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Introduction to the Special Issue

The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Impact on Educational Institutions

by Linsay DeMartino

The Global Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis

The COVID-19 crisis continues to impact everyone across the globe. It is apparent no one is spared by the devastation caused by this virus. Previously, global citizens never considered a pandemic affecting every facet of our lives. Our social, health, economic, and political spheres are forever changed. In the field of education, adjustments were made swiftly, if not overnight. Everyone felt the pressures brought on by the pandemic and were drowning in the imperative need to radically shift their practices and provide an array of supports to their students, faculty, staff, and communities.

The Very Near Past

On January 9, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that Chinese authorities determined the influenza-type outbreak was caused by a novel coronavirus (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). Then, from January 10-12, 2020, the WHO published a package of guidance documents for countries, covering topics related to the management and mitigation of an outbreak of the novel coronavirus. Among other topics, this guidance included prevention and control, risk communication and community engagement, and travel advice (WHO, 2020). Soon after, on January 30th, the Director-General of the WHO “declared the novel coronavirus outbreak a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC), the organization’s highest level of alarm” (WHO, 2020). On February 11th, in order to avoid any inaccuracies or stigma attached to a certain geographic area, animal, or group of people, WHO announced the widespread novel coronavirus would be named COVID-19 (WHO 2020). Finally, on March 11th, the Director-General stated, “we cannot say this loudly enough, or clearly enough, or often enough...all countries can still change the course of this pandemic...detect, test, treat, isolate, trace, and mobilize their people in the response” (WHO 2020). Thus, WHO determined the COVID-19 outbreak was now considered a pandemic. As of February 25, 2021, over 112.2 million cases and 2.4 million deaths have been reported worldwide (WHO, 2021), and the WHO expects that this numbers will unfortunately continue to climb higher by the time of this publication’s release and beyond.

The Present Impact of COVID-19 on Education

Pivoting to the impacts of COVID-19 on education, most K-12 and institutions of higher education shifted to emergency remote instruction and operations in the fall of 2020. As Hong Kong returned to remote learning (Chor, 2020), the three largest public-school districts in the United States (U.S.), including New York City Public Schools, Los Angeles Unified School District, and Chicago Public Schools (CPS), and so many other PK-12 school districts started their school year online (Hubler & Goldstein, 2020). In fact, given the recent rising number of COVID-19 cases and extensions of stay-at-home advisories (Rosenberg-Douglas et al., 2021) at the beginning of the spring 2021 semester, many students remain in the remote classroom, while some have returned to in-person classrooms. For example, 6,500 CPS students in pre-kindergarten and special education arrived for in-person classes at the start of the second semester, with a phase-in approach planned for kindergarten through eighth graders by February 1, 2021 (Rosenberg-Douglas, et al. 2021). Simultaneously, major international universities transitioned to mostly online learning at the onset of the pandemic, as well. For example, due to an alarming spike in COVID-19 cases, the University of Southern California (USC) announced that undergraduate students would take all, or most of their courses online, reversing course from earlier plans to invite undergraduates back to campus for an in-person fall semester (Redden, 2020). In addition, major universities continue to delay the return of students by extending remote classes and operations into the spring, like Stanford University and the University of Pittsburgh (Ruark, 2020).

Planning and Changing Special Issue

As co-editors for the re-launch of the open-access journal, *Planning and Changing*, Dr. S. Gavin Weiser and I curated a selection of articles written by a brilliant group of international scholars with the purpose of documenting the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the changes and planning necessary to attend to at the intersection of education in order to better inform our decision-making under future crisis. In this Special Issue on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in education, the reader will find articles from both the PreK-12 and higher education perspectives.

In the PreK-12 section, Jennifer Antoni begins with her article, “Disengaged and Nearing Departure: Students at Risk for Dropping Out in the Age of COVID-19,” where her robust review of literature indicates the need to examine the turbulence of the current educational context considering COVID-19 pandemic and the associated school closures for disengaged high school students. Next, in “The (Im)possibilities of Equitable Education of Multilingual English Learners in Remote Teaching: An EL Teacher Survey of the Great Lakes Region,” Jenna Cushing-Leubner,

Trish Morita-Mullaney, Michelle C. S. Greene, Amy Stolpestad, and Michelle Benegas explore the response to the sudden shift to emergency remote teaching and learning experienced by teachers of emergent bilinguals labeled “English Language Learners” due to COVID-19 pandemic. The third article in our PreK-12 sequence is “Mother School Leaders Negotiate ‘Blurred Lines’ Between Work and Home During COVID-19,” by Lisa Crosslin and Lucy E. Bailey, addresses the challenging experiences and “blurred boundaries” between work and home of school mother/leaders during the pandemic.

In the higher education section, Donna Sayman and Heidi Cornell’s “‘Building the Plane While Trying to Fly’: Exploring Special Education Teacher Narratives during the COVID-19 Pandemic,” presents a qualitative narrative inquiry research design to explore special education teacher narratives related to their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Next, in “First-Year Students’ Experience in Higher Education in Chile in Times of COVID-19,” Rosa Bahamondes Rivera and Erika Abarca Millán studied first-year university students’ experiences with an emphasis on the aid and support provided to them by the university to succeed in their academic programs. Also, Susan Zoll, Natasha Feinberg, Beth Pinheiro, and Leslie Sevey’s “Found in Oz, the Ruby Slippers to Embracing Digital Classrooms Through Appreciative Inquiry,” closes our section in higher education, where researchers mapped their journey of transforming their instruction and delivery by collectively re-envisioning the upcoming semester’s online teaching approach. Finally, S. Gavin Weiser concludes the special issue with “Taking a Pause to Consider a Radical New: Or All (Re)envisioning is Science-Fiction Work,” where ze extends the conversation by suggesting this pandemic has given us a pause to (re)consider a radical new vision for education.

Lastly, it was a privilege to collaborate with the talented scholars included in this special issue, and I hope you will find the following literature enlightening and pragmatic for your work in 2021 and beyond. As the pandemic continues, we know information about COVID-19 changes rapidly and we need to continue to study its effects on PreK12 and higher education. However, it is important to note that the COVID-19 pandemic affords us an opportunity to dig more deeply into our educational practices as a way to reset education.

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