issues of social capital, access, and vulnerability were evident as student feedback was received. These included poor living conditions, environments not conducive to learning, student hunger and, while not necessarily quantifiable, a possible worsening of economic conditions during the Covid-19 lockdown that would impact on the students. Academics, staff working with students and students themselves drew attention to the problems with the university devising responses. For example, food parcels were organised for students living off campus in privately owned accommodation, and ramped-up psychological services for students who were exhibiting high levels of anxiety and stress. Equity and access are goals that have been pursued by government as far back as the National Commission on Higher Education (1996) as set out in the White Paper 3 (Department of Education 1997). The agenda for the transformation of higher education outlined the need to 'redress inequalities of access, participation and success' and 'expand SA's competitive participation in the global context' (Council on Higher Education 2004: 24). With the

advent of Covid-19 and the unprecedented full closure of campuses, the debates on access to higher education have shifted and have been reshaped with a heightened focus on affordability and the quest to create ideal remote learning environments for students.

One could argue that Covid-19 has exacerbated social exclusion and the accompanying inequities. The lack of student access in the transition to remote learning has further entrenched exclusion and created barriers to learning. 'Quality and equality' of provision is a central tenet for the university as is evident from the lessons from China; these have to be factored into this unusual shift to remote learning (Wu 2020). The suddenness of the total lockdown left little time for the university to lay the groundwork for all academics to teach remotely and students to learn remotely. Some academics reported this as an incredibly steep learning curve. The rapid translation of modules from traditional face-to-face to online learning surfaced a new level of underpreparedness in students. Through the multiple committee structures and frequent meetings, academics could express difficulties as well as new ways of teaching and reaching their students. This was particularly important because many students wrote and communicated with academics about their difficulties and experiences with the transition to remote teaching and learning. The inequitable resourcing of students in terms of the required technology was a factor extraneous to the university strategy, but one that took centre stage regardless. This led to the provision of more than 5,900 devices to students as of 19 June 2020 and provision of data to staff and students on a monthly basis – 30GB (10GB anytime plus 20GB night owl data).

What are the pedagogical implications of this rapid shift to remote teaching and learning, particularly, with regard to the gap between academics and students? It became apparent that there was a need to distinguish the rapid shift to emergency remote teaching and learning and well thought-out transitions to online learning, the time and resources to do so, and the preparedness of both academics and students. An imperative in the university was to reduce the distance between the intent and the realities of remote teaching and learning. In ensuring that the academic programme was not disrupted, aspects of synchronous and asynchronous delivery had to be exploited to the advantage of the students. The consistent mantra was that remote teaching was to remain student-centred.

The intent was to continue with remote teaching and learning. This brought with it the complexities associated with the remote learning mode specific to faculties and disciplines, and disciplinary divides began to surface with the realisation that 'one size does not fit all.' Practicals, work integrated learning and laboratory work remained a concern. Innovative practices like online simulations or videoed practicals were some examples of closing the gap. Assessment became a major challenge, and academic regulations were changed to emphasise continuous formative assessment.

Notwithstanding the above, the significant variations in South Africa relating to socioeconomic factors, data coverage, and between universities and their resource levels became evident. It is within these parameters that the university approached remote teaching and learning. Digital inequality is one aspect of this. In part, UJ saw this as an opportunity to assist students to embrace

the changes necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic as part of an accelerated 4IR journey. With the emerging economic reality, it is essential to adapt and the university took steps to ensure that its students are capacitated with the resources necessary wherever possible. The focus on academic excellence is, in the context, as important as ever. Academics reported that teaching approaches had to be adapted and varied, creating smaller sections of module content, discussion forums and mini assessments and revising.

Pedagogical practices for remote learning are different to those in the contact learning mode. UJ has for some time now been using Blackboard in its blended approach with a view to enhancing contact learning. As of 2019, approximately 90% of undergraduate modules had a presence on Blackboard with more than 50% actively using the blended approach. Academics were supported by multiple divisions in the university both before and during the transitional period. As academics have had to acquire new skills, they have also continued with research, administered and reflected on the changes required, and engaged with one another pertinently on teaching and learning issues. In sessions with academics, it was patently clear that juggling multiple tasks took its toll. As one academic reflected in a personal communication, choices had to be made as online teaching was taking a considerable amount of time and the collaborative book she was working on had to be deferred. The university was keenly aware that its staff, also subjected to the lockdown, have their own personal and social challenges to address in their own family environments. Ongoing psychosocial support has also been made available to staff and students.

Nationally and at UJ, the major concern has been for postgraduate students' time to continue and complete the research activities for their master's and doctoral degrees. The lockdown as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic has led to the suspension of some research activities for postgraduate students at UJ. The disruption from the pandemic raises multiple threats for postgraduate scholarship including potential deterioration in the quality of research projects because approved methods have to be changed or abandoned, declines in the productive persistence of the student as their anxiety and stress increases because their project is delayed or changed, changes in the mode of supervision, and the inability to use alternative methods because there is a lack of expertise to supervise the project, and delay in time to completion.

In April 2020, UJ had 9,139 postgraduate students, consisting of 1,323 doctoral students, 3,859 master's students (RDM 1,553, CWM 2,306), 2,635 honours students and 1,322 postgraduate diploma students. The immediate priorities were faculty action plans to provide online teaching of coursework master's and honours programmes and dealing with the constraints of data and device access for students. While many postgraduate students have access to laptops and computers, practical work, laboratory work and specialised software remained a challenge. Postgraduate supervision continues online through phone, e-mail, WhatsApp, Skype, Zoom and Blackboard Collaborate. Access to library resources is in place, and statistical consultation services are available.

While postgraduate teaching and learning have been adapted and are continuing, further areas of concern were identified. These included assessment, laboratory work and practical classes, clinics

and patient interaction; experimental work and other primary data collection; and administrative updating and examination progress. While the pandemic can affect all stages of the research process, the severest impact is likely to be on the data collection phase. For example, students who were conducting experimental research can no longer access the laboratory/field and students planning to conduct face-to-face interviews or use paper-based questionnaires can no longer meet participants and will only be able to do so if following strict health and safety guidelines when lockdown ends. While online methods could be explored, there were still restrictions, which led to revision of strategies. The advice to postgraduate students was to plan their work by staggering working on conceptualisation, the literature study and design while anticipating laboratory access. The postgraduate students can also focus on writing the parts of their dissertation and thesis that can be written prior to data gathering and analysis. In some cases, students can start on writing the articles and other pieces of work that are required prior to the completion of their degrees (Devey 2020).

Given the circumstances and uncertainty, it became necessary for some students to rethink their research design. However, students found that the change in research design also represented an opportunity by challenging predominant research methods in a discipline and encouraging supervisors to learn new methodology and methods. The Postgraduate School prepared guidelines for different disciplines to use different research strategies given that the lockdown will not affect all strategies in the same way. In some cases, laboratory simulation and emulation to replace routine practical work was explored (for example through LABSTER). Although the research progress of some students may be impacted, students who are able to continue with their research designs are being encouraged to do so and concomitant ethical aspects are being reevaluated.

Tensions and challenges: Do we carry on regardless?

Bringing the physically absent student in teaching and learning into sharper focus

For all staff and students at UJ who were faced suddenly with this new normal, the choice of the mode of delivery was not a conscious one but was propelled by current circumstances. Collegiality and teamwork were required at every step in the shift to remote learning and teaching, which required fine-tuned multiple teams and student cooperation throughout.

Kotter's (1995) leading change model is powerful in initiating or bringing about change through establishing urgency, creating a powerful and guiding coalition, providing a vision to clarify the direction, communicating the vision, empowering others to act on the vision, planning for and creating short-term wins, consolidating improvements and producing still more changes, and institutionalising new approaches. The institutional change expectations and strategy at UJ reflected all the above albeit with unexpected gains, and challenges.

What is the new normal for universities? Much discussion has taken place about how universities might effectively adapt. For example, although the university may have the infrastructure, there can be no assumptions about the students' ability to access learning, or whether it is effective.

Going forward, this may require us to redefine our teaching and learning enterprise – to consider whether we need to invest in technology, provide different resources to support the new mode of delivery, and what kind of graduate is being produced for a post Covid world and society. Indeed, new technologies were rapidly bought, sourced and adapted, and budgets have already been reprioritised to accommodate this. The rapid transition required redirected resources. These included human resources, academics to transition teaching fully online, assessing online and the conundrum posed by disciplinary differences where practicals, clinical training, and work integrated learning were required. Much discussion took place on what the key skills of the future are and on the different skill sets that will be needed, with digital capabilities identified as critical for success. This was not straightforward – it required a paradigm shift in attitude towards curricula, teaching pedagogies, and how to provide students with the highly flexible, mobile mindset that they will need in the 21st century workplace. Will the future be one where online is the norm? If yes, then social exclusion and inequity could be deepened with the distinctions between advantaged and disadvantaged students determining access to learning in yet unprecedented ways. An appropriate social justice framework must inform South Africa's higher education approach as Bell (1997: 3) notes: 'Social justice education is both a process and a goal. The goal of social justice education is full and equal participation of all groups in society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs.'

Enhancing the pedagogical project

Much discussion has taken place about whether the pedagogical project has been derailed or enhanced, and it is suggested that this is not binary. The alternative for the university would have been to do nothing and face closure. This would not have been a viable option because it could pose a risk to the financial sustainability of the university and, secondly, it would not be delivering on its mandate. Some institutions, for example UKZN and UNIZULU, were closed prior to lockdown due to protests, and their ability to deal with the Covid-19 period proved more difficult. Others were more prepared. As Meek and Davies (2009) note, such institutions tend to exhibit strong features of managerial control both in the nature of their management structures and the corporate culture that emerges in these contexts. The UJ culture exhibits much of this already, and a robust platform existed to ensure the level of preparedness needed for the Covid-19 period.

The announcement by Cambridge University ahead of other institutions that it would continue fully online until 2021 (except for an ongoing tutorial system), reflected the uncertainty about the future, which requires universities to hone and finesse the teaching and learning strategy. While there is a national regulatory and set of statutory rules, it seems that universities are opting for return with restrictions or remote teaching, or a combination of these. In South Africa, a controlled resumption of the academic year was announced in June 2020 with national directives and the parameters for reintegration published by the DHET.

The flipped classroom to fully online: Technology 101 as the new norm

A useful distinction is made between teaching with technology and teaching through technology (Black 2020). Lecturers who previously used technology to support face-to-face/contact teaching

to construct engaging learning opportunities, no longer had this blended option. They had to now teach solely through technology and consequently the whole enterprise had to be rethought. In some cases, lecturers used alternative ways of teaching, conscious of the data challenges that students faced. Working remotely required a rehaul of ways of working, convening meetings, but also the training of supervisors, conducting writing classes, and sessions with academics. Along with the rethinking, an evaluative exercise is required to determine whether, if digital connectivity is achieved, teaching and learning can occur optimally. This will require postmortem reflections from academics, students and different divisions involved in teaching and learning. Whether there will be sufficient pause in the Covid-19 pressures to enable critical reflections is an unknown factor.

How does one ensure that the spaces created by 'live' human interaction are similar in online situations? One academic indicated that due to the connectivity problems of the students, the lectures were recorded for asynchronous viewing, although some students were present in the live classroom, which immediately created a disparity. She immediately found a solution by using WhatsApp to call each student in her class (but this was a small class so was feasible).

Achieving educational equity highlights social equity and socioeconomic divides

South Africa is a vastly unequal society with great wealth and income inequality (STATS SA 2019; Omarjee 2020). Despite strides being made in transforming the higher education sector with widening of access a primary goal of the country, Covid-19 may in future hinder progress. The digital divide could create new patterns of exclusion.

Numerous poignant anecdotes capture the challenges the students faced. In one instance in a rural area, a student had to climb a mountain in order to get limited connectivity to WhatsApp images of an assignment to meet the designated submission time because there was no possibility of e-mailing it (Personal communication, Law lecturer, May 2020). The role of social media has complemented communications and has informed strategy, with many requests or problems coming to the university on these platforms, especially with connectivity, data and devices.

The critical dilemma for the university will be how to develop a strategically cautious, informed approach to remote teaching and learning. This can only be done through holding up the mirror and evaluating whether the rapid adaptation to technologies for teaching and learning has been effective. Conscious of the inequities of the student population, decisions have to be made about ensuring access with success:

The lockdown in many countries occasioned by the pandemic requires us to hold the mirror up to what happens when classroom space-time travels in the other direction, into the home environment, introducing the polysynchronous world of learning in the digital age into the rhythms of family life. (Williamson et al. 2020: 111)

The successful translation of modules on the LMS for remote learning and teaching did not mean that students were equally accessing the platform or that provision of a device, or data, equated to learning taking place.

Equity and inequality issues surfaced repeatedly. Some students had uncapped access to Wi-Fi, and sophisticated devices, others lived in areas where network connectivity was poor and worked off a simple smartphone. Some, who live in remote areas, received devices only after delays. Despite this, and as data and device access improved, the level of participation on the LMS especially for undergraduates increased to about 90%, up from an average of 50% in the first week of the lockdown. Weekly reports from deans on progress fed discussions on fine-grained issues like students' vulnerabilities; reports from academics provided insights into difficulties that students and academics were experiencing such as incidence of erratic performance or participation on Blackboard and, additionally, academics having to cope with families, young children and care responsibilities. The gap between social equity and education equity (Motala 2014) was very evident, as were the vast social disparities that enabled or disadvantaged students. Moreover, as Fataar (2020: 27) notes 'the Covid-19 pandemic simultaneously engages, intensifies and subverts existing educational inequity and iniquity' and this forces us to engage with a new way of seeing and doing.

A major issue that emerged was the psychosocial issues in an environment devoid of human contact and touch, and the real distress that some students and staff felt with isolation, physical and social distancing. The university has responded in various ways, but the human cost of the Covid-19 period is yet to be seen. Caring and support had to be normalised, recognising that the emotional impact of the pandemic was pervasive. The only choice for the university was Hobson's choice – 'business as usual' – while recognising that it was 'business unusual.' Academics reflected on sessions with students and spent time 'counselling' and allaying the fears of students, often deriving comfort from the contact. Different strategies for staff and students were enhanced, and modified and expanded for psychological support and counselling. As Peters and Rizvi (2020: 2) note:

Since a core function of education has always been social and cultural formation, the question arises as to what kind of sociality is possible when students and their faculty only meet in the digital space, especially since in recent years, when universities have promoted the idea of global citizenship.

UJ, like other institutions, will have to prepare for this new reality.

Conclusion

The Covid-19 period has brought sharply to the fore inclusion and exclusion across all sectors of education. The social divides that existed in our society are now even more pronounced, with parents having to make hard decisions daily about whether to spend on food or data for their children. Social justice and social exclusion have taken on new dimensions and the elusive equity (Ladd & Fiske 2006) of the pre Covid-19 period is in further jeopardy. Gustaffson and Patel (2006) and Motala (2014) have noted that while education equity has improved in some sectors through greater resource allocation, social inequity has widened. This inequality mirrors the international experience, which the Oxfam report (2016) and the work of Piketty (2014) and Rodrik (2016) have put into sharp and uncomfortable focus. This discomfort persists as higher education leverages

online modalities, with the divides and inequities surfacing in the student body. The provision of education as a public good is under further threat.

Higher education is at an early stage to review and evaluate the effectiveness, efficiency or quality of the transition to remote teaching and learning. The disruptive nature of the transitions at UJ provoked innovative pedagogical practices and even incidental or accidental learnings for academics and students. This in no way obviates the need for discussions and research to be conducted on accessibility and success of online learning, amongst other pedagogical issues. Education is a public good, and equality and social justice must drive educational reform. Differential redistribution must define our equity approach to address the seemingly intractable divides in South African society. In this context, this article contributes to a future research agenda on how to develop an equitable teaching and learning strategy in order to adapt to a post Covid world, providing a better and more just future for students and youth.

References

- Al Hessian, M, Bengtsson, S & Kohlenberger, J. (2016) *Understanding the Syrian Educational System in a Context of Crisis* (No. 09/2016). Vienna Institute of Demography Working Papers.
- Badat, S. (2020, June 02) The 4IR superhighway: A dangerously technocratic utopia. *Daily Maverick* [online]. Available at <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2020-06-01-the-4ir-super-highway-a-dangerously-technocratic-utopia/> [accessed 19 June 2020].
- Baran, E. (2011) *The Transformation of Online Teaching Practice: Tracing Successful Online Teaching in Higher Education* [doctoral thesis, Iowa State University, online]. Available at <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3134&context=etd> [accessed 19 June 2020].
- Bell, L. (1997) Theoretical foundations for social justice education. In Adams, M, Griffin, P & Bell, L (eds). *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook*. Routledge, 3–26.
- Black, S. (2020, May 11) The problem with Stephen Grootes' views about online learning. *Daily Maverick* [online]. Available at <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2020-05-11-the-problem-with-stephen-grootes-views-about-online-learning/#gsc.tab=0> [accessed 19 June 2020].
- Coombs, WT. (2007) *Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding*. SAGE.
- Council on Higher Education (CHE). (2004) *South African Higher Education in the First Decade of Democracy*. CHE.
- Czerniewicz, L. (2020, March 15) What we learnt from 'going online' during university shutdowns in South Africa, *PhilonEdTech* [online]. Available at <https://philonedtech.com/what-we-learnt-from-going-online-during-university-shutdowns-in-south-africa/> [accessed 19 June 2020].
- Department of Education (DoE). (1997) *White Paper 3: A Programme for Higher Education Transformation* [online]. Available at <https://www.justice.gov.za/commissions/FeesHET/docs/1997-WhitePaper-HE-Transformation.pdf> [accessed 19 June 2020].

- Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). (2008) *Classification of Educational Subject Matter* [online]. Available at https://www.sun.ac.za/english/learning-teaching/learning-teaching-enhancement/APQ/Documents/Academic%20Planning/CESM_August2008_%26Addendum_2014.pdf [accessed 19 June 2020].
- Devey, R. (May 2020) Discussions between the Postgraduate School and Statcon, University of Johannesburg on postgraduate studies during COVID-19 (Internal Communication).
- Fataar, A. (2020) Educational transmogrification and exigent pedagogical imaginaries in pandemic times. In Peters, MA et al. (eds). *Reimagining the new pedagogical possibilities for universities post-Covid-19, Educational Philosophy and Theory*. doi:10.1080/00131857.2020.1777655
- Garcia, BD. (2015) *Crisis Leadership: The Roles University Presidents and Crisis Managers Play in Higher Education – A Case Study of the State University System of Florida* [doctoral thesis, Florida International University, online]. Available at FIU Electronic Theses and Dissertations 2180 <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3246&context=etd> [accessed 19 June 2020].
- Gustafsson, M & Patel, F. (2006) Undoing the apartheid legacy: Pro-poor spending shifts in the South African public-school system. *Perspectives in Education*, 24(2): 65–77.
- ICEF Monitor. (2020, April 15) *Measuring Covid-19's Impact on Higher Education* [online]. Available at <https://monitor.icef.com/2020/04/measuring-covid-19s-impact-on-higher-education/> [accessed 19 June 2020].
- Julius D, Baldrige J & Pfeffer J. (1999) A memo from Machiavelli. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 79(2): 113–133.
- Kotter, J. (1995) Leading change: Why transformation efforts fail. *Harvard Business Review*, March/April: 59–67.
- Ladd, H & Fiske, E. (2006) Racial equity in education: How far has South Africa come? *Perspectives in Education*, 24(2): 95–108.
- Marwala, T. (2020, May 28) COVID has forced us into the fast lane of the 4IR Highway. *Daily Maverick* [online]. Available at <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2020-05-28-covid-19-has-forced-us-into-the-fast-lane-of-the-4ir-super-highway/> [accessed 19 June 2020].
- Meek VL & Davies, D. (2009). Policy dynamics in higher education and research: Concepts and observations. In Meek, VL Teichler, U & Kearney, M (eds). *Higher Education, Research, and Innovation: Changing Dynamics*. UNESCO/INCHER-Kassel, 41–84.
- Menon, K & Castrillon, G. (2019) Reimagining curricula for the Fourth Industrial Revolution. *The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 14(2): 6–19.
- Mgqwashu, E. (2016, August 22) Universities can't decolonise the curriculum without defining it first. *The Conversation* [online]. Available at <https://theconversation.com/universities-cant-decolonise-the-curriculum-without-defining-it-first-63948> [accessed 19 June 2020].
- Motala, S. (2014) Equity, access and quality in basic education. In Meywa, T, Nkondo, M, Chitaga-Mabugu, J, Sithole, M & Nyamnjoh, F (eds). *State of the Nation 2014: A Twenty-Year Review*. HSRC Press, 284–299.
- Motala, S. (2020) The dilemmas and challenges of achieving equity in higher education. In Tella, O & Motala, S (eds). *From Ivory Towers to Ebony Towers: Transforming Humanities Curricula in South Africa, Africa and African-American Studies*. Jacana, 48–66.

- National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE). (1996). *An Overview of a New Policy Framework for Higher Education Transformation*. NCHE.
- Omarjee, L. (2020, April 30) SA risks losing 7 million jobs, reaching over 50% unemployment: Treasury's grim worst-case scenario. *Fin24* [online]. Available at <https://www.fin24.com/Economy/South-Africa/sa-risks-losing-7-million-jobs-reaching-over-50-unemployment-treasurys-grim-worst-case-scenario-20200430> [accessed 19 June 2020].
- Oxfam America. (2016) *Annual Report* [online]. Available at https://s3.amazonaws.com/oxfam-us/www/static/media/files/Oxfam_America-Annual_Report_2016.pdf [accessed 19 June 2020].
- Peters, M & Rizvi, F. (2020) Introduction. In Peters, MA et al. (eds). *Reimagining the New Pedagogical Possibilities for Universities Post Covid-19, Educational Philosophy and Theory*. doi:10.1080/00131857.2020.1777655
- Piketty, T. (2014) *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Belknap Press.
- Rajab, R. (2020, April 16) Still in recovery mode, universities rise to new challenges. *University World News Africa Edition* [online]. Available at <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200413133206595> [accessed 19 June 2020].
- Rawls, J. (2001) *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*. Harvard University Press.
- Rodrik, D. (2016) The abdication of the left. *Project Syndicate* [online]. Available at <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/anti-globalization-backlash-from-right-by-dani-rodrik-2016-07> [accessed 19 June 2020].
- Stanmore, T. (2020, April 14) Coronavirus: Rumours and remedies from Black Death and other plagues show how little people have changed. *The Conversation* [online]. Available at <https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-rumours-and-remedies-from-black-death-and-other-plagues-show-how-little-people-have-changed-135725> [accessed 19 June 2020].
- STATS SA (2019) *Quarterly Labour Force Survey (P0211): Quarter 1* [online]. Available at <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/P02111stQuarter2017.pdf> [accessed 19 June 2020].
- Thornton, P & Ocasio, W. (1999). Institutional logics and the historical contingency of power in organizations: Executive succession in the higher education publishing industry, 1958–1990. *American Journal of Sociology*, 105(3), 801–843.
- UNESCO (2020) *Methodological Note: Tracking Covid-19 Caused School and University Closures* [online]. Available at https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/methodological_note_-_unesco_map_on_covid-19_caused_school_and_university_closures_final.pdf [accessed 19 June 2020].
- Wang, VC & Torrisi-Steele, G. (2015) Online teaching, change, and critical theory. *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, 27(3): 18–26.
- Williamson, B, Eynon, R & Potter, J. (2020) Pandemic politics, pedagogies and practices: Digital technologies and distance education during the coronavirus emergency. *Learning, Media & Technology*, 45(2): 107–114.
- Wu, F, Zhao, S, Yu, B, Chen, YM, Wang, W, Song, ZG, Hu, Y, Tao, ZW, Tian, JH, Pei, YY & Yuan, ML. (2020) A new coronavirus associated with human respiratory disease in China. *Nature*, 579(7798): 265–269.

Wu, Z. (2020, March 16) How a top Chinese university is responding to coronavirus. *World Economic Forum* [online]. Available at <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/03/coronavirus-china-the-challenges-of-online-learning-for-universities/> [accessed 19 June 2020].

Notes on the authors

Prof. Shireen Motala, Senior Director: Postgraduate School and NRF SARChI Chair: Teaching and Learning, University of Johannesburg.

Dr. Kirti Menon, Senior Director: Division for Academic Planning, Quality Promotion and Academic Staff Development, University of Johannesburg.

Address for correspondence

smotala@uj.ac.za

Corona, crisis and curriculum: History of health education in South Africa

Linda Chisholm
University of Johannesburg

Abstract

One of the significant consequences of the Spanish flu of 1918 was an emphasis by the Transvaal schools' medical officer, C Louis Leipoldt, on health education in schools. This raises questions about the nature of the subject as a school subject over the last century in both black and white schools given that Leipoldt's concern was principally with white schools and health education – understood as hygiene. The article traces the main outlines of the history of the subject through the segregation, apartheid and postapartheid years. Using primary and secondary historical sources, and a framework to define school subject knowledge drawn from Deng and Luke, Goodson and Popkewitz, it argues that there were similarities and differences in approach: during segregation, the pedagogical approach was similar across schools, in that both emphasised the practical, cross-curricular knowledge required to form habits. The main difference was the added moralising/'civilising' role it was seen to have in black schools. Although conditions in most schools prevented the realisation of health education as envisaged during this and the later apartheid period, some teacher training colleges did start specialised training for physical education teachers. Treated as a separate and self-contained subject in primary school curricula throughout the segregation and apartheid years, health education was subsumed along with a range of others into the container learning area, life skills, after 1994. The article argues that among the main changes from earlier periods is that the subject has simultaneously become much broader than hygiene education, and has been stripped of its moralising intentions and practical, 'habit-forming' pedagogy. It requires much more to be done in less time.

Keywords: history of South African education, history of school subjects, curriculum history, health education, hygiene education, physical education, Covid-19, South African schooling

Chisholm, L. (2020) Corona, crisis and curriculum: History of health education in South Africa. *Southern African Review of Education*, 26(1): 100–115.

Introduction

As the Spanish flu raged in 1918, the then Transvaal schools' medical inspector, C Louis Leipoldt, lamented that schools had been closed. Leipoldt argued that 'closure is useless, a waste of money and of educational facilities, an interruption of the normal routine of the child's life and a sure means of engendering panic among the public and promoting a scare' (in Phillips 1984: 405). His views were not popular and there was resistance to reopening schools in some areas. But from 1919 onwards, more schools began to open and 'the new principle of non-closure in the face of infectious diseases began to take root slowly' (Phillips 1984: 405). If one compares the impact of the 1918 Spanish flu epidemic with the 2020 Covid pandemic just over a century later, there are some instructive parallels and differences, especially in the field of curriculum. Then as now, the effects in South Africa were similar to those across the globe. There were however many differences related to the preparedness to deal with the epidemic. As Phillips (1984, 2012, 2018) reveals, the question of whether and when to open schools was as contested in 1918 as it was in 2020. In 1918, however, there was no uniformity on how long schools should be closed, or guidelines on what to do during closure. Even when provincial authorities eventually gazetted regulations for the reopening of schools, many parents refused to return their children. In 1918, the entire final quarter of schooling was lost, with devastating consequences for those affected. Not only did the Spanish flu leave many orphans, it also disrupted schooling with dramatic effects. Curricula were compressed to enable catch-up, whole grades were promoted automatically, there were complaints about academic lag in subsequent years and about the much lower enrolments in later years than were expected.

A major difference between past and present is the attention to health education in school, the focus of this article. Better known as a figure in the Afrikaans-speaking literary canon of the early 20th century than as an educational innovator, Leipoldt's intervention in 1918 was similar to that of the contemporary South African Paediatrics Association (Merrington 2003; Lindgren 2015; Oppelt 2019). In the framework of a budding Afrikaner nationalism, the context of an emerging system of segregated schooling, and as a medical inspector of schools concerned with the health of white children, he did however advocate for health education in schools. Phillips (1984) notes that Leipoldt added a chapter on 'Gesondheidsleer als Onderwisyak' to the 1919 edition of his primer on *Skoolgesondheid*. At the same time, he 'campaigns vigorously for schools to become centres of health education in the community. *Die Huisgenoot* (for which, along with *Die Boerevrou*, he wrote many medical articles) took up this argument' (Phillips 1984: 411).

Leipoldt's interests in getting schoolchildren back to school were largely in the newly emerging system of white schools, but health and hygiene were also a mainstay of colonial priorities for African education. What the parameters of this subject were in both the state-controlled white, and mission-controlled black, education systems and how it changed is completely unknown. What kind of knowledge was and is comprised by school subjects such as health or hygiene education? How do we conceptualise it? This article will provide an overview of the history of a subject, from its position in the first half of the 20th century, to its place in the life skills curriculum in the early

21st century.

An examination of this history may throw some light on the significance attributed to it by a society whose patterns of disease have followed those of class and colour, historically, and into the present (Marks & Andersson 1987: 177; Phillips 1987, 1990; Andersson & Marks 1988). Very little has been written about health education in schools either as part of the history of health or as education. Within social history, it is subsumed under the history of the training of nurses and doctors (Marks 1994). Part of the lacuna of knowledge in education relates to the emphasis in curriculum studies on the broad lineaments of the curriculum rather than its constituent parts, subjects, or learning areas. With some rare exceptions, despite this being a substantial field elsewhere, there is a small history of school subjects as part of curricular history in South Africa. With few exceptions do scholars take subjects further back than apartheid (Prinsloo 2002; Kallaway 2010; Cleophas 2013 can be considered exceptions). Even where there is an emphasis on school subjects within contemporary South African sociology, the focus has fallen squarely on the high-status school subjects such as mathematics and English, for example, or on history. Much less attention has been paid to those low-status subjects considered to be on the margins of school curricula. Although health education on its own cannot solve health challenges, it can play an important role and so is worth looking at.

A note on methodology

The article provides a broad overview of the subject from the interwar years of segregation before apartheid, through apartheid and the postapartheid years. There is some unevenness in the treatment of these three periods. The reason for this is that the article was written during lockdown in South Africa and was therefore dependent on sources available electronically. For the early period, I was able to draw on teacher education curricula and textbooks in use for teacher education that I had earlier used for other purposes. They provided insight into what teachers were being prepared to teach in the area. Here, I was unable to reference the serialised and adapted chapters in the *Cape Education Gazette* because the photocopies were in my office and, under Covid-19 regulations, I was not permitted to set foot in it. For the apartheid period, it was not possible to visit archives that would have made a more substantial treatment possible. Here, the textbook sources in the South African National Library are a key resource but could not be accessed physically or electronically. I drew mainly on secondary sources and constructed a picture from what was available. This period needs much more work. The curriculum for health education in the contemporary period is readily available electronically and I used that for this period. The sources are not sufficient on their own, however, and require an interpretive lens.

