Mapping Possibilities: Creative Educational Responses to the Time-Space Disruptions of Climate, COVID, and Inequality

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Abstract

> *With the COVID-19 pandemic winding down, there is a strong push to return to "normal." But a too fast and unreflective attempt to get back to how things were carries its own risks. A rushed return to normal could limit the learning that should arise from an experience of this magnitude and could compound the loss already endured. This special issue, "Mapping Possibilities: Creative Educational Responses to the Time-Space Disruptions of Climate, COVID, and Inequality," is an effort to record and share some of the learnings educators have developed over the course of the triple pandemic. We have chosen this framing for a number of reasons.*
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> - *We live in the context of time-space, so this framing makes possible an approach of breadth and inclusion.*
> - *The disruptions of COVID have the potential to spark a deep reordering of the time-space parameters of educational thinking and practice.*
> - *Climate and associated disruptions have been implicated in the zoonotic origins of COVID, and the pandemic has been described as a preview of the impacts of climate change and our response a kind of rehearsal.*
> - *The disruptions have been experienced unequally, impacting different countries, communities, and individuals in different ways and with different degrees of intensity.*
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> *Change inevitably creates possibilities. The greater the change, the greater the range of new possibilities created. Negative possibilities are often realized through inertia or negligence. Good and constructive possibilities are only realized through active imagination and collaborative effort.*

Keywords: education, time-space disciplines, disruption, triple pandemic, inequality, COVID, climate

Reflecting on Disruption

Over the course of the past year, availability of effective vaccines and fatigue with the restrictions implemented to reduce the spread of COVID-19 have combined to drive a rush back to normality. On many levels, this is understandable. The scale of disruption, fear, loss, and grief has been such

that people have wanted COVID to be "over" and—despite the continuing global toll of the pandemic—a consensus has emerged that it is. Again, the urge to go back to "the before," to "normal," is easy to understand. But a too fast and unreflective attempt to get back to how things were carries its own risks.

As of the publication date of this special issue, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates the global total of COVID-related deaths at more than 6.9 million people, close to half of whom are thought to have been aged 60 or older. Developed on the basis of the reports of different governments and government agencies, these numbers may represent a gross underestimate. According to UNESCO, the number of children kept out of school at the peak of the COVID response was 1.6 billion (UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, 2021). At the same time, the shutdowns that figured prominently in the initial pre-vaccine response brought clear skies to cities long tormented by pollution and reduced the global output of CO_2 by 17% over the course of 2020 (University of East Anglia, 2020). Communications technologies were deployed in new and creative ways to enable people to connect and interact; at the same time the preciousness of actual presence was brought home to people everywhere in new and powerful ways. The pandemic impacted the world with a suddenness and simultaneity that made long-bruited ideas of interdependence—both among humans and between humans and non-human nature—an immediate and pressing reality.

In short, the world's people underwent a series of profound disruptions which, while simultaneous and ubiquitous in many senses, were experienced in highly uneven and unequal ways. To the extent that a rushed return to normal limits the scope of learning that should arise from an experience of this magnitude, it will refract and compound the loss already endured by so many.

This special issue, "Mapping Possibilities: Creative Educational Responses to the Time-Space Disruptions of Climate, COVID, and Inequality," is an effort to record and share some of the learnings educators have developed over the course of the (still on-going) triple pandemic. We have chosen this framing concept for a number of reasons.

- We live in the "painful kingdom of time and place" (Emerson, 1849). Such a framing offers the potential for an approach of the kind of breadth and inclusion required to consider the experience of recent years.
- The basic spatio-temporal orders of modern education can be identified, at least in outline, and have been generally stable for some 150 years. COVID profoundly disrupted these and has the potential to spark a deep reordering of the time-space parameters of educational thinking and practice.
- Climate and associated environmental disruptions have been implicated in the zoonotic origins of COVID, creating conditions for the virus to jump from another species to humans. Further, COVID has been described as a preview of the impacts of climate change and our response a kind of rehearsal. (What, for example, will be the long-term political outcomes of hundreds of millions of young people witnessing their governments having undertaken previously unimaginable forms of action in response to COVID even as an inertial commitment to business-as-usual prevails in much of the response to the threats posed by climate change?)
- The disruptions have been experienced unequally, impacting different countries, communities, and individuals in different ways and with different degrees of intensity. There have been high-tech knowledge workers enjoying freedom from long commutes and restricted office spaces, and there have been children standing outside restaurants

and coffee shops in hopes of finding the wifi bandwidth they need to connect to their classes; large numbers of children have simply disappeared from the educational map.

