



Embracing Change and Refraction: A Prism Through Pandemic Times

*Kathryn Ricketts, University of Regina
Robert Nellis, Red Deer Polytechnic*

Abstract:

This special issue initially arose from the 2019 Provoking Curriculum Studies Conference at the University of Regina. Shortly after the conference, the world was thrown into the COVID-19 pandemic. The papers in this special issue view the pandemic through a prism to consider existing practices within the academy and reflect upon and imagine new possibilities for academic work and lives. Author explorations include arts-based inquiry, grief, peer-to-peer support, Indigenous Métissage, poetic inquiry and diasporic bodies.

Keywords: COVID-19; arts-based inquiry; grief; peer-to-peer support; Indigenous Métissage; poetic inquiry; diasporic bodies

Accueillir le changement et la réfraction : Un prisme à travers les temps de pandémie

Résumé :

Ce numéro spécial est né de la conférence 2019 "Provoking Curriculum Studies" à l'Université de Regina. Peu après la conférence, le monde a été plongé dans la pandémie liée à la COVID-19. Les articles dans ce numéro spécial utilisent la pandémie comme prisme pour examiner de nouvelles pratiques au sein de l'académie ainsi qu'afin de réfléchir et d'imaginer de nouvelles possibilités pour le travail et la vie académique. Les auteurs explorent notamment la recherche artistique, le deuil, le soutien entre pairs, le métissage autochtone, la recherche poétique et les corps diasporiques.

Mots clés : COVID-19; enquête artistique; deuil; soutien entre pairs; métissage autochtone; enquête poétique; corps diasporiques

What a period of time this has been over these first few years of the 2020s! The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on our everyday lives—let alone our teaching, learning and scholarly work—linger, well after the lifting of mask mandates and stay-at-home policies. As we move through 2024, we can sense a rumbling return to our prior routines.

We still feel awkward to hug, and we don't taste each other's drinks or food when in a warm dining atmosphere. We no longer get into a crowded elevator and make jokes on the way down, provoking raucous laughter. Instead, we either decline the ride or refrain from eye contact and even breathing throughout the journey. We no longer settle in to an airplane seat relieved that we have finally made it and can relax. Instead, many of us still busy ourselves disinfecting our surroundings with tiny Clorox sheets, which we keep in bundles in our bags.

But we *have* cultivated humour and generosity, as when, during a high-stakes meeting on ZOOM, we witness a lazy, arrogant cat plod slowly across the keyboard. We have mustered nonchalance when our platforms suddenly won't share screens with documents, or when the sound cuts out unexpectedly, and a colleague hospitably offers to share the PowerPoint held hostage in the computer, or we are instructed how to adjust sound settings. We laugh again and again when the silent voices are reminded to unmute. We have learned to recognize the most minute inhale, signaling that someone is about to speak a thought.

Surprisingly, COVID helped us to expand our teaching environments beyond the walls of our classrooms, enabling guests from around the world to come in with ease and share their expertise. We have been able to engage in information-exchange without rushing to catch buses or find parking, and without sweating over wardrobe choices—at least from the waist down.

And after all of this, we may look at a tree or a flower or a cloud and say, we survived all of this, nay, we even thrived!

This is a complicated time, as we all understand that we will be living with COVID forever, as it cunningly finds endless mutations. Can we practice the discernment to linger in what COVID has given us and to confidently discard the rest? Can we agree that education will never be the same, as we begin to radically question space, place and practices?

In this special issue of JCACS, we unite in a moment of mindfulness, acknowledging the profound impact of COVID-19 on people, families and communities around the world. The metaphor of a prism frames our reflections and refractions through these times looking forward toward the future. We, as co-guest editors, and the authors all in their own way, use the pandemic as a prism through which to view received practices within and around the academy. As a result, we see things we otherwise might not, new possibilities for practice and living.

This conversation started through, and after, the 2019 Provoking Curriculum Studies conference at the University of Regina. Long a site and occasion for curriculum studies fostering diverse methodologies and artful approaches, the conference was offered as an opportunity for conversation transcending traditional academic structures. Afterward, and in reflections through the

pandemic, we felt called to take the opportunity to re-evaluate our roles, identities and practices within the academy.

We are honoured to share these journeys with the authors in this issue. Cecile Badenhorst, Heather McLeod, Abena Omenaa Boachie, Bahar Haghghat, Julia Halfyard and Haley Toll offer an opportunity to think, feel and write about and through grief as an unsanctioned way of being in neoliberal academic institutions. Emma Chen and Yina Liu reflect upon the serendipitous character of their own meeting and mutually supportive relation. Their work opens toward broader reflections of how cultures of peer-to-peer support, especially for immigrant and marginalised students, might organically be nurtured. Ramona Elke engages grieving in an Indigenous métissage, braiding poetic inquiry, life writing and artwork, through the experience of the pandemic and traumatic legacies of dis-ease. Shyam Patel and Saba Alvi forward diasporic bodies as a curriculum of Brown(ing) bodies, refracting complexity and nuance through the occasion of the pandemic and beyond.

COVID-19 has left a lingering impact not only on academic and educational practices, but also our social worlds. We feel the impact of this, not only in our efforts to remain well—for ourselves, but also for students, colleagues, and especially loved ones. But how could one's experience of this moment proceed unnoticed of the impacts of the political push-back against policies intended to keep people safe across the country and world?

These articles are part of a stepping away from several years of critical practices inspired by clinical insights, toward a resuscitation of pedagogic practices reborn and reimagined through and with COVID, like the underside of a leaf, showing its small veins of life lit by the ever-powerful force of the sun.

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