School subjects, historical analysis and subjectification

In order to interpret the curricula, and the nature of health education as a school subject, I drew on the work of scholars who have theorised school subjects and written about them historically. Deng and Luke's (2008) distinction between theoretical/disciplinary, practical and

productive/experiential knowledge is helpful. All are historically situated. These knowledges are not the same as school subject matter, or the basis on which school subject matter is selected. This is guided by normative, ideological questions about the relationship between schooling, culture and society that they argue can also be divided into four basic orientations: academic rationalism (the transmission of disciplinary knowledge), social efficiency (the production of human capital), humanism (the personal development of the individual learner) and social reconstructionism (the importance of meaningful learning experiences to enable agency with regard to social contexts). The latter view starts with a sociopolitical view of the relationship of knowledge to human interests, and sees a close link between knowledge and different social classes. This article uses these to characterise the subject but adds to it by showing how colonial constructs shaped the subject.

Sociohistorical scholarship on the formation of school subjects has also been important, and especially that which has drawn attention to the non-static, shifting character of school subjects (Goodson 1985, 1990, 1993; Popkewitz 1987, 2018; Goodson & Marsh 1996; and Deng & Luke 2008: 14 & 19). Although Goodson has shown how competing interests of a wide array of agencies not reducible to 'dominant interests' may sustain different school subjects, one can also add the role that social events such as pandemics play in propelling interests to intervene in shaping school subjects. Polenghi, taking this work further, has taken up more recent concerns by Popkewitz with the 'translations' of subject matter in the classroom (Popkewitz 2018: 78). For her, 'the content of the subject itself is deeply influenced by other factors, such as text-books, the culture of teachers, the social and cultural conditions of pupils and their families, etc.' (Polenghi 2014: 637). Popkewitz, in similar vein, has argued that teaching involves a form of alchemy 'or translations of disciplinary knowledge . . . as children are not physicists, mathematicians, or professional artists' (2018: 77). In this article, I will use the textbook as translation of the subject matter in the classroom.

Within this framework then, health and hygiene education can be seen as a hybrid, eminently practical subject drawing from and applying biological and scientific knowledge to teach about human conduct. It is a school subject constructed in the interface between society, interest groups and schooling, focused on human behaviours, and has changed over time. Health and hygiene education embed knowledge that is instrumental in the construction of behaviours in subjects that are invested with moral virtues. And here the Foucaultian concept of *subjectification* is also important because it points to how subjects are constructed as moral beings through forms of 'disciplinary' knowledge acting in and on the body (Heller 1996; Davies 2006). These concepts and approaches helped shape my interpretation of the evidence used to provide a broad overview of the history of the subject health/hygiene in the South African context.

The article argues firstly that the curriculum for health education in black and white education cannot be understood outside its context of inequality and the highly ideological and racialised nature of its constructions at different times. Secondly, it argues that at its inception in the first half of the 20th century, and linked to its subjectification purposes, health/hygiene education was a

preeminently practical subject, its knowledge and learning intended to occur tacitly rather than theoretically, and through integration across the curriculum rather than as a separate subject. This was true for both black and white systems. Physical education was in many cases taught as a separate subject. During the apartheid period, hygiene and physical education became separate activities in the curriculum, as increasing numbers of teacher education colleges, both white and black, had already developed specialisations in physical education in the earlier period. The postapartheid curriculum has seen the reintegration of the subject in a wider curriculum as health education and physical education within life skills. The article argues that while the subject area has been compressed into a container learning area with an absence of opportunities for the development of specialised knowledge in teacher education on this subject, it has also simultaneously expanded and limited expectations. A historical perspective shows that while the importance of the subject is much diminished, the changes include a far wider and more contemporary array of 'knowledge' to be learnt. While it is now far more detailed and knowledge-focused than before, it is also less experiential and practical than it was a century ago. Subjectification processes have thus shifted from the informal to the formal curriculum.

Segregation: Interwar years

The emergence of hygiene in colonial curricula was from the onset preoccupied not so much with the combating of disease as with its moral purposes. The South African Native Affairs Commission that reported in 1903 to 1905 specifically recommended that the socialising force of work in the mines and on farms combined with the moral and religious as well as vocational training provided by mission schools was sufficient. Grants-in-aid should be provided to mission societies whose 'moral and religious instruction' must include 'simple scientific and sanitary principles, temperance and the elementary rules of hygiene' (South African Native Affairs Commission 1905: paras 329, 339, 343–347). Schooling and health education were to serve as a moralising force preparing students for labour. As Comaroff has argued, for an earlier period but equally applicable to this, 'The power of colonial education . . . had more to do with the inculcation of values than the transfer of knowledge' (1996: 26). It was concerned to 'inculcate a new set of dispositions; "good habits"' to be absorbed 'mimetically' through the daily 'rituals of bodily hygiene' (Comaroff 1996: 31). Health education was to form part of an 'everyday process of [cultural] transformation,' a 'practical education in European culture' and schoolbooks were to be 'important instruments for extending [this] "mode of seeing"' (Comaroff 1996: 35–36). Rather than part of the formal, disciplinary training of the curriculum, health education was thus pre-eminently 'part of the informal curriculum of the civilising mission' (Comaroff 1996: 36). It was here that colonial education was most successful. It had little impact however on the broader transmission of disease.

Was it any different in schools established for people defined as white and coloured? And did it change in mission schools? Here teacher education curricula that came into being in the aftermath of World War I and the Spanish flu provide some insights. In the early 1920s, the Cape Education

Department published a number of draft and final syllabi for primary school teachers being prepared to teach in white, coloured and African schools – the latter mainly mission schools with state grants. As I have argued elsewhere (Chisholm 2019), these curricula were versions of one another, all of them containing elements of academic, professional and practical education; the main differences lay in the time allocated to languages (more for white teachers) and manual training (more for coloured and African teachers).

Health education was understood as education in hygiene. As far as health education was concerned, hygiene and physical exercises and games comprised a good part of the syllabus for teachers in training for white schools, with about as much time dedicated to hygiene as to geography, nature study and manual training (Anon. 1922). In the Higher Primary Teachers' Certificate, hygiene was combined with physiology (Anon. 1923a). In the courses for teachers preparing to teach in coloured and 'native' mission schools, elementary physiology and hygiene were routinely combined, like elementary science and natural science, and allocated the same amount of time as history, drawing and music (Anon. 1921a, 1921b, 1921c, 1921d, 1923a, 1923b, 1923c). Regulations changed for African teachers in 1933: physiology and hygiene was designated an 'academic subject' alongside biology, language, elementary mathematics, geography, history, scripture and a range of professional subjects (Anon 1933). Combining hygiene with physiology, on the one hand, made sure that coloured and African teachers in training spent less time on the academic discipline of physiology than did white teachers. But it also brought hygiene into a combination with a science and academic discipline rather than as a practical subject. To this extent it may have reflected initiatives in the colonial world in the 1930s aimed at a broader modernisation of curricula through the introduction of science into mission schools that both used progressive methodologies and sought to make schools more 'useful' to modern/industrial economies (Kallaway 2012). The separate but linked activity and subject of physical education, Cleophas has also shown, was imbued with the late 19th century ethos of 'muscular Christianity' (Cleophas 2013).

Health or hygiene education thus certainly formed part of the formal curriculum for both white and black teachers and schools. But how was it framed? Were there major differences between the curricula for black and white schools? An examination of texts for the preparation of white and black teachers suggests rather that the approach was very similar, although the implementation was probably hampered by differences of facilities. First, there is the *Handbook of Suggestions for Teachers* that was adapted and serialised for white and coloured teachers in the Cape *Education Gazette* in the late 1920s (Board of Education Great Britain [BEGB] 1928). The London Board of Education *Handbook* contained chapters on each subject with advice to the teacher on how to approach these in the classroom. It was very similar in approach to what was serialised in the Cape *Education Gazette*. These chapters were in turn adapted for African teachers in *The Native Primary Teacher: Handbook of Suggestions for the Consideration of Teachers* (Cape of Good Hope Department of Public Education 1929b). Both were highly popular among teachers and were, reportedly, 'the bible' in teacher preparation until World War II (Chisholm 2020). So how do they deal with hygiene and health education?

Health education, comes at the end of the Board of Education's *Handbook* as the last chapter, and as part of a chapter on physical training (BEGB 1928: 411–422). Given that a separate syllabus was to be published, it sketched only the basic principles but this is sufficient to get a sense of the overall approach. These essentially defined the subject in terms of an experiential curriculum. Far more important than 'instruction which is mainly theoretical in character,' children were to be 'initiated into the life of health' through performing certain acts 'as a matter of routine' and without having any explanation, until they were considerably older (*ibid.*: 420–421). In order to achieve its aims of 'healthy habits,' it had to be integrated into all subjects. Healthy habits were the aim and so the aim was not to separate hygiene from the rest of the curriculum, and especially not from 'physical training, housecraft, natural history, and above all biology' (*ibid.*: 420–421). Its connections with history and geography were also not to be ignored because

there are few more interesting themes than the effect in the settlement and development of the Empire of the great discoveries in tropical medicine or the influence of great epidemics on the social, the industrial and the political progress of the nation. . . . The study and practice of health must form, from the first, part of the everyday life of the school. (BEGB 1928: 421)

How then did the bible of African primary school teacher education, *The Native Primary Teacher*, deal with it? The chapter on 'Hygiene and Health' is written in the style of advice or tips on how to approach the subject pedagogically. It too, is synchronous with the Board of Education and Phelps-Stokes approach to ensure that healthy habits become embedded through seeing and doing rather than theory or abstract teaching. The chapter generally tries to make teachers aware of how aspects of the school environment and classroom can detrimentally affect health, and what teachers should do to ensure that students internalise good habits. Out of it emerges an idealised picture of healthy schools and classrooms. But the emphasis is on knowledge of healthy habits being instilled through dealing with the child's life and surroundings. Advice is given around how to integrate healthy habits through paying attention to specific aspects of the school and its surroundings, lighting in the classroom, ventilation, temperature, equipment and position/posture, the timetable and actual teaching lessons. Guidelines are given on the buildings and gardens, how to keep the school including latrines clean, and how to ensure that children develop habits of washing their hands and drinking fresh water. The teacher should pay attention to lighting in the classroom, trying to arrange classes in such a way that the light comes from the left and that, when children are writing, there are no shadows on the page and making sure that children are not learning in the dark or in light that is too strong. Similarly, how to keep classrooms well ventilated in both cold and warm weather is emphasised. Exercise, the movement of children during cold weather, and keeping doors and windows open during hot is recommended. Correct posture is advised. And there is the injunction that 'the hours of the school should be arranged so as to save the children as much fatigue as possible, by working in the cooler hours of the summer, and by having sufficient breaks to rest the children' (Cape of Good Hope Department of Public Education 1929a: 54). For the younger children, it was emphasised that hygiene itself must not be taught out of books. Physical exercises in the form of a cleanliness parade, breathing exercises and drill and games were to supplement the formation of habits and teaching. From Standard IV upwards,

hygiene was to be integrated into lessons about the body and practical implications of not keeping the body healthy (Cape of Good Hope Department of Public Education 1929a: 55–58). Examples were given of the kinds of physical exercises to do with children at different ages. There was also an appendix on how to take care of and recognise problems with the eyes, ears, nose, throat and teeth. This very much fits the muscular Christianity ethos described by Cleophas that prevailed in Wesley College of Education.

The approach to health echoes the recommendations of Phelps-Stokes African Education Commission that visited Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Gold Coast, Nigeria, Cameroons, the Belgian Congo, Angola, and South Africa between August 1920 and March 1921. Written by Thomas Jesse Jones, it promoted the already widely held view of adapting education to meet local conditions. It identified four ‘essentials’ of education that needed to be integrated into the curriculum at all levels: health, appreciation and use of the environment, effective development of the home, and recreation. It promoted the idea of developing ‘a sense of community consciousness among the indigenous people, [the] overriding importance of agricultural and simple industrial training . . . better school supervision, cooperation between missions and government and differentiating between education for the masses and for leaders’ (in Berman 1971: 135). It also incorporated the view that character building and the acquisition of good habits was vital and that this would be best achieved not through literary but a practical education.

Despite the significance attached to health and sanitation, and its inclusion in school and teacher education curricula, Swiss missionary and author of indigenous texts, AA Jaques (1930), nonetheless deplored the fact that despite the importance of the subject and its special place in the recommendations by the Phelps-Stokes Commission, by 1930 it existed more in rhetoric than in practice. Jaques shared the view that hygiene as subject was useful in introducing scientific modes of thought but he was also of the view that it should be taught practically and not theoretically ‘as the mere memorisation of anatomical and physiological facts’ (Jaques 1930: 502). He believed strongly that it should be taught in the vernacular rather than in English and, indeed, authored a bilingual Sotho-English book on it in 1938 (Jaques 1938). It appears to have been part of a broader initiative by an International Institute of African Languages associated with Cambridge University Press to survey hygiene books used in Africa, design new curricula and commission new ones (see also, Millman 1930). In 1929 they found those textbooks in use to be ‘unrelated to local conditions and therefore [to have] have very little meaning to the African’ and recommended that more textbooks ‘of a very elementary character are needed’ that include health stories, plays and songs (Brackett & Wrong 1930: 507). Jaques, Millman and Brackett and Wrong may have been part of the growing movement in the 1930s to promote secular and scientific education in mission schools, still deeply shaped by paternalist notions of the ‘white man’s burden’ in Africa (see Millman 1930). Kallaway has recently argued that this approach was

linked to international trends which highlighted progressive pedagogy and the promotion of student motivation which sought to move away from the older tradition of passive rote-learning and promoting progressive pedagogy. Educational curricula were to focus on environmental awareness – plants, animals, agriculture, hygiene, nutrition, economic environment – and the role of women

and children in society. (2020: 93)

When speaking about health and hygiene, it is important to mention the mental hygiene movement. It was also significant during this period and had an impact on especially white schools through the measurement of their mental capacities. And it found expression later in the measurements of achievements of black students. It did feature as a subject in teacher training in so far as teachers were taught about mental testing in psychology (Cook 1939; Dubow 1995; Toms 2010; see Chisholm 2017: 104–110)

Apartheid

We do not know whether much of the advice provided in the *Handbooks* for teachers was implemented in classrooms or not. What we do have some knowledge of is that, other than the larger and more substantial mission schools, the vast majority were small wattle and daub structures to which the buildings, temperature and lighting advice simply could not be applied. It was not until the 1940s and 1950s that colonial ‘tropical’ school design began to take into account environmental conditions and to consider building with appropriate materials (Uduku 2018). However, by this stage South Africa under apartheid was also disconnecting from international and British colonial practice, at least as far as African schools were concerned. The principle whereby the state matched community contributions, and communities built schools resulted in many more community-built mud structures with inadequate lighting and ventilation. These were later augmented by the typical apartheid Bantu Education primary school built at low cost for expanding enrolments. This standard design ensured not only that ‘teacher and blackboard’ focused learning practices have persisted to the present day but also that much of the health guidelines of the 1920s remained a pipe dream (Horrell 1968; Karlsson 2004; Uduku 2018: 16). Classroom furniture was also inadequate and unlikely to encourage the teaching of ‘good posture.’ The health guidelines thus assumed spaces that Karlsson, citing Shields, saw as representing ‘a form of ‘blindness’’ – since ‘spatial knowledge [was] de-contextualised and read physically and conceptually only’ (Karlsson 2004: 41).

The key and well-known statements on Bantu Education and Christian National Education are not marked by any specific attention to health or hygiene. There were however some curricular continuities. The list of prescribed textbooks for Bantu Education schools of 1953 shows that health education was in the primary school curriculum. It included books on First Aid and on health education for tropical primary schools, some in indigenous languages, among the titles (Department of Bantu Education 1955). While there were variations of the subject in African and coloured schools, neither the school buildings nor the opportunities for physical exercise promoted sports in the townships (Cleophas 2014: 13–14; Stroebel et al. 2016). An outline of Bantu Education curricula in 1970 also indicates that ‘practical hygiene, environment studies and singing’ were included in a primary school syllabus that emphasised the three R’s in the mother tongue, religious instruction, handicrafts such as needlework, handwork and gardening in the primary school; physical education was included in the Junior Certificate (Ireland 1970: 152–3).

Health education and *gesondheidsleer* or *gesondheidsopvoeding* and physical education continued to be taught as separate subjects in white primary schools from Standard I up to Standard V throughout the apartheid period. Health education disappeared completely in high school. But it was replaced by physical education, a non-examinable subject. Even though physical education came to be seen by Christian National Education ideologues as central to a Christian and national world view, linking race with physical health and prowess, these ideologies were possibly weaker in English-speaking and black schools than in Afrikaans-speaking schools. Towards the end of the period, many schools, white and black, began phasing out the subject because of shortages of staff, equipment and facilities – the shortages of staff were in part linked to the processes of teacher rationalisation begun towards the end of the 1980s.

A glance at the South African National Library holdings shows that health education became a source of income for many schoolbook writers from the 1970s onwards. Because none of these has been digitalised, only a post Covid-19 era will enable more research into this subject. Much more work clearly still needs to be done on what it actually comprised for both black and white schoolchildren, and how subjectification processes may or may not have occurred in different contexts.

Post 1994

The shift towards outcomes-based education in 1995, followed by the Revised National Curriculum Statement in 2002 and Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) of 2011 marked a major change in the nature of the subject. Underlying these could be what Deng and Luke (2008) have defined as social reconstructionist curricular ideologies. In the first decade of change, the 1990s, when constructivism defined the overall approach, ‘subjects’ became subsumed within learning areas and health and physical education became part of life skills. Even though the emphasis shifted from constructivism to a ‘knowledge-focused’ approach in the 2000s, the life skills/orientation curriculum did not change fundamentally. Health education is now confined to the foundation and intermediate phases. Life skills has four focus areas: beginning knowledge, personal and social well-being, creative arts, and physical education (Department of Basic Education 2011). Personal and social well-being encompasses personal health, emotional health and relationships with people and the environment; physical education covers perceptual and motor development, rhythm, balance and laterality. The health education dimension of the curriculum came into prominence with the HIV/AIDS pandemic and much attention was focused on the way sexuality education was and is presented to children. This remains a major concern in the literature.

A range of more general criticisms has been advanced of the life skills curriculum’s treatment of both health and hygiene and physical education. A major criticism has been the compression into one subject of what had previously been independent, stand-alone subjects. For physical education specialists, the reduction of the stand-alone subject of physical education to a learning outcome of life orientation has meant not only a loss of status and the employment of unqualified teachers who

have to struggle with insufficient equipment but also the impact on the health of children where fully one third of 10-year-olds do not do physical education during the week (Deventer 2011, 2012; Stroebel et al. 2016, 2017).

Dixon et al., whose focus is on the foundation phase more generally, consider the loss of the ‘disciplinary integrity of specialised knowledge fields’ a distinct problem for teachers and teacher educators (2018: 13–14). Subjects lose their coherence through such compression. In addition, the content overload, and the requirement that foundation phase teachers have specialised knowledge of all the school subjects that underlie the four (new) knowledge domains in the CAPS life skills curriculum, create undue pressures and tensions for teachers and teacher educators (Dixon et al. 2018: 16). Both argue for separation of subjects lumped together in life skills and draw attention to the need for adequate preparation of teachers in the specialist knowledge needed to treat all the areas compressed into the container subject/learning area, life skills. These criticisms have been reinforced by life skills teachers; there is a solid body of research that teachers can meet the demands of the subject only with difficulty (Krishna 2013; Hebron 2015; Yoyo 2018).

From a historical perspective, a few additional observations can be made of the health education aspect of the life skills curriculum in the foundation and intermediate phases. Firstly, it has lost its emphasis on habit formation through practical learning and attention to the child in the school environment. The progressive, experiential pedagogy that underlay this earlier approach has given way to one focused on building human capital. Learning through the daily rituals has given way to learning knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. The formal curriculum is more important than the informal in the teaching of the habits. The pedagogical dimensions that were central in the first half of the 20th century to instruction are gone and the emphasis is on the abstract teaching of it. Hygiene and ‘healthy habits’ are included in the curriculum but the emphasis is less on how the teacher can, throughout the school day, reinforce these habits than on how it can be covered in a few hours. It is, in addition, part of a much broader conception.

Much more is also demanded of children in much less time. This points on the one hand to an underlying human capital approach and on the other to the different interests that have contributed to the curriculum. As a result of the latter, there is a much broader concept of health education, which is now no longer confined to hygiene. This broader concept, the result of different interests, includes those of sexuality education and environmental education, road safety, substance abuse and anti-TV lobbies. The scope of the subject is far wider than it was in the first part of the 20th century. It includes social and emotional health, values and attitudes towards and relationships with other people and the environment over and above issues relating to nutrition, diseases including HIV/AIDS, safety, violence and abuse (Department of Basic Education 2011). In the foundation phase (Grades R–3), physical education is allocated two hours per week and reduced to one hour per week in the intermediate phase (Grades 4–6). Health education is one of three dimensions of what has to be taught in personal and social well-being. Personal and social well-being is allocated one hour per week in the foundation phase and one and a half hours in the intermediate phase. This probably amounts to about 20 minutes a week on health education.

The curriculum identifies topics to be dealt with in each grade in each term. Grade R formally teaches children about good basic hygiene practice such as washing regularly, cleaning teeth, hair, and nails, washing fruit before eating, good toilet habits, sleep, exercise, the importance of a clean environment, ways that pollute the environment and the importance of recycling. In Grade 1, some of the same issues are covered: sleep; healthy eating; proper use of toilet, washing hands, keeping clean, regular exercise and play, limited TV; the body, and its different parts that can be seen and the five senses and their uses; keeping one's body safe by saying no and protecting it from illness by, for example, covering the nose and mouth when sneezing, and washing fruit and vegetables; healthy eating and safe and unsafe water. Grade 2 again covers healthy living through teaching about protecting food from flies, simple ways of purifying water, making children aware of harmful substances such as smoke and alcohol, and of good habits such as regular exercise, not watching TV and road safety. Grade 3 covers basic First Aid, basic health and hygiene, healthy eating, concentrating on food groups, insects such as flies that carry disease, pollution and recycling.

The emphasis shifts in the intermediate phase (Grades 4–6). The personal and social well-being part of the life skills curriculum still exists side by side with creative arts and physical education in one subject or learning area. But what used to be the elements of hygiene are now included in a section called 'health and environmental responsibility' alongside 'development of the self' (dealing with relationships, bullying, self-esteem, reading, self-management) and 'social responsibility' (dealing with children's rights and responsibilities, major religions in South Africa, child abuse, violence and discrimination, dignity, caring for people and animals, nation building and stereotyping). This means even less time is available for the previous hygiene components. It also includes a range of different topics. The section on health and environmental responsibility addresses dangers in and around water, traffic rules, personal and household hygiene, dietary habits, HIV/AIDS, safety measures, water use, healthy eating, environmental problems and a healthy environment, substance abuse, basic first aid, food hygiene, communicable diseases and myths and realities of HIV/AIDS.

Physical education is taught separately and as much detail is provided as here.

Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa has been accompanied by a massive public health and sanitation campaign. This campaign has been conducted via television and all other social and print media, with the President, Minister of Health and leading medical professionals championing it. It has raised profound questions about the conditions and facilities in schools to enable practices that support healthy habits. The infrastructural issues of water and sanitation have long been a preoccupation of social movements such as Equal Education. That they continue to be so neglected and depend on campaigns by NGOs and civil society organisations suggests a general lack of priority given to health and hygiene by educational authorities. And this in turn points to the poverty of education in this area. Diseases will not go away with better health education in schools.

Nor will an improved curriculum solve all the social problems that give rise to disease and ill-health in communities living with poverty. And yet attention to school curricula and how they address health education is critical.

An historical perspective on Covid-19 through the treatment of health indicates some differences and continuities. Neither pandemics nor the debates and issues confronting those both attending and in charge of schools have changed that much. The question of whether to go to school during a pandemic is not a new one, nor are the positions taken by historical actors very different. The curriculum concerns are similar in that there are fears of the gaps in learning that will arise. However, there are differences. Health education in the form of hygiene education in schools was very much on the agenda as a consequence of the pandemic a century ago. It is a less central dimension of curricular concerns today, its changed place in the curriculum as a subject or learning area reflecting not only its diminished importance socially but also the impact over time of different interests seeking a place for new areas in the curriculum. Here, interests stressing the importance of dealing with HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence as much as those concerned with the environment have found expression in the curriculum. The concept of health education is much broader as a consequence, and has to encapsulate much more than it did before. This means less time for what was previously hygiene education, especially as it is no longer conceptualised as a cross-curricular activity. That it is not a major issue nationally or among health professionals may well be because of the new role assumed by mass and social media in public health education. This does not, however, diminish its importance.

Examining health education a bit more closely is instructive. When brought into formal curricula for both black and white learners, health education was conceptualised in the early 20th century, not only as hygiene, and as a moralising and civilising subject in the case of black people, but one primarily of the learning and internalisation of habits – a knowledge that needed to be taught through practical example and experience rather than through instruction in the theory. The subject has continued through to the present, shorn of its moralising but also its pedagogical purposes and dimensions. With the current curriculum, more has to be done in less time and more abstractly. The curriculum thus, probably unintentionally, lends itself to a pedagogy of rote learning. These changes reflect the impact of changing curriculum ideologies over time and the way in which curriculum writers have mediated these influences on the curriculum.

Another important theme in the article has been the historical relationship between what is taught, and actual conditions in which it is taught. Civil society organisations' attention to the failures of infrastructure to support health and safety of children in schools today make a mockery of curricular pieties to teach healthy living, raising questions about the character of the instruction. What does it mean to teach the importance of washing hands when there is no water in the school? What does it mean to teach good toilet practice when the toilets are unusable? Although it is clear that the entire life skills curriculum itself requires some rethinking, what teachers teach in practice in the area of health education may also be worth much more research.

References

- Andersson, N & Marks, S. (1988) Apartheid and health in the 1980s. *Social Science & Medicine*, 27(7): 667–681.
- Anon. (1921a) Draft courses of training for Native primary teachers. *The Education Gazette*, XXI(No. 8).
- Anon. (1921b) Draft primary school course for Native schools. *The Education Gazette*, XXI(No. 3).
- Anon. (1921c) Native education: Primary school course. *The Education Gazette*, XXI(No. 13).
- Anon. (1921d) Native education: Teachers' courses of training. *The Education Gazette*, XXI(No. 8).
- Anon. (1922) Syllabus of courses of training for European teachers. *The Education Gazette*, 25 May.
- Anon. (1923a) Courses of training for European primary school teachers. *The Education Gazette*, XXII(36): 692–701.
- Anon. (1923b) New training courses for coloured teachers. *The Education Gazette*, XXII(40).
- Anon. (1923c) Training of coloured primary teachers. *The Education Gazette*, XXII(No. 22).
- Anon. (1933) The new T3 course. *Iso Lomuzi*, October: 15.
- Berman, EH. (1971) American influence on African education: The role of the Phelps-Stokes fund's education commissions. *Comparative Education Review*, 15(2): 132–145.
- Board of Education Great Britain. (1928) *Handbook of Suggestions for the Consideration of Teachers and Others Concerned in the Work of Public Elementary Schools*. Board of Education.
- Brackett, DG & Wrong, M. (1930) Notes on hygiene books used in Africa. *Africa*, 3(4): 506–515.
- Cape of Good Hope Department of Public Education. (1929a) Hygiene and health. In *The Native Primary School: Suggestions for the Consideration of Teachers*. Cape Times.
- Cape of Good Hope Department of Public Education. (1929b) *The Native Primary School: Suggestions for the Consideration of Teachers*. Cape Times.
- Chisholm, L. (2017) *Between Worlds: German Missionaries and the Transition from Mission to Bantu Education*. Wits Press.
- Chisholm, L. (2019) *Teacher Preparation in South Africa: History, Policy and Future Directions* [Chapter 6]. Emerald.
- Chisholm, L. (2020) Transnational colonial entanglements: South African teacher education college curricula. In McCulloch, G, Goodson, I & González-Delgado, M (eds). *Transnational Perspectives on Curriculum History*. Routledge, 163–181.
- Cleophas, FJ. (2013) A historical exploration of physical education at Wesley Teachers' Training School, Cape Town (1915–1966). *Southern African Review of Education*, 19(1): 38–59.
- Cleophas, FJ. (2014) A historical-political perspective on physical education in South Africa during the period 1990–1999. *South African Journal for Research in Sport, Physical Education and Recreation*, 36(1): 11–27.
- Comaroff, J. (1996) Reading, rioting and arithmetic: The impact of mission education on black consciousness in South Africa. *Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnology: Academica Sinica*, 82: 19–63.
- Cook, PAW. (1939) *The Native Std VI Pupil: A Socio-Educational Survey of Std VI Pupil in Native Schools in the Union of South Africa, 1935*. van Schaijk.
- Davies, B. (2006) Subjectification: The relevance of Butler's analysis for education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 27(4): 425–438.
- Deng, Z & Luke, A. (2008) Subject matter: Defining and theorizing school subjects. In Connelly, FM, He, MF & Phillion, J (eds). *The SAGE Handbook of Curriculum and Instruction*. SAGE, 66–87.
- Department of Bantu Education. (1955) Prescribed list of books: Health education. *Bantu Education Journal*, May: 175.