The Time-Space of Modern Education

In the modern era, it has been assumed that space-time extends evenly with an objectivity fully isolated from the subjective concerns of human beings. Major institutional developments of the 18th and 19th centuries were premised on this understanding and the particular forms of discipline which they both made possible and demanded. Considering first the spatial relations, we have the emergence of the nation-state, with its stress on clearly defined national territories (and assumptions of cultural, linguistic, or other forms of sameness); industrialization, centered on the space of the factory; and education, whose public primary practices had their spatial locus in the school. The spatio-temporal disciplinary regime of these institutions can be summed up in their demand that large numbers of people come together in the same place and the same time, often within complex patterns of repetition and variation.

In medieval and early modern societies, while people might gather once or a number of times each year for fairs, festivals, or pilgrimages, modern classrooms, factories, and armies require the consistent observation of the spatio-temporal discipline of gathering regularly at the same place at the same time.

In the case of the school, there is the additional temporal discipline of age-segregated grades, in which the same content is taught to children born between the same, arbitrarily defined, dates. The degree of detail and finality with which generational cohorts were subdivided and sorted was something unimaginable in earlier eras. Birth one day before or after the cut-off date for a grade defined both the materials that would be studied in that year and the peers with whom these would be studied. The idea, and perhaps more, the language, of a factory model of the school has been widely criticized, and any analogizing between the two must be conducted with care. But in terms of the overall structure of spatio-temporal discipline, the parallels between these two central institutions of modernity is hard to overlook.

Superimposed on this fine-grained system of division and discipline we can see the larger demarcations of the full span of life, with an initial period of formal learning to be followed by the years or decades of work. In the logic of capitalist production, these correspond to the periods of investment and recovery. This educational system, which developed and reached completion over the course of the nineteenth century, has been almost universally adopted the world over; it has been the normative practice continuing with only minor variation to our present time.

The COVID pandemic wrought profound disruptions in this educational system in ways that have brought to the surface underlying inequalities, including with regard to access to spatio-temporal resources.

In the United State, public schooling as an entitlement appears in policy and law by the late 1700s, and public schools were designed to maintain socio-economic and racial segregation and exclusion based on ability (Applied Research Center, 2013). As such, their spaces, assumptions, behavioral expectations, and temporal disciplines represent racialized Whiteness and the project of White conditioning. From the 1950's to the present day, Black, Brown, Indigenous, individuals with disabilities and multilingual communities have used legal decisions and precedent to demand educational equality. Educational attainment and disciplinary data confirm that schools pre-COVID continued to enact racial isolation, educational inequality and exclusionary practices. As long as student outcomes are demographically differentiable and disproportionate, it is difficult to

conduct authentic analysis without consideration to applications of critical race theory to education, specifically the presence of Whiteness in schooling (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Similar self-perpetuating regimes of inequality can be observed in societies around the world (Wilkerson, 2020).

Mapping Possibilities

Change inevitably creates possibilities. The greater the change, the greater the range of new possibilities created. It is crucial that we recognize the scale of the changes, and thus possibilities, that we are experiencing now, and think about the direction we want these changes to take—which of the possibilities of the present moment we want to realize and which we must work to forestall. This is important because negative possibilities are often realized through inertia or negligence. Good and constructive possibilities are only realized through active imagination and collaborative effort.

These are the qualities embodied in the work of the contributors to this special issue and it is hoped that they will serve as an invitation to readers as they envisage and work toward the possibilities of their own disrupted situations. This issue offers multiple perspectives and moments from the triple-pandemic and its intersectionalities. Each contributor's positionality directly impacted their access, observations, and the meaning they constructed as a result. It is the editors' contention that value is found in reading across texts, dialogically, with eyes and ears tuned to resonance and dissonance with one's own experiences.

This editorial collaboration grew out of an encounter in an asynchronous online course, taught by Gebert, focused on the Japanese reformist educator Tsunesaburō Makiguchi (1871–1944), his ideas on human geography and value creation. Harper and Gebert's shared resonance with Makiguchi's approach to mapping human possibilities over time and space provides an important point of reference for the conceptual framing of this special issue, which tracks the effects and opportunities of the triple pandemic on teachers, learners, and learning communities, in intrapersonal, K-12, vocational, and post-secondary contexts.

The Contributions

Lynn Harper's article titled *Imagined and Unimagined Spaces* weaves Japanese philosopher Tsunesaburō Makiguchi's educational recommendations, as well as contemporary educational equity scholarship, with timeline and autoethnography in her reflection on the imagined and unimagined spaces that emerged in her personal, local, and immediate K-12 context from 2020–2022.

Bernadeia Johnson and Julianne E. Schwietz present a case study on the self-proclaimed Good Trouble Principals, a group of school leaders committed to equity work and applying the exemplarist model of John Lewis to their own leadership of schools. In their article, *Making a Case for Exemplary Principal Leadership for Racial Equity*, Johnson and Schwietz follow the group as challenges and limits emerge in response to their applications of virtue theory within K-12 systems.

