



BUILDING A BETTER NORMAL

Visions of Schools of Education
in a Post-Pandemic World

Priya Goel, Jonathan Simmons and Smridhi
Marwah

Together with

Lars Andersson, Sinikka Neuhaus
and Marian Mahat

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BUILDING A BETTER NORMAL

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*This book is dedicated to all of the educators across the globe
who work tirelessly for the success of their students.*

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PREFACE

Sinikka Neuhaus and Lars Andersson

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about unprecedented challenges and changes in schools of education globally. Administrators, instructors and students were forced to create and quickly adapt to new modes of teaching and learning while navigating the complex and often-changing public health and safety guidelines and regulations. While we faced different circumstances across our institutional contexts, we collectively grappled with the challenge of flexibility, adaptability, technology-enhanced remote learning, and supporting our students. As we enter post-pandemic research, learning and teaching, we must reflect to reimagine. That is, we must consider the past and present to facilitate our reimagination of what schools of education can and should be in a better normal. Our reflections on our organisations, policies and practices can generate critical insights as we collectively tackle persisting issues of student well-being, educational equity, educational quality, technology use and more.

In the spring of 2020, the Universitas 21 (U21) Deans of Education group and the Forum for International Networking in Education (FINE) Leadership Team conceived of this book project to collectively reflect and reimagine learning, teaching and research in schools of education. This inspiration came

from virtual meetings, from 2020 onwards, in which members of the Deans of Education group shared their ongoing experiences and challenges with navigating and managing learning, teaching and research during the pandemic. This book emphasises the possibilities and challenges we face in education in a post-pandemic era, driven by knowledge, skills, creative and critical thinking with technology as an accelerator for learning. Guided by late Professor David Clarke's legacy and his remarkable willingness to collaborate and engage in dialogue and our collective commitment to educational excellence and equity, we aim for this book to inspire reflection and reimagination among education scholars globally. In that spirit of reflection, collaboration and reimagination, we'd like to share a poem written by David Clarke that speaks to living joyfully in community.

*Good morning all, here comes the sun.
Another day has now begun.
We are the gifts that we exchange.
Across the landscapes of our lives we range.
No need for fear, we are all here.
And gloriously evermore shall be.
In conversation you with me and we.
A joy to live, a joy to be,
Please celebrate without restraint,
We have no pretext for complaint.*

—David Clarke, 22 November 2017

TOWARDS A BETTER NORMAL:
SCHOOLS OF EDUCATION
DURING THE COVID-19
PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

This introductory chapter traces some of the impact COVID-19 has had on education in different global contexts. It traces the history of the Universitas 21 Schools of Education Deans Group and its Forum for International Networking in Education and sets the context for the subsequent contributions in this book. It provides points of reflection for scholars and institutions as they traverse through the ongoing challenges of the pandemic.

Keywords: Universitas 21; Schools of Education; Forum for International Networking in Education; COVID-19 pandemic; better normal; educational impacts

INTRODUCTION

The novel coronavirus, or commonly known as COVID-19, created one of the largest disruption to human lives. At the time of writing, there were 600,366,479 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 6,460,493 deaths and 12,478,615,692 vaccines administered ([World Health Organisation, 2022](#)). In education systems around the world, closures of schools, institutions and other environments for learning have impacted more than 94% of the world's student population, approximately 1.6 billion learners in more than 200 countries ([Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021](#)). Two and a half years on, the pandemic is far from over.

In some countries, the pandemic occurred at a time where other global and local phenomena were taking place. In Hong Kong, for instance, the 1 July 2019 march protesting the handover of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) to China was raging when the pandemic hit. The social movement persisted until early 2020 attended by hundreds of thousands of people. Its subsidence was partly attributed to the official arrival of COVID-19 in Hong Kong on 23 January 2020 ([Cheung, 2020](#)). In Australia, the 2019–2020 bushfires were considered a ‘megafire’ ([Neuman, 2020](#)) due to its catastrophic nature which claimed human and animal lives, affecting ecosystems and destroying infrastructure ([Deb et al., 2020](#)). In addition to the bushfires and the outbreak of a global pandemic, drought, cyclones and hailstorms characterised the first quarter of the new decade in Australia ([Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020](#)).