- Department of Basic Education. (2011) *National Curriculum Statement, Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), Foundation Phase, Grades R–3: Life Skills*. DBE.
- Deventer, JKV. (2011) The state and status of physical education in selected primary schools in four South African provinces: A survey. *African Journal for Physical Health Education, Recreation and Dance*, 17(SI 2): 824–841.
- Deventer, KJV. (2012) School physical education in four South African provinces: A survey. *South African Journal for Research in Sport, Physical Education and Recreation*, 34(1): 153–166.
- Dixon, K, Janks, H, Botha, D, Earle, K, Poo, M, Oldacre, F, Pather, K, Schneide, K-L. (2018) A critical analysis of CAPS for life skills in the foundation phase (Grades R–3). *Journal of Education* (71): 6–23.
- Dubow, S. (1995) *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa: History of ideas and intellectual history*. Cambridge University Press.
- Goodson, I. (1985) *Social Histories of the Secondary Curriculum: Subjects for Study*. Taylor & Francis.
- Goodson, I. (1993) *School Subjects and Curriculum Change*. Falmer Press.
- Goodson, I & Marsh, C. (1996) *Studying School Subjects: A Guide*. Falmer Press.
- Goodson, IF. (1990) Subjects for study. *Journal of Curriculum & Supervision*, 5(3): 260–268.
- Hebron, NA. (2015a) Exploring teachers' experiences of teaching CAPS life skills (physical education) in the foundation phase. Unpublished master's thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban.
- Heller, KJ. (1996) Power, subjectification and resistance in Foucault. *SubStance*, 25(1): 78–110.
- Horrell, M. (1968) *Bantu Education to 1968*. South African Institute of Race Relations.
- Ireland, RR. (1970) Bantu primary and secondary education in the Republic of South Africa. *The Social Studies*, 61(4): 150–57.
- Jaques, AA. (1930) Teaching of hygiene in Native primary schools. *Africa*, 3(4): 501–505.
- Jaques, AA. (1938) *Hygiene: A Bilingual English-Sotho Text Book for Native Primary Schools and Bantu Homes, With Practical Examples*. The Swiss Mission.
- Kallaway, P. (2010) Civic education in the context of South Africa's history and political struggles. *Southern African Review of Education*, 16(1): 15–38.
- Kallaway, P. (2012) *Julian Huxley and a Biological Approach to Education in British East Africa During the Inter-War Years*. International Standing Committee on the History of Education (ISCHE) Geneva.
- Kallaway, P. (2020) *The Changing Face of Colonial Education in Africa: Education, Science and Development*. Routledge.
- Karlsson, JA. (2004) Apartheid and post apartheid discourses in school space: A study of Durban schools. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of London.
- Krishna, AR. (2013) From OBE to CAPS: Educators' experiences of the new life skills curriculum in the foundation phase. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban.
- Lindgren, C. (2015) CF Louis Leipoldt (1880–1947): Controversial paediatrician and prolific writer who cared passionately about the health of children. *Acta Paediatrica*, 104(12): 1229–1232.
- Marks, S. (1994) *Divided Sisterhood: A History of Nursing in South Africa*. Macmillan.
- Marks, S & Andersson, N. (1987) Issues in the political economy of health in Southern Africa. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 13(2): 177–186.
- Merrington, P. (2003) C Louis Leipoldt's 'Valley Trilogy' and contested South African nationalisms in the early twentieth century. *Current Writing*, 15(2): 32–48.
- Millman, W. (1930) Health instruction in African schools: Suggestions for a curriculum. *Africa*, 3(4): 484–500

- Oppelt, R. (2019) C Louis Leipoldt's 'The Mask': Lost opportunities and cautions from the past. *English Academy Review*, 36(2): 25–37.
- Phillips, H. (1984) Black October: The impact of the Spanish influenza epidemic of 1918 on South Africa. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Cape Town.
- Phillips, H. (1987) The local state and public health reform in South Africa: Bloemfontein and the consequences of the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1918. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 13(2): 210–233.
- Phillips, H. (1990) *Black October: The Impact of the Spanish Influenza Epidemic of 1918 on South Africa*. Government Printer Archives Yearbook of South African History.
- Phillips, H. (2012) *Plague, Pox and Pandemics: A Jacana Pocket History of Epidemics in South Africa*. Jacana Media.
- Phillips, H. (2018) *In a Time of Plague: Memories of the 'Spanish' Flu Epidemic of 1918 in South Africa*. Van Riebeeck Society for the Publication of Southern African Historical Documents.
- Polenghi, S. (2014) *School subjects didactics in the history of education: Sources and methodology*. *History of Education & Children's Literature*, 9(1): 635–648.
- Popkewitz, TS. (1987) *The Formation of School Subjects: The Struggle for Creating an American Institution*. Falmer Press.
- Popkewitz, TS. (2018) What is 'really' taught as the content of school subjects? Teaching school subjects as an alchemy. *High School Journal*, 101(2): 77–89.
- Prinsloo, J. (2002) Possibilities of critical literacy: An exploration of schooled literacies in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand.
- South African Native Affairs Commission 1903–5. (1905) *Volume I: Report of the Commission*. SANAC.
- Stroebel, LCE, Hay, J & Bloemhoff, HJ. (2016) Physical education in South Africa: Have we come full circle? *South African Journal for Research in Sport, Physical Education and Recreation*, 38(3): 215–228.
- Stroebel, LC, Hay, J & Bloemhoff, HJ. (2017) Needs and challenges of foundation phase life skills teachers in delivering physical education: Jack of all trades and master of none? *South African Journal for Research in Sport, Physical Education and Recreation*, 39(3): 163–177.
- Toms, J. (2010) Mind the gap: MIND, the mental hygiene movement and the trapdoor in measurements of intellect. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 54(1): 16–27.
- Uduku, O. (2018) *Learning Spaces in Africa: Critical Histories to 21st Century Challenges and Change*. Routledge.
- Yoyo, S. (2018) A review of the implementation of the CAPS life skills curriculum training, as a recontextualising process, in engaging teachers in environmental education in two districts of the Eastern Cape Province. Unpublished master's thesis, Rhodes University.

Notes on the author

Linda Chisholm is a professor in the Centre for Education Rights and Transformation, University of Johannesburg

Address for correspondence

lchisholm@uj.ac.za

Every child is a national (playing) asset:¹ A portrait of a Soweto boy's contradictory worlds of play and performance before and during the Covid-19 lockdown

Shafika Isaacs

University of Johannesburg

Abstract

Amidst the Covid-19-inspired rethinking of education, this article appeals for the recognition of the township school-going learner as a playful child and playing citizen for whom the world is an imaginative play world. It deliberately places under a microscope, a township boychild named Kabelo, who is labelled in the formal education system as underperforming, learning-disabled and cognitively challenged. Kabelo epitomises the pattern of boy academic underperformance in South Africa and worldwide, particularly in reading and literacy. This pattern feeds a dominant narrative about systemic learning deficits that risks the stigmatisation of academically underperforming children whose lives intersect with stubborn structural inequality, and renders them invisible as capable, playful children. Through a third-generation Engeströmian activity theory lens, it illuminates the interactions between Kabelo's worlds of academic performance and play, before and during the Covid-19 lockdown, as a portal of complex contradictions. It proposes that the contradictory interplay of his worlds opens up opportunities for socially just recognition of his play capabilities as decisionmakers deliberate over education system reengineering during and beyond the pandemic.

Keywords: contradictions, play, performance, boychild, social justice, portraiture, CHAT

Isaacs, S. (2020) Every child is a national (playing) asset: A portrait of a Soweto boy's contradictory worlds of play and performance before and during the Covid-19 lockdown. *Southern African Review of Education*, 26(1): 116–133.

¹ Adapted from 'every child is a national asset' – a rallying slogan of the South African Government's Department of Basic Education, restated by the State President's address to the January 2019 basic education sector workshop (Ramaphosa 2019).

Introduction

Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. (Roy 2020: para.: 48)

Consistent with Roy's (2020) proposition, the Covid-19 pandemic is also a disruptive portal of contradictions within and between worlds. Others have depicted the Covid-19 moment as a paradigm shift (UNESCO 2020), a black swan (Winston 2020), a renaissance moment and one in which the architectures and bannisters of a pre Covid-19 era can no longer apply (Lalu 2020).

These depictions have also found expression in educational responses to the pandemic, which, in May 2020, led to the closure of schools in 143 countries (UNESCO 2020), catalysing deepening socioeconomic and education inequality. Predictions of how school closures can lead to short- and long-term learning loss equivalent to a year to a year and a half of schooling, and an increase in school dropout and teenage pregnancies, have already been extrapolated (Kaffenberger 2020; World Bank 2020). Darling-Hammond & Kini (2020) suggest further that education 'as we know it,' is over and that schooling will need to be thought of in profoundly different ways. A new imagination in learning, teaching and education delivery under increasingly unequal emergency conditions and beyond is thus urgently in demand.

In response, a few ideas are germinating in the fertile soil of Covid-19. These include the need to draw on South Africa's rich history of popular, grassroots education in the 1970s and 1980s as demonstrated by Choudry & Vally (2018); the need to confront how present-day formal schooling can also be a barrier to children's learning and creativity, as extolled by Robinson (2001, 2007, 2013); exploring openness in education, catalysed by the growing open education resources (OER) movement (Hodgkinson-Williams & Trotter 2018) and its concomitant relationship with open education practice (OEP) (Huang et al. 2020). Underpinning the OER and OEP movement is an emancipatory equity-centred, social justice intent (Lambert 2018). Thus, in a Covid-19 context, the call is to prise open the closed, containerised and tightly bounded (Leander et al. 2010) system of schooling.

In support of the emancipatory underpinnings of these ideas, this article proposes that renewed attention also be given to the school-going learner as a playful child and playing citizen for whom the world is a play world. The article draws on a doctoral study (Isaacs 2019) that foregrounds the worlds, peer cultures and capabilities of an ostensibly underperforming township boychild living in Soweto, named Kabelo. At the time of the study in 2017, Kabelo was nine years old and in Grade 2. The study's purpose was to make visible Kabelo's play world that lay hidden beneath his underperforming test scores. By following Kabelo ethnographically for 16 months (August 2017 to January 2019) across the vast expanse of his life in Soweto, the study creates, through his voice, a portrait that juxtaposes his everyday world of play with his world of academic performance (Isaacs 2019).

At the time of the Covid-19 outbreak, the researcher engaged with Kabelo and his parents in May

and June 2020 to magnify his portrait under home-confined lockdown conditions. The research question was expanded to ask pertinently: ‘How do the contradictions show up within and between Kabelo’s everyday play world and his world of academic performance before and during the Covid-19 lockdown?’ By exposing the contradictions between his worlds as activity systems (Engeström 2015), the article draws out the implications for socially just learning expansion, particularly in view of Covid-19 conversations on reengineering schooling.

Theoretical and conceptual framework

The study is situated at the intersection of theories on children’s play and social justice. It also applies third-generation cultural-historical activity theory as a heuristic, particularly focusing on contradictions between activity systems (Engeström 2015).

Play is a contested construct that is philosophically, theoretically and operationally complex. There is still no unifying theory on play and, operationally, play is applied differently from different theoretical vantage points (Zosh et al. 2018). However, human play theorists agree that children at various stages of cognitive, social and emotional development construct and make sense of the world through play (Vygotsky 1967; Bruner et al. 1976). By extension, I propose that much of the child’s lived experience (van Manen 2016) of the world is also a lived play experience. Such views are consistent with Huizinga (1949), who alludes to *homo ludens* – the imagining human whose play is integral to the culture of being human and being a child. To this, I add a constructionist frame based on Papert and Harel (1991) who show how children learn by making, building and constructing, which Thomas and Brown (2009) refer to as *homo faber*.

The concept of play world is adopted to depict the lived world of the child and refers to a range of play spaces both physical and imaginary, real and virtual, including a third space that lies in between home and school (Yahya & Wood 2017). Play world is an analytical construct that has spatial, cultural-historical, temporal, mobile, digital and aesthetic underpinnings. The child’s play world also involves different forms of play including pretend play (Vygotsky 1978; Piaget 2013), play-as-making (Papert & Harel 1991), digital play (Bird & Edwards 2015) and violent or dark play (Bjartveit & Panayotidis 2017).

In this article, the playing child as *homo ludens* and *homo faber* are adopted and applied critically with social justice intent. Kabelo is, specifically, a working class, multilingual boychild growing up in a historically black township, and who navigates structural marginalisation as a child capable of making choices and decisions (Bessant 2014), a human being and human becoming (Uprichard 2008), and a playing citizen with rights, agency, and who exercises participation through play (Grindheim 2017).

Kabelo’s play world juxtaposes with his schooled world of academic performance, which is informed by a web of policies, regulations and laws. These include policies related to the curriculum and curriculum reform (Chisholm 2012), language of instruction (Posel & Casale 2011; Spaul 2016), assessment (Kanjee & Sayed 2013; Kanjee & Molo 2017) and inclusive

education policies (Engelbrecht et al. 2016). Contestations on these policies have surfaced challenges with the conceptual underpinnings and efficacy of policy formulation under the influence of globalisation (Deacon et al. 2010; Spreen & Vally 2010), the challenges with policy implementation (Donohue & Bornman 2014), and the depiction of children within policy (Walker & Unterhalter 2007).

Academic performance is considered given a pattern of boys' underperformance relative to girls that has emerged in South Africa (Broekhuizen & Spaul 2017). This gendered pattern is echoed globally, as evidenced by the 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS; Mullis et al. 2016), which has been analysed by some, as a *cognitive catastrophe* (Aitchison 2018) reinforcing the intersections between poor performance, poverty and inequality (Spaul 2013). These persistent intersections of inequality make social justice struggles in education an essential clarion call (Chisholm 2012).

I shine a spotlight on *recognition* as a dimension of social justice, drawing on Fraser's (2008) three-dimensional social justice theory combined with the capabilities approach (CA; Sen 2005; Nussbaum 2002). Recognition relates to whose attributes and capabilities are regarded by society as valuable, and the way an individual is seen and acknowledged reciprocally as an equal by other individuals, institutions and systems. Recognition is linked to misrecognition, which shifts the analytical gaze towards the explicit and implicit, overt and subtle, external, internal and institutionalised ways in which power-marginalised individuals experience invisibility, inequality, disadvantage, exclusion, marginalisation and powerlessness within institutions and systems. These experiences are felt beyond just their lack of rights and access to material resources but as 'institutionalised patterns of interpretation and evaluation that constitute one as unworthy of respect and self-esteem' (Fraser 1997: 280).

While Sen (ibid.) defines capability as the individual's freedom, opportunities and choices to do what she or he considers to be valuable, Sen (ibid.) and Nussbaum (ibid.) refer to the human capability to fulfil the essential quality of life functions. The study on which this article is based also acknowledges the limitations of CA in acknowledging power relations within systems. The study adopts cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), which integrates asymmetrical relations of power within a given activity system.

CHAT and contradictions

Roy's (2020) concept of a portal is expanded to incorporate contradictions that emanate from the interaction within and between worlds. It builds on lifeworld studies of children and youth in South Africa (Fataar 2010; Fataar & du Plooy 2012; Joorst 2015; Domingo-Salie 2018; Sonamzi 2018) and studies on children's everyday literacy practices (Lemphane & Prinsloo 2014; Sibanda & Kajee 2019).

The concept of *worlds* is further analysed as interactions within and between dynamic, complex and contradictory activity systems, applying third-generation CHAT (Engeström 2015) as a heuristic. Using CHAT, the tool-mediated, object-oriented base upon which a subject and a

network of relations interact within an activity system serves as the unit of analysis. It also includes the engagement between many role-players ('multivoicedness') and the historical evolution of a system over time (its 'historicity'). It incorporates the internal contradictions that drive transformative agency of the subjects and, hence, expansive learning and qualitative transformation of the activity systems. This article gives prominence to the contradictions between the interacting activity systems.

Contradictions are 'historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems' (Engeström 2001: 137). The study adopts Engeström and Sannino's (2011) methodological framework that identifies four types of discursive manifestations of contradictions: double-blind, critical conflicts, conflicts and dilemmas. Each includes specific features, associated linguistic cues, and possible ways in which the contradiction can be resolved. Moreover, Engeström (2005) proposed the concept of expansive learning that arises out of ways to address the systems' internal contradictions.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative hybridised design incorporating critical ethnography (Carspecken 1996), narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connolly 1991) and portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis 1997), which were applied as techniques to write up a critical ethnographic narrative portrait of Kabelo. Kabelo was one of four underperforming township boychildren, part of a purposefully selected sample for this study.

It applied a range of qualitative data collection strategies that included reviews of academic and policy documents, clinical and ethnographic interviews, focus group discussions, interviews, participant observation, and digital storytelling (Lambert 2010). The voluminous data was analysed using constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz 2014; Saldana 2016), which involved systematic, iterative coding, categorising and thematising the raw data as they emerged over the 16 months of fieldwork ending (August 2017 to January 2019) and during May and June 2020.

The research engaged with different models and experiences of ethical research on children (Graham et al. 2013; United Nations Children's Fund 2015). Their approaches acknowledge how the research journey with children is continuously influenced by the researcher's values, experiences, attitudes and beliefs. In applying these models, the research objectives and process were explained in detail to the parents and boychildren (including Kabelo and his parents) at meetings dedicated for this purpose. During the Covid-19 lockdown in May and June 2020, further explanation was provided to Kabelo and his parents on the phone. Following these consultations, all of the participants provided their formal written consent to participate. During the Covid-19 period, consent was given both verbally and via WhatsApp message by Kabelo and his parents. The research was also granted an ethical clearance number from the University of Johannesburg (2018-061), and an ethical clearance certificate was issued whose application was extended to the Covid-19 period.

While following these ethical procedures was necessary, the fieldwork required vigilance to the potential and actual ethical dilemmas that invariably arose. One example involved being asked to help Kabelo's mother with her search for a job. The researcher highlighted the request as a compromise on the researcher's role. In these ways, the quest to maintain the ethical research protocols proved to be a complex and challenging endeavour that was consciously integrated as attempts to sustain research rigour and trustworthiness.

Findings and analysis

From the grounded theoretical data analysis, a narrative portrait of Kabelo emerged, which illuminated themes in his worlds of play and academic performance. Applying CHAT enabled further analysis of his portrait as two interacting activity systems before the Covid-19 lockdown, as shown in Figure 1. Within each of the pre Covid-19 activity systems, the *subject* (Kabelo as a playful child or a national learner) mediates his world through the use of *tools and signs* (a range of play tools or his academic performance tools), which orients him towards an *object* (his meaning making and self-making or his progression through the academic performance system) that leads to *outcomes* (his play capabilities or his academic skills and competencies) under given conditions and *rules* (play rules or the academic performance policies), with particular *communities* (his friends, relatives, parents and teachers in both systems) and in a *division of labour* (Kabelo versus his peers or Kabelo and his parents versus the education authorities).

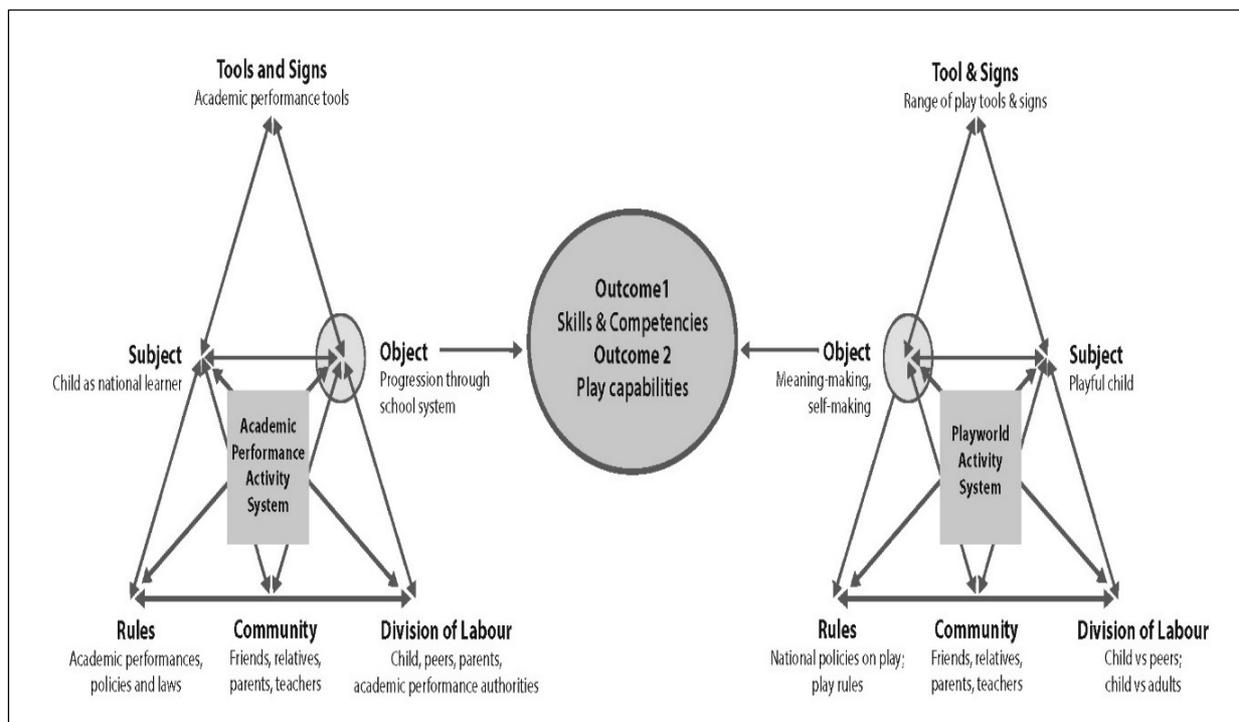


Figure 1: The structure of two interacting activity systems before Covid-19 (Engeström 2006: 3)

During the Covid-19 lockdown, the structure of the two activity systems differed (see Figure 2).

The rules in both systems shifted to lockdown regulations, which led to a home-confined subject in both systems with reduced tools and signs to support his academic learning and performance, leading to formal academic learning losses.

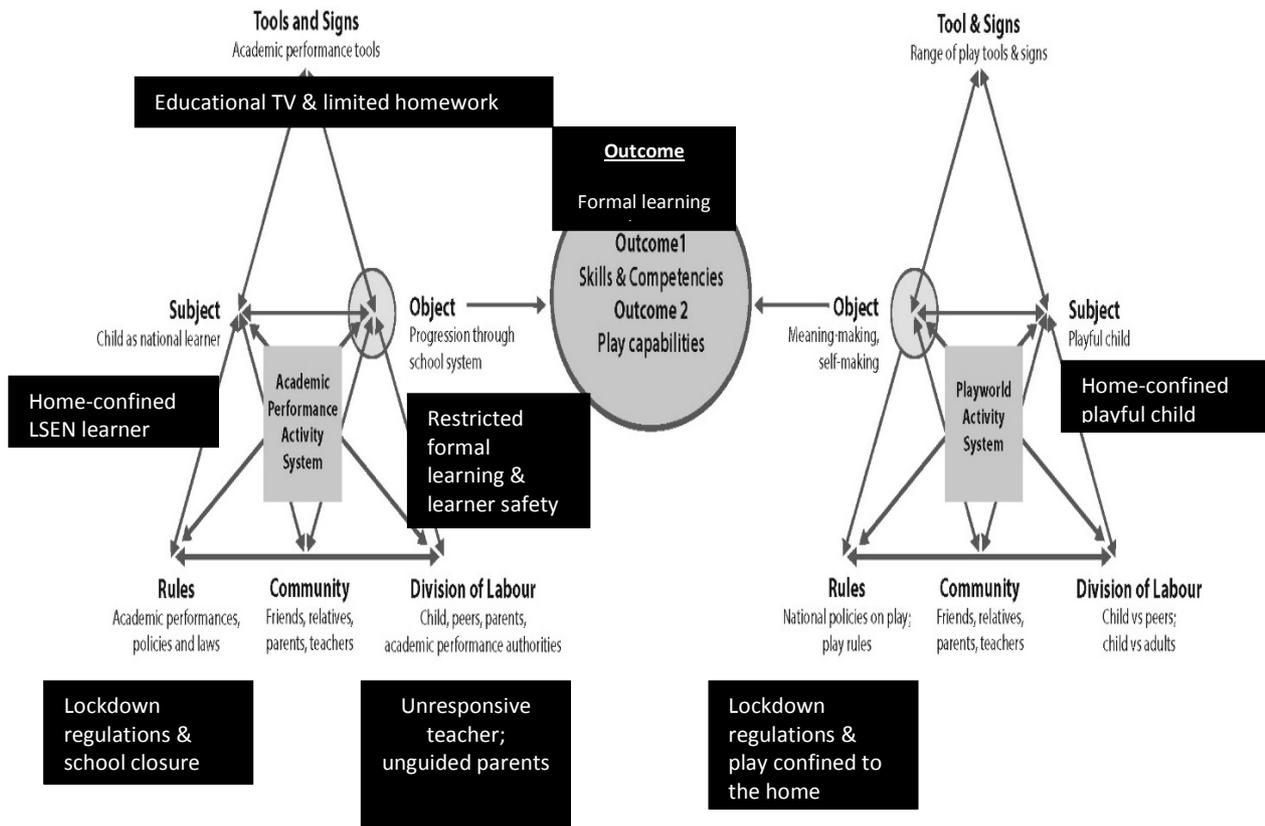


Figure 2: The structure of two interacting activity systems during Covid-19 lockdown (Engeström 2006: 3)

As shown in Figure 2, during the lockdown, Kabelo’s academic performance world was dramatically curtailed, leaving more time for his play world, albeit confined within his home. In the former, as the subject, he became a home-confined learner with special educational needs (LSEN) mediating his academic performance world – initially through his tools and signs, which involved self-motivated watching of educational television channels and then, later, through homework provided to him by the school on Fridays between 12 June 2020 and 2 July 2020. These tools oriented him towards an object (restricted formal learning and an emphasis on learner safety) that led to his loss of formal learning as an outcome under lockdown regulations – initially, as school closures and movement towards partial reopening on 6 July 2020.

An analysis of contradictions that emerged within and between Kabelo’s play world and academic performance activity systems before and during the Covid-19 lockdown follows next.

Pre Covid-19 pre lockdown contradictions

In Table 1, four critical contradictions are highlighted between the two interacting activity systems, before the Covid-19 lockdown.

Table 1: Pre Covid-19 contradictions between activity systems

	Pre-Covid Contradictions Between Systems	
	Play World Activity System	Academic Performance World Activity System
Subject	A playful and capable child	A cognitively challenged national learner
Tools	Translanguaging practices	Monolingualised boundaries and questionable psychoeducational assessment tools
Objects	Self-making and meaning making	Progression through performance
Outcomes	Play capabilities	Learning disabilities

Contradiction 1 (Subject): Playful and capable child versus cognitively challenged national learner

In his play world, Kabelo as the subject is a playful child who can exercise his agency, choices and capabilities, as demonstrated in the excerpts below (Table 2):

Table 2: Excerpts from participant observation

Context: Arriving at a workshop in Soweto on his own	Context: Providing directions from school
Shafika: Wow, you are early. Where is your mom? Kabelo: I came alone. Shafika: By yourself? Kabelo: Yes Shafika: By taxi? Kabelo: Yes Shafika: Have you travelled on your own before? Kabelo: Yes	‘I know the way to my grandfather’s place,’ said the then 9-year-old Kabelo confidently as he stepped inside my car, one Friday afternoon. He then pronounced as if a tour guide: ‘See, there is Maponya Mall.’ ‘At the next robot, you turn left,’ directed self-assured Sesotho-speaking Kabelo, a minute before the computer-generated, English-accented female voice beckoned: ‘In one hundred meters, turn left.’ Kabelo continued: ‘At the garage, turn left, and then you turn right and then you are at my grandfather’s house.’

He can provide clear directions when travelling around Soweto and demonstrates navigational capabilities and knowledge of Soweto. He travels by taxi on his own, challenges his mother on mobile learning apps that he dislikes, self-manages his morning routine to school, navigates bullying and gambling at school and violence in the home and community. He is politically aware and offers critical opinion on politicians from Soweto.

He is also an aspirant child with an imagination about a desired future. He wants to be a truck driver, a fast-car owner, an engineer, and he aspires to go to the university. This resonates with Zipin et al. (2015) who show how aspirations emerge via a range of sociocultural influences and resources including family, community histories and populist ideologies.

In his performance world, Kabelo is a national learner who is severely cognitively challenged: a boy with a learning disability. He is an underperforming learner, based on his challenges with reading and writing in Sesotho as his home language and English as a first additional (second) language, as reflected in his poor test scores. He is also a 'progressed' learner who has already repeated the Grade 1 year and cannot repeat another grade in the foundation phase. Thus, he progressed to Grade 3 before he moved to an LSEN school with a different grading system:

I struggle to see the words of the books. Sometimes it is the first word and the last word. The sentence. I struggle to get to the end. (Focus group discussion 2018)

He can identify his struggles with reading in English and Sesotho, which he explains as a problem with his eyes; he talks about his frustration and sadness that his reading challenges cause him, and his plans to overcome them. Kabelo's articulation of his sadness and frustration resonate with a growing knowledge corpus on the learner perspective in literacy and language learning that highlight the emotional aspects of literacy learning (Busch et al. 2016), and provide first-person accounts of language learning.

Thus, there are two conflicting depictions of the subject in each activity system. He is a capable, playful child with agency who contrasts with Kabelo as a cognitively challenged national learner.

Contradiction 2 (Tools): Multilingualism versus monolingualised boundaries as cultural tool

Across the vastness of Soweto as Kabelo's playground, is a melting pot of local African languages that combine with the languages of modernity via globalisation and digitisation. Kabelo is exposed to, speaks and understands Sesotho, Setswana, isiZulu and siSwati. At his LSEN school, he is further exposed to Afrikaans with his Afrikaans-speaking classmates, which he did not experience at his former school. With me as researcher, Kabelo chose to communicate in English despite the presence of a Sesotho translator. With his friends and peers, he talks of *mpalma klap* (a smack in the face), *zwebi* (a gambling game) and of loving *kwotas* (a special sandwich) as reflections of *kasi taal*. He also talks of 'googling' when he does his homework and sending 'WhatsApp' when he has data. In these ways, Kabelo's portrait reveals that he has a few languages in his fluid linguistic repertoire (Busch 2010) and that he is a multilingual subject who communicates and understands a range of African languages, English, *kasi taal*, the encroaching language that accompanies cultural globalisation, and his recent exposure to Afrikaans at his new school. He moves within and

between formal and informal language practices, which is consistent with translanguaging practice (Makalela 2014).

This contrasts with his world of academic performance where the tools and signs are those that are used to mediate academic learning and achievement. From the academic performance system's perspective, Kabelo learns English as a second language and Sesotho as his home language as bounded, monolingualised (Busch 2010) languages. His multilingualism takes a back seat, and his performance in reading is based on literacy and language teaching as prescribed in the curriculum. In this way, the incongruencies in linguistic practice between the two systems of the boychild are evident.

Contradiction 3 (Objects): Meaning making and self-making versus progression through performance

The object under transformation in Kabelo's play world is his meaning making and stylised self-making. I interpret Kabelo's stylised self-making as that of an urban multilingual digitally exposed boy in a bustling Soweto that is integral to the 21st century Johannesburg. Through a complex blend of interactions with local and modern global cultural consumption, Kabelo's *Afropolitanism* combines stable, routine family and churchgoing life with consumption of global and local commodities and a precarious and vulnerable exposure to poverty, crime and gender-based violence in his home and community. Kabelo demonstrates the construction of his culture, his world through his selfies and digital photos and videos as acts of self-expression, self-making and aspiration.

Kabelo's meaning making and stylised self-making in his play world stand in contrast with the object of his academic performance world, which is to demonstrate that relevant grade appropriate proficiencies have been acquired in order to progress towards higher grades. Based on the curriculum and assessment system, Kabelo's progression through the system was challenged by his underperformance, particularly in reading and literacy, which eventually led him to be labelled as an underperforming, severely cognitively challenged learner who was eventually sent to an LSEN school. Thus, his meaning making and self-making as object contrast with his underperformance in his progression through the mainstream schooling system.

Contradiction 4 (Outcomes): Play capabilities versus learning disabilities

A further, related contradiction is manifest between the conflicting outcomes between the two activity systems. The play world system highlights Kabelo's play capabilities as an outcome, whereas relevant academic skills and proficiencies are critical outcomes in the academic performance system. However, the latter reflects Kabelo's learning disabilities instead, thereby juxtaposing his disabilities in the one system versus his play capabilities in the other.

During Covid-19 lockdown

The four contradictions explained above compare with three contradictions that emerged between the activity systems during the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak when he was confined to his home

during May and June 2020.

Table 3: During the Covid-19 lockdown: Contradictions between activity systems

	Covid-19 Lockdown Contradictions Between Systems	
	Play World	Academic Performance World
Tools	Range of play tools under home confinement	Educational broadcasting and restricted homework
Outcomes	Play capabilities under home confinement	Formal learning loss and limited formal learning gains
Division of labour	Parents and relatives in support of play	Unresponsive teacher; Unguided parents

Contradiction 1 (Tools): A range of play tools and personal protection equipment versus educational broadcasting and limited homework

Under lockdown Kabelo's world of academic performance, while formally curtailed, continues through his willing appropriation of tools to continue his formal curriculum learning under home confinement:

When I get up in the mornings, I watch 317. They teach me about maths for Grade 6. They teach me to multiply and divide. The other day they teach me about addition and subtraction. I sit with my books and write when they teach me.

