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## Histories of the past and histories of the future: pandemics and historians of education

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### ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 outbreak at the beginning of the 2020s not only marked a dramatic moment in world health, but also the start of manifold and entangled global crises that seem to define a watershed moment with severe effects on education. Pandemics we know are recurrent events. Faced with COVID-19 some historians have looked to previous pandemics to understand the nature of the disease and its trajectory, and how previous generations have dealt with similar health crises. This special issue intends not to reinforce narratives of the past but rather to question them. The histories that have been written for this special issue *Histories of the Past and Histories of the Future: Pandemics and Historians of Education* offer insights that refer to past and future research agendas. They look at the mediation and circulation of knowledge during past pandemics, trace unheard voices and emotions of pandemics, analyse national policies and emerging discourses, and underline the entangled histories of education and pandemics. Collectively the articles brought together in this issue forcibly suggest that the most fruitful and rewarding way forward to studying past pandemics lies in thinking ecologically. By assessing the myriad consequences of living in "pandemic times," of confronting exposure, transmission, transmutation, disruption, and loss, and looking to community and collective futures we believe we cannot study pandemics and their impact on education and children's lives without widening the aperture of our research. Adopting an ecological approach will help us to not only actively engage with histories of the present and contemporary collecting, but also offer the possibility of new understandings and new insights into the dynamics and consequences of past pandemics.

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When we conceived the idea for this special issue the media was reporting that the polio vaccine that had so effectively eradicated the virus for the last five decades was getting old and the attenuated virus used by the vaccine to stimulate the immune system was mutating in under-immunised populations, resulting in a new strain known as vaccine-derived poliovirus. In 2020 the number of vaccine-derived cases of polio had increased fivefold from the previous year, and 23

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countries were battling polio outbreaks.<sup>1</sup> While drafting this introduction we read in the media that every day more cases of monkey pox have been identified around the globe.<sup>2</sup> In addition, we are becoming more and more aware of global interlinkages between armed conflict, climate change, pandemics, markets, migration and food security that dramatically threaten peace and well-being.<sup>3</sup> It seems as if the COVID-19 outbreak at the beginning of the 2020s marked not only a dramatic health situation but also the start of manifold and entangled global crises that seem to define a watershed moment. Scientists predict COVID-19 most likely will not disappear and instead come back in variants and (re-)infection waves on a long-term perspective.<sup>4</sup> However, COVID-19 not only affects human health but also precipitates severe economic downturns, reveals problematic interdependencies of food supply, shines a harsh light on existing inequalities and makes one aware of dramatic planetary exhaustion.<sup>5</sup>

Pandemics are recurrent events and there have been earlier large-scale influenza pandemics – in 1830–1833 (spreading from China to India, the Philippines, Indonesia, Russia, Europe and North America), in 1847–1848 and in 1898–1900 (spreading from Europe to India, Australia and North and South America) – and similarly post the Spanish flu and prior to COVID-19 there had been four pandemics in which millions of people died. In June 1957 there were more than a million cases of flu in Asia, as a large part of the world grappled with the H2N2 strain. Immunity to this strain was rare in people less than 65 years of age. The disease was spread from classroom to home when children went back to school in the autumn. Infection rates were highest among school children, young adults and pregnant women. Press reports referred to school closures in Belfast and Tokyo and the Japanese Welfare Ministry reported that 500,000 children were affected. Most influenza- and pneumonia-related deaths occurred between September 1957 and March 1958. Ten years later a new virus strain, H3N2, was detected in Hong Kong and signalled the beginnings of a new pandemic. Global deaths from the Hong Kong flu peaked in December 1968 and January 1969. Those over the age of 65 were most likely to die. The same virus returned in 1970 and 1972. The number of fatalities was lower. It is believed that earlier infections by the Asian flu virus provided some immunity and reduced the severity of the illness during the Hong Kong pandemic. Also, instead of peaking in the autumn as with earlier pandemics it gained momentum near the winter school break and as

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<sup>1</sup>Robin McKie, “The defeat of polio proved that immunisation saves lives . . . but there’s a sting to the tale”, *The Observer*, 15 November 2020, 7. See also <https://polioeradication.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/GPEI-CVDPV-Fact-Sheet-20191115.pdf> (accessed May 2022).

<sup>2</sup>See <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-45665821> (accessed May 2022).

<sup>3</sup>An example of this growing awareness is the agenda of the 2022 Stockholm Forum for Peace and Development: <https://www.sipri.org/events/2022/2022-stockholm-forum-peace-and-development> (accessed May 2022). See also, Andreas Malm, *Corona, Climate, Chronic Emergency: War Communism in the Twenty First Century* (London: Verso, 2020).

<sup>4</sup>Apoorva Mandavilli, “How often Can You Be Infected by the Corona”, *The New York Times*, 16 May 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/16/health/covid-reinfection.html>.

<sup>5</sup>Bruce Campbell, “The Black Death and the future of history after Covid-19”, accessed at <https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/black-death-future-of-history/>, and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Education in a post-COVID world: Nine ideas for public action* (Paris: UNESCO, 2020).

children were at home the rate of influenza illness among schoolchildren and their families declined. Finally, the 1977 Russian Flu influenza similarly spread rapidly, and caused epidemic disease in children and young adults worldwide.<sup>6</sup>