While in other countries, other issues emerged as the pandemic ensued, adding a layer of adversity. In South Africa, for instance, riots and looting exploded in South Africa in the midst of the pandemic, sparked by the imprisonment of former President Jacob Zuma for contempt of court. The

Zuma riots left many dead and thousands arrested ([BBC News, 2021](#)). In the United States, the George Floyd protests began in Minneapolis on 26 May 2020, as a result of the murder of George Floyd, an African American man, by a police officer. The protests spread nationally and internationally in over 60 countries in support of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement ([Burch et al., 2020](#)), involving millions of people making the protests the largest in the US history ([Buchanan et al., 2020](#)). The Russian invasion of Ukraine in early 2022 provides another example of adversity with significant impacts within Ukraine and globally. Cumulatively, the extraordinary conditions that shaped these events, whether before or during the pandemic, disrupted almost every aspect of society including economic, health and social.

Universities have not been spared from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Buzzing campuses – with diverse student populations from around the world – closed down. Teaching and learning pivoted to remote online means, enrolments dipped particularly from international students, research stalled, staff and students' health and well-being were placed on the spotlight. The higher education ecosystem was threatened, creating tidal waves of uncertainty in all aspects of university life.

At the time of writing, the world is waking up, albeit slowly, from its pandemic slumber. The streets are starting to bustle, travel restrictions have been lifted in most countries, hopes and optimism are high as countries navigate the new world of social distancing, mask wearing and 'elbow-bumping' in lieu of handshakes. The reopening of campuses after the relaxation of restriction has impacted traditional educational practices and status quo, bringing with it many new operating procedures. What does this mean for higher education? What are the implications for Schools of Education around the world that work across social, cultural, environmental, economic and

political contexts? How will the new world impact on individual academics and organisational units – across both local and global contexts? Are we ready for a better normal?

COVID-19 EDUCATIONAL IMPACTS

The COVID-19 pandemic began in Asia in Wuhan, Hubei, China. Countries in Asia were among the first globally to be affected by the pandemic. While China was criticised for initially minimising the severity of the outbreak, its wide-scale response has largely contained the disease since March 2020 (Burki, 2020), with China having the lowest death toll per capita (Hopkins, 2022). The magnitude of impacts, including educational ones, has varied between countries. For instance, early wide-scale response of some countries, particularly Bhutan, Singapore, Taiwan and Vietnam, has allowed them to successfully limit the spread of the disease, and in preventing deaths. These responses include the use of contact tracing and mobile sim-tracking for those in quarantine (Taiwan) and registering students' temperatures multiple times a day through an app (Singapore) (UNICEF, 2021). Differing government responses throughout the world, particularly in terms of healthcare, political and financial, had varying degrees of efficacy.

At the start of the pandemic, almost all countries implemented school closures at all levels (Hale et al., 2021), impacting 1,437,412,547 learners worldwide (UNESCO, 2021). Over time, some schools remained closed as viral transmission increased, while others kept them open even in a difficult pandemic context. For instance, there were full or partial school closures of more than 200 days in countries such as Colombia, Costa Rica, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Mexico, Poland and Turkey between January 2020 and May

2021, compared to less than 50 days in Norway, New Zealand and Spain (OECD, 2021). In Australia and the United Kingdom, schools were closed to all but vulnerable students and the students of key workers such as medical practitioners. By the end of the first year of the pandemic, many have started to reopen with little or no measures (Ritchie et al., 2020).