Kabelo sent photos via WhatsApp of how he watches the educational TV channel 317 in the mornings. His mother reports that he watches for a short while every day, especially on weekdays and on some afternoons.

With the phased return to school on 8 June 2020, Kabelo, being Grade 6 at an LSEN school, continued to stay at home. However, over three of the planned four Fridays between 12 June 2020 and 2 July 2020, his mother went to the school to collect maths, English and life orientation homework in the form of worksheets and readers, which Kabelo would work on during the week. She dropped off his completed homework on Fridays when she collected homework for the following week.

Kabelo, thus, circumvented learning losses through his self-motivation and reported self-discipline to watch the educational TV channel on his own volition, his reported enthusiasm about receiving homework from the school and completing it on time. Kabelo moved between his consumption of educational TV, doing his homework, and everyday play, including:

- playing car racing games on his mother's phone;
- playing cards with his father whose job in retail sales was drastically restricted from a 24-day to an 8-day working month during May and June 2020;

- learning to bake cookies with his cousin who stayed with them on some days;
- cooking food;
- playing soccer on his own;
- helping out with cleaning the house; and
- watching entertaining television programmes.

His knowledge of using personal protective equipment appropriately and restricted movement was apparent:

I know I must wear my mask and wash my hands. I can't see my friends, and I can't play soccer with them because I can't touch anything. This will spread the virus. I must be one point five metres.

While he expresses awareness of the restrictions on his play repertoire, the restricted play tools under lockdown contrast with his expanded play repertoire before the pandemic.

Contradiction 2 (Outcomes): Play capabilities and informal learning gains versus formal learning loss

I miss school so much.

I miss my teacher. I miss my principal. I miss my friends. I miss playing soccer at school.

For Kabelo, school is a place that offers more than formal curriculum learning. The outcome in his academic performance world under lockdown is focused on his loss of formal curriculum learning and schooling. This loss is associated with loss of relationship building with his friends and caring adults, and his sporting activities at school. His excitement about going back to school for three days of the week, wearing civvies and reconnecting with his school community was palpable. He reports that his friends with whom he communicates via WhatsApp are equally excited to meet up again.

Before their knowledge about returning to school, his parents expressed anxiety about extended formal learning losses, which is why then encouraged educational TV viewing and wholly supported Kabelo's return to school on 6 July 2020. The loss of formal curriculum learning, slightly compensated by the limited homework received, contrasts with the informal learning gains through his everyday play, relationship building with his family, his digital play and making activities in the home.

Contradiction 3 (Division of labour): Solidified parental relations versus unresponsive teacher and unguided parents

During the lockdown, communication with the authorities in his academic performance world was severely curtailed. At the beginning of June 2020, however, an SMS was received by Kabelo's mother from the school principal. Throughout the lockdown period until 29 June 2020, Kabelo had not received any communication from any of Kabelo's teachers. The absence of teacher guidance was particularly felt when his mother expected feedback on the homework that Kabelo had submitted to the school on 19 June 2020. The absence of communication from the school

authorities, particularly the caring adults at his school, was also felt in terms of the expressed guidance needed by Kabelo's parents about ways to support his homework completion:

But I don't know if he is doing it right. There is no writing from the teacher about the homework that he did. They just gave it back to me like we gave it to them.

The lack of communication and expected guidance from Kabelo's teacher contrasts with the solidifying of Kabelo's relationship with the caring adults in his home, with his relatives when they visit and particularly with his father. He mentioned his playing time with his father during the lockdown on three occasions, particularly the card games they played together. Before the lockdown, Kabelo spent less time with his father at home. Despite the financial hardship they were experiencing under lockdown, the time with his father and mother featured prominently for Kabelo.

Thus, the contradictions identified above qualify as critical conflicts in the Engeström & Sannino (2011: 375) model. This array of interrelated contradictions within and between the two systems before and during the Covid-19 lockdown suggests that they operate as conflicting systems in the life of the child. The one operates in a formal official domain above ground, while the play world system operates as a subterranean system, hidden underneath. By virtue of the play world activity system operating in the domain of informality, the knowledges and capabilities reflected as outcomes would also lack legitimacy and recognition in the formal academic performance system. This lack of legitimacy operates as moments of misrecognition of the child's capabilities, voice and agency as he moves within and between both worlds.

Misrecognition assumes the form of inappropriate assessment instruments used for neuropsychological assessment and show up as the misrecognition of his play tools and capabilities in his performative, measured schooled world. These contradictions assume renewed form during the lockdown when they manifest as a loss of formal learning and a sense of loss of relationship-building time from the family and community and loss of relationship building and activities provided at school. The contradictions also manifest as the misrecognition of the value of his informal, play world learning – the skills that he acquired while at home. Moreover, the critical role of the caring adults at home to support Kabelo as the subject in his academic performance world and his play world under lockdown is underutilised and misrecognised. The lack of communication and the absence of guidance to his parents throughout the lockdown period is evidence of the disconnect between the school authorities and his caring adult community at home. Misrecognition also assumes the form of discrepancies in the value that Kabelo's play activities as learning in the home, relative to the value that society attributes to academic performance and formal curriculum learning. Because the use value of Kabelo's play lacks legitimacy, it is not recognised in formal schooled knowledge spaces. Academic performance is premised on gaining skills and proficiencies in exchange for progression through the system and eventual absorption into the labour market. In this way, from a labour market perspective, the schooled knowledge carries exchange value that gives it its legitimacy. Transformation of the formal education system would thus entail a process of socially just recognition and valuation of Kabelo as a playing child

and his imaginative play world.

Conclusion

The research question was: ‘How do the contradictions show up within and between Kabelo’s everyday play world and his world of academic performance before and during the Covid-19 lockdown?’ Applying the concept of a portal of contradictions within and between worlds, the study highlighted discursive manifestations of contradictions between the play world and academic performance world of Kabelo before and during the Covid-19 lockdown. These contradictions were analysed as manifestations of misrecognition. For the interacting activity systems to become a portal towards socially just transformation, formative interventions that confront the contradictions would be required.

The systemic recognition of Kabelo’s play capabilities would require a shift in the policy and practice of his dominant academic performance world towards one that embraces the informal, the openness, and that legitimises his play world. Implementation of the latter would have implications for a more robust interplay with formal academic knowledge, in curriculum change and the culture of learning and schooling in ways that also enable an active learning support role of the caring adults in Kabelo’s home. Against the backdrop of the Covid-19-inspired calls for education system reengineering, the socially just recognition that every child is a national playing asset would need to be legitimised and would entail a critical, transformative disruption of the current deeply embedded performative system.

Acknowledgements

This research for this paper was supported by the National Research Fund (NRF) grant number 98573. It was undertaken as part of a doctoral study at in the faculty of education at the University of Johannesburg. Opinions and conclusions are those of the author and are not attributable to the NRF. Professor Elizabeth Henning (South African Research Chair on the Integration of Mathematics, Science and Languages in the Primary School) and Professor Nicky Robert provided the supervision support and enabling environment for this research.

References

- Aitchison, J. (2018) South Africa’s reading crisis is a cognitive catastrophe. *The Conversation* [online]. Available at <http://theconversation.com/south-africas-reading-crisis-is-a-cognitive-catastrophe-89052> [accessed 19 August 2018].
- Bessant, J. (2014) A dangerous idea? Freedom, children and the capability approach to education. *Critical Studies in Education*. doi:10.1080/17508487.2014.873368
- Bird, J & Edwards, S. (2015) Children learning to use technologies through play: A digital play framework. *British Journal of Educational Technology*. doi:10.1111/bjet.12191
- Bjartveit, C & Panayotidis, EL. (2017) Transforming early childhood educators’ conceptions of ‘dark play’ and popular culture. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1463949117714075>

- Broekhuizen, H & Spaull, N. (2017) The 'Martha effect': The compounding female advantage in South African higher education. *Working Papers 14/2017, Stellenbosch University, Department of Economics*. <https://doi.org/RePEc:sza:wpaper:wpapers290>
- Bruner, J, Jolly, S & Sylva, K (eds). (1976) *Play: Its Role in Development and Evolution*. Penguin.
- Busch, B. (2010) School language profiles: Valorizing linguistic resources in heteroglossic situations in South Africa. *Language and Education*. doi:10.1080/09500781003678712
- Busch, B, Jardine, A & Tjoutuku, A. (2016) *Language Biographies For Multilingual Learning* [online]. Available at www.researchgate.net/profile/Brigitta_Busch/publication/265484949_Language_biographies_for_multilingual_learning/links/56b474aa08ae61c48059b84d.pdf%0D [accessed 21 July 2019].
- Carspecken, PF. (1996) *Critical Ethnography in Educational Research: A Theoretical and Practical Guide* [Kindle]. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.34-1057>
- Charmaz, K. (2014) *Constructing Grounded Theory* (2nd ed.). SAGE.
- Chisholm, L. (2012) Apartheid education legacies and new directions in post-apartheid South Africa. *Storia Delle Donne*, 8: 81–103. doi:10.13128/SDD-11892
- Choudry, A & Vally, S. (2018) Learning from, in, and with independent community and activist archives: The past in our present and future. *Education as Change*, 22(2): 1–9. doi:10.25159/1947-9417/4513
- Clandinin, DJ & Connelly, FM. (1991) Narrative and story in practice and research. In Schon, DA (ed.). *The Reflective Turn: Case Studies in and on Educational Practice*. Teachers' College Press, 258–281.
- Darling-Hammond, L & Kini, T. (2020) *A New 'New Deal' for Education: Top 10 Policy Moves for States in the COVID 2.0 Era* [online]. Available at <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/blog/covid-new-deal-education-top-10-state-policy-moves> [accessed 12 June 2020]
- Deacon, R, Osman, R & Buchler, M. (2010) Education policy studies in South Africa, 1995–2006. *Journal of Education Policy*. doi:10.1080/02680930903314269
- Domingo-Salie, N. (2018) The educational practices and pathways of South African students across power-marginalised spaces. In Fataar, A (ed.). *The Educational Practices and Pathways of South African Students*. SUN MeDIA, 53–76. doi:10.18820/9781928357896
- Donohue, D & Bornman, J. (2014) The challenges of realising inclusive education in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education*, 34(2): 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.15700/201412071114>
- Engelbrecht, P, Nel, M, Smit, S & van Deventer, M. (2016) The idealism of education policies and the realities in schools: The implementation of inclusive education in South Africa. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*. doi:10.1080/13603116.2015.1095250
- Engeström, Y. (2001) Expansive learning at work: Toward an activity theoretical reconceptualization. *Journal of Education and Work*, 14(1): 133–156. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080123238>
- Engeström, Y. (2005) Toward overcoming the encapsulation of school learning. In Daniels, H (ed.). *An Introduction to Vygotsky* (2nd ed). Routledge, 157–176.
- Engeström, Y. (2006) Activity theory and expansive design. In Bagnara, S & Crampton-Smith, G (eds). *Theories and Practice of Interaction Design*. Lawrence Erlbaum, 3–24.
- Engeström, Y. (2015) *Learning by Expanding: An Activity Theoretical Approach to Developmental Research*. Cambridge University Press.
- Engeström, Y & Sannino, A. (2011) Discursive manifestations of contradictions in organisational change efforts. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 24(3): 368–387. doi:10.1108/09534811111132758

- Fataar, A. (2010) Youth self-formation and the 'capacity to aspire': The itinerant 'schooled' career of Fuzili Ali across post-apartheid space. *Perspectives in Education*, 28(3): 34–45.
- Fataar, A & du Plooy, L. (2012) Spatialised assemblages and suppressions: The learning 'positioning' of Grade 6 students in a township school. *Journal of Education*, 55(1): 11–36.
- Fraser, N. (2008) *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalising World*. Polity Press.
- Fraser, N. (1997) Heterosexism, misrecognition, and capitalism: A response to Judith Butler. *Social Text*, (52/53): 279–289. <https://doi.org/10.2307/466745>
- Fraser, N. (2008). Reframing justice in a globalizing world. In Olson, K (ed.). *Adding Insult To Injury: Nancy Fraser Debates Her Critics*. Verso, 273–291.
- Graham, A, Powell, M, Taylor, N, Anderson, D & Fitzgerald, R. (2013) *Ethical Research Involving Children*. UNICEF.
- Grindheim, LT. (2017) Children as playing citizens. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*. doi:10.1080/1350293X.2017.1331076
- Hodgkinson-Williams, CA & Trotter, H. (2018) A social justice framework for understanding open educational resources and practices in the Global South. *Journal of Learning for Development*, 5(3): 204–224.
- Huang, R, Liu, D, Tlili, A, Knyazeva, S, Chang, T. W, Zhang, X, . . . Holotescu, C. (2020) *Guidance on Open Educational Practices During School Closures: Utilising OER Under COVID-19 Pandemic in Line With UNESCO OER Recommendation*. Smart Learning Institute of Beijing Normal University.
- Huizinga, J. (1949) *Homo Ludens: A Study in the Play Elements of Culture*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Isaacs, S. (2019) *Towards the Recognition of a Soweto Boy's Play Capabilities in the Formal Education System* [online doctoral dissertation, University of Johannesburg]. Available at <http://hdl.handle.net/10210/411941> [accessed 28 May 2020].
- Joorst, J. (2015) Towards a 'self-schooled' habitus: High school students' educational navigations in an impoverished rural West Coast township. *Southern African Review of Education*, 21(2): 53–68.
- Kaffenberger, M. (2020) *How Much Learning May Be Lost in the Long-Run From Covid-19 and How Can Mitigation Strategies Help?* [online]. Available at <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2020/06/15/how-much-learning-may-be-lost-in-the-long-run-from-covid-19-and-how-can-mitigation-strategies-help/> [accessed 20 June 2020].
- Kanjee, A & Moloi, Q. (2017) A standards-based approach for reporting assessment results in South Africa. *Perspectives in Education*, 34(4): 29–51. doi:10.18820/2519593X/pie.v34i4.3
- Kanjee, A & Sayed, Y. (2013) Assessment policy in post-apartheid South Africa: Challenges for improving education quality and learning. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 20(4): 442–469. doi:10.1080/0969594X.2013.838541
- Lalu, P. (2020) *Facebook Post on Coronavirus* [online]. Available at <https://www.facebook.com/premesh.lalu/posts/10159141989583594> [accessed 1 April 2020].
- Lambert, J. (2010) *Digital Storytelling Cookbook*. Digital Diner Press.
- Lambert, S. (2018) Changing our (dis)course: A distinctive social justice aligned definition of open education. *Journal of Learning for Development*, 5(3): 225–244. doi:10.1177/0011000006287390
- Lawrence-lightfoot, S & Davis, JH. (1997) *The Art and Science of Portraiture*. Jossey-Bass.
- Leander, KM, Phillips, NC & Taylor, KH, Nesper, J & Lewis, C. (2010) The changing social spaces of learning: Mapping new mobilities. *Review of Research in Education*, 34(1): 329–394. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X09358129>

- Lemphane, P & Prinsloo, M. (2014) Children's digital literacy practices in unequal South African settings. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. doi:10.1080/01434632.2014.908894
- Makalela, L. (2014) Translanguaging in kasi-taal: Rethinking old language boundaries for new language planning. *Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics Plus*. doi:10.5842/42-0-164
- Mullis, IVS, Martin, MO, Foy, P & Hooper, M. (2016) *PIRLS International Results in Reading* [online]. Available at <http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/pirls2016/international-results/> [accessed 1 August 2017].
- Nussbaum, M. (2002) Capabilities and social justice. *International Studies Review* 4(2): 123–135. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1521-9488.00258>
- Papert, S & Harel, I. (1991) Situating constructionism. *Constructionism*. doi:10.1111/1467-9752.00269
- Piaget, J. (2013) *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood*. Routledge. doi:10.4324/9781315009698
- Posel, D & Casale, D. (2011) Language proficiency and language policy in South Africa: Findings from new data. *International Journal of Educational Development*. doi:10.1016/j.ijedudev.2010.09.001
- Ramaphosa, C. (2019) *Address by President Cyril Ramaphosa at the 2019 Basic Education Sector Lekgotla, Birchwood hotel, Ekurhuleni 21 January 2019*. [online]. Available at <https://www.education.gov.za/Newsroom/Speeches/tabid/950/ctl/Details/mid/8127/ItemID/5979/Default.aspx> [accessed 20 February 2019].
- Robinson, K. (2001) *Out of Our Minds. Learning to Be Creative* [Kindle]. Capstone. doi:10.1108/ws.2002.07951aae.005
- Robinson, K. (2007) *Sir Ken Robinson: Do Schools Kill Creativity?* [Ted Talks online]. Available at https://www.ted.com/talks/sir_ken_robinson_do_schools_kill_creativity?language=en [accessed 10 August 2019].
- Robinson, K. (2013) *How to Escape Education's Death Valley* [Youtube online]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wX78iKhInsc> [accessed 10 August 2019].
- Roy, A. (2020) *The Pandemic Is a Portal* [online]. Available at <https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca> [accessed 30 May 2020].
- Saldana, J. (2016) *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. SAGE.
- Sen, A. (2005). Human rights and capabilities. *Journal of Human Development*, 6(2): 151–166. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649880500120491>
- Sibanda, R & Kajee, L. (2019) Home as a primary space: Exploring out-of-school literacy practices in early childhood education in a township in South Africa. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 9(1): 1–10. doi:10.4102/sajce.v9i1.686
- Sonamzi, B. (2018) Mobilising community cultural wealth: The domestic support practices of township families in support of their children's education. In Fataar, A (ed.). *The Educational Practices and Pathways of South African Students*. SUN MeDIA, 19–30. doi:10.18820/9781928357896
- Spaull, N. (2013) Poverty & privilege: Primary school inequality in South Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 33(5): 436–447. doi:10.1016/j.ijedudev.2012.09.009
- Spaull, N. (2016) Disentangling the language effect in South African schools: Measuring the impact of 'language of assessment' in Grade 3 literacy and numeracy. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 6(1): 1–20. doi:http:// dx.doi.org/10.4102/sajce. v6i1.475
- Spreen, CA & Vally, S. (2010) Prospects and pitfalls: A review of post-apartheid education policy research and analysis in south africa. *Comparative Education*. doi:10.1080/03050068.2010.519478
- Thomas, D & Brown, JS. (2009) Learning for a world of constant change: Homo sapiens, homo faber & homo ludens revisited. *7th Glion Colloquium*: 1–16.

- UNESCO. (2020) *Global Monitoring of School Closures Caused by COVID-19* [online]. Available at <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse> [accessed 28 May 2020].
- United Nations Children's Fund. (2015) *Unicef Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis*. UNICEF.
- Uprichard, E. (2008) Children as 'being and becomings': Children, childhood and temporality. *Children and Society*. doi:10.1111/j.1099-0860.2007.00110.x
- van Manen, M. (2016) *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (2nd ed.). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315421056>
- Vygotsky, LS. (1967) Play and its role in the mental development of the child. *Soviet Psychology*, 5(3): 6–18. doi:10.2753/RPO1061-040505036
- Vygotsky, LS. (1978) *Mind and Society*. Harvard University Press.
- Walker, M & Unterhalter, E. (2007) *Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and Social Justice in Education*. doi:10.1057/9780230604810
- Winston, A. (2020, March) Is the COVID-19 outbreak a black swan or the new normal? *MIT Sloan Management Review* [online]. Available at <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/is-the-covid-19-outbreak-a-black-swan-or-the-new-normal/> [accessed 10 April 2020].
- World Bank. (2020) *The COVID-19 Pandemic: Shocks to Education and Policy Responses* [online]. Available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/publication/the-covid19-pandemic-shocks-to-education-and-policy-responses> [accessed 19 June 2020].
- Yahya, R & Wood, EA. (2017) Play as third space between home and school: Bridging cultural discourses. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 15(3): 305–322. doi:10.1177/1476718X15616833
- Zipin, L, Sellar, S, Brennan, M & Gale, T. (2015) Educating for futures in marginalised regions: A sociological framework for rethinking and researching aspirations. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*. doi:10.1080/00131857.2013.839376
- Zosh, JM, Hirsh-Pasek, K, Hopkins, EJ, Jensen, H, Liu, C, Neale, D, . . . Whitebread, D. (2018) Accessing the inaccessible: Redefining play as a spectrum. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9(August): 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01124>

Notes on the author

Shafika Isaacs works as an independent digital learning specialist, currently on assignment to UNESCO. She also serves as Associate Professor of Practice in the Faculty of Education at the University of Johannesburg.

Address for correspondence

shafika@shafika.co.za

Reimagining parents' educational involvement during the Covid-19 lockdown

Doria Daniels

Stellenbosch University

Abstract

When Covid-19 forced South Africa into lockdown in mid-March 2020, and closed school doors indefinitely, it laid bare the essential and the most vulnerable aspects of education: children's home realities and the need for education to be an act of care. Presently, the well-being of children across the world is under threat and subject to inexorable trauma due to members of their community and family being infected and affected by the virus. What the advent of Covid-19 did was expose the structural violence of disadvantage and poverty for vulnerable children's education. We see this in the diversity of children's experiences of access to education during the lockdown. The literature identifies parental educational involvement as a key contributing factor to the educational success of children (Seginer 2006; Epstein 2011; Daniels 2018). However, for many caring parents, the situational and dispositional challenges that Covid-19 introduced to their families' survival made the prioritisation of formal educational outcomes problematic. In this article, I argue that under emergency conditions such as Covid-19, the strategies that the official educational establishment imposed to retain the formal curriculum are unjust. The abnormal educational circumstances require that education prioritise the well-being and safety of schoolchildren. Furthermore, the parental educational role needs to be reimagined for its value in advancing educational goals. I motivate for the valorisation of a caring pedagogy that entails parents' engagement with their children's capitals through informal and non-formal learning opportunities. I substantiate my argument by reporting on a caring pedagogy that used play as strategy to create learning opportunities for traumatised children.

Keywords: Covid-19, parental educational support, parental engagement, structural violence

Daniels, D. (2020) Reimagining parents' educational involvement during the Covid-19 lockdown. *Southern African Review of Education*, 26(1): 134–147.

Introduction

In mid-March 2020, a few days short of the start of the school holiday, South Africa's state president, Cyril Ramaphosa, declared a national state of disaster due to the spread of the Covid-19 virus. South Africa, like the rest of the world, was under threat of a global disease, so on the recommendation of the National Coronavirus Command Council, the president declared a national lockdown that started on 26 March. The continuation of the lockdown beyond the school holiday shifted many parents' role from educational supporter to educator. My research on parent involvement (Daniels 2017, 2018) has shown that schools have a list of legitimised school-related activities for parents. These include checking that their children do their homework, supporting extracurricular activities, attending meetings and serving on school governing bodies (Lemmer 2007; Mncube 2009; Daniels 2017). The sanctioned role for parents is as supporter of the educator's work, not as a co-educator (Lemmer 2007; Epstein 2011). This narrow definition of the caregiver role might have introduced constraints in how educators view parents' educational contributions to children's success.

Collectively, many schools faced tremendous hurdles making distance learning work during the lockdown, from schools not having the technology to offer online teaching to parents being too poor to buy data to read WhatsApp communications from teachers. In the schools with excellent technological infrastructure, teachers continued to teach and parents continued to be supporters of the educational project. Distance learning seems to have exacerbated the already existing academic injustices and weaknesses of the education system. Collectively though, all parents of school-going children had additional educational responsibilities to navigate alongside great emotional, psychological and financial stress. The unfamiliarity of Covid-19 and the potential danger that the virus poses to families' health is the cause of great fears and anxieties, and detrimental to the mental well-being in families.

The deteriorating health situation in the Western Cape, the context of this study, has exacerbated the challenges that poor school communities and families have to centralise formal education. It is against this background that I argue that the prioritisation of formal educational outcomes is problematic. My thesis for this article is that during the Covid-19 pandemic, the focus of school communities should shift from the formal curriculum because the majority of schools are not able to do justice for children. My contention is that the well-being of children should be the principal consideration guiding all decisions that educational administrators make. I draw on the work of Noddings (1999) in my motivation for a caring pedagogy that is situated in an informal and non-formal educational site, the home. Education from the care perspective revolves around four key components, namely modelling, dialogue, practice and confirmation (Noddings 1984; Smith 2020). These components guide most caregivers' interactions with children, though we seldom acknowledge them for their educational value. Recognition of the educational potential of the home, and the parent as educator, in social policy could lead to the educational authorities reimagining parents' contributions to education development during the pandemic. It could shift teachers' thinking and broaden their perspective on the home as pedagogical site and parents as

co-educators. I argue that this could position education in a more equitable way for vulnerable communities during times of crisis. I conclude the article with my reflections on our learning process and the lessons learnt.

The context, and the ethical dilemmas when children's lives are involved

The challenging home circumstances of a relative's family motivated our household's decision to invite three of his children to spend the 3-week lockdown with us. The family of 10 people had been homeless since January, and had been living in their car. The parents' search for suitable accommodation came to an abrupt standstill when the lockdown started. My educational research with vulnerable learner communities (Daniels & Adams 2010; Norodien-Fataar & Daniels 2016; Daniels 2018) showed that homelessness, parent unemployment, and low socioeconomic status pose major educational and psychological challenges to children. Due to their situational and dispositional constraints, the children had missed more than a month of schooling at the beginning of the year and only started their academic year in February. In 2020, they thus had had less than two months of formal schooling when the lockdown happened. Psychologically, children's self-esteem suffers when their financial circumstances limit their opportunities and alienate them from their peers. The official educational discourses seldom engage with societal structural violence as a cause of children's marginalisation and underperformance in school, other than to report on their school dropout and failure rates.

This article is my critical reflective account of three stand-in parents' experiences as generic educators during the Covid-19 pandemic. Our all-female household consists of my 91-year-old mother, my newly retired sister and me. My sister and I are qualified teachers with working experience in high schools and in higher educational contexts. I want to reiterate that our invitation to the children was not motivated by a research agenda and for the children to become subjects in a research project. The children's father is a relative whom we have supported through many of his family crises. Given that it was the start of the school holiday, our invitation to his daughters was to give the children a respite from the structural violence of their homelessness. They would be spending the lockdown with relatives they knew well.

To authenticate my argument for an ethics of care approach to their education during the pandemic, I had to divulge personal information about the cause of the children's vulnerability. Uppermost in my mind, however, was how that information could affect the rights, dignity and well-being of the three children (Graham et al. 2013). My research interest in the last decade has been the role of parents in the support of their children's successful navigation of schooling. I have conducted funded NRF research on immigrant parents' educational support of their children's schooling and have supervised master's and doctoral studies on the phenomenon, focussing on vulnerable home contexts such as the single-mother household, farmworker parents and homes with children with special needs. In all studies, parents reported on their experiences and actions of support. As their parents and legal guardians, these parents were within their rights to provide information about their engagement with their children.

In this article, I turned my gaze inwards to report on my personal parenting experiences as a stand-in parent, a role that I shared with the other two adults in my household. The dilemma was that none of us was the legal guardian of the children. Both parents, however, gave their informed consent that I could write about their children's participation in the educational activities. In my negotiation of consent, I explained to the parents that I reveal information about their homelessness in order to argue for a caring pedagogical approach to education. Both parents gave permission that this information could be shared. I draw on anecdotal information that the three adults shared on the value that formal and informal educational activities had for the girls' development. I also draw on two of the adults' reflexive dialogue about the purpose of education during the pandemic, and our efforts to advance a caring context in which the children could just experience the joy of being children.

Framing the problem within parent involvement, parent engagement and parental educational support

Because we had no internet access to find out whether the Department of Basic Education had provided guidelines to support the educational initiatives of parents, we made the decision to follow an asset-based approach to educational support. Drawing on the work of Yosso (2005), Noddings (1984) and other educational researchers (Lopez et al. 2001; Williams & Sánchez 2012), we explored the potential of formal, non-formal and informal education for the children's learning and development. The literature on parent support uses the terms 'parent involvement,' 'parent engagement' and 'parental educational support' as if they are synonymous. In the article, my use of the term, parental educational support, is in reference to all those home activities and practices that promote academic and social outcomes for the school-going child (Epstein 2011). I positioned the three adults as caring parents who had the well-being of the children as goal. I furthermore engaged with parental educational support as a complex and multidimensional concept that is subject to gender, race, class and socioeconomic status (Green et al. 2007).

At a policy level, a supportive parent-practitioner partnership is encouraged in South African schools (SASA 1996). However, at the institutional level, most research on teachers' views shows that they mostly sanction a compliancy and supportive role for parents, and expect parents' school involvement to be an educator-approved involvement that schools should train parents for (Epstein 2001; Nargis & Tikly 2010). Educator-sanctioned parent activities at primary school are homework support and their physical presence at school meetings and extramural events (Sheldon & Epstein 2005; Green et al. 2007). This paradigm discourages co-educational roles for parents, and situates the contributions that parents can make within a very narrow support framework that misrecognises the educational contributions that parents make to the academic success of their children. It furthermore discounts informal learning opportunities and interventions that happen in homes as valuable and educationally worthwhile.

Education as a formalised system (Jarvis 2004) should equip those who participate in it with the confidence to enhance their abilities and to develop the capabilities to make informed decisions

about life's issues. This happens when schools are enabling environments where equitable opportunities exist for children to develop and become socially and economically empowered (Vila 2000). The literature, however, identifies societal power relations as an influencer of educational benefits – both at school and at home. The reasons for the disparities in children's educational attainment and the variations in their cognitive ability are not entirely due to economic disadvantage. Cultural influences and modes of socialisation play a role in how children experience school and respond to it. According to Bourdieu's (1973) sociology of educational attainment, the home culture and the socialisation of children from the dominant class in society significantly advantage them over the children of subordinate classes. The school is a familiar context for middle-class children because the language and the style of social interaction correspond with what they have been orientated to at home (Goldthorpe 2007). How safe and at home a child feels in school thus sets the stage for the successes that the child will have in school. It is for this reason that many studies advocate that the sociocultural challenges in school and home communities be studied for the barriers they place in vulnerable children's navigation of educational contexts (Hoover-Dempsey et al. 2001; LeFevre & Shaw 2012; Epstein 2011; Daniels 2017, 2018; Camacho-Thompson et al. 2019).

In her ethics of care theory, Noddings describes care as a basic human need; she describes natural caring as having 'a significant basis in women's experience' (as in Smith 2002: para. 6) and equates it to a moral attitude that stems from women's longing 'for goodness that arises out of the experience or memory of being cared for' (Flinders in Smith 2020). She positions natural care as the foundation of ethical care. As educators, we identify with her definition of education as an assemblage of formal and informal encounters that encourage development through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, understanding and appreciation. We also perceive the home as a primary educational site where informal educational encounters occur that facilitate children's development. However, we acknowledge that in some homes, situational challenges such as poverty and unemployment lead to a lack of material resources, which hampers such informal educational encounters. Therefore, establishing an ethics of care in such homes could be a challenge when children experience their parents' absenteeism, lack of time spent with them, or disorganised lives as divestment in their development, and as rejection. The philosophy that undergirds formal education does not allow for an ethics of care because its main goal is to prepare the individual for public life. The competencies that vulnerable children need to develop and blossom in their private lives are not considered educationally important enough to be part of the formal curriculum.