Faced with COVID-19 some historians have looked to such previous pandemics to understand the nature of the disease and its trajectory and how previous generations dealt with similar health crises. In this context, it is the so-called Spanish Influenza pandemic of 1918–1920 which has become the global crisis against which COVID-19 is measured. It is estimated the pandemic affected 20 to 40 per cent of the world population and over 50 million people died. The Spanish flu had been forgotten but in recent years it was rediscovered by public health specialists following the avian flu and swine flu epidemics in 2005 and 2009 and has become an “omnipresent reference in the pandemic preparedness scenarios that have guided global health security in the last two decades”.<sup>7</sup> However, this desire to learn from the past has been criticised by Guillaume Lachenal and Gaëtan Thomas, who have argued against an over-reliance on the allure of “pandemic precedents” and instead advocate “an enhanced understanding of the capacity of present crises to resist historical interpretation”.<sup>8</sup> They write that the current situation deserves something other than “a scholarly ‘spot the difference’ game between more or less recent pandemic precedents”, the “relative merits” of “stressing analogy . . . [and] parallels” and “embroidering the present crisis into a quasi-mythical structure of panic and quarantine” which has the effect of “smoothing over the intricate historicity of pandemic events”.<sup>9</sup>

Both Lachenal and Thomas write as medical historians and their criticisms focus on explanations of cause and effect, of similarities and differences, and on analyses based on precedents that do not “map onto neat narratives” and are problematic. As researchers they have looked beyond influenza pandemics to HIV/AIDS, SARS and Ebola. It is also important to note that there are many other disease outbreaks/epidemics – measles, smallpox, polio, tuberculosis and Legionnaires disease to name but a few – each with their own situated histories of content and conjuncture, each with their own historians and historical interpretations. Elizabeth Fee and Daniel Fox writing about the new epidemic of AIDS made the case for “histories of the present” to open up new perspectives on the past so as to question received categories of analysis and trajectories of response.<sup>10</sup> Writing on Ebola in 2015, Lachenal introduced the idea of “urgent pasts” and the value of looking at the ecology of epidemics. “Histories of the present” and “urgent pasts” both suggest a focus on the moment and the need to look for the immediate context and the ecology of the local and to recognise what has changed between epidemics in terms of “medical knowledge and techniques, global interconnectedness, economic structures, and so on”.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup>C. W. Potter, “A history of influenza”, *Journal of Applied Microbiology*, 21 (2001): 572–579; Claire Jackson, “History lessons: the Asian Flu pandemic”, *British Journal of General Practice* 59, no. 565 (2009): 622–623.

<sup>7</sup>Guillaume Lachenal and Gaëtan Thomas, “COVID-19: When history has no lessons”, *History Workshop Online*, March 2020, <https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/covid-19-when-history-has-no-lessons/>.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Elizabeth Fee and Daniel M. Fox, eds., *AIDS: The Burdens of History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988).

<sup>11</sup>Guillaume Lachenal, “Outbreak of Unknown Origin in the Tripoint Zone”, *Limn*, no. 5: *Ebola's Ecologies*, January 2015, <https://limn.it/articles/outbreak-of-unknown-origin-in-the-tripoint-zone/>; and Lachenal and Thomas, “COVID-19: When history has no lessons.”

What then of histories of the present moment?<sup>12</sup> The official global COVID-related death toll as of 15 May 2022 is over 6.2 million and over 517 million confirmed Coronavirus cases globally.<sup>13</sup> Using raw numbers from a range of sources the data team of the journal the *Economist* at the end of 2021 put the real death count as being in the region of 17.5 million.<sup>14</sup> Beyond morbidity and mortality, pandemics have secondary impacts. Two years on what do we know about how the COVID-19-induced turmoil has impacted on education and children's lives? What layers of information are currently in circulation? Data show there has been mass education disruption on a global scale with 1.6–1.7 billion children initially excluded at the peak of school closures in April 2020 and 500 million children were unable to access emergency remote-learning activities.<sup>15</sup> For teachers globally the impact of COVID-19 intensified already existing challenges associated with education reforms, changing roles and responsibilities and teacher workload as teachers were “required to respond rapidly and with flexibility and creativity and work in new ways”.<sup>16</sup> The abrupt closure of schools and other restrictions implemented to curb the spread of the virus have had deleterious impact on the well-being of young people. Children experienced involuntarily isolation and reduced access to support services – the latter particularly impacted on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth.<sup>17</sup> As one commentator noted, COVID has resulted in “an upturning of the contract between the generations” with children “conscripted to protect adults, and [they] have paid the price . . . [they] missed months of interacting with one another at the stage of life when they need it most”.<sup>18</sup> In addition, there is widespread evidence that because of lockdowns children have been placed at greater risk of exposure to violence and abuse in domestic settings.<sup>19</sup> International researchers found that globally, from March 2020 to April 2021, an estimated “1,134,000 children experienced the death of primary caregivers, including at least one parent or custodial grandparent”, and because COVID could lead to death within weeks, families had little time to prepare children for “orphanhood”. Their research pointed to the need for an additional response pillar: “prevent, detect, respond, and care for children”.<sup>20</sup> Other research has pointed to both the hierarchisation of grief and “the silencing of loss amongst marginalised and

<sup>12</sup>John Lanchester the British journalist and novelist rightly warns us of the difficulty of pinning down COVID-19 to a moment in time: “I have been reading books about the crisis – and many, many yards of journalistic commentary – for more than a year now, and it has left me feeling that Covid is an almost impossible subject to sum up, because we don't know where we are in the story”, Lanchester, “As the Lock Rattles”, *London Review of Books*, 16 December 2021, 13.

<sup>13</sup>Dashboard of the World Health Organization (WHO), accessed at <https://covid19.who.int/>.

<sup>14</sup>Lanchester, “As the Lock Rattles”, 16.

<sup>15</sup>Prachi Srivastava, “Education and the Pandemic: Engaging in epistemic humility to question assumptions, institutions and knowledges”, *Unesco Education Research and Foresight Working Papers*, 3 May 2022.

<sup>16</sup>Catriona O'Toole and Venka Simovska, “Same storm different boats! The impact of COVID-19 on the wellbeing of school communities”, *Health Education* 122, no. