



Introduction to Special Issue:


Re-imagining Teaching and Learning in the Context of Current Crises

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 10.46303/repam.2023.1

How to cite

Johnson, C. S., & Sdunzik, J. (2023).
Introduction to Special Issue:
Re-imagining Teaching and Learning in the
Context of Current Crises. *Research in
Educational Policy and Management*, 5(1),
i-iii.
<https://doi.org/10.46303/repam.2023.1>

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ABSTRACT

In this editorial, we describe the reasons for the special issue, namely the need to understand and re-imagine the “new normal” of teaching, learning, and teacher professional development in light of the societal inequities and economic injustices laid bare by the COVID-19 pandemic. We summarize the extent to which the articles in this issue help us take a new look at classroom practices of teachers within higher education and K-12 spaces, and re-envision of educational policies and theoretical frameworks within and beyond learning spaces to enhance inclusivity.

KEYWORDS

Online learning; blended learning; language acquisition theories; political efficacy framework.

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Teaching and teacher professional development have been greatly impacted by the crises associated with COVID-19—public health and economic instability. These twin crises uncovered existing societal inequities and economic injustices. As it pertains to education, times of crises lay bare and reinforce seemingly insurmountable boundaries and discrepancies, inequities and access to information and learning spaces. A convergence of stressors such as remote learning and engagement, a decline in student outcomes, a highly charged political environment, racial and cultural inequities, and COVID-19 fatigue, have generated mental and physical exhaustion for students, parents, teachers, and policymakers alike. These stressors sparked contemplations on what the “new normal” of teaching, learning, and professional development may look like post-pandemic. Stakeholders cannot retreat during times of crises. Rather, all stakeholders should adapt and transform their philosophical stances, policy positions, and pedagogies. This special issue puts forwards re-imaginings and reflections on teaching, teacher professional development, and educational policies during times of crises.

Specifically, this issue articulates ways and approaches that re-imagine educational spaces and learning, the influence of gender, race, and social issues, the inclusion of civic values in teaching, teacher professional development, and educational policies. The most evident impact of COVID-19 was the transition from face-to-face learning to online or blended learning. The lead article, “Revisiting ‘Great Media Debate’: Technology-Mediated Learning and Ground Realities across the Indian Institutes of Technology,” by Pushpanadham, Mandal, and Sareen revisits the “Great Media Debate” (GMD) to examine availability and accessibility in times of crises. Though GMD was framed around access during times of prosperity and growing interest in the internet, using this debate to understand how and why so many students still lacked equitable access to online and blended learning opportunities nearly 25 years later makes this study so important.

Josua and Hamakali’s article brings forth the “new normal” regarding technology-assisted pedagogies in Namibia and attempts to build a blended-learning strategy for enhancing the academic writing skills of university students. The authors’ findings indicated that students preferred the blended learning mode, which makes them less likely to be resistant to curricular changes. Both articles unveil digital inequities across South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa and advocate for the opportunity to use this moment of crisis to re-imagine curricular and educational policies to facilitate the use of technology in and beyond the twenty-first century classroom.

Shifting to the K-12 level, Dwomoh et al. examine how in-service teachers’ perceived language acquisition theories and improved their classroom practice during a pandemic. Centering on Freeman and Freeman’s (2014) discussion of the five FLA theories (imitation, reinforcement, behaviorist, social interaction, active construction, connectionist), the authors argue that in-service teachers’ perceptions of language acquisition theories impact how they

teach and engage emergent bilinguals in their classrooms. Timely and warranted, this study has much to offer the field, particularly as it pertains to in-service teacher development and emergent bilingual education.

In our theoretical piece, we re-imagine two separate, yet compatible theoretical frameworks, Black Resilience Neoliberalism (BRN) and the sociopolitical development model (SPD), to grasp the racialized identity and the political efficacy of adolescent Black youth in an era of crises. This conceptual framework can serve as a way to visualize how adolescent Black youth negotiate their racialized identity and sense of societal responsibility, civic agency, and contribution to their community in trying times. Contemporary events and crises in the United States demand a thoughtful re-imagining of those learning spaces dedicated to civic development, particularly among historically subordinated populations such as adolescent Black youth. The pandemic has exacerbated existing societal inequities and sparked conversation regarding youth political engagement and efficacy. The COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated pandemic-induced stressors such as the current experiences of Black youth with racial injustice and the potential of economic insecurity, homelessness, and a health disaster affecting a family member, further challenging their political engagement and political efficacy. Tackling adolescent youth political efficacy is therefore indispensable to the success of American democracy.

Together, the articles presented in this special issue touch on key areas impacted by crises associated with the global pandemic. It is our hope that each article provides a way to re-envision or re-consider how we can globally re-imagine educational spaces and learning in teaching, teacher professional development, and educational policies.

REFERENCES

Freeman, E. & Freeman, Y. S. (2014). *Essential Linguistics: What Teachers Need to Know to Teach ESL, Reading, Spelling, and Grammar* (2nd). Heinemann.