Lockdown literacies

Kate Pahl, Fiona Scott, Melanie Hall and Natalia Kucirkova

'Lockdown literacies' began with a Call for Papers issued in the immediate aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst for many, 2023 may feel far removed from the disruptive global events of the last few years, we propose that now is an auspicious time for continued contemplation. The release of this Special Issue offers an opportunity to reflect, not only on what happened at home during the pandemic, but also on what's happening now and what comes next for children's literacies, both in and out of the home. As Waters-Davies et al. (2022) have argued, the complex issues associated with early childhood literacies in the pandemic were rarely new, rather the pandemic brought many ongoing debates and complexities into sharper focus. At a time when children, educators and academics alike are being encouraged to return to 'business as usual', we present six papers as provocations to imagine early childhood lit-eracies differently.

While normative discourses of children having to 'catch up' abound, es-pecially in educational contexts characterised by performance-based account-ability regimes (Moss, 2022), the disruptive effect of the pandemic has also opened up space for innovation and reflection for literacy, education and society. Based on two empirical projects, Moss and colleagues at the Institute of Education published a series of reports (e.g. Harmey and Moss, 2021) that documented the generative ways in which some English primary schools connected to their local communities during the pandemic. The schools' re-sponse to community needs was a resilient way to deal with the uncertainty of the situation and shifting policy-makers' priorities. The articles in this special issue align with Moss et al.'s premise that the public discourse of learning loss has an unsubstantiated evidence base and put forward creative approaches for embracing diversity as a resource for resisting normative discourses.

We present empirical work undertaken during the pandemic across five countries: Scotland (United Kingdom); Michigan and North Carolina (United States); the Eastern Cape (South Africa); Newfoundland (Canada); and a provincial city in South Korea. Our Special Issue authors capitalise on local resources to document, exemplify and theorise 'lockdown literacies' in all

their inherent diversity. The notion of 'lockdown literacies' was coined by Gourlay et al. (2021) to refer to the literacy and social assemblages of language, objects and places that were brought together during home quarantines. There is an open-ness to lockdown experiences, in that the home became the centre stage in learning. This holds potential to surface new realities and create opportunities for equity, as attested by several initiatives that connected teachers and children in exploring new kinds of world-making, which created opportunities for racial justice within the lockdown space. The idiosyncratic experiences documented by our authors put into words the deeply felt daily experiences and conse-quences of the pandemic. While presented as a unified discourse of national lockdown ('we are all in this together'), the experience of individual families was far from unified. As the papers in this Special Issue illustrate, the pandemic was felt and lived very differently by individual families.

In our first paper, Laura Teichert and Lorna Arnott reflect on their own experiences of educating their children in the midst of lockdowns. Recognising their cultural capital, relative privilege and expertise as compared with families more broadly, their autoethnography details experiences of learning as fun, but also of the anxiety in striving to ensure structured and more playful learning. These insights challenge a number of moral panics applied to children's lives specific to the pandemic, as well as more broadly. The article provides a rebuttal to the catch-up narratives that have come to dominate educational discourses around the pandemic. However, this is indicative of a narrow conceptualisation of education which overlooks other dimensions of children's development, such as emotional literacy and experiential learning. Certainly, there have been detrimental impacts that are documented elsewhere, but this piece gives space to explore hopeful and joyful narratives, particularly for relationships between family members and home/school. More broadly, the authors challenge concerns that have been raised about the digitisation of children's lives. The sharp pivot to online spaces will be an enduring memory of lockdowns for many of us as the digital developed apace and took hold. However, children's lives remain multimodal and indeed, there was space for crafts and the out-doors. Both were crucial to maintaining relationships. To return to the posi-tionality of the authors, the fact that they as academics – armed with knowledge of child development – still experienced feeling disempowered raises the possibility that the crippling fear was likely a fraction by that which may have been felt by families who experienced hardship with respect to health, those experiencing socio-economic deprivation and so on.

In our second paper, Anne Burke and Kristiina Kumpulainen consider the many ways in which digital platforms supported children's agency in play

during the pandemic, as well as the roles of parents in facilitating this play. Drawing on the Day-in-the-Life methodology (Gillen et al., 2007), the authors observed three Canadian families with children aged between two and 10 years old, analysing the resulting vignettes through narrative inquiry. Their analysis reveals children's use of several platforms (Zoom, YouTube and TikTok) for a number of playful activities that enabled them to stay in touch with their friends (e.g. the use of Zoom to organise a virtual sleepover or TikTok for a dance challenge with peers). Children's agency in inventing, and engaging in, these activities was evident in their skillful exchange of messages and independent use of the platforms. Parents supported younger children's communication on these platforms and discussed with their children their anxiety and ambivalence around digital play. Pinning down the features of digital play that position it as a literacy practice shows that a lot of learning goes on under the school 'radar'. While digital technologies can document and systematise practices, they are also tools for impromptu exploratory interactions between adults and children and sites for agency and meaning-making. Through careful qualitative analyses, Burke and Kumpulainen document the very real challenges that families and schools faced during national lockdowns, juxtaposing these with the hope and resilience they generated.

Drawing on the experiences of two 3-year-old children and their families, our third paper offers insight into home learning in South Africa during the pandemic. Parents and carers articulated considerable material and pedagogical obstacles to supporting their children's home literacy learning. Nonetheless, Sibhekinkosi Nkomo's article illuminates the rich play, oral storytelling, reading aloud and mark making activities experienced by both children. Nkomo's study is also a reminder of the productive practices that must not be lost as we move beyond the pandemic, such as parents' evident appreciation of increased opportunities to collaborate with teachers. In our fourth paper, Christy Wessel-Powell and colleagues offer a counter-narrative to the much discussed limitations of virtual learning environments. The authors discuss the literacy practices of kindergarten and fourth grade aged siblings, Marco and Mara. Like Nkomo, its authors foreground crisis-era practices with the potential to support young children's literacy learning beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. The au-thors conclude that the 'Literacy-Cast' virtual space, offered by Appalachian State University during the pandemic (and beyond) supported genuinely multidi-rectional flow between home and school for children like Marco and Mara, brokering relationships and strengthening literacy practices.

In our fifth paper, Aireen Grace Andal employs a contrasting methodological approach (content analysis) to examine spatial discourses in children's books

about COVID-19. Her analyses suggest that children's books in this period emphasised the disruption of the 'normal' in everyday space, whilst offering imaginaries of a post-lockdown world in which various life forms share outdoor spaces once again. Our final paper offers a different theoretical per-spective, drawing on critical posthumanist approaches and Bennett's (2010) vital materialism. Yeojoo Yoon charts the home and preschool literacy practices of Andrei, a four-year-old recent immigrant and emergent bilingual Koryo-saram child from Kazakhstan living in South Korea, across home and preschool settings during the pandemic. Yoon's close analyses of the encounters between Andrei's voice, voice search technology and popular media texts counter ed-ucational constructions of Andrei as 'silent'. Yoon challenges us to think differently about immigrant children's voices, language practices and uses of digital technology.

Diversity, then, is central to our Special Issue, both in terms of methodo-logical, geographical and empirical diversity. Acute attention to the diversity of experience in each community indicates the need for a serious analysis of agency and individuals' capacity to act as agents of change (see Kuby et al., 2018) who respond to their circumstances with resilience and resistance. This shines a different light upon political 'learning loss' discourses and offers vital possibilities for exploring home-school learning opportunities. The SI authors highlight the need to look beyond the 'catch up' rhetoric and describe the lockdown experience in all its complexity, including the strange routines and uncertain practices it generated. These documentations compel us to re-think home and school boundaries.

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