Alice Wexler's article, *What my students taught me about disability*, is a collaborative autoethnography of how online learning created the proximity necessary for a discussion related to disclosure of disability within educational and professional environments.

The article features teacher and student communications from spring 2021, when Wexler taught a synchronous online course in disability studies, communing with young people struggling with their present and future as educators. The students not only felt empowered to introduce themselves with their preferred pronouns, but one-third of the students identified as having, or as having had, a disability that significantly impacted their lives. As a result, participants were brought into conversations about what is important in life in a new way.

Joy Angowih's article, *Reimagining K-12 School Assessment Measures in the era of Triple Pandemic through a logic of Human Empathy and Embodying Assessment,* troubles K-12 school assessment practices both formal (i.e., standardized assessment measures (SAMs)), and informal (alternative or context-based assessment types). It calls for more awareness on the urgent need to incorporate human empathy and embodiment into both forms of school assessment so as to close the power-relation gap that makes SAMs incompatible as an integral part of the K-12 school assessment system. Angowih argues that human empathy, together with assessment embodiment, can ultimately result in the realization of K-12 school's original goals of equity and efficiency.

Marcus Johnson visits historical/philosophical models for conceiving social and planetary changes in his article *Agential Equanimity: Marcus Aurelius, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Educational Principles for Embracing Change.* From his perspective, "COVID provided us with an unexpected and unwelcome opportunity to grow." Johnson offers the "naturalistic model" of Aurelius and Nietzche as a constructive way of embracing change, agential equanimity, and the real world as it is, while refraining from qualitative judgements.

Barbara Tischler Hastie examines pandemic impacts on vocational education leadership in her article *A Story to Move Forward: A History of Past, Present and Future Ways of Responding to Education.* This qualitative case study examines the leadership's responses from Ulster BOCES (Board of Cooperative Education), during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. BOCES-Educator Edge leadership in Ulster County, NY, attended to the hearts and minds of staff in human ways throughout each stage of the pandemic. This qualitative case study applied adaptive resilient frameworks as an inquiry into the kind of environment that nurtures human development and promotes learning, how leaders can attend to the human elements in virtual and hybrid spaces, and how inclusive contexts highlight the need for varied approaches to nurturing and developing stakeholders.

In *Tsunesaburō Makiguchi's Recasting of Competition: Striving for Excellence in a Context of Interdependence*, Andrew Gebert explores possible transformations in the conceptualization and practice of competition through the lens of the human geographic studies of Tsunesaburō Makiguchi (1871–1944).

In *Creating Pathways for Learners*, Maria Guarjado recounts challenges and new learnings that emerged as teachers and learners worked to co-create an environment that nurtured the human spirit and promoted learning through the co-construction of knowledge during the early days of the pandemic. Teaching and learning experiences for this exploratory case study based in Tokyo, Japan, were examined through aspects of two pedagogical approaches: Ikeda's value-creating pedagogy and Freire's critical pedagogy. Featuring the importance of bringing the world into our learning spaces, exploring the possibilities, and connecting the relevance of global issues to student lives, new pathways are presented. The possibilities of deepening a sense of belonging, connection, and purpose are highlighted with the hope of imbuing an inspired perspective of advancing work in education that allows new transformative learning for both the student and teacher.

Jessica Bridges offers an autoethnography of anti-racist work and the weaponization of this work in media-based political discourse. In her article *The Epistemic Uncertainty in Learning and*

Doing Anti-Racist Work, she presents an overview of two major events in 2020—the Coronavirus and the murder of George Floyd—in order to contextualize White women's engagement in anti-racist work. She shares an autoethnographic narrative account of engaging in anti-racist work, concluding by highlighting the hopeful contributions White anti-racist work can make to the creation of a more just society.

Acompañamiento and the Sounds of Resilience in the Social Distance posits learning beside, or as an aspect of, instructional design found to build a sense of community in the virtual middle school classroom space. The case study by Jennifer Parker Monger, Mary Beth Hines,and Catherine Marchese describes the work of a student teacher to embody asset-oriented virtual pedagogy that fostered a community built on student funds of knowledge/funds of identity. The findings further highlight some common themes across texts within this issue: culturally sustaining instruction, repositioning students as collaborative experts, and learning alongside toward the realization of a humanizing virtual pedagogy.

This special issue seeks to contribute to the larger post-pandemic dialogue on education for this time-space. Accordingly, the issue places divergent priorities and perspectives side by side for consideration. The editors encourage reading between and across texts in order to expand the dialogic process into multiple contexts. The editorial team are deeply indebted to *Thresholds in Education* for this opportunity, and to the scholars who entered fully and graciously into this space.

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