Educational researchers like Yosso (2005) argue for the recognition of community cultural wealth that subordinate classes in society accumulate, but which does not necessarily have legitimate positioning and recognition in schools. Yosso (2005) identified several forms of capital that families in low socioeconomic communities accrue, namely, aspirational, linguistic, familial, navigational and resistant capitals. She distinguishes the skills, abilities, resources and knowledge that are acquired as different forms of capital to what dominant society produce. Aspirational capital contributes to the ability to maintain a sense of hope in the midst of adversity. Linguistic

capital is present when a family is competent in more than the dominant language. Significant relationships with family or community members create familial capital. Often, these relationships provide special knowledge on navigating systems or institutions, and this would constitute navigational capital. Yosso (2005) also speaks of resistant capital, which refers to the skills or knowledge that individuals develop through challenging systems of inequality or resisting their status in life. The community cultural wealth can therefore be mobilised as active family resources.

Starting on the back foot

The first week of the lockdown started disastrously. We normally have internet access and wireless access from various hotspots in our home. We also normally enjoy off-site technical support from my university's information technology department and our telecommunications service provider. However, when cable thieves struck a few days before lockdown and our modem started malfunctioning, we found ourselves without a landline and without internet access. We could not purchase a replacement modem due to suspended trading, and technical support from the service provider diminished. When we realised that home schooling was on the cards, we were ill prepared for the role of substitute teachers. Both of us are former high school teachers, but have no knowledge of the primary school curriculum. Our lack of access to the internet and being unable to search for external support online was disempowering and alienating. However, our situation was not unique. Many South African homes are without technology other than a cell phone.

We sought advice from parents with school-going children on what to do. Not surprisingly, many were unsure of what their role should be during the lockdown. Our informal survey of parents whose children were in the same grades as the children in our care confirmed our suspicions about the great class divide within the Western Cape public school system. At the affluent, well-resourced schools, the school community was ready to continue classes through cloud-based peer-to-peer software platforms such as Zoom and Teams. These schools transitioned from contact to online teaching without major challenges. In such school communities, parents' roles stayed the same because teachers were still firmly installed in their role as teacher.

However, for schools serving pupils from the low socioeconomic communities, the situation could not have been more different. Their schooling stopped because their schools did not have the technology to make Zoom sessions and Teams meetings a reality. During the 3-week lockdown, many children had no contact with the teachers at their schools because the lack of suitable electronic communication channels between school and community led to a breakdown in communication and support. In the absence of such communication, the educational role of parents with children in township schools was very different from that of the former Model-C school parents.

Creating a conducive learning context

We were in the fortunate position that we knew about the children's home circumstances. Their family live a migratory life, parking their car wherever it is safe to do so. Such living conditions do not allow for privacy, nor does it instil stability. Their car barely accommodated the 10 bodies living in it. The material resources that children need to engage effectively with their schoolwork were nonexistent because their worldly belongings were all in storage.

Acquiring the right tools and attitude

We assumed from the start that they had had limited experience with supervised homework. Although they initially lied and told us that they had no schoolbooks, we discovered their schoolbooks amongst their clothing a few days after their arrival. They had only written on the first few pages of books that had no covers or had ripped covers. What was lacking in their educational preparation was a good work ethic. This was evident in their approach to their schoolwork as well as in how they engaged with their educational resources. When we started them on activities, they would focus on just getting the work done. They did not take pride in their work and approached it as a chore. The way they engaged with the material resources that we made available to them suggested disrespect given that they kept on misplacing or damaging them. They seemed to not know that it was their responsibility to store and take care of the items. We decided to focus on their organisational skills and their sense of responsibility by introducing the practice component of Noddings' (1999) pedagogy of caring. We started by immersing them in activities and processes that could lead to a required mentality, which, in this case, was to be responsible consumers and better organisers. This we did by introducing them to a routine in the evenings where we assigned them small tasks to bring order to their living space. These would be tasks such as preparing their bed, packing away clothes and clearing the desk before they went to bed.

We gave each child two items that only she owned and was responsible for. The first was a personal file where she could store her completed homework and collected artefacts. The second was a personal diary. Every night before bed, they were encouraged to make an entry in it. We compared these items to containers or personal spaces that only the owner could enter, and encouraged them to store anything that they considered valuable, private or sacred in these two containers. This was our effort to bring order to their lives and to encourage them to accumulate capital in tangible ways.

Catching up

The older girls had been absent for more than half of the first school term given that they started in February. Because we had assumed that they had brought no schoolbooks with them, we slotted them into the mid-morning television class for their grade-level literacy and numeracy lessons. These classes, however, assumed certain learner competencies that included fluency in English, foundational competency in the subject area, and being able to work independently. The lessons were offered at a fast pace and, because both girls struggled with comprehension, they could not keep up with the work and soon became frustrated and disinterested. It seemed futile to assign

homework on parts of the curriculum that they had not yet mastered. For us, it made sense to select interesting activities in the textbooks and use them to develop competencies, or improve others such as their reading competency. The plan we followed with each activity was for the learner to read the activity aloud and explain what she had read. We would then engage in dialogue about the topic, often inserting ourselves in the reading and creating different scenarios and outcomes for the stories. This approach encouraged the girls' personal investment in the formal school activities and enhanced their eagerness to stay on task. The mentality that was established was that it is important to understand what one reads because comprehension leads to the successful execution of the activities. A benefit of the dialogue and reading was that they learnt new words that we had them write down and use in our informal conversations.

Finding our rhythm and one another

In the beginning stage of their visit, the children seemed lethargic all the time and mostly wanted to watch television. This was understandable because they did not normally have access to a big screen television and the Disney cartoon channels. However, it was the girls' lack of curiosity about the world around them that was concerning. The two older girls seemed to have no interests or opinions about matters affecting them and were submissive to most suggestions we made. They seem to have not acquired ample dispositions – what Bourdieu (1973) referred to as cultural capital. They were unfamiliar with games like Snakes & Ladders and Monopoly, and were not interested or eager to learn how to play these games. Games are important learning experiences and, through them, children learn skills that they use as bargaining tools to impress their peers.

Cultural influences and modes of socialisation play a role in how children respond to their environment. My impressions were that the two older girls had had very limited opportunity to acquire the cultural and social capital that girls of their ages need to confidently face the world. The girls had a vulnerability about them that we put down to the marginalised lives they had led during the past two years. In their young lives, they have been through many traumatic experiences that included being homeless twice in the past two years. With this as context, my family wanted their three weeks' visit to be a happy one. We wanted them to experience a caring environment that was affirming, fun and educational. In the rest of the article, I report on how we explored, created and learned.

Learning in informal ways

In the second week, we decided to shift the focus of our educational engagement from formal to informal educational activities. This decision we took based on our views that the children could benefit from acquiring basic life skills and competencies to aid their being in the world. The attraction of informal learning is that it does not require a formal classroom environment to occur, happens in a much more relaxed manner, and is less threatening for children whose experiences with formal education have been disempowering. We utilised play as our main strategy to advance a safe environment in which the children could strategise with a caring adult on how to cope with uncertain periods in their lives. Our aims with the play activities were simple: they should learn a

new skill or gain new knowledge, and the activity should take them out of their comfort zone.

I do not know what happened to Little Red Riding Hood

On their first morning at the breakfast table, I asked the youngest sister if she knew the story of Little Red Riding Hood. I discovered that none of them did, so I told them the story. In middle-class homes, children grow up hearing fairy tales, and they read stories that convey certain sanctioned values and dispositions of society. Importantly, they acquire knowledge about how the world works through the questions they ask about the characters in the stories and the decisions and activities the characters engage in. The stories that children from poor families hear about are often the ones that they are living – and these are seldom fairy tales.

Knowing that the family was living in a car, we were concerned that the parents were putting their children's safety at risk by parking in unsafe areas. The story of Little Red Riding Hood provided us with an opening to introduce the topic of children's safety in society, and to find out how their living arrangements were affecting them. The two older girls were 10 and 11 years old, respectively, and were in a vulnerable stage of their sexual development. My sister and I took turns supervising their bathing, which was a luxurious experience that the three enjoyed together. We used this time as an opportunity to talk about feminine hygiene and facilitated informal conversations on what to expect in puberty. We encouraged them to ask questions because their mother had not yet initiated discussion about puberty with her daughters. Yosso (2005: 77) would describe the above account as 'struggles to survive and resist macro and micro forms of oppression.' In the days that followed, we often returned to the story of Little Red Riding Hood, where each one of us had the opportunity to retell the story. The aim with the retelling of the story was to teach the girls that they can take control of their personal narrative and that they can change the course of the actions and so influence how the story ends.

Our breakfast table discussions served two purposes. The first was for the girls to find their voices and to build familial capital. We did a lot of modelling that they could emulate. We would start the conversation with an experience that happened the previous day and then reflect on the lessons that we learnt from it. I would often follow this up by inviting each one of them to share a learning experience too. In the beginning, they struggled to identify learning experiences and, instead, piggybacked on my experiences. They seemed unable to identify the value in what they were experiencing or doing. They furthermore lacked the vocabulary to describe their experiences. In the first few days, the children had no stories to tell. However, by the third week, they were vying for airtime to tell their stories. The second purpose was to check their mental well-being and to determine whether the children were still happy to be with us. Although they had accepted that we were in lockdown and that they could not have physical contact with their family, we knew that they were missing their other siblings and parents. Because we had anticipated that this might happen, we arranged that they have telephonic contact with their family every third afternoon. During these short conversations, they mostly asked to talk to their father and their younger siblings. Once they had assured themselves that their family was safe, they would be pacified and settle down.

A healthy body houses a healthy mind

We anticipated that confinement to the home without outdoor activities and interaction with their school friends would have a negative effect on the children. In their study of the effect of school closure and prolonged home confinement on China's schoolchildren, Brooks et al. (2020) expressed their concerns about the negative effect it was having on children's physical and mental health. They stated that children become less active, spend more time watching television and eat less healthy foods. Because we limited their television viewing time to one film or programme per day, and only in the mornings, it was challenging to keep the children occupied during the day. Mostly, they would get into trouble for picking fights with their siblings. One way of channelling their energies and frustrations was through structured play. Together, we identified an area in our backyard that we dubbed our recreational area. Our arrangement was that we would spend one to two hours outdoors to engage in group activities. The aim was to have collective fun, to encourage exercising and to become fit.

We planned the first exercise series around four activities: rope skipping, dancing, shooting bottle caps into a bucket, and jogging on the same spot – one activity for each of the four corners. To progress from one activity to the next, the participant had to bunny hop or zig-zag between strategically placed plastic bottles. During the first week, the adults planned and managed the process and the timing. Thereafter, we passed on the responsibility to the children to plan new activities and to manage the process. This activity was educational in many ways. The diversity of the activities encouraged the 10-year-old, who was unfit and self-conscious about her clumsiness, to participate. As the days passed and her confidence grew, she did not need our encouragement or our validation to persist with the activities. On some afternoons, I found her setting up her own course and practising on her own. These structured play activities improved their coordination and enhanced their skills. It also made them come up with new games that they could introduce to their siblings. Importantly, it became an outlet for built-up emotions. On more than one occasion I noticed that, whenever the older girls fought, the eldest would go outside and start skipping.

The things girls did when we were your age

In our conversations with the girls, they kept telling stories about 'When Pa was rich.' They seemed to be in awe of their father's stories of the affluent life he had led before he had them. Some of the activities we engaged them in were so that they could create their own childhood memories. We used play within a romantic/nostalgic discourse where we told them anecdotes and stories of our childhood and the activities that we engaged in when we were their age. This point of view is informed by what Sutton-Smith (1995 in Ailwood 2003) referred to as 'play as progress' rhetoric. In other words, we engaged with our childhood as a time of innocence and focused on the positive aspects of our childhood play. This stance was to debunk the children's perception that happy memories are only possible through middle-class upbringing.

We identified play activities that girls their ages did when we were growing up. One of them was dressing our paper dolls. For working-class children, paper dolls were inexpensive toys that anyone with imagination could make. We devoted a whole day to teaching them how to make

paper dolls as well as how to design a wardrobe for each doll. We made a template of a paper doll that each one could trace on shoebox cardboard and cut out. They then personalised their dolls as they saw fit. Together, we planned clothes for each doll using magazine prints as material. All the materials that we used were items that we repurposed. For each of these activities, one of the adults usually took the lead and modelled the activity. Then we would challenge them to produce an item that differed from ours and leave them to execute it. It was interesting to see how creative children become once they start trusting their choices. Also, how competitive they become once they start believing in their capabilities. As they gained confidence, they started commenting on each other's ideas and gave advice on the suitability of the clothing that they were designing. Children flourish on praise, and that was given in abundance by their 91-year-old 'grandmother.'

We also taught them to knit. Their eagerness to learn to knit was encouraged by the knowledge that girls learn this skill in primary school. It was painstaking to teach the skill to two very inept girls. They, however, were eager to learn and their perseverance paid off. On many nights, I would find one of them practising her knitting. This was the one activity that they persisted with and mastered before they returned to their family. In the period of lockdown, we also used the knitting activity a few times as a time-out activity after a fight. We found that the process of knitting was therapeutic to help calm young minds after a fight.

Feeding the soul

Despite the lack of stability in their young lives, the two older girls displayed a strong sense of spirituality. They spoke with pride about their religious education and competed with each other to lead in prayer. Although they struggled to read from their school textbooks, they were quite competent reciting from their holy book, the Quran. I ascribed the religious confidence that they showed to the madrassa classes being a constant in their lives and a place where they were experiencing a sense of community and belonging. Their madrassa teacher had taken a personal interest in them and they have flourished under her caring guidance. In the first week of their stay, the girls struggled to abide by our house rules and kept on misbehaving and acting up. On one such night, I reprimanded them and insisted on silence for the rest of the evening. An hour into the punishment, the silence was broken by a loud rendition by the girls of an eminent chapter from the holy book. We saw this as an act of defiance and as a way to provoke a response from the adults. However, we also entertained the idea that they drew comfort from reciting the chapter. I responded by going into the room to listen to their rendition. When they finished, I complimented them on their melodious rendition, which diffused the tense atmosphere. By complimenting them on their rendition, I engaged in an act of affirmation and encouragement, something that Noddings (1999) refers to as confirmation.

From that night onwards, we established a ritual of reciting the surah (chapter) after evening prayer, with them leading the reciting. What I learnt from this incident was that the religious nurturing that the girls experienced from their madrassa teacher had empowered them spiritually. Religious education can sometimes serve as counter-narrative for children who are struggling with formal schooling and whose experiences of secular education is a disempowering one. Religion

can also serve as a support in troubled times.

Discussion

Parents expect schools to be enabling environments where equitable opportunities exist for children to develop and become socially and economically empowered (Vila 2000). However, what the Covid-19 pandemic did was expose the academic injustices and weaknesses in our formal school system. During the Covid-19 pandemic, South African schools closed for instruction. While some schools could transition seamlessly to online remote course instruction and learning, the majority of South Africa's schools were in crisis concerning delivery of the formal curriculum. Schools defined their crisis in terms of threats to curriculum delivery, assessment and time management. Disappointingly, concerns about children's mental wellness seemed to fall outside of what the education department deemed it should be concerned about.

When one reviews the responses of the Department of Basic Education, common fault lines reveal themselves – such as the prioritisation of formal education's continuation in a time when communities' mental health was under threat. The situation that we are currently experiencing mimics the normal, daily experiences of many children. This agenda of government reflected its inability to acknowledge the intersectionality of school with home contexts. It is thus not surprising that educators follow suit and engage with the school and the home as static spaces that operate in isolation of each other. The main goal of formal education cannot be to prepare the child for public life when we are living in times where there is no preparation of children to cope with their challenging private lives. Education should also make sure that children's well-being is attended to and that they have the competencies to navigate education successfully. My educational engagement with three vulnerable primary school children during the lockdown exposed me to children's vulnerabilities and alienation from formal school when the school system is unsympathetic towards children's disorganised private worlds. The lessons I learnt were that when children feel safe, they flourish when a caring adult gives them attention and shows compassion. They also need to experience validation to see themselves as individuals with potential. Because schools mostly assess educational potential, children who struggle academically become marginalised and alienated. The philosophy that drives formal education should be an ethics of care where compassion, learning and knowledge intersect.

The Covid-19 pandemic has created an opportunity for official educational role-players to shift their thinking towards a caring ethos in education and to consider a broader team of educators. The crippling effect that institutional, situational and dispositional challenges (Jarvis 2004) have on children's education made me reflect on the role that parents as caregivers can play to mitigate their marginalisation. During the lockdown, parents have taken on educator roles that they are navigating in home climates filled with anxiety and vulnerability. As education happens in the home space, the pedagogy that the parent as generic educator follows focuses less on education, and more on learning. The successes that many caregivers have with their children's learning could lead to recognition of the parent as co-educator and contributor to the academic success of

their children. It could also lead to the acknowledgement of informal learning opportunities and interventions that happen in homes as valuable and educationally worthwhile.

In this article, I argued that effective formal education is not possible for the majority of South Africa's formal school learner constituency during the Covid-19 pandemic. Many children will fail their 2020 academic year if assessed on the formal curriculum for their respective grades. This one-size-fits-all assessment measure is blind to the unequal societal structures and school-home dynamics and should be abolished for this year because it is unlikely to benefit our learning societies in the end. However, if educators were to adopt a more holistic approach to education, and explore children's learning during the Covid-19 pandemic, they will find evidence of various forms of learning. This knowledge might encourage educationists to advocate for a socially just education system.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Sharifa Daniels for her support and incisive feedback and suggestions on earlier drafts.

References

- Ailwood, J. (2003) Governing early childhood education through play. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 4(3): 34–62.
- Bourdieu, P. (1973) Cultural reproduction and social reproduction. In Brown, RK (ed.). *Knowledge, Education and Cultural Change*. Routledge, 71–84.
- Brooks, SK, Webster, RK & Smith, LE. (2020) The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: Rapid review of the evidence. *Lancet*, 395(10227): 912–920.
doi:[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)30460-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30460-8)
- Camacho-Thompson, DE, Gonzalez, NA & Fuligni, AJ. (2019) Adolescent academic socialization: A within-group comparative analysis among Mexican-origin families. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 34(4): 411–437.
- Daniels, D. (2017) Initiating a different story about immigrant Somali parents' support of their primary school children's education. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 7(1): 1–8.
- Daniels, D. (2018) Educating in diverse worlds: The immigrant Somali parent as a strategic partner of South African education. In Walton, E & Osman, R (eds). *Teacher Education for Diversity: Conversations From the Global South*. Routledge, 87–102.
- Daniels, D & Adams, Q. (2010) Breaking with township gangsterism: The struggle for place and voice. *African Studies Quarterly*, 11(4): 45–57.
- Epstein, JL. (2001) *School, Family, and Community Partnerships*. Westview Press.
- Epstein, J. (2011) *School, Family, and Community Partnerships, Student Economy Edition: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools*. Westview Press.
- Goldthorpe, JH. (2007) 'Cultural capital': Some critical observations. *Sociologica*. doi:10.2383/24755
- Graham, A, Powell, M, Taylor, N, Anderson, D & Fitzgerald, R. (2013) *Ethical Research Involving Children*. UNICEF Office of Research [online]. Available at <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/706-ethical-research-involving-children.html> [accessed 10 June 2020].

- Green, CL, Walker, JM, Hoover-Dempsey, KV & Sandler, HM. (2007) Parents' motivations for involvement in children's education: An empirical test of a theoretical model of parental involvement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 99(3): 532–544.
- Hoover-Dempsey, KV, Battiato, AC, Walker, JM, Reed, RP, DeJong, JM & Jones, KP. (2001) Parental involvement in homework. *Educational Psychologist*, 36(3): 195–209.
- Jarvis, P. (2004) *Adult Education and Lifelong Learning: Theory and Practice* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- LeFevre, AL & Shaw, TV. (2012) Latino parent involvement and school success: Longitudinal effects of formal and informal support. *Education and Urban Society*, 44(6): 707–723.
- Lemmer, EM. (2007) Parent involvement in teacher education in South Africa. *International Journal About Parents in Education*, 1: 218–229.
- Lopez, GR, Scribner, JD & Mahitivanichcha, K. (2001) Redefining parental involvement: Lessons from high-performing migrant-impacted schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(2): 253–288.
- Mncube, V. (2009) The perceptions of parents of their role in the democratic governance of schools in South Africa: Are they on board? *South African Journal of Education*, 29: 83–103.
- Nargis, R & Tikly, L. (2010), *Inclusion and Diversity in Education: Guidelines for Inclusion and Diversity in Schools*. British Council.
- Noddings, N. (1984) *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. University of California Press.
- Noddings, N. (1999) Two concepts of caring. *Philosophy of Education* [online]. Available at <http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/EPS/PES-yearbook/1999/noddings.asp> [accessed 10 June 2020].
- Norodien-Fataar, N & Daniels, D. (2016) Exploring the educational engagement practices of disadvantaged students at a South African university. *Alternation*, 23(1): 90–112.
- Republic of South Africa. (1996) *South African Schools Act*. Government Printers.
- Seginer, R. (2006) Parents' educational involvement: A developmental ecology perspective. *Parenting: Science and Practice*, 6(1): 1–48.
- Sheldon, SB & Epstein, JL. (2005). Involvement counts: Family and community partnerships and mathematics achievement. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 98(4): 196–207.
- Smith, MK. (2020) Nel Noddings, the ethics of care and education. *The Encyclopaedia of Pedagogy and Informal Education* [online]. Available at <https://infed.org/mobi/nel-noddings-the-ethics-of-care-and-education> [accessed 24 June 2020].
- Vila, LE. (2000) The non-monetary benefits of education. *European Journal of Education*, 35(1): 21–32.
- Williams, TT & Sánchez, B. (2012) Parental involvement (and uninvolvement) at an inner-city high school. *Urban Education*, 47(3): 625–652.
- Yosso, TJ. (2005) Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1): 69–91.

Notes on the author

Doria Daniels is a professor in the Department of Educational Psychology at Stellenbosch University.

Address for correspondence

Doria@sun.ac.za

School lessons from the Covid-19 lockdown

Nick Taylor

JET Education Services

Abstract

This article draws on recent literature spawned by the Covid-19 outbreak, together with related research studies and a survey of 16 South African families undertaken in April 2020 at the start of the national lockdown. A qualitative case study method was adopted and telephonic interviews conducted with the main caregiver and up to two children in each family in order to understand how learning at home might be promoted. Although the sample is not representative of the South African population, the results of the survey may be used to guide policy and practice as long as account is taken of the probability that the difficulties experienced by the typical family are likely to be far more acute than those exhibited by most families in the study. Recommendations are made about how to improve communication between home and school, to allay anxiety among parents and children, to use printed material to support home educational practices and to provide guidance to parents.

Keywords: Home educational practices, parental involvement, remote instruction

Taylor, N. (2020) School lessons from the Covid-19 lockdown. *Southern African Review of Education*, 26(1): 148–166.

Introduction

This article draws on recent literature spawned by the Covid-19 outbreak, together with related research studies and a survey of 16 South African families undertaken in April 2020 at the start of the national lockdown (Taylor 2020a). The purpose is to understand how learning at home might be promoted, not only under conditions of home confinement, but more generally too.

At the time of writing (end of June 2020), South African learners had begun to return to school and the question of learning at home became less urgent. However, the heightened awareness of the relationship between the school and the home occasioned by the pandemic presents an important moment for instituting new practices that have the potential to improve learning in the long term. If this can be achieved then the virus, despite its devastating damage to economies and societies across the world, will have presented an opportunity to facilitate lasting beneficial effects on the quality of learning in school.

Literature review

Aside from providing instruction and the socialisation of young citizens, schools may be used to supply a number of additional social benefits, including the provision of healthcare and nutritional services. The latter are particularly important for children from poor homes, as is clear from the fact that over nine million of South Africa's poorest learners receive a daily meal through the National School Nutrition Programme. The disruption to these services wrought by the Covid-19 lockdown has been written about extensively (see, for example, Taylor 2020b; van der Berg & Spaul 2020) and we will not rehearse the arguments here.

This article focuses, rather, on the educational damage caused by the lockdown, how this might be mitigated should confinement be reinstated, and what its lessons hold for the future. Four well-established sets of research findings are pertinent to these questions: the effects of time spent away from school on the retention of reading and arithmetic skills, the role of parents in the education of their children, the modalities of remote instruction and, perhaps most importantly, the differential effects of these three factors on children from more or less affluent families.

The summer slump

Research evidence is unequivocal that children suffer learning losses when they are out of school for extended periods. The longer they are out of school the larger the losses, and the damage is heaviest for the youngest learners. This phenomenon has come to be known as the 'summer slump,' having been detected first during the summer vacation in the USA, although it has also been shown to occur during teacher strikes and other disruptions to schooling. According to Busso & Munoz (2020), on average over all studies of this kind, children from low socioeconomic backgrounds lose the equivalent of around three months of learning, while their more affluent peers continue to consolidate their skills (Figure 1).

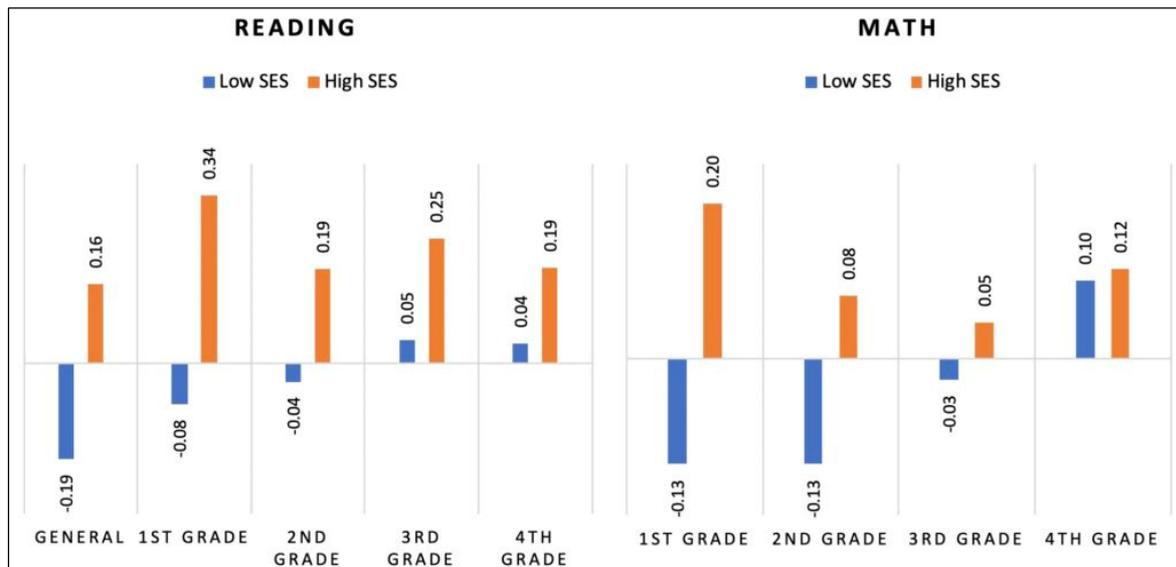


Figure 1: Change in test scores between end of school year and beginning of following school year (Source: Busso & Munoz 2020).

The learning loss reflected in these graphs affects both reading and mathematics and ‘when compounded over time, the differential summer loss can explain part of the learning gaps observed between these two groups [children from more and less affluent families] that start very early on in life and widens as students age’ (Busso & Munoz 2020: 1). Furthermore, these authors note, these effects have a long-term impact, leading to increased grade retention and dropouts among children from poorer homes, lower rates of employment and reduced labour market earnings.

These are the consequences that we can expect from the extended school closures in response to Covid-19. For example, Reddy et al. (2020) speculate that the lockdown is likely to cause a significant decline in the TIMSS mathematics scores, and that this decline is likely to be significantly higher in no-fee schools than in fee-paying schools. To its credit, in the face of the kind of evidence presented above, and taken together with the relatively very low rates of infection and serious illness faced by children under the age of 19 years, the South African government made the decision to reopen schools three months into the lockdown, despite strenuous (and understandable) resistance from teachers, parents and students; a victory of science over emotion. But the disruption to habitual practices occasioned by the virus presents an important opening for doing things differently, not only to mitigate the learning loss that occurs ‘normally’ during school holidays, teacher strikes and the like, but also to bolster learning in the long term. This is an exciting prospect and one that would require reconfiguring both the role of parents and the relationship between home and school.

The role of parents and the home–school relationship

Another phenomenon that has been known for some time is the strong relationship that exists between parental involvement in the education of their children, and children’s performance. This becomes apparent from the earliest age, in the way middle-class parents talk to their children and

read to them. Not only are these children introduced to the exciting worlds that lie inside the pages but, as they get older, they begin to crack the reading code themselves and appreciate the differences between various literature genres. In these practices, we see parents stimulating children's imaginations and curiosities, imparting technical skills and generally socialising them into the world of education. Less educated parents are far less likely to do this but, importantly, when they do, their children are less likely to experience significant learning disadvantages compared with their middle-class peers. For example, Dearing et al. (2006) collected longitudinal data from kindergarten to 5th grade on both family involvement in school and children's literacy performance for an ethnically diverse, low-income sample ($N = 281$). Within families, increased school involvement by parents predicted improved child literacy. In addition, although there was an achievement gap in average literacy performance between children of more and less educated mothers if family involvement levels were low, this gap was non-existent if family involvement levels were high. According to these authors, the results support arguments that family involvement in school should be a central aim of practice and policy solutions to the achievement gap between lower and higher income children. They also conclude, from a survey of the evidence, that high levels of family involvement during the elementary school years are associated with a decreased probability of high school dropout and an increased probability of high school completion in minimum time.

As children progress through the primary grades, many parents tend to become less directly involved in matters educational, leading Hill & Tyson (2009) to wonder whether the same relationship between involvement and performance seen in the early grades holds in the middle school. Defining parental involvement in education as 'parents' interactions with schools and with their children to promote academic success' (ibid.: 741), they conducted a meta-analysis on the existing research on parental involvement in middle school to determine whether and which types of parental involvement are related to achievement. Across 50 studies, parental involvement was positively associated with achievement, although the strength of this relationship was found to depend on the type of activity parents engaged in.

Among the various types of involvement, what Hill and Tyson (2009) refer to as *academic socialisation* had the strongest relationship with achievement. This includes creating an understanding about the purposes and meaning of academic performance, communicating high expectations from their children and providing strategies for adolescents to use in semiautonomous decision making. The creation by parents of an educationally supportive home environment by means of appropriate structure and intellectually engaging materials in the home (books, newspapers, educational toys), taking children to events and places that foster academic interest (museums and libraries), also had a positive impact on learning.

At the other end of the scale, parental assistance with or supervising and checking homework was not consistently related to achievement, sometimes accelerating and sometimes interfering with learning progress. Hill and Tyson (2009) speculate that the negative relation may be due to parental interference with students' autonomy, to the application of excessive pressure, or to

differences in how parents and schools present the material. On the contrary, supporting a student who is having trouble completing or understanding homework can deepen and further the student's understanding of the material.

