

Conclusion to the Special Issue

Taking a Pause to Consider a Radical New: Or All (Re)envisioning is Science-Fiction Work

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The last several months have seen monumental changes in the landscape of not only education, but the world broadly conceived. Due to the on-going COVID-19 pandemic, many people have used this time to reconceptualize what could be across a variety of fields, from health-care to Big Tech. This special issue of *Planning & Changing* includes the voices of 16 scholars based out of the U.S. and abroad who shared their reactions and research in connection to this pandemic. While there are ongoing clinical trials, and at least two (with an anticipated third) vaccines approved within the U.S., this raises perhaps just as many questions as it potentially answers. First, will the vaccine be the magic bullet to allow us to enter back into classrooms with less worry? Will we still need masks? If so, for how long? Further, many nations across the globe have yet to have access to these vaccines due to wealthy nations hoarding these life-saving vaccines, which some say opens us up to a new surge with a new variant in the future. While the scholars who have written within these pages are not epidemiologists, we are all scholars who are considering the impact the pandemic has had on education. As of yet, we have only inklings of ideas of what impact the pandemic will have on education in 2021 and beyond.

As a fan of speculative fiction, growing up, and even as recently as 2019, the idea of a pandemic evoked images borrowed from popular media. Images from such texts as Butler's *Clay's Ark*, Brooks's *World War Z*, Crichton's *The Andromeda Strain*, Scalzi's *Lockdown*, Cronin's *The Passage*, or the one that haunted my childhood in particular, King's *The Stand*. All of these texts tell of a virus that forever alters the history of humankind on one way or another. Other texts have taken on plagues throughout history either in fictional manners (such as García Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera*) or in non-fictional manners (I'm thinking here of Caldwell's *The American Plague* and Kelly's *The Great Mortality*, but also France's *How to Survive a Plague*). And all of these texts have both given me night sweats and hope over the past year. In the end, we as a species are given remarkable insights into our own adaptability. All of these texts also help us to understand that we are still here, even after facing a world-changing pandemic.

Additionally, the articles contained within this issue have given me hope for the future of educational research both during and after this cataclysmic event. The pieces within this special issue took care to understand the issues within educational administration during the global pan-

dem, in the United States and internationally. Lisa Crosslin and Lucy E. Bailey explored the blurred lines that occur for home and work for mother school leaders, incisively using visual research methods to help us all better understand the overlapping responsibilities of mother/leaders (Grzelakowski, 2005). Jennifer Antoni explored conceptually how the viral pandemic may exacerbate student drop-out or push-out within U.S. high schools. Susan Zoll, Natasha Feinberg, Beth Pinheiro, and Leslie Sevey used the framework of Appreciative Inquiry alongside feminist theory (with a good measure of magic ruby slippers) to explore the ways to create a better digital classroom experience, something many of us are still struggling with.

Moving beyond the borders of the United States, Rosa Bahamondes Rivera and Erika Abarca Millán explored how first-year university students adapted to moving last minute to remote instruction on a moment's notice with an eye to how institutions can better support first-year students during the pandemic and beyond. Jenna Cushing-Leubner attempts to better understand how English language learners (ELLs) adapted to the sudden shift to online learning. While many of us were required to make this adjustment, the authors examined the impact of the barrier for ELLs in light of the affective nature inherent in language acquisition. The title of Donna Sayman and Heidi Cornell's piece said what we all have been feeling that we are trying to build the plane while trying to fly during the pandemic. They attempt to illuminate special education teachers' experiences to formulate lessons for the future. This eye toward the future runs as a throughline for all of these pieces—a radical imagination of what could be. Science fiction is ultimately about hope, a hope that a new world will be waiting on the other side of struggle. That world may not be a wonderful world (here I think of the film, *Bladerunner*) but a world, nonetheless.

Pandemics are certainly not the only devastating occurrences that impact humankind. Some of these events are maybe only cataclysmic on a local scale. I, for one, lived through a hundred-year flood in Columbia, South Carolina only a few years ago. This localized disaster changed my own conceptualization of many things related to not only disaster preparation, how I consider water, but also education, for at the time I was working as a university administrator. What then might a reflection on these items during and in the aftermath¹ of disaster look like for the COVID-19 pandemic, one that is both local and global at the same time?

I for one believe that this pandemic has given us a pause to (re) consider a radical new vision for education. While the pandemic has gripped the world, it would be disingenuous to allow for us to contend that this pandemic has had equitable impacts on all populations. This pandemic, like others before it, and likely the next, has had greater impacts on communities including Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color (BIPOC). Moreover, in the U.S. we were reminded of the ongoing violence against

BIPOC communities at the hands of the state in the form of not only the aid delivered to help alleviate the stress caused by this pandemic, but also the physical violence enacted in the name of law & order. Like many summers before this, the late spring and summer brought to the fore the ongoing pandemic of white supremacy enacted by police violence causing the U.S. to (re)encounter and consider two on-going pandemics.

This pandemic will not be the last crisis that neither we as educators, nor we as humans, will face. My scholarship with co-editor, Dr. Lindsay DeMartino, focused on the pandemic and the challenges it has brought to educational leaders (DeMartino & Weiser, in press b, in press a) and was in part inspired by another moment of crisis in education. In 1999, Texas A&M had their annual bonfire collapse and kill 12 students and injure many others. While this crisis is by no means on the magnitude of the pandemics referenced here, it provided me a space to understand and conceptualize educational response to crisis (Treadwell, 2017; Treadwell et al., 2020). How might educational leaders respond to an ongoing crisis? Through our research, the research contained within this issue, and beyond, I am heartened to see the ongoing response, and the documentation and archiving that is occurring. These acts of organizing, activism, mutual aid, and planning give me hope that incremental progress is occurring to create the change that our world needs.

While a vaccine may bring us comfort that the COVID-19 pandemic may be nearing its twilight, we mustn't let the end of one pandemic, which has had disproportionate impacts on BIPOC communities, allow us to be lulled back into complacency. The scholars within this issue have spoken to how education has responded to one pandemic. My aim is that through learning from these scholars and their scholarship, as well as our own research and experiences living through this time, will help us all (re)imagine a radical new future. Using speculative science-fiction as a creative endeavor to help us sharpen and hone our imaginations allows us as scholars to think of what could be. It is, admittedly, difficult to envision something that one has never seen, and one person alone cannot (and really should not) reconceptualize a more just and hopeful future. While we may not yet know what that future looks like, I have critical hope that the time scholars, activists, and organizers have spent "dreaming new worlds every time [they/we] think about the changes we want to make in the world" (Imarisha & brown, 2015, p. 3) will not be in vain. Recognizing that in some way, all "organizing is science fiction" (Imarisha & brown, 2015, p. 3), the engagement in revisioning what can take place, what needs to take place, can take its lead from the creative scholars who aim to imagine what could be during this interlude. While our work is ongoing and will likely never end, this violent and deadly interlude will hopefully have awoken a critical mass in order to take on the challenges to create a more just world, not only in education, but in the worlds contained within and beyond.

Endnote

- 1 If we are ever to get to an after – presupposing that after should and hopefully looks vastly different than before – which is in fact the purpose of this brief essay.

References

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