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Post-Pandemic Classroom Literacies

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The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the lives of children and youth, their families, communities, and teachers. As access to and participation in classroom learning experiences was affected by changing public health conditions, language and literacy education was correspondingly resituated across modes of text, interactivity, and enactment in social, familial, and educative contexts. It was also predominantly framed in terms of deprivation and deficit. Recognizing that the pandemic, the prolonged period of uncertainty it generated, and its ongoing viral, social, and political resurgences have brought multiple forms of loss, gain, disruption and nurturance to the fore, the aim of this special issue is to give attention to the hopeful language and literacy teaching and learning that occurred in its midst, and the possibilities they might offer a post-pandemic future.

When we invited researchers to conceptualize and contribute studies for this special issue we perhaps naively imagined “post-pandemic” as a moment in which we might be on the other side of a temporary, bounded experience. Today the post- of post-pandemic seems to suggest a different temporal relationship. Today’s post- still hopes for relief from the rawness of the pandemic but more explicitly recognizes that individuals and communities will carry what pandemic experiences took, offered, questioned, and caused to waver into a future of which it is now a part. The idea of “post-pandemic” education is one that reminds us that in many ways educators and researchers can neither look back nor forward without the pandemic figuring in our gaze.

The authors assembled through this special issue have investigated capacious learning experiences in which students and teachers participated in literacies and forms of expression beyond the “norm” of pre-pandemic schooling. Their studies move in and through pandemic experiences, exploring pedagogical stances and spaces as instances of living beyond what “should” have/could have been. They newly attune us to enduring matters in the pasts/presents/futures of language and literacy education.

Attuning to Pedagogical Stance

Pandemic experiences have caused many of us to rethink how we are placed in relation to one another: physically, interpretively, and dialogically. Aukerman and Aiello’s

Beyond “Learning Loss” and Li and Sun’s *“COVID Has Brought Us Closer”* provoke similar rethinking within instructional relationships and practices. Aukerman and Aiello offer ways to reconsider the “learning loss” narrative through which students and their post-pandemic literacy education are too-easily framed. They call for forms of pedagogical attention, interpretation, and shaping that recenter noticings of children’s emotions, funds of knowledge, relations, and purposes: possibilities grounded in the immediacy of pandemic disruptions but with poignancy “one year or one hundred years ‘post-pandemic’” (this issue, p. 24). Li and Sun’s proleptic account of English-as-a-second language teachers shows how the ESL instruction broadened during the pandemic to include socio-emotional learning, caused ESL teachers to rethink relationships with technology, and helped forge new communication networks and collaborations. Having had these experiences, developed new skills, and felt the “magic” (this issue, p. 46) of professional collaboration, how they, students, families, and colleagues might work together has been collectively set anew.

Attuning to Pedagogical Space

Beyond the abrupt and forced shift to online learning necessitated by school closures, the pandemic provided opportunities for educators to think differently about their learning spaces. In their contributions to this special issue, Cormier & Burke-Saulnier (*Chapeau a Vous*), Burke (*Understanding Children’s Drawings*), and McKee, Murray-Orr, & Robinson (*Learning to Teach Outside the Box*) introduce us to educators grappling with the tensions associated with requiring young children to spend long days attending to a tiny screen. There was also the concern of ensuring access to rich reading materials normally available in class that Blain (*Recherche-développement dans le contexte pandémique*) addresses by transforming print books into multimodal texts available online. These educators expanded the space of online learning, transforming traditional print literature, moving children away from desks to explore spaces in their homes and out-of-doors as part of the new learning assemblage. Students began to see their teachers’ living spaces and make new associations about the lives of their teachers beyond the classroom. Likewise, as family members moved in and out of view on the computer screen, teachers began to see their students and their families in new ways - as learners with rich linguistic and cultural repertoires, as parent-employee-teachers with both capacities to teach and unprecedented time constraints. Not being face-to-face in the classroom opened dimensions of educator and learner humanity that may have otherwise felt beyond reach or inaccessible. Through bringing homes, family members, pets, furniture, grass, trees, and open skies into the learning assemblage, opportunities for attuning to the fullness of student and educator life were opened up in together-apart learning spaces. Even as they reflect on what these moments have to say for how we might move forward in face-to-face classroom intra-action, Cormier and Burke-Saulnier’s, Blain’s, Burke’s, and McKee, Murray-Orr, and Robinson’s work collectively acknowledges that the physical separations of the pandemic – children from friends, educators from students – also remind us of all that is

precious, important, necessary, and worth advocating for in together-together learning spaces.

We are fortunate to have the thoughtful contributions of these authors in this special issue and are reminded of the multi-dimensioned, insightful, and critical work in literacy pedagogy and research that took place during a time when educators were called upon to pivot on a moment's notice and in the time since, when so much has been asked of them. They have enriched how we might recognize the pandemic/post-pandemic as a portal into new practices in language and literacy education. We also appreciate the team of reviewers who contributed to this issue and the researchers whose work was interrupted, delayed, and put on hold as the pandemic relentlessly marched on.

Author Biographies

Ronna Mosher is the Director, Professional Programs in graduate education and Assistant Professor, Curriculum and Learning in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. Her research interests include curriculum studies, literacy education, and the epistemologies and ontologies of educators' professional practice. Her recent work explores playful(1) literacy practices in grade 1 and 2 classrooms and in outdoor story play.

Kim Lenters is an Associate Professor and Canada Research Chair (Tier 2) in Language and Literacy Education at the University of Calgary where her research focuses on the social and material worlds of children's literacy development. Kim's work has consistently focused on those students whose literacy practices are seen to be out-of-step (and therefore, generally unwelcome) in classroom spaces. Most recently, Kim's work has examined the relationship between play and literacy in spaces beyond preschool and kindergarten settings. In addition to several chapters in edited volumes, her work has been published in journals such as *Reading Teacher*, *Literacy*, *English Teaching: Practice & Critique*, *Journal of Literacy Research*, and *Research in the Teaching of English*. She is also co-editor of the volumes, *Affect and Embodiment in Critical Literacy: Assembling Theory and Practice* (2020) and *Decolonizing Literacies: Disrupting, Reclaiming, and Remembering Relationship* (forthcoming).

Gail Cormier is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Education specialized in language, literacy and curriculum at Université de Saint-Boniface in Manitoba. Her areas of research include linguistic landscapes, schoolsapes, language and literacy education, education in minority settings and Francophone and French immersion programming. She is currently conducting research supported by the Government of Canada's New Frontiers in Research Fund (NFRF) on schoolsapes in rural French immersion schools in Manitoba. Her doctoral research on schoolsapes was funded by the Joseph Armand Bombardier Scholarship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). She taught French, English and Spanish in Manitoban schools as well as in Costa Rica.