Somewhere in between involvement with homework and academic socialisation, parental activities such as visiting the school, volunteering to undertake duties at school, participating in school governance and attending school events were moderately positively associated with achievement.

These studies show that, while parental involvement not only significantly improves learning across the board, it can assist in closing the gap between the performance of low and high socioeconomic status (SES) learners. But the catch is that it is notoriously difficult to get poor parents to participate in school activities, while their own reduced levels of formal education and straitened circumstances preclude them from the providing the kinds of home support that their more affluent peers are able to offer their children. Poorly educated parents tend to be intimidated by teachers and hand their children's education entirely over to the school. These difficulties are well illustrated in an intervention by the Early Grade Reading Project in South Africa, which attempted to get parents to undertake simple reading activities with their Grades 1–3 children in schools serving poor families in North West province (Department of Basic Education, DBE 2017).

While there was positive association between test scores and parental practices such as reading to their children, checking their school bag, keeping track of their reading levels and assuming some degree of responsibility for their children's reading, these practices seem to have predated the intervention and showed little change as a result of the programme. Overall, children whose parents participated in the programme showed a very small advantage over a control group in terms of gains in reading ability, while parallel interventions with teachers, involving the provision of lesson plans, reading materials and coaching, showed very significant gains (Taylor et al. 2018). A large part of the problem with the parental intervention seems to be that parental attendance at the workshops organised by the programme was poor (DBE 2017).

The modalities and intensity of remote instruction

Remote instruction by means of web-based modalities seems an obvious way to keep children busy with educational activities during the lockdown. But this is easier said than done. In a survey of remote-learning activities, Superville (2020: 1) pointed out the very inferior quality of online remote instruction in the USA despite the considerable investment in hard- and software by many school districts, that 'left thousands of frustrated parents and students. Many just logged out.'

More detail of these practices is provided by the Covid-19 Educational Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERL), which tracked the lockdown responses by schools in the USA situated in a nationally representative sample of 250 districts (Malkus 2020). Districts were stratified according to high and low performance, and higher and lower percentages of minority students, and students eligible for free and reduced-priced meals. Data on the quality of remote instruction offered by

schools was collected from district websites in six waves over a 12-week period from late March to the end of May.

C-ERL placed schools in one of three categories based on the extent to which instructional offerings during lockdown approximated classroom instruction under normal conditions. Thus, *rigorous instructional offerings* occurred in districts that relied on online platforms to allow individual teachers to direct students' remote learning; provided some synchronous (live) instructional platforms; expected all students to participate, either through explicit statements or by formally taking attendance in remote instruction; required that teachers grade students' remote work; and expected teachers to have some form of direct contact with students. In contrast, *perfunctory instructional offerings* occurred in districts that explicitly stated on their websites that students' participation was not required, that attendance would not be taken, or that student work would not be graded. If a district website did not communicate any information on remote instructional offerings, then it was placed in this category. Finally, *moderate instructional offerings* occurred in districts that were less ambitious than rigorous counterparts, but more ambitious than perfunctory ones. The results are shown in Figure 2.

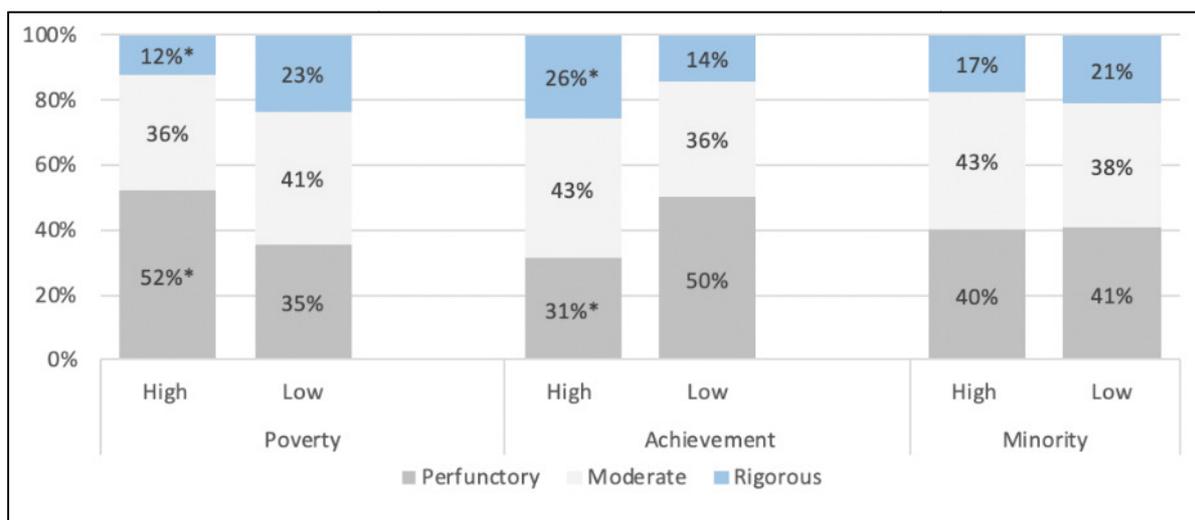


Figure 2: Categories of remote instruction offered by schools, by district characteristics

Note: * indicates difference is statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level. (Source: Malkus 2020)

Overall, 40% of schools were in districts with perfunctory programmes, 40% were in districts with moderate programmes, and only 20% of schools provided rigorous instructional support. Furthermore, the differences in remote instruction by poverty and academic achievement were striking, with half of schools in low achieving districts serving poorer children providing perfunctory instruction, compared to about a third of wealthier and higher achieving districts. The share of schools with rigorous programmes in high-poverty and low-achieving districts was about half the share in low-poverty and high-achieving districts.

Lessons from the literature

This brief review of literature offers three lessons relevant to the survey described below. First, allowing children to spend time being educationally inactive causes a loss of learning, particularly in the first two grades. Second, it is most important that children keep busy and the most important forms of educational activities are reading, writing and calculating. Three, even in one of the highest income countries in the world, the provision of online remote instruction is difficult, even for schools serving wealthier communities. Four, failure to address the summer slump (for northern countries), not facilitating parental involvement in their children's education, and failing to provide appropriate forms of remote schooling, may lead to a widening of existing disadvantages experienced by low SES children.

A survey of 16 South African families

In order to study the home educational experiences of families during the lockdown in South Africa precipitated by the onset of Covid-19, a telephonic survey of 16 families was undertaken (see Taylor 2020a for a detailed description). The study commenced on 31 March 2020, just two days into South Africa's lockdown, which was initially scheduled to end on 17 April. The target was to complete the study by the end of the initial lockdown period, providing the team with just over two weeks to undertake the work.

Method

A qualitative, case study method was adopted. The families identified for the case studies comprise a convenience sample, selected by researchers as South African families they were familiar with. This sampling technique was adopted in view of the compressed timeframe, which did not provide a lengthy period in which to build trust among the subjects.

The Google platform was used to develop a Household Education Questionnaire containing both open-ended and multiple-choice items, and consent forms were developed and used to undertake the case studies. The questions investigated the context and modalities of learning at home, together with the resources available to children and their parents, rather than the actual content and outcomes. Researchers identified a family they knew, but did not live with, obtained written consent and administered the questionnaire, telephonically interviewing the caregiver¹ in the family who played the biggest part in the education of the children. A maximum of two children per family were interviewed, commencing with the oldest and moving to the next oldest in those families with more than one child. The caregiver gave written consent for the study and was present during the child interviews. Data was captured in real time by each interviewer.

Family demographics

All 16 caregivers interviewed were women with the majority aged between 31 and 40 years. The majority were black, had completed high school and, in most cases (10), had a tertiary

¹ Caregiver is used to refer to the parent assuming most of the responsibility for the children's education during the lockdown.

qualification. The majority were employed and living in either suburbs or townships. Details are summarised Table 1.

All families had access to a cell phone and the majority had access to regular electricity supply, television and radio. Fewer than half of the families had access to a regular internet connection. Although only 19 children were interviewed, the families sampled contained a total of 37 children aged 18 years and under. The children from six families were enrolled in independent schools: two of these are classified as low-cost and two as pursuing an explicitly Christian education.² The children from 10 of the families were in public schools, with three of the latter specifying that they were in Model C³ schools.

This is certainly not a sample that is representative of the South African population. It is almost exclusively urban, caregivers predominantly are employed and over half have some post-school education, and over a third of the children attend independent or Model C schools.

² Independent schools in South Africa cater for just 3% of learners, but are made up of a variety of types. A key distinction in this sector is between those that charge fees below R20,000 p.a. (low cost) and those that charge fees in excess of this figure.

³ Towards the end of the apartheid era, those schools reserved for white children were given the option of adopting one of four forms of privatisation or partial privatisation. Model C refers to those public schools that opted for partial privatisation (96% of formerly white-only schools), in which government continued to pay teacher salaries and supply a certain level of funding, and to which the governing body was allocated a higher level of autonomy. These schools continue to be called Model C schools and are generally better resourced than the majority of public schools.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the case study families

Family	Race	Ed	No in house	Ages of children (years)	Dwell	Loc	School	Internet	Computer
1	C	HS	3	14	Complex	Sub	Indep Christ		Y
2	C	Tert	4	15	FS	Sub	Mod C	Y	Y
3	Withheld	Tert	5	18	FS	Sub	Indep high-fee	Y	Y
4	B	HS	6	13	FS	Ts	Pub		Y
5	B	HS	7	10, 6	Plot	IS	Pub		Y
6	W	Tert	3	17, 15,13	FS	Farm	Pub	Y	Y
7	W	HS	3	18	FS	Sub	Mod C	Y	Y
8	B	Tert	10	18, 14, 12, 9, 9	FS	Ts	Pub		
9	B	PS	13	16, 14, 8, 7, 4, 2, 1	SD	Ts	Pub		
10	B	Tert	4	8, 2	Flat	Sub	Indep high-fee		Y
11	B	Tert	2	6	Flat	Ts	Indep low-fee	Y	Y
12	B	Tert	4	10, 2	FS	Ts	Pub	Y	Y
13	C	HS	4	7, 3	FS	Ts	Indep Christ	Y	Y
14	B	Tert	5	17, 17, 5	FS	Sub	Mol C		Y
15	B	Tert	4	17, 12, 11	Flat	Sub	Pub		
16	B	HS	3	10, 1	FS	Sub	Indep low-fee		Y

Key: Race: B – black; C – coloured; W – white. Ed: the highest education achievement of the caregiver interviewed: Tert – tertiary; HS – completed high school; PS – completed primary school. Dwell: Dwelling: FS – Free-standing house; SD – Semi-detached house. Loc: Location: Sub – suburb; Ts – township; IS – informal settlement. School: Pub – public; Mod C – Model C; Indep Christ – independent Christian; Indep high fee – independent high fee; Indep low fee – independent low fee.

Home educational practices before the lockdown

All 16 caregivers reported taking some form of responsibility for the education of their children before the lockdown. Five (31%) stated that the father and the mother shared responsibility for the education within the family, and seven families (44%) stated the mother had sole responsibility. Three families (19%) stated that the children were responsible for their own education. In addition, five families (31%) highlighted that siblings played an important role in educating the other children in the home.

Those responsible for education within the family assisted in many varied educational activities, with 81% being involved in all of the following: helping with specific homework exercises, organising school calendars, preparing children for assessments, and motivating them to learn. Some caregivers mentioned other ways of assisting their children, for example, teaching younger children how to read (7%), transporting children to extra lessons (13%) and giving children freedom to work independently on homework (19%).

The majority of caregivers (75%) stated that they used the internet as a resource to educate their children using a computer, iPad or smartphone before lockdown. Fourteen (88%) families stated that they used resources from school, with nine (56%) specifying textbooks. Other resources used to a lesser degree included library books (25%), television (13%), newspapers, tutoring books, and educational materials already in the house (6%).

Although 69% of caregivers were employed, 81% of them assisted their children with homework, prepared them for assessments and checked their school schedules. It is interesting to note that 81% of caregivers noted motivating their children as a way of helping them, indicating that the focus is not merely on skills development when it comes to education but also on emotional and motivational support. Although fewer than half of the families (44%) had a stable internet connection, 75% of caregivers identified the internet as a resource to support their child's education. Since all families had a smartphone, it may be that this device is often used for children's education or used to create a hotspot for the 81% of families who reported having a computer, laptop or tablet. Although 94% of families had a television, only 13% reported using it as an education resource.

Guidance from the school during the lockdown

When asked if they had received any guidance on what to do during lockdown, there was a marked difference in the respective responses of caregivers and their children (see Table 2, which reflects only the Child 1 interview responses). Whereas nine children answered positively (and a further two from the Child 2 interviews), only five caregivers said yes and one of the latter said her advice had come from television and not the school.

Table 2: Responses of caregiver and oldest child on guidance from the school

No	School	Gr	To caregiver: Have you received any guidance on how to educate your child during lock down?	To Child 1: Has your school given you work to do at this time? Tell me how it happens?
1	Indep Christ	9	No nothing. I've just tried to Google myself and see what can be done at home.	They give holiday assignments and homework. So before school closed they gave us a number of papers and assignments to do and they gave us due dates of when they must be in. My work isn't checked by anyone.
2	Model C	10	No. I have just used my initiative to keep schooling going.	They uploaded their school website under the resources, and select which grade you in with the different work. The work is not checked by anyone.
3	Indep high-fee	7	Parents have been instructed to contact the teacher if needed.	We use Google Classroom so I just have to go to the site and get my work, but it's all the same like before because we had it before too.
4	Public	7	No, there was no guidance.	No.
5	Public	10	No. Nothing from Maswazi, nothing from his teacher.	No.
6	Public	12	Yes, the school.	Some teacher gave us some work on a paper before the schools closed. Like pages to do revision work on and prescribed books to read. One teacher sent us a video on WhatsApp and we have to do an oral video as well.
7	Model C	12	I've just received from the school the importance of signing onto Google Classroom, of them signing into Google Classroom. Apart from that I've had two letters, like D6 communicators – email.	On Google Classroom. All the teachers from the different subjects are on the group for that subject, and then the teachers on the group send the work through that needs to be done for the week, or until we come back to school. If we have issues, we can email the teachers between 8 and 2, or get help from our friends. Some work has to be handed in before a certain time. There's a little tab in Classroom where you take a picture of your work, and then you submit it and it goes to your teacher. They then feedback that they've received the work. I had to hand in my Afrikaans oral and prepared reading and then the teacher gave me suggestions on what I could fix up, and the teacher confirmed that she had received it.
8	Public	9	No.	No.

9	Public	9	No.	No.
10	Indep high-fee	2	Not really, the school simply shared videos but not much has been shared on how as a parent I can teach certain topics.	I use my mother's phone to watch videos from my teachers.
11	Indep low-fee	R	No, I believe other grades did but not for Grade R	No.
12	Public	5	No.	Child was out and not interviewed.
13	Indep Christ	2	No nothing.	I do math, English, Afrikaans.
14	Model C	11	Yes, from the school. The Google Classroom platform.	We are required to log into an online service known as Google Classroom. Work and other updates are posted on this platform weekly.
15	Public	12	No.	No.
16	Indep low-fee	5	Yes, from TV.	I do the homework with my mum.

There was also a marked difference in the responses of public schools, on one hand, and their independent and Model C counterparts, on the other. In only one case did a public school provide advice to the child or caregiver (Family 6), whereas in only one case (Family 11) did a Model C or independent school not offer advice to the child and, in the latter case, the child was in Grade R.

The kinds of guidance provided by schools varied widely across the sample. Two of the Model C schools and one high-fee independent school made use of Google Classroom to keep children occupied. Although the modality of support and advice offered by schools was not clear in all cases, it seems that the majority used a combination of electronic (internet, WhatsApp, videos) and paper-based methods to communicate with children.

Difficulties faced by parents under lockdown

The challenges faced by parents point to the kinds of support that would facilitate involvement in their children's education: uncertainty about the future, lack of curriculum guidance, lack of structure at home and access to resources.

Uncertainty about the future

During lockdown, parents and caregivers are faced with an enormous task of trying to educate their children at home. There was a sense of general anxiety about teaching at home and the future of the academic year. Six of the participants mentioned that they were really looking to schools and the DBE for reassurance, specifically with regards to contingency plans and ways of catching up the academic year. There was also a concern expressed about the continuation of assessments and tests. It was clear that parents would have liked reassurance from schools that alternative plans were being made:

I would say from [me] personally, maybe to get the reassurance from the School Governing Body (SGB) contingency plan for the rest of the year for exams assignments etc., and how that will be assessed for the child to progress. My major concern is how will we assess in terms of exams? (Family 2. See Table 1 and Table 2 for family and school details)

Lack of curriculum guidance

In terms of content and curriculum, parents and caregivers wanted to know more about what work and topics should be covered. This seemed especially true for the caregivers with lower levels of education. Clearly, their own literacy level was something that was creating anxiety among some caregivers because they did not feel equipped to help their children with educational activities:

Because I am uneducated, I have been facing difficulties helping them with their school work. (Family 9)

However, this challenge was not only limited to families in which caregivers did not hold tertiary qualifications. The practice of actually teaching was something that caregivers were finding challenging, even the well educated:

I quickly realised that knowing the topic doesn't mean you can teach it, and that is the difference between myself and the teacher teaching my child. I sometimes get impatient when she doesn't understand or isn't paying attention. (Family 10)

Parents would benefit from guidance from schools on what aspects they should be focusing on. Eight of the survey respondents pointed to the fact that they would benefit from the provision of lesson plans, resources and materials for them to facilitate learning at home. However, the nature of this support needs to be simplified and should be something that parents can understand and implement:

I don't think everybody has the ability to interpret what is written in the CAPS document. A simplified version would be to put out a document that outlines what will be the focus for numeracy. (Family 11)

Lack of structure and routine at home

Not only were caregivers experiencing challenges with regards to content and teaching, but also with the planning and structuring of lessons and weekly plans. Lack of routine was highlighted as a concern:

It's a challenge because sometimes I get lost, I don't know what I am going to teach him today, tomorrow, after that. I need to sit and think and plan about what I can teach. (Family 5)

Furthermore, respondents said they had difficulty setting boundaries between the roles of parent and teacher; behaviour and discipline were mentioned as challenges that parents were facing:

Kids do not listen at all because I am not their teacher. (Family 5)

Access to resources

Access to resources was a persistent challenge for many families. For one caregiver this was given as a pretext for not taking responsibility. Furthermore, while the approach taken by government and schools is to drive online teaching and electronic resources, the question still remains, how applicable and accessible are these resources to caregivers? Fewer than half the families had regular access to the internet, and many of these cited the costs of data as a significant inhibition to accessing educational materials:

Are there any resources available? There are no resources – the libraries are closed. If you want to do any activity – where should you go? Even Google – no-one in the community has resources to buy data and go to Google all the time. It's difficult for us. (Family 4)

Responses from the children

The 19 children interviewed were spread across both primary and secondary schools, from Grade 2 to Grade 12. The majority (12) describing their average daily activities under lockdown referred to their schoolwork, with nine clearly dedicated to actively keeping up their learning momentum; these children made a point of creating time in their day for doing their schoolwork regularly. While a further four children did not mention schoolwork in their account of their daily activities, some of the activities they engaged in, for example reading, may be viewed as educational.

Ten of the 19 children were in touch with their friends, with eight of them using electronic devices to socialise with friends. Eight of the children used WhatsApp on mobile phones, with one child using Instagram as well.

Learners were asked to identify what made their learning easier or more difficult. Things that made it easier included being able to work at their own pace, concentrating better at home and being comfortable there, having help and support from family members and friends, and being able to access the internet. Not being under time pressure or having time constraints was identified by six of the children who reported doing schoolwork daily.

When naming things that made learning at home difficult, one child said she missed having physical contact with friends. Other inhibiting factors included distractions, including noise within the family and from neighbours (4), interpersonal dynamics (1), television and gadgets (3), lack of teacher support/interaction (3), teachers overestimating the amount of work students could manage (1), parents being unable to offer adequate help (2), too many chores (1), no space for study in a household with many occupants (1), and no data at a time when access to the library is not possible (1).

Some children who were actively engaging in schoolwork whilst at home were finding it challenging to work with electronic sources while not having access to live teacher input.

Conclusion

The 16 families and their home educational practices before and during lockdown described in the survey are not representative of the South African population. Although there are cases of less advantaged families in the sample – including one living in an informal settlement and six in townships – a good proportion of the subjects of the study are highly educated, live in a suburban setting and send their children to independent or Model C schools. Nine of those who directed educational practices in each family have tertiary qualifications and only one has not completed high school; all are women and 56% are 40 years old or younger.

Do these atypical features of the sample render the research results incapable of providing lessons for the country? The answer to this question is negative, as long as we interpret the results according to two provisos. One, the home educational practices exhibited by the sample are likely to represent best practice in the population, and the task of the research analyst is therefore to recommend conditions under which such practices could be aspired to by less advantaged families. Two, the difficulties experienced in directing home schooling practices by families in the sample are likely to be experienced far more acutely by most South African families. From this perspective, the research task is to identify support measures that are likely to enable less advantaged families to overcome these difficulties. These two conditions guided the discussion of the research implications below and the recommendations contained in the final section of the report.

The first point to note is that even before lockdown, in the large majority of these families (81%), caregivers were involved in their children's education, assisting children with homework, preparing them for assessments, checking school schedules and motivating them. Resources from the school (88%) and the internet (75%) were stated as the main resources used in the child's education. But even the most highly educated of these parents experienced difficulties undertaking these tasks, and these difficulties became more acute under lockdown.

These difficulties were of two types. One, more than half of the families (nine out of 16) did not

have access to a regular internet connection, including five families who live in the suburbs. Furthermore, a frequent complaint from families was that downloading educational materials is data-heavy and the cost of data restricts access to these materials. The internet is therefore not the best way of communicating with even relatively highly educated families, and must therefore be a very poor choice for communicating with the large majority of South African homes. Only seven of the families had access to a computer, but all had cell phones, and WhatsApp was widely used. However, while phones present a viable form of communicating with families, the problem of data costs remains, while less sophisticated smartphones are unable to download any but the most simple documents.

The second kind of problem experienced by the families in our sample relates to the changes to their home education practices demanded by lockdown. Here too, even the most highly educated caregivers felt inadequate in undertaking tasks such as drawing up a work programme that lays out which topics should be addressed, in which order and, even more problematic, guiding their children through these topics. This is the expert work of teachers, and parents cannot be expected to assist their children in relation to these curricular and pedagogical tasks without very clear guidance. In this regard, the research findings outlined above indicate that such guidance is being provided by some independent and Model C schools.

Eight of the 16 families in the sample were receiving support from their child's school by means of printed material given to children to take home before lockdown, or electronic platforms such as Google Classroom or D6 Communication Platforms. Furthermore, the provision of these resources was accompanied by advice from the schools on how to use materials, commonly by means of WhatsApp chat groups. In such families, there appeared to be a more structured learning programme occurring in the home during the lockdown.

The majority of public schools serving families in the sample were not providing educational resources or advice to homes, and it is clear that they require guidance on how to do so. The DBE did place large quantities of learning material on its website (<https://www.education.gov.za/>), while the Western Cape Education Department (WCED)¹ established a model for school support, which may provide lessons to other provinces (Schäfer 2020). In addition, an increasing number of online libraries, learning platforms and websites offer educational materials while a number of telecommunication networks have zero-rated their learning sites (Jantjies 2020). However, widespread utilisation of the DBE electronic material, the WCED model, or the many other online facilities will run into the same IT-related problems described above, namely, internet access and the cost of data.²

While the use of electronic forms of communication and resource provision should be utilised wherever possible, these modalities are not easily available to the majority of families. It seems that the best way to overcome these difficulties is to provide printed materials to families, both for use by children in their daily tasks and to guide parents in supporting their children. And the most effective way of getting such printed materials to families is for parents or children to collect them from their schools during lockdown. And once the lockdown is ended, they should

¹ The materials may be accessed from <https://wcedportal.co.za/eresource/92236>

² Although the WCED website contains much material that is useful to teachers, it is very busy and complex to navigate, and is probably not useful to all but the most tech-savvy parents.

be provided as a matter of routine in order to enhance the important role played by parents in supporting their children's education.

One of the most important functions in regard to parental support is establishing a routine for doing schoolwork, whether this is for a substantial part of the day during lockdown, or for undertaking homework after school when things return to normal. Many children find it all too easy to be distracted even in the most advantaged homes, and for children in crowded homes in which space and quiet time are restricted this is even more of a problem.

Interviews with caregivers and their children indicate that the educational uses of television are not being exploited nearly as well as they could be. A wealth of material, pitched at all levels of schooling, is available for broadcast, and low-cost access to television is widely distributed across the country. And while SABC and other stations do broadcast educational programmes daily, the families described above make little use of the medium for educational purposes. What is required is not only stronger advocacy but also a higher degree of coordination between daily broadcasts and the rollout of the curriculum.

Finally, a major source of anxiety among parents and children arises from uncertainty. While government should be commended for swift and decisive action as soon as the virus entered the country, and while the abruptness of the lockdown left little time to prepare, many schools did manage to send books home and to communicate with families during the lockdown. Schools should have communication strategies in place and have contingency plans for emergency situations in future.

Table 3 provides a set of strategies aimed at promoting learning at home, both during lockdown and normal times.

Table 3: Steps to promote parental involvement and learning at home

Problem	Solution	Responsibility
Lack of communication between school and home	Keep class lists with cell phone numbers (parents, children, neighbour or other family member). Communicate regularly with parents.	Provinces, schools
Parents and learners anxious about the future	Communicate with parents regularly. Issue simple quarterly and annual plans.	Provinces, schools
Lack of structure for learning at home	Set aside fixed time and place for learning every day and encourage and support learners to adhere to these.	Parents
No curriculum guidance	Provide simple guidance to parents on promoting learning. Reading to young children daily; discussing the reading. Ensure that all children undertake reading, writing and calculating daily, according to a programme: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grades 1–6: Use the DBE workbooks for home language, first additional language and mathematics daily - Grades 7–12: Work from textbooks. 	Provinces, schools, parents
Paucity of resources	Grades 1–6: Provide reading material for children to take home; ensure DBE workbooks are taken home.	Provinces, schools

	Grades 7–12: Ensure textbooks and stationery are taken home according to a work plan.	
--	---	--

Parental involvement in the education of their children is difficult to promote but the anxiety and heightened awareness of the importance of schooling precipitated by the virus presents an opportunity to intervene decisively in promoting better home–school relations and more effective learning at home. If the kinds of support to and communication with parents recommended above are implemented by the Ministry, the DBE, provincial departments and schools both during and in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic, then the crisis precipitated by Covid-19 may result in significant educational benefits.

Acknowledgement

The survey described above was undertaken as part of a 12-workstream research study into various aspects of the Covid-19 pandemic, led by JET Education Services. The survey was conducted by the following team: Nick Taylor, Whitty Green, Lori Foster, Aifani Tahulela, Chosi Mtoba, Freda Walters, Gail Robinson, Gino Garach, Mthandazo Khumalo, Kimberleigh Bodley, Neo Letsoalo, Nonjabulo Makhowane, Stacy Kratz, Zonke Mpotulo.

References

- Busso, M & Munoz, J. (2020) *Pandemic and Inequality: How Much Human Capital Is Lost When Schools Close?* [online]. Available at <https://blogs.iadb.org/ideas-matter/en/pandemic-and-inequality-how-much-human-capital-is-lost-when-schools-close/> [accessed 21 May 2020].
- Department of Basic Education (DBE). (2017) *Early Grade Reading Study (EGRS): Family Influences on Early Grade Reading*. DBE.
- Dearing, E, Kreider, H, Simpkins, S & Weiss, HB. (2006) Family involvement in school and low-income children’s literacy performance: Longitudinal associations between and within families. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98: 653–664.
- Hill, NE & Tyson, DF. (2009) Parental involvement in middle school: a meta-analytic assessment of the strategies that promote achievement. *Developmental Psychology*, 45(3): 740–63.
- Jantjies, M. (2020, March 26) Kids can keep learning even during a lockdown: Here’s how. *The Conversation* [online]. Available at <https://theconversation.com/kids-can-keep-learning-even-during-a-lockdown-heres-how-134434> [accessed 29 June 2020].
- Malkus, N. (2020) School districts’ remote-learning plans may widen student achievement gap. *Education Next* [online]. Available at <https://www.educationnext.org/school-districts-remote-learning-plans-may-widen-student-achievement-gap-only-20-percent-meet-standards/> [accessed 25 June 2020].
- Reddy, V, Soudien, C & Winnaar, L. (2020, May 5) Impact of school closures on education outcomes in South Africa. *The Conversation* [online]. Available at <https://theconversation.com/impact-of-school-closures-on-education-outcomes-in-south-africa-136889> [accessed 29 June 2020].
- Schäfer, D. (2020) *MEC Debbie Schäfer on Launch of a New Lesson Planning Platform*, Western Cape Education Department [online]. Available at <https://www.gov.za/speeches/mec-debbie-sch%C3%A4fer-launch-new-lesson-planning-platform-17-apr-2020-0000> [accessed 30 June 2020].

- Superville, D. (2020, June 30) The all-remote schedule: No risk to health, high risk to learning. *Education Week* [online]. Available at <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/06/25/the-all-remote-schedule-no-risk-to-health.html?cmp=enl-enl-eu-news1-rm&M=59606954&U=2040594&UUID=8b420c04cbad9a684028712f06de5114> [accessed 30 June 2020].
- Taylor, N. (2020a) *Education Researchers Respond to The COVID-19 Pandemic. Theme 1: Education at Home* [online]. Available at <https://www.jet.org.za/resources/theme-1-overview-report-final.pdf> [accessed 29 June 2020].
- Taylor, N. (2020b, May 22) Getting kids back into school is a priority – but interim learning methods are just as important. *Daily Maverick* [online]. Available at <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2020-05-22-getting-kids-back-into-school-is-a-priority-but-interim-learning-methods-are-just-as-urgent/> [accessed 22 May 2020].
- Taylor, S, Cilliers, J, Prinsloo, C, Fleisch, B & Reddy, V. (2018) *The Early Grade Reading Study: Impact evaluation after two years of interventions. Technical Report*. Department of Basic Education.
- van der Berg, S & Spaul, N. (2020) *Counting the Cost: COVID-19 School Closures in South Africa & its Impacts on Children*. Research on Socioeconomic Policy (RESEP). Stellenbosch University.

Notes on the author

Dr Nick Taylor is Senior Research Fellow and former CEO of JET Education Services

Address for correspondence

ntaylor@jet.org.za

Data or bread? A policy analysis of student experiences of learning under lockdown¹

Jonathan Jansen
Stellenbosch University

Abstract

The response of many schools to the pandemic-enforced lockdown of 2020 came in various forms of online learning. We know from research that online learning in unequal social contexts leads to unequal academic outcomes. What we do not know is how students in unequal societies experience lockdown learning through various forms of online learning – if at all. This study offers a policy analysis of student experiences of online learning by focusing on emergent themes from more than 600 student stories including the educational and emotional costs of lockdown learning and what this means for immediate and long-term policy interventions.

