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COVID-19 and Education in the Global North

Storytelling and Alternative Pedagogies

Edited by
Ruby Turok-Squire

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ISBN 978-3-031-02464-1 ISBN 978-3-031-02469-6 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-02469-6>

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This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

FOREWORD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bath Spa University
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October 2021

THE STORY OF *COVID-19* AND EDUCATION IN THE GLOBAL NORTH: STORYTELLING AND ALTERNATIVE PEDAGOGIES

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

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

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

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

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

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

University of Warwick, Coventry, UK

Ruby Lindiwe Turok-Squire

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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