To minimise the educational impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, online teaching and learning was implemented in many educational institutions (Kundu & Bej, 2021). The transition to online teaching occurred over a short time frame, creating massive challenges for pedagogical practices and assessments (Rolak et al., 2020) with multiple impacts across the sector. In a systematic review of the literature published on the educational impacts of COVID-19 at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, Tang (2022) found several educational impacts as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In a pre-primary, primary and secondary school contexts, learning loss and disruption, psychological impacts and inequality and inequity were found to be the top three impacts of the pandemic. For instance, learning loss among primary school students was found – this was particularly so for those from disadvantaged schools. Studies on psychological impacts were predominantly in the secondary rather than primary school contexts. Secondary students were reported to experience symptoms related to depression, anxiety, stress and suicidal attempts and ideation. Inequality refers to the unequal distribution of or accessibility to resources among societal groups (such as access to internet, learning resources and access to reasonable learning environments), while inequity refers to the conditions leading to inequalities such as corruption, poor governance and marginalisation. Both created massive challenges in education. The top impacts of COVID-19 on tertiary education included psychological impacts, disrupted practicals, inequality and financial impacts, which were also

discipline-specific. None of the studies Tang reviewed focused on education as a discipline at the tertiary level.

SCHOOLS OF EDUCATION IN THE PANDEMIC

In Schools of Education around the world, many of the new procedures and policies were not only impacted by new ways of working in higher education but also by new ways of working in initial teacher education (ITE), practicum planning, supporting school communities in their school closures, remote learning, teacher vaccination and gradual returns to in-class instruction. As a result of school closures, normal placements of students in ITE could not continue. ITE programmes were delivered online with lost opportunities for practising teaching, raising significant issues of equity and pedagogy (La Velle et al., 2020). The lack of practical experience in schools raised concerns about the dangers of preparing teachers who know much about theory and little about practice (Levine, 2006) and the impact on the professional identity of pre-service teachers in their future work (Caires et al., 2012). These assumptions called into question the ability of teacher education programmes to properly train and qualify teachers during the pandemic.

An added challenge for Schools of Education was dealing with Departments of Education in their specific countries. Federal systems, in which power is split between federal (national) and state (sub-national) governments, create challenges for universities and Schools of Education working across both. In Australia, for instance, the state and territory governments retain constitutional responsibility for schooling (through exercising their powers to impose lockdowns and close schools), but nationwide responses to the impacts of the

pandemic were overseen by the Federal government (such as travel and economic measures), creating tensions between the two. Despite this tension, government education bodies in Australia launched a range of initiatives to support all phases of schooling that were easily accessible by the teaching community (Sacks et al., 2020).

Similar efforts of collegiality around the world are heavily reliant on the profession coming together to help, with those better prepared sharing their time and resources to help those less ready. In a similar vein, the Schools of Education within the Universitas 21 (U21) community of institutions have come together to support each other during this challenging time. Built on a collegial network of more than two decades, the U21 Deans of Education Group shared not only challenges and issues but compiled stories of success and best practices that have allowed them to redefine the landscape of education globally. This book is a celebration of this collegial sharing.

SETTING THE CONTEXT FOR THIS BOOK

This book offers insights from academics and graduate students in Schools of Education within the U21 Deans of Education Group and the Forum for International Networking in Education (FINE). Also included in the manuscript are academics from several non-U21 institutions who, at the start of this book project, were employed at a U21 institution.

U21 Deans of Education Group

U21 is a unique global network that brings together 28 world-leading, research-intensive universities who share a common belief in the value of collaboration and

internationalisation ([Universitas 21, 2023a](#)). Member-led initiatives and programme within U21 are designed to benefit staff, students and member institutions, through sharing resources, learning together and co-designing solutions to shared challenges. The U21 Deans of Education Group has leveraged on the network's collegiality by bringing together Deans of Education from U21 institutions.

The U21 Deans of Education Group is part of the U21 Educational Innovation Steering Group, which aims to connect key institutional leaders in teaching, learning and innovative educational practices across U21 universities to promote collaboration, share good practice and combine resources with the common objectives of enhancing student learning in research-intensive universities ([Universitas 21, 2023b](#)). The Deans group first met in 2000 to discuss issues of common interest and to promote collegial interaction and collaborative projects. Led and convened by the late Professor David Clarke at the University of Melbourne, the group has met annually since then, coincident with the annual conference of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). These meetings have provided an important forum for the discussion of issues in education of common interest and concern across the participating U21 institutions. The goals of the network are:

- to share best practice in research and teaching in Education internationally;
- to identify and develop a wide range of collaborative projects, which are to the benefit to participating U21 Faculties of Education;
- to create opportunities for staff and student interaction and exchange;