Keywords: online learning, lockdown learning, emergency remote teaching, digital inequality, social learning

Jansen, J. (2020) Data or bread? A policy analysis of student experiences of learning under lockdown. *Southern African Review of Education*, 26(1): 167–181.

¹ This article benefitted from critical comments on an earlier version by anonymous reviewers and from Professor Laura Czerniewicz from the University of Cape Town.

Introduction

We know from research that the pursuit of online learning in unequal social contexts leads to unequal academic outcomes (Ahn & McEachin 2017; Heppen et al. 2017). As one recent review found,

Even when overall outcomes are similar for classroom and online courses, students with weak academic preparation and those from low-income and under-represented backgrounds consistently underperform in fully-online environments. (Protosaltis & Baumi 2019: 1)

What we do not know in fine-grained detail is how digital inequality is experienced by schoolchildren in the context of social inequality in one of the most unequal countries in the world (Spaull & Jansen 2019). This study offers an analysis of more than 600 stories composed by primary and high school children drawn from the nine provinces of South Africa in which the participants responded to the broad question: ‘What were your experiences of learning under lockdown?’

Background and methods

In May 2020, I posted on social media (Facebook and Twitter) an invitation to school students to write a short essay on their experiences of learning under lockdown, the so-called LuL Project as it came to be called. As prompts, the following questions were given:

What was ‘learning under lockdown’ like for you? Was it easy or difficult or a bit of both? Say why. What did you struggle with? What did you enjoy? Were you able to access online learning from your school or not? And if you did do online learning was that a new experience for you? How did you manage? Did you parents also play a role in your learning during lockdown? Are you homeschooled? Were you able to reach out to other students in your class to learn together? How many hours on average did you spend learning? What did you miss most about regular school? Could you concentrate or were you distracted learning from home? Were you worried about what was going on with the pandemic and did this affect your ability to learn from home? What tips do you have for other students about how to make the most of learning under difficult circumstances?

Students from at least 220 schools submitted 640 stories from all nine provinces. Most of the stories came from schools in the Western Cape (77), KwaZulu-Natal (61) and Gauteng (43), and the majority of submissions came from high schools (84%). Some stories were sent via teachers, others were written on paper and copied via a WhatsApp message or sent by e-mail attachment. Each story came with the child’s age, name (some chose anonymity), school and province.² Given the nature of the call via social media, the stories submitted are not therefore representative of the national school system.

It has become difficult and somewhat meaningless to describe many of the responding schools by their racial origins, in part because the race and class status of schools often change dramatically over time (Jansen & Kriger 2020) and, in part, because one cannot read resources

² There was missing school information for 23 submissions, while one submission was from a California primary school and one from an online school.

such as access to online learning off a school's apartheid classification. For example, students in the same school may or may not have access to data and devices depending on their family's economic circumstances. Nevertheless, using data from one province (KZN), most schools were black public (46%) and black independent schools (7%) with the rest being formerly white and mainly public schools (47%) with varying degrees of racial integration in the student body.

All the stories were run through Atlas.ti software using an auto-coding tool applied to the following preselected codes based on frequency identification of keywords by two researchers: emotions, distractions, piling-up (work), friends, family, and data. The substantive paragraphs from this initial coding were used to identify the themes and construct the narrative analysis representative in this article. For example,

1:45 I use Netflix as a form of escapism to distract me from the loneliness . . . (409341:409604)
D1: Learning under Lockdown Final DR

I use Netflix as a form of escapism to distract me from the loneliness of lockdown and as a way to remember what the world used to be like. But it is just another distraction, another way to procrastinate tackling the constantly increasing pile of work in my room.

Particularly insightful paragraphs were extracted from the results of the auto-coding search and appear as partial quotations in the text below. All students quoted in the article provided permission directly or through their parents/guardians (for those younger than 18 years) for a retrospective policy analysis of their stories, originally collected for a popular book publication (Jansen & O'Ryan 2020). The richness of the data and its implications for education policy and practice suggested that another reading of the stories would be invaluable for policy research purposes as well.

Main findings

Three dimensions of digital inequality

The most important finding is also the least surprising. There is an emphatic digital divide when it comes to opportunity to learn (Wang 1998) in the context of online learning and under conditions of a pandemic-enforced lockdown. The reference to lockdown learning conditions is important because how and whether students learn is directly affected by the social context around them – that of a pandemic, which poses an existential threat to their lives and those of their families and therefore impacts on their state of mind even as they are called to receive teaching through a device and pursue learning from a distance. We identify three non-equivalent digital divides among students in terms of their relative access to learning technologies.

The Google Classroom group (high tech, digital)

For students in the elite, middle-class schools – almost all formerly white schools – the transition from face-to-face teaching to online learning was relatively smooth. Devices and teachers were readily available: 'I am lucky enough,' says a student from an elite institution, 'to attend a school that was able to move online relatively swiftly. My school has a staff of brilliant teachers capable . . . to do everything they can to conquer online schooling.' One of the reasons

is that these schools were already offering some form of blended learning prior to the lockdown as part of the regular educational experiences of their students. Google Classroom is a common platform and many students experienced the teaching-learning connection as a productive engagement – though there were many other connecting technologies such as FlipGrid, Google Meet, d6, Zoom, Khan Academy, Moodle and Microsoft Teams. It is this group that experienced fully online teaching and learning almost from the start of the 26 March 2020 lockdown.

The WhatsApp group (medium tech, digital)

For students in many of the working-class and poor schools, the alternative to Google Classroom was the WhatsApp facility. Teachers created WhatsApp groups and found ways of downloading materials onto this text and voice messaging system. Students could in turn upload assignments to WhatsApp for teachers to receive and assess. But the online uses of the facility were often rudimentary, as this student explains: ‘They just give us the pages to study on WhatsApp and there’s no more teaching. This scares me because I really want to pass this grade.’ Or, in the words of another: ‘The problem with these online classes is [that] they make learning extremely boring and monotonous. This causes a major lack of interest and commitment.

This was the group that experienced the most frustration because of the intermittent availability of devices (often shared) and data (very expensive), while unstable internet connections constantly disrupted the learning process.

The Radio-Television group (low tech, analogue)

It is reasonable to project, even from the limited data in the stories of disadvantage, that for most students in South Africa, there are neither devices, data or a connected teacher and this means that online learning – even if intermittent – simply does not exist. In the poorest schools, there is no tradition of sending books home because of the scarcity of these basic resources and the school’s estimation that these precious resources might not be returned. One student’s story captures this shared reality:

I was very worried about my schoolwork because I don’t have the resources to study online. Our school does not have enough textbooks for each and every learner so we leave the books in class. That means I only had my writing books with me.

Most students would be left with a connection to educational radio and television programmes and then only when older, competing family members would grant access to these two sources of broadcast learning. A recent study found, however, that for educational broadcasting via the public broadcaster, ‘scheduling and information on what is available on both TV and radio is often confusing and at best limiting . . . you can’t see exactly what content is covered’ (Perlman & Potenza 2020: 3).

It is for this group that the lockdown carried little if any academic benefit and where the inequality of the opportunity to learn was intensely experienced.

The social dynamics of learning from home

The often upbeat assessments of online learning by technology evangelists completely ignore

the complex dynamics of learning from home. Homes for most children are crowded spaces with competing demands on the resources available, such as the television, and this makes living and learning difficult. The following student narration beautifully holds together the living–learning dynamic under lockdown:

I have shared a bedroom with my grandmother forever. When my mother moved in with us, she stole my bedroom and since then I have had no privacy. When I want to learn in the bedroom my granny wants to do her granny business too. I have no say because it's her bedroom. So I decided to use my aunt's bedroom when she is at work, but there is a television in her bedroom, which makes it hard for me to study because I get distracted.

There is only one television that has all the channels and so I struggle because at a particular time my aunt would want to watch the news and I would have to sacrifice my show or miss the work that was covered. Sometimes I would study anywhere and everywhere, from the lounge to outside, just to find a place where I could concentrate.

The question of the social context of learning as portrayed in this insert shows that the question of out-of-school education is much more than simply one of access to online facilities. It is about contexts in which social inequalities and educational inequalities merge to create profoundly negative experiences of learning under lockdown.

The access to off-line familial resources

The fact that cultural capital (knowledge, skills and values) plays such a powerful role in the opportunity structures available to students from middle-class and wealthy families is incontrovertible (Sui-Chi & Willms 1996; Henderson & Mapp 2002). What is not well-described is how exactly various forms of cultural capital, such as the education levels of the parents, influence learning opportunities and outcomes *from the perspective of students*.

What the stories reveal is the critical role of the family in making or breaking opportunities to learn. One student story was particularly evocative on this point:

My parents are not that well experienced with homeschooling – I should actually just say my mommy. She's a single mother who receives a social grant due to disability. She cannot help me because she only has Grade 9 and my dad, well, let's just say he only gives money when he feels like it because my mommy raised me all on her own. She made me the young lady I am today.

The complex of issues here includes a broken family living with economic hardship and a devoted, caring mother who invests in the development of her matriculant daughter. This is an important observation across the stories – that the absence of formal education did not mean the absence of social and emotional support for lockdown learning, as this student pointed out: 'My mother, who is uneducated, supported me all the way and I really appreciate her for such.'

What the devoted mother cannot do is provide the direct educational support that other stories reveal about parents with degrees and, in some cases, parents who are teachers as well.

Where there is cultural capital in abundance, parents help with difficult mathematics or science assignments. A father's profession as an accountant or engineer comes in handy when the whole family is under lockdown and that practical knowledge can assist with project assignments. Few students could boast that 'my father and I will soon be studying data science online which is an area of mathematics that requires calculus, statistics and computer science.'

In one middle-class family, this learning bond is intimate and productive: ‘Most days my mom will read a few books and I will read a few, then we write about what we read and do some maths before spending some time singing and learning about artists.’ But parents with resources do much more, as these stories tell. They monitor performance and check on progress with assigned work: ‘Two or three responses from teachers later, I was booted from my room to work in the lounge right next to my mother, where she could watch me from the comfort of her own chair.’

By surrounding their children with these forms of social and academic support, a stay-at-home parent (often a mother) plays a crucial role in creating an environment very similar to the school in which learning is managed, monitored and secured.

Data versus bread

Easily the most difficult element in the stories about the lockdown is the stark choices faced by parents and children when it came to online learning. One student described this heartrending problem as ‘the pain of choosing between bread and data.’ Often, student stories are very conscious of this dilemma for the family and end up simply not asking their parents because ‘it will eat into her pocket,’ said one of her mother’s budgetary choices. Or, another: ‘I decided not to ask for a smartphone and Wi-Fi connection because that would mean my family had to choose between those facilities and providing food for me as we depend on social grants for living.’

Data is expensive and universities in South Africa would among themselves experience ‘unequal digital access and [the] relative affordability of data’ (Czerniewicz 2020: para. 26). In the case of poor and working-class schools, there will always be inadequate provision of these essential resources. The data available would have to come from poor parents’ limited resources or not at all. The crisis is even worse in cases where more than one child requires data to enable at least a cell phone connection to the school.

The contrast could not be more stark than so crisply captured by a student writing about her own privileged circumstances in an elite school: ‘I could very well sit here in front of a R7,000 laptop with optic fibre connection [and] I am lucky enough to attend a school that was able to move online relatively swiftly.’ For this student there is no pressure of data or lack of devices, let alone the warm comforts of food and security in a spacious learning environment. For another privileged student, ‘nothing was a hassle’ because teachers were quick to respond and there were printing facilities at home for downloading.

‘Please can you get me a cell phone?’ asked a student after submitting her story for the book project. The device (a single cell phone) is shared with her parents and other siblings attending school. It was not only the data on the phone, but access to the phone itself that was a very real challenge. When the parent required the phone for her normal business, there was no online access to learning materials for these students even if only through the WhatsApp facility.

The new demands of the pedagogic relationship

What learning under lockdown revealed was the complex new relationship between teacher and learner. A teacher who was not physically present to solve problems or address questions about a science or mathematics problem was not accessible for immediate resolution in the

usual way. This was experienced as stressful for many students, especially in the learning of mathematics – an observation that calls for further research across subject areas. As one student explained,

Many subjects were easy to work with but our main subjects were not. Maths, science and accounting are subjects that need hands-on explanations and face-to-face interactions with teachers and students. This became a very difficult task for me.

What is interesting in the context of online learning is how exactly the technology is experienced as the communication medium between students and teachers in the WhatsApp group. The complexity of the teacher–student relationship is limited in part by the technology available to children in poorer schools but also by the lack of assistance to make better use of what is available:

My maths mwalimu (teacher) and we communicated at set times. We formed a small WhatsApp group. There were a few things that were not positive about that: you have to type out everything and it was difficult, especially with maths. We had a whole two-hour long session to work out one problem because of the typing and getting everybody on board.

At the same time, some students talked about new opportunities that the online relationship enabled. For example, students who described themselves as introverts claimed that they could now ask a question via the technological facility – the chat room or the hands-up device – without feeling exposed, embarrassed or ‘looked at’ for asking a question. Paradoxically, the distance of the teacher behind the screen made the pedagogical relationship more intimate for the more reserved student.

In this regard, some students also expressed relief that they could no longer be bullied because of their lockdown status. Some said they did not miss school at all and would happily continue learning from home if that was possible through, for example, homeschooling. This was, however, the desire of a minority of students.

The social nature of learning

Even though learning is often conceived of as an individual learning effort (Soudien 2020), we know that it is also a social activity (Okita 2012). What student stories reveal is how much and in what ways learning is experienced as a profoundly social activity in these lockdown reflections. The examples students cite are themselves revealing of how learning actually takes place in dynamic classroom spaces.

A hand-up summonses a teacher to a problem. By leaning over, a student can consult with a friend next to or behind their seat. Groups of students discuss a project or solve a problem together. For one student, ‘not being able to see or physically interact with my peers is also difficult, and I miss learning and solving problems together.’ ‘Things that I miss,’ says a younger learner, is ‘sharing ideas, doing schoolwork together with other learners.’

Taking a look at another student’s marked script gives the other a sense of what to do next. Outside the classroom, a discussion of a problem set might continue in the course of playing outdoors. All of these myriads of pedagogical interactions take place in traditional school and classroom settings and enable learning much more than the one-dimensional analyses often assumed, if not claimed, about the teacher teaching in the front of the classroom and the learner

learning at her or his desk. It is the social atmosphere of the classroom that enables learning: ‘I miss the learning and teaching spirit that took place in the classroom,’ says a matriculant student. That broader purpose of education is captured beautifully in this excerpt from one student’s story:

[This] has been one of the most difficult aspects of learning under lockdown for me – not being able to bounce off ideas about essay topics with my classmates and share my worries and burdens with my friends. School is about so much more than learning how to find the distance of the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle; it teaches us how to *be human*. Learning in isolation, however, teaches us how to *stay human* in conditions that we, as a social species, find very challenging.

This dynamism of the social interactions that constitute learning is poorly understood and requires more systematic inquiry – ‘that influence of all the other learners working,’ according to one student, or those ‘debates in English and Afrikaans classes’ that another student misses.

Online learning experts claim that these kinds of pedagogical transactions are also possible in online learning. That may well be a function of *learning design* and not an inherent limitation of online technologies (Hodges et al. 2020). If so, what students experience in the lockdown learning may reflect both the state of the technologies they access and the capacity of teachers to be able to activate higher functions in the online platforms. In fact, one student from an elite school complains explicitly about the linear nature of teacher instructions to learners and learner responses to teachers: ‘The need for a more interactive online learning experience is sorely needed and, more importantly, desired.’

The impact of ‘distractions’ on lockdown learning

Almost every story contains the word. At home, distractions are everywhere. Television. Netflix. Xbox. Fridge. Games. Friends. Family. Online learning, it turns out, is not as simple as sitting down in front of a screen. With no teacher to issue commands and manage attention, students find the drift of distractions to be a major concern in lockdown learning.

Sometimes the distractions are online where ‘social media, YouTube videos and our friends texting us during lessons threaten,’ and sometimes it is off-line as when

the television in the living room is calling my name. It was seductive. It played all my favourite series: *High Fidelity* and my all-time favourite series *Black-ish*. I feel for the television’s seductive ways. I sat on the couch for two weeks doing no schoolwork.

Not all homes make the neat separation between schoolwork and homework, claim several students who complain of being called to do house chores at all times of the days. For others, it is the distraction of siblings tumbling into their learning spaces. Where concentration is difficult, all kinds of noises distract – from the neighbour’s barking dog to the birds chirping outside or, simply, ‘my sister munching annoyingly on a bag of crisps.’

Where schools are punctilious in keeping student attention online, for example, requiring sit-down sessions on the basis of a timetable given in advance, such scheduling discourages distraction. Even then, students would slink onto a classroom late because they overslept and make apology. Some schools record such online tardiness.

Many schools are less demanding when it comes to online learning and monitor progress

mainly via assignments completed. Parents are sometimes informed when work is not done. All students complain of the one huge consequence of distraction – ‘the work piles up’ is the phrase of choice. This brings down huge pressure on the distracted student and some fold under the workload while others play catch-up simply to stay ahead of ‘the tsunami of work’ as one of them put it. Sometimes those distractions are of the intimate kind; one student reports that he became a father during lockdown.

Those who eventually manage the many distractions that come their way speak of a new maturity and even an independence that will serve them well as they prepare for university. This learning, incidentally, might be one of the most important benefits of lockdown learning – the ability to learn, or at least try to learn, on your own. Several students tell of how they developed their own timetables and schedules to deal with distractions, and advise other students to do the same.

It now becomes clear that the structured environment of the classroom, while it provides direction and imposes discipline, has one major disadvantage. It seldom empowers students to learn in ways that manage the distractions that surrounds all young people, especially in a time when technological inventions such as any number of gaming consoles can eat up so much time.

The emotional costs of lockdown learning

The emotional costs of lockdown learning are often invisible in media accounts of biomedical health (rates of infections and death). In the context of schools, the emotional toll of a protracted lockdown is seldom included in calculations about when and how to reopen schools. There is much more emphasis on the education policy response to physical protective equipment (PPE) and mitigating measures such as social distancing and hand hygiene.

But what about students’ emotional lives? These stories lend urgency to a broader response that must include the mental and emotional health coming out of lockdown. Student stories of students speak of isolation, anxiety, depression, loneliness, fear, anger and disappointment. Here are some representative voices about the emotions of lockdown learning:

Sadness, a feeling suffocation and being deprived of interaction makes one grow weaker psychologically.

During the lockdown, I learned that humans thrive on contact, to be touched, to be looked in the eye.

As the lockdown was extended, I was forced to accept that my desire for human touch and connection could not be met and I fell into a deep hole of depression.

What emerges from these stories is the direct connection between emotional states of children and their ability to learn:

Hopelessness. Fear. Anxiety. Feeling hopeless about schools reopening, fearful for my loved ones dying and anxious about being falling behind on my schoolwork. How was I supposed to learn under lockdown with all these emotions haunting me?

I progressively lost my drive for online learning – skipping Zoom lessons, handing in assignments late, but also neglecting my emotional health.

We're all separated, touch-starved, restless, and plagued by loneliness. It negatively affects our productivity.

One profound moment in the swing of student emotions is when the lockdown was extended – just as millions of students had expectations of returning to ‘normal,’ their hopes were dashed as a limited lockdown became an interminable shutdown.

The general uncertainty about the future weighed heavily on the emotions of students. What was initially a period of great excitement – schools closed early for the vacation because of the virus and students could study from home – became a period of great boredom. There were dark moments for many students as their world came crumbling down around them.

Then there are students with preexisting emotional distresses. For one such student, the lockdown and the loneliness brought back memories of an earlier assault. This traumatic memory weighs heavily on the mind of the senior high school student as she writes about the experience of learning in isolation.

In other words, the emotional distresses of lockdown often grafts onto existing traumas such as the recent death of a parent or grandparent (mentioned by several students) and not being able to attend the funeral due to regulations, or the fact that one or both parents are essential workers (doctors, nurses), which itself creates an abiding fear in the family house. Says one student, ‘I lost my dad to a kidney infection in March so my family and I literally had to bury my dad a day before the lockdown began.’

Students, even the very young, are always aware of the existential threat of coronavirus and the disease Covid-19. They hear their parents speak and they hear of climbing infections and hospitals set aside for Covid-19 patients. Sometimes the parents talk to their children about the virus and its effects as they console their young. The television, says a student in her story, is stuck in repetition mode: ‘Everybody on radio and television only spoke about the virus. I started to feel scared that I may not go back to school.’ The news is unrelenting. All of this combines to influence the emotional lives of schoolchildren.

How schoolwork piles up

There is something unusual about students’ experiences of schoolwork during online learning. It is the extraordinary amount of work that teachers require of them. This is not an observation of some students in particular schools or communities. Across the board, these stories tell of more work than ever before, and this requires some explanation. As one student puts it: ‘My teachers seemed to think that just because we were at home they could pile us with work, not realising that this was adding to the stress of lockdown.’ Another student shows the link between the tenuousness of connectivity and the piling up of work:

Learning is a struggle because you have either a good stable internet connection and can attend classes or you have an unstable connection. . . . The work is endless. When you think you’re done, it keeps coming like you’re Pac-Man and the more you eat those dots, the more those ghosts chase you.

In the context of the WhatsApp group of students, the facility is often experienced as nothing more than a dumping ground for content that the student or student group has to make sense of, as this story explains:

We have WhatsApp groups on which our teachers give us work daily. It was all fine until data problems occurred. This meant I missed a day or two's work that led to piles of work that you had to go through while also being worried about the following day's work. I would see in the WhatsApp group that fewer and fewer students were participating. I was starting to lose hope.

Sometimes it would appear that teachers are not talking to each other and that each of them simply made work demands without careful coordination of the effects on students. But there seems to be an unspoken logic about workload expectations on the part of many teachers – that because the student is at home they have more time to do more work than they would in class. Perhaps this piling on of work is a genuine desire to keep students busy rather than waste their time at home on nonacademic activities.

The problem is that students report working long hours at the computer screen from early in the mornings to late at night. It appears that the growing workloads – and some stories are quite bitter about this – really do stress students, and that the only way they can keep up is to keep going until dark. This excessive workload has a debilitating effect on student motivation.

There is of course the fear that falling behind might mean doing poorly in examinations and even failing the academic year. And so the students press on at considerable costs to themselves. Clearly, more and more work does not mean better teaching or improved learning; it more likely means, as these stories tell, simply more pressure.

Many students use the word procrastination – putting off work for later until they realise that this was a major mistake, given the piling up factor. With distractions around and no teacher to monitor work done on a daily basis, it is easy for many of the students to delay working on the growing pile of assignments. Some recover strongly and keep up with the pace. Others stare dimly into the future, exhausted and demotivated.

The added dilemma of managing schoolwork is that learning at home means attending to other work as well. In tightly controlled families, students have to find a way of negotiating everyday household chores and daily schoolwork commitments. When at regular school, this problem is of course resolved; there is homework and there is schoolwork.

Not all parents understand this distinction and so become part of the distraction arrangements. A student is called to help with a maintenance problem or to attend to a sibling. Where parents are both working, that becomes an even greater burden because the older sibling has to take care of the younger ones and also assist with their school tasks.

Because learning from home blurs the distinction between home and school or between housework and schoolwork, it invariably means that a student falls behind even as workload demands increase.

The other things children learn during lockdown

Learning under lockdown is much more than coverage of the official curriculum. The student stories are replete with examples of other learnings they experienced during lockdown. The obvious learning was how to use a computer, for some, and how to navigate the many different online learning platforms available through the school. Lockdown learning meant doing the same things differently as for this student: 'I started doing online extramural activities like ballet, drama and public speaking.'

But the learning students experienced was something that also blossomed in the kitchen and in the garden. Some students learnt to bake alongside a parent, and this was at once a wonderful diversion from the demands of online learning and an opportunity to enjoy the learning from home. It is telling from these stories that the more parents were involved in the daily lives of their children, the more they drew them in to learning new skills in and around the home.

Students also credit themselves with learning patience and acquiring the discipline of self-guided learning. The initial and extended lockdowns demanded an unusual level of self-control and a readjustment of social and academic expectations. Often, these dreary experiences brought on emotional distress. But in many (not all) cases, student stories tell of bouncing back and resetting course, of making new determinations. There were both academic and social learnings in the constraining context of lockdown learning: 'I have not only learned things for school. I learned how to talk to my parents about my feelings, my anxiety and fears about the future.'

The resilience of students in lockdown learning

Despite the emotional burdens and stresses of online learning, the student stories reveal a strong resilience among schoolchildren as they deal with the pressures of continuing education under lockdown conditions. A common theme is the need for organisation, as this student tells:

It may have taken a whole weekend but I managed to make myself weekly planners and broke my work down into manageable chunks. After nine weeks of being safe but stuck at home, I have managed to keep up to date with my work.

Others found strength in their faith as this beautiful story reveals about a pandemic that came in the heart of the Muslim holy month: 'The best news for me was that I could spend the entire month of Ramadan working from home and still have time for religious involvement. I have developed spiritual peace and have felt enlightened numerous times.'

The student stories paint a picture not of hopelessness but, for many students, of resourcefulness as they find ways of coping with living and learning in the lockdown. Many students talked about altering their thinking by considering those with less – no data, no devices and no connection to live teachers. That reflection brought gratitude rather than despair as the more privileged students took account of their own advantage. It made them appreciate the ordinary, said one student, teaching the lesson of 'not taking any class or teacher for granted.' Others found strength in family structure and supportive friends; a working class student found her vital strength in a mentor from the Women Lead Movement without whom, she claims, 'I would still be suffering from anxiety and depression and telling myself I would not make it.'

One student drew on the memory of tough experiences to carry her through the present. Her family travelled 47,000 km through 38 African countries and had 27 breakdowns. 'I am using the same techniques I learned on the road to keep myself stable, focused and calm. The first and most important is routine.' Others looked for the upside in lockdown learning – learning in pyjamas, watching late-night television, accessing the refrigerator throughout the day and not dealing with all kinds of classroom pressures.

Suddenly, learning that was abstract and distant became very real and applied. One student saw

this as an opportunity for ‘learning new things everyday’ for ‘the exponential growth of the virus are two topics in maths and life sciences. We study the exponential function in mathematics and the study of viruses is a concept in life sciences.’

In reassessing the future, several students speak of the toughness that lockdown learning produces within them:

This generation will be the most resilient . . . the most diligent and hardworking as we had to do everything by ourselves. It is also good practice for people who would like to go to university, as the learning style is very similar.

It is this capacity to look for the positive in the dire circumstances of lockdown learning that sustains many students and enables them to cope, as in this reflection: ‘Not having to my life cut up into 30-minute intervals and being dictated by a bell is a refreshing escape from the routine drilled into us since primary school.’

Conclusion

There are many lessons from this study of student experiences of lockdown learning for immediate and urgent education policy actions. First, there must be educational mitigations for the predictable growth in inequalities between students in the three categories of learning experiences described as the Google Classroom group, the WhatsApp group and the Radio-Television group. One way to do this is to develop a school-based version of what was developed for universities as Strategies for Addressing Unequal Technological Access (Olds 2020).

Second, there has to be provincial (department of education) guidelines for schools on how to manage student workloads via online learning through much better coordination at the school level. The piling on and piling up of workloads are sources of great stress for students learning under lockdown.

Third, there has to be structured emotional support for students both at home and as they return to school in the phased-reopening approach. Such support could come from the resources of the more well-endowed schools but from government departments in the case of the majority of ordinary public schools. As shown, the emotional vulnerability of students is directly related to their ability to learn.

Fourth, there has to be investment in what is often mischaracterised as online learning. There is a difference between effective full online learning and what is more accurately described, in the student experience, as little more than ‘emergency remote teaching’ – a distinction so aptly made in recent writings (see, for example, Hodges et al. 2020). What students often describe reveals perhaps a third version of distance education – emergency rote learning where content-heavy material is downloaded for purposes of coverage of an already crowded (CAPS) curriculum. The key element in this regard is urgent investments in teacher capability and technological capacity that leads to highly interactive, substantive and resource-rich pedagogies rather than simply ‘dumping’ content to learn for examination purposes (see Means et al. 2014).

Fifth, there has to be design elements in online learning that encourage social learning given

the relative isolation of students. This need for human connection is something strongly expressed in student stories and that researchers also point to when it comes to teachers. ‘It will be essential,’ holds Laura Czerniewicz (2020: para 12), ‘to pay attention to human connection in virtual teamwork and to find ways to ensure that human support is continued.’

Sixth, schools should also provide students with concrete guidelines for managing learning in the context of home dwellings that impede learning in different ways. Students could be given direction on how to manage distractions and pace their learning in the absence of a present teacher. Parents need to be informed on how to create dedicated time and spaces for learning even in difficult (such as crowded) home dwellings. The social context of learning in homes cannot be assumed to be uniform, let alone supportive of student learning.

Seventh, government has to plan for investments in infrastructure that serves poor and working-class schools into the future such that the availability of data and devices does not become reduced to the survival of the fittest. Emergency policy action now is no substitute for long-term planning to prevent what is already likely to be an exacerbation of racial and class differences in learning outcomes that compound those legacy deficits of apartheid education and postapartheid inattention to the grinding inequalities of opportunity to learn for the children of the privileged and the children of the poor (Spaull & Jansen 2019).

References

- Ahn, J & McEachin, A. (2017) Student enrollment patterns and achievements in Ohio’s online charter schools. *Educational Researcher*, 46(1): 44–57.
- Czerniewicz, L. (2020, March 15) What we learnt from going online during university shutdowns in South Africa. *PhilOnEdTech* [online]. Available at <https://philonedtech.com/what-we-learnt-from-going-online-during-university-shutdowns-in-south-africa/> [accessed 28 June 2020].
- Henderson, AT & Mapp, KL. (2002) A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family and community on student achievement. *SEDL Annual Synthesis, National Center for Family and Community Schools* [online]. Available at <https://sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf> [accessed 28 June 2020].
- Heppen, JB, Sorensen, N, Allensworth, E, Walters, K, Rickles, J, Taylor, S & Michelman, W. (2017) The struggle to pass algebra: Online vs. face-to-face credit recovery for at-risk urban students. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 10(2): 272–296. doi:10.1080/19345747.2016.1168500
- Hodges C, Moore, S, Lockee, B, Trust, T & Bond, A. (2020, March 27) The difference between emergency remote teaching and online learning. *Educause Review* [online]. Available at <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning> [accessed 28 June 2020].
- Jansen, JD & Kriger, S. (2020) *Who Gets in and Why? Race, Class and Aspiration in South Africa’s Elite Schools*. UCT Press.
- Jansen, JD & O’Ryan, E. (2020) *Learning Under Lockdown: Voices of South Africa’s Children*. CNA.
- Means, B, Bakia, M & Murphy, R. (2014) *Learning Online: What Research Tells Us About Whether, When and How*. Routledge.
- Okita, SY. (2012) Social interactions and learning. In Seel, NM (ed.). *Encyclopedia of the Sciences of Learning*. Springer, 3104–3107

- Olds, K. (2020) Strategies for addressing unequal technological access. *University of Cape Town, Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching* [online]. Available at <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1541zKh3UCtVKAkdITkYHWu4GXVW1IGWEdWFE-I8PeXk/edit#heading=h.k7gjqsmn9m4k> [accessed 28 June 2020].
- Perlman, H & Potenza, E. (2020). *An overview of broadcast learning: Supporting the delivery of the core curriculum at home & in schools*. A research report developed for PILO, 30 June.
- Protopsaltis, S & Baumi, S. (2019) *Does online education live up to its promise? A look at the evidence and implications for federal policy* [online]. Available at <http://mason.gmu.edu/~sprotops/OnlineEd.pdf> [accessed 28 June 2020].
- Soudien, C. (2020) Systemic shock: How Covid-19 exposes our learning challenges in education. *Southern African Review of Education*, 26(1): 6–19.
- Spaull, N & Jansen, JD. (2019) *South African Schooling: The Enigma of Inequality*. Springer.
- Sui-Chu, EH & Willms, JD (1996) Effects of parental involvement on eighth-grade achievement. *Sociology of Education*, 69(2): 126–141.
- Wang, J. (1998). Opportunity to learn: The impacts and policy implications. *Educational Evaluation & Policy Analysis*, 20(3): 137–156.

Notes on the author

Jonathan Jansen is Distinguished Professor in the Department of Education Policy Studies at Stellenbosch University.

Address for correspondence

jonathanjansen@sun.ac.za

Contents of previous issues of SARE

Volume 11

Articles

Professional identity and misconduct: Perspectives of Tanzanian teachers: *Angeline Barrett and William Angisiye*

The effectiveness of the Zimbabwe School Examination Council in rural day secondary schools: *GM Steyn and N Ncube*

Teacher power and student resistance to radical pedagogies: *Juliet Perumal*

Racial discourse in the Commission on Native Education: The making of Bantu identity: *Crain Soudien*

Research note

Alternative basic education in Uganda: *Hannah Kakembo*

Debate and discussion

The challenge for education in these times: War, terror and social justice: *Salim Vally*

Volume 12(1)

Articles

Sociolinguistic research and academic freedom in Malawi: Past and current trends: *Gregory Hankoni Kamwendo*

Contextualizing identity in comparative studies after the demise of national character: *Susara Berkhout*

A hybrid identity among the Sukuma in the Tanzanian Africa Inland Mission: *Fabian Maganda*

Teacher learning: Development in and with social context: *Lynne Slonimsky and Karin Brodie*

The academic profession in South Africa: *Charl Wolhuter and Leonie Higgs*

Book reviews

Sam Govender on *Education in Exile: SOMAFCO, the ANC School in Tanzania, 1978 to 1992* (HSRC Press, 2004)

Charl Wolhuter on *Comparative Education: Continuing Traditions, New Challenges, and New Paradigms* (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003)

Linda Chisholm on *Dilemmas of Culture in African Schools: Youth, Nationalism and the Transformation of Knowledge* (University of Chicago Press, 2005)

Volume 12(2)***Special Issue on Comparative and History of Education in Southern Africa*****Articles**

SACHES and comparative, international and development education in Southern Africa: The challenges and future prospects: *Sheldon Weeks, Harold Herman, Rouaan Maarman and Charl Wolhuter*

Recent developments in History of Education in Western Europe and their significance for Southern Africa: *Charl Wolhuter*

The institutionalization of comparative education discourses in South Africa in the 20th century: *Anne-Marie Bergh and Crain Soudien*

Globalization, knowledge, skills and development: Possible new directions for international and comparative education research in Southern Africa: *Simon McGrath* *Knowing others and knowing self: Patterns of differentiated publishing in education journals from the North and South: Karen Biraimah*

Volume 13(1)***Special Issue on Assessment and Educational Standards*****Articles**

Making our own modernity: Standards, values and benchmarks in the African school in the age of globalization: *Crain Soudien*

'Local knowledge', assessment and international standards: *Kai Horsthemke*

Piloting school-based assessment at middle-basic level: The Zambian experience: *Gabriel Mweemba and Michael Chilala*

Standards-based educational reform and its implication for school-based assessment: lessons from Zimbabwean schools: *Francis Chirume*

Standards – a couple of steps back: *Mark Potterton*

Book review

Jeffy Mukora on *Knowledge, Curriculum and Qualifications for South African Further Education* (HSRC Press, 2006)

Volume 13(2)**Articles**

Lessons from the past two decades: Investment choices for education and growth: *Martin Carnoy*

Aid agency support for education: Gaps between intention and action: *Christopher Colclough*

Why some Education For All and Millennium Development Goals will not be met: Difficulties with goals and targets: *Keith M Lewin*

The role of donors and civil society organisations in the education sector of Malawi: *Joseph Chimombo*

Harnessing private monies to fuel university growth: A case study of Makerere University: *Bidemi Carroll*

Education, skills, sustainability and growth: Complex relations *Kenneth King*

Decentralizing and revitalizing school-based teacher support and continuous professional development at the primary school level: Why it has failed in East Africa: *Akim Okuni*

The developmental state in Africa: *Dani W Nabudere*

Book review

Matseleng Allais on *Gender, Schooling and Global Social Justice* (Routledge, 2007)

Volume 14(1-2)

Special Edition: Teacher Education in Southern Africa

Articles

Teacher education in the Latin American Region: An unfinished business?: *Beatrice Avalos*

Critical perspectives on teacher education in neo-liberal times: Experiences from Ethiopia and Namibia: *Lars Dahlstrom and Brook Lemma*

Learning to teach in post-devolution United Kingdom: A technical or an ethical process?: *Moire Hulme and Ian Menter*

A comparison of Ugandan, English and German teacher education models: *Proscovia Ssemtamu-Namubiru*

Trajectories of restructuring : The changing context for initial teacher education in South Africa: *Glenda Kruss*

Who are we missing? Teacher graduate production in South Africa 1995-2006: *Andrew Paterson and Fabian Arendse*

Towards collaboration rather than co-operation for effective teacher professional development in South Africa: Insights from social practice theory: *Suriamurthee Moonsamy Maistry*

The practicum in pre-service teacher education: A survey of institutional practices: *Chris Reddy, Hannie Menkveld and Eli Bitzer*

Keeping abreast of changing times and demands in education: Implications for teacher education in South Africa: *Fanie Pretorius*

Book reviews

Peter Kallaway on *The Trouble with Ed Schools* (Yale University Press, 2004)

Salim Vally and Carol Spreen on *Teaching in the New South Africa at Merridale High School* (University Press of America, 2006)

Volume 14(3)**Articles**

In(sites): Examining early literacy practices at home and school in rural Malawi and South Africa: *Kerrun Dixon, Jean Place and Foster Kholowa*

Language policy, classroom practice and concept learning in a Grade One Tshivenda classroom: *Azwihangwisi Muthivhi*

Postcards from the edge: Exploring multi-modal strategies for reconciliation pedagogy: *Ana Ferreira*

Children of democracy: Teaching for democracy in early childhood classrooms in South Africa: *Lorayne Excell and Vivien Linington*

The gender sensitivity of Zimbabwean secondary school textbooks: *Dudu T Washington, Jairos Gonye, Rugare Mareva and Jabulani Sibanda*

The history of Biology as a school subject and developments in the subject in contemporary South Africa: *Lesley le Grange*

Double-shift schooling: Motives for implementation in Namibia and Uganda: *Godfrey Kleinhans*

Caught in ideological crossfire: Private schooling in South Africa: *Shireen Motala and Veerle Dieltens*

Book review

George Makubalo on *HRD Review 2008* (HSRC Press, 2007)

Volume 15(1)**Articles**

Partnerships for educational development in Africa: Evidence from Japanese professional development programmes for science teachers in Ghana and South Africa: *Zacchaeus Bukari and Loyiso C Jita*

The school cluster system as an educational reform: Evidence from Namibia and Zimbabwe: *Vitallis Chikoko and Lydia Aipinge*

Procedural and substantive knowledge: Some implications of an outcomes-based history curriculum in South Africa: *Carol Bertram*

Towards a definition of protocols when embedding the national and the civic in a history curriculum: *Robert Guyver*

'Nobody says how people died of heartache!': Constructing a primary narrative in a pedagogical setting: *Sofie MMA Geschier*

Curriculum as a product of an activity system: Translating policy in the teaching of History: *Rejoice Nsibande and Maropeng Modiba*

Book review

Hlengani Baloyi on *The Challenge of Learning: Improving the Quality of Basic Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Quality, Equality and Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2008)

Volume 15(2)**Articles**

Employment equity and Western Cape educators, 2002–2007: *Clarence Williams*

Tertiary graduates: Earnings and employment prospects in the South African labourmarket: *Adjoa Acquah*

Preference for teaching as a career among students at the University of Botswana: *MR Montsi and HJ Nenty*

Preparation of teachers for multigrade teaching: Global lessons for South Africa: *Byron Brown*

Hidden and subtle effects of racism in law and school policy in post-apartheid South Africa: *Isaac Ntshoe*

Youth becoming across the rural-urban landscape: The case of Fuzile Ali at a Muslim community school in Cape Town: *Aslam Fataar*

Scarce skills and public technical and vocational education and training in South Africa: Twin challenges or two sides of the same coin?: *Salim Akojee*

Book review

Yvonne Reed on *Key Issues in Teacher Education: A Sourcebook for Teacher Educators in Developing Countries* (Macmillan, 2009)

Volume 16(1)**Articles**

‘Southern Theory’ and its relevance for comparative education: *Crain Soudien*

Civic education in the context of South Africa’s history and political struggle: *Peter Kallaway*

Outcomes-based education and its (dis)contents: Learner-centred pedagogy and the education crisis in South Africa: *Carol Anne Spreen and Salim Vally*

A critique of South Africa’s National Human Resources Development Strategies: *Andre Kraak*

Curriculum planning and reform in sub-Saharan Africa: *Anil Kanjee, Yusuf Sayed and Diana Rodriguez*

Initial teacher education in selected Southern and East African countries: Common issues and ongoing challenges: *Chiwimbiso Kwenda and Maureen Robinson*

An encounter with supervisors’ and institutional discourses: A personal reflective account: *Chinedu Okeke*

Book reviews

Mineo Poleo on *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science* (Sydney, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2007)

Dorcas Molefe on *Multilingualism in Education and Communities in Southern Africa* (Botswana: UB Tromso Collaborative Programme for San Research and Capacity Building, 2009)

Godfrey Kleinhans on *Confronting the Shadow Education System. What Government Policies for what Private Tutoring?* (Paris: UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning, 2009)

Obituary: Mineo Poleo

Volume 16(2)

Articles

'The complications and challenges of sustaining a new journal during its formative years: *Sheldon Weeks*

A periodical of its time: A brief history of the Journal of Education 1969–2009: *Ken Harley, Wayne Hugo and Volker Wedekind*

The pragmatics of education journals: The case of the International Journal of Educational Development: *Carol Anne Spreen and SalimVally*

The decline of educational research in South Africa: Reconstituting the place of reason: *Yusef Waghid*

The politics and culture of education research publishing in South Africa: A brief commentary: *Beverley Thaver*

Volume 17

Articles

From boys to men: The education and institutional care of coloured boys in the early twentieth century: *Azeem Badroodien*

The rise of 'class apartheid' in accessing secondary schools in Sandton, Gauteng: *Jarred Bell and Tracey Morton McKay*

Modalities of mobility: Johannesburg learners' daily negotiations of the uneven terrain of the city: *Illana Lancaster*

Fresh grounds: African migrants in a South African primary school: *Crispin Hemson*

Ruth First as educator: An untold story: *Alan Wieder*

Vocational teacher identity: Spanning the divide between the academy and the workplace: *Joy Papier*

A comparison of preferences for real-life situations that could be used in school mathematics in three SADC countries: *Lorna Holtman, Cyril Julie, Monde Mbekwa, David Mtetwa and Minenhle Ngcobo*

School history in Zimbabwe's political conundrum: Is patriotic history reflected in the examination system?: *Nathan Moyo and Maropeng M Modiba*

Book reviews

Adam Cooper on *Growing Up in the New South Africa: Childhood and adolescence in post-apartheid Cape Town* (HSRC Press, 2010)

Corene de Wet on *A history of schooling in South Africa: Method and context* (Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers, 2011)

Volume 18(1)**Articles**

The forgotten history of South African education: *Peter Kallaway*

The struggle for the curriculum at the ANC's Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College in Tanzania, 1978–1992: *Rajuvelu Govender*

I want my family to be white': Coloured adolescent schoolgirls' articulations of identity in a South African peri-urban community: *Ronelle Carolissen, Sherine van Wyk and Melody Pick-Cornelius*

Teachers addressing HIV&AIDS-related challenges resourcefully: *Tilda Loots, Liesel Ebersöhn, Ronél Ferreira and Irma Eloff*

Measuring the impact of educational interventions on the academic performance of black academic development students: *Leonard Smith*

Towards higher education in a post-neoliberal future: A comment on Ethiopia: *Jana Zehle*

Book reviews

Thabisile Nkambule on *Research-led Teacher Education* (Pearson Press, 2012)

Linda Chisholm on *History Wars and the Classroom: Global Perspectives* (Information Age Publishing, Inc., 2012)

Lorinda Minnaar on *The Low Achievement Trap: Comparing Schooling in Botswana and South Africa* (HSRC Press, Stanford and University of Botswana, 2012)

Volume 18(2)**Articles**

Introducing the challenge of converting access to quality in education: *Crain Soudien, Shireen Motala and Aslam Fataar*

Gender equity in educational access in India: *Madhumita Bandyopadhyay*

Parental involvement in early childhood care and education: Promoting children's sustainable access to early schooling through social-emotional and literacy development: *Jacob Marriote Ngwaru*

Challenges to gender equality and access in education: Perspectives from South Africa and Sudan: *Vuyokazi Nomlomo, Alawia Farag and Halla Holmarsdottir*

Your house is on fire, your children all gone: Boarding institutions for children living on farms and the rights of parents: *Veerle Dieltiens*

Monitoring the right to education for refugees, migrants and asylum seekers: *Carol Anne Spreen and Salim Vally*

The push-out factors that cause children to drop out of basic school in Ghana: *Eric Daniel Ananga*

Getting in and staying there: Exclusion and inclusion in South African schools: *Yusuf Sayed and Shireen Motala*

Review essay

The Low Achievement Trap: Comparing Schooling in Botswana and South Africa: *Dorcas B Molefe, Nkobi Owen Pansiri and Sheldon G Weeks*

Volume 19(1)**Articles**

The textbook saga and corruption in education: *Linda Chisholm*

Towards 'Discourse 4': Re-orientating research discourse to address a key aspect of South Africa's education crisis: *Laurence Wright*

A historical exploration of physical education at Wesley Teachers' Training School, Cape Town (1915-1966): *Francois Cleophas*

A critical assessment of research on South African further education and training colleges: *Lesley Powell*

Is access inclusion? Exploring understandings of girls' inclusion in a Tanzanian secondary school: *Doria Daniels and Margaret Philip Mwingira*

First-year university student teachers' beliefs about teaching and the teaching profession: The case of Rwanda: *Gabriel Nizeyimana and Ruksana Osman*

Prevalence of the formalistic paradigm in African schools: *Gerard Guthrie*

Six failures of the pedagogic imagination: Bernstein, Beeby and the search for an optimal pedagogy for the poor: *Wayne Hugo and Volker Wedekind*

Starting from pedagogical zero in 'developing' contexts? Let's re-imagine!: A response to Hugo and Wedekind: *Lew Zipin*

The ordering principles and operating principles of pedagogy: A reply to Zipin: *Wayne Hugo and Volker Wedekind*

Volume 19(2)**Articles**

Cutting pice and running away: Discipline, education and choice at the UMCA Boys' Industrial House, Zanzibar, 1901–1905: *Morgan Robinson*

The government teacher who resolved to do what he could himself. Wynberg, Cape Colony, 1841–1863: *Helen Ludlow*

'It was a sort of soft war that one waged': Teacher education at the University of Cape Town, 1976-1994: *Charles Dorn*

With a church comes a school: Protestant mission education in Madagascar: *Ellen Vea Rosnes*

From domestic servants to girl Wayfarers at St Agnes', Rosettenville: Phases in the life of a South African mission school, 1909–1935: *Debbie Gaitskell*

The making of white schooling in the Cape Colony in the late nineteenth century: *Crain Soudien*

Book review

Healdtown: Under the Eagle's Wings: The Legacy of an African Mission School: *Mandy Goedhals*

Volume 20(1)**Articles**

Working for whose benefit? An analysis of local development NGOs in relation to the communities in Ethiopia: *Yoshiko Tonegawa*

Engaging community members in enhancing educational quality: Studies of the implementation of the Primary School Improvement Programme in Malawi: *Mark Ginsburg, Rudi Klauss, Felix Nankhuni, Luka Nyirongo, Joan Sullivan Omowoyela, Emily Richardson, Reinier Terwindt and Carrie Willmann*

Enhancing the learning environment in Malawian universities: The challenge of neopatrimonialism: *Lester Brian Shawa and Ruksana Osman*

The C Major scale as index of 'back to basics' in South African education: A critique of the curriculum assessment policy statement: *Susan Harrop-Allin and Cynthia Kros*

Shifting discourses and assumptions about teacher learning in South African teacher development policy: *Carol Bertram*

Setting the pace for a new race towards an HIV-free society: Selected HIV and sex discourses of teachers: *M Noor Davids*

Teacher knowledge and employer-driven professional development: A critical analysis of the Gauteng Department of Education programmes: *Francine de Clercq and Yael Shalem*

Volume 20(2)**Articles**

Education financing strategies and the neoliberal project in Mozambique: *Adelino Chissale and Michael Cross*

Active participation in Namibia's democratic education system: Challenges for the girl child: *Rachel Ndinela Shanyana and Michael Cross*

Illuminative evaluation of the Expressive Arts curriculum in Malawi primary schools: *Grames Chirwa and Devika Naidoo*

The role of active parent community school committees in achieving strong relative school performance in Zambian community schools: *Zachariah J Falconer-Stout, Kalisto Kalimaposo and Eunifridah Simuyaba*

Parental involvement and access to learning: A perspective from Gauteng and the Eastern Cape, South Africa: *Shireen Motala and Viwe Luxomo*

Some theoretical considerations of 'engaged scholarship' and 'use-oriented research' at a new university in South Africa: The Vaal University of Technology: *Bernadette Johnson and David Cooper*

Book review

Selling Out Education: National Qualifications Frameworks and the Neglect of Knowledge: *Linda Chisholm*

Volume 21(1)**Articles**

On the cosmology of cumulative progressive hallucination: *Gerard Guthrie*

Of false-starts, blind spots, cul-de-sacs and legitimacy struggles: The curriculum debate in South African higher education: *Crain Soudien*

Education, science and mental difference in South Africa: *Azeem Badroodien*

Formative elements in the making of a young radical teacher in an ethos of resistance to educational and broader social marginalisation in early twentieth-century Cape Town: *Yunus Omar*

Comparing history textbooks in apartheid South Africa and the German Democratic Republic, 1950–1990: *Linda Chisholm*

Experiences of parents with children diagnosed with reading difficulties: *Lorna M Dreyer*

Volume 21(2)**Articles**

Using agency-space and aspiration-scape to interpret grassroots perspectives on secondary education in South Africa: *David Balwanze*

The organisation of schools that succeed against the odds: *Ursula Hoadley and Jaamia Galant*

Towards a ‘self-schooled’ habitus: High school students’ educational navigations in an impoverished rural West Coast township: *Jerome Joorst*

Making place: High school girls’ place-making practices and identifications in the light of the ‘expressive culture’ of their independent school in peri-urban Cape Town: *Elzahn Rinquest*

Chasing curricular justice: How complex ethical vexations of redistributing cultural capital bring dialectics to the door of aporia: *Lew Zipin*

Moosa’s aporia: A critical interrogation of the text *What is a Madrasa?*: *Aslam Fataar*

Can Foucault liberate madrasa knowledge from commodification practices?: A critical engagement with Ebrahim Moosa’s concept of madrasa knowledge: *M Noor Davids*

What is a Madrasa? Unveiling narratives from the margins: *Hasina Banu Ebrahim*

Book reviews

University Access and Success. Capabilities, Diversity and Social Justice: *Alejandra Boni*

Engaging Schooling Subjectivities across Post-Apartheid Urban Spaces: *Jyothi Chabilall*

Volume 22**Articles**

Creating sustainable teacher education ecologies: A people’s education for people’s power reimaged: *Sechaba Mahlomaholo*

Performativity and authenticity in higher education: From reductionist to ecological thinking: *Petronella van Niekerk*

Theorising student constructions of quality education in a South African university: *Kehdinga George Fomunyam*

Harnessing contextuality: A sustainable ecological model for distance learning in a complex world: *Louise Schmidt*

The evolution of resources provision in basic education in South Africa: A projectile with diminishing returns: *Jonas Seabata Kabi*

Journeying into the past: Lesotho sexuality education curriculum history: *Mathabo Khau*

Resilience in the continuum of support, juxtaposing inclusive education and special education systems: *Ruth Mampane*

Periodisation of mathematics teacher knowledge for teaching: A construction of bricolage: Moeketsi Simon Mosia

Book review

Gender, Experience, and Knowledge in Adult Learning: Alisoun's Daughters: *Judy Harris*

Volume 23

Articles

From teachers to teaching: Locating teachers in pedagogy in the post-apartheid South African education and training system: *Nazir Carrim*

Learner poor performance: Provoking Bourdieu's key concepts in analysing school education in South Africa: *Labby Ramrathan*

The dilemmas of cooperative governance in the Department of Basic Education in South Africa: *John Shebabese Maluleke, Chika MT Sehoole and Everard Weber*

Ideology and the good society in South Africa: The education policies of the Democratic Alliance: *Yusuf Sayed and Robert van Niekerk*

Resegregation and recreation of racism in education in a post-apartheid setting: *Isaac Ntshoe*

Role of the practicum in teacher preparation for multilingual classrooms in Tanzania: *Anjum Halai and Peter Kajoro*

Alternative pathways to universal basic education: Through the lens of Almajiri nomadic schooling in northern Nigeria: *Victor Nnadozie and Michael Anthony Samuel*

Volume 24

Articles

HIV-AIDS, decolonisation and the South African curriculum: Explorations on the edges of curriculum learning: *Crain Soudien*

Troubling 'race' as a category of explanation in social science research and analysis: *Salim Vally and*

Enver Motala

Challenges facing life orientation educators in the delivery of sexuality education in South African schools: *Gavin George, Leigh Adams Tucker, Saadhna Panday and Faith Khumalo*

Teacher views of the implementation of the HIV/AIDS curriculum in Zimbabwean primary schools: *Starlin Musingarabwi and Sylvan Blygnaut*

Decolonising history of education in South African teacher education: *Linda Chisholm, Michelle Friedman and Queenta Anyele Sindoh*

Commemorating the 50th anniversary of forced removals: Contested District Six discourses: *M Noor Davids*

Reframing the quality education discourse via a capability analysis of Quintile 1 (poor) school communities: *Paul Nwati Munje and Rouaan Maarma*

Volume 25(1)

Articles

Professional judgment in and for complex social and educational contexts: *Elizabeth Walton, Douglas Andrews and Ruksana Osman*

Pushed out! The perils of teacher professionalism in dysfunctional South African teaching contexts: *Thabo Msibi*

Complexities of professional practice in South African education: *Nazir Carrim*

Identities in transition: Professional identity construction by student teachers in England and South Africa at the end of their university-based training: *Viv Wilson and Mirna Nel*

Preservice student views of teacher judgement and practice in the age of artificial intelligence: *Jacqueline Batchelor and Nadine Petersen*

Developing standards for inclusive teaching in South Africa: A dilemma analysis: *Elizabeth Walton and Lee Rusznyak*

Inclusive education as a localised project in complex contexts: A South African case study: *Petra Engelbrecht and Nithi Muthukrishna*

Governance in psycho-pedagogic practices for equity and inclusive education: *Therese Mungah Shalo Tchombe*

Contributions of social workers' professional judgements within a multidisciplinary team in mental health care: *Emily Walton and Edmarie Pretorius*

Volume 25(2)

Articles

Challenges of decolonisation in higher education: *Fazal Rizvi*

Academic conversation: From the shadows to the university's epistemic centre – engaging the (mis)recognition struggles of students at the post-apartheid university: *Aslam Fataar*

Large-scale improvement interventions in the education system: PILO's contribution to the theory of change in education: *Francine de Clercq and Yael Shalem*

Transforming the conversation: The essential role of teachers in ensuring quality education for all : *Carol Anne Spreen, Jill Knapczyk and Alexandria Meier*

The schoolboy cluster as a complex learning ecology: An agentic social space for socially marginalised youth: *Doria Daniels and Lynne Damons*

A paradox of defined relationships between the spheres of government in South Africa: *John Shebabese Maluleke*

Sexuality education beyond the life orientation class: Teacher perceptions across the curriculum: *John Chaka, Christa Beyers and Eben Swanepoel*

Future directions of economics education for teachers in South Africa: A review of current trends: *Carina America and Lara Skelly*

A complex heritage: A survey of the histories of historically black universities in South Africa: *Bronwyn Strydom*

Notes to contributors

Southern African Review of Education (SARE) is the journal of the Southern African Comparative and History of Education Society (SACHES). It was previously published together with **Education with Production** (EWP), the journal of the Foundation for Education with Production.

SARE will appear at least once a year. Contributors are welcome to submit articles on educational issues with specific reference to educational policy, comparative education, sociology of education, history of education and education with production.

Beginning with Volume 5 in 1999, articles submitted will be anonymously refereed. Articles are accepted on the understanding that they have **not** been published or submitted for publication elsewhere. Articles or review essays should not be longer than 8 000 words and may include maps, figures and tables. Reports on research, book reviews and critical comments should be limited to 2 000 words.

Contributions should be submitted electronically. All pages should be numbered. Authors should not use programs like EndNotes to generate lists of references automatically, as these do not transfer for typesetting purposes.

The manuscript should be submitted bearing the title of the paper and an abstract of 150-200 words together with keywords on a separate page. Maps, figures, tables and illustrations should be supplied on separate pages and not included as part of the text. Their approximate position in the text should be indicated. Maps, figures and illustrations should also be provided as separate electronic files (jpg or tiff) with a resolution of at least 150 dpi.

The title of the contribution and the name and address where the work was carried out should be provided on a separate page. The address of the author who will handle correspondence should be clearly indicated. Telephone and fax number(s) and e-mail address(es) for the author(s) should be submitted as well. Authors should supply brief biographical material for the 'Notes on the author'. In a covering letter the author(s) must state that the contribution has not been published, is not being published or considered for publication elsewhere, and will not be submitted for publication unless rejected by the editorial board of SARE or withdrawn by the authors.

Notes

Footnotes are *not required* ('If it is worth saying, say it in the text, or not at all'). Please cite material in the text as follows: (Hirson 1979: 9) *or* (Kahn 1997: 202) *or* (Swartz 1993: 181) *or* (Brock 1974: 186; Bray & Steward 1998: 66).

References

For books:

Hirson, B. (1979) *Year of Fire, Year of Ash: The Soweto Revolt: Roots of a Revolution?*

London: Zed Press.

Morrow, S, Maaba, B & Pulumani, L. (2004) *Education in Exile: SOMAFSCO, the ANC School in Tanzania, 1978 to 1992*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.

Bray, M & Steward, L (eds). (1998) *Examination Systems in Small States: Comparative Perspectives on Policies, Models and Operations*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

For articles:

Kahn, MJ. (1991) Attitudes of Botswana senior school pupils towards agriculture. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 11(3): 201-208.

For chapters in books:

Swartz, D. (1993) Curriculum change, certification and assessment: The case of Zimbabwe, 1979-1990. In Taylor, N (ed.). *Inventing Knowledge: Contests in Curriculum Construction*. Cape Town: Maskew Millar Longman, 169-189.

For unpublished theses and papers:

Brock, S. (1974) James Stewart and Lovedale: A reappraisal of missionary attitudes and African responses in the Eastern Cape, 1870-1905. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh.

For sources on the Internet:

Furlong, J & Hagger, H. (2006) *Review of Initial Teacher Training Provision in Wales: A Report to the Welsh Assembly Government* [online]. Available at www.learn.wales.gov.uk/scripts/ [accessed 4 March 2008].

Papers that are accepted become the copyright of **SARE**, unless otherwise specifically agreed. Neither the editors nor the publishers accept responsibility for opinions expressed or for the accuracy of the data presented.

Authors will receive a copy of the journal in which their article is published.

All correspondence should be directed to the SARE Editor, Azeem Badroodien, at Azeem.badroodien@uct.ac.za.

ISSN 1563-4418

SACHES

Southern African Comparative and History of Education Society



Jo-Anne Koch
E-mail: joanne.adams@saches.co.za
Tel: +27 84 929 0170

PO Box 13455
HATFIELD
0028

SACHES MEMBERSHIP

Surname		Title	
First Name		Initials	
Institution			
E-mail address			
Postal Address			
Postal Code		Country	

Description

Membership fee

SACHES Membership 2019/2020

African Countries – R500
Elsewhere – R550

Banking Details

Bank: ABSA
Account Name: SACHES
Account Number: 2352-7847
Account Type: Active Save
Branch: Claremont
Branch Code: 632005
Swift code: ABSA za jj (for members abroad)

Use name as reference

PAYMENTS

Payments should be made by EFT into the above account. Please send completed form and proof of payment to the SACHES Treasurer, Jo-Anne Koch at joanne.adams@saches.co.za.

Contents

Aslam Fataar and Azeem Badroodien	
<i>Editorial notes</i>	1
ARTICLES	
Crain Soudien	
<i>Systemic shock: How Covid-19 exposes our learning challenges in education</i>	6
Yusuf Sayed and Marcina Singh	
<i>Evidence and education policy making in South Africa during Covid-19: Promises, researchers and policymakers in an age of unpredictability</i>	20
Sara Black, Carol Anne Spreen and Salim Vally	
<i>Education, Covid-19 and care: Social inequality and social relations of value in South Africa and the United States</i>	40
Stephanie Allais and Carmel Marock	
<i>Educating for work in the time of Covid-19: Moving beyond simplistic ideas of supply and demand</i>	62
Shireen Motala and Kirti Menon	
<i>In search of the ‘new normal’: Reflections on teaching and learning during Covid-19 in a South African university</i>	80
Linda Chisholm	
<i>Corona, crisis and curriculum: History of health education in South Africa</i>	100
Shafika Isaacs	
<i>Every child is a national (playing) asset: A portrait of a Soweto boy’s contradictory worlds of play and performance before and during the Covid-19 lockdown</i>	116
Doria Daniels	
<i>Reimagining parents’ educational involvement during the Covid-19 lockdown</i>	134
Nick Taylor	
<i>School lessons from the Covid-19 lockdown</i>	148
Jonathan Jansen	
<i>Data or bread? A policy analysis of student experiences of learning under lockdown</i>	167
BACK MATTER	
<i>Contents of previous issues of SARE</i>	182
<i>Notes to Contributors</i>	195
<i>SACHES Membership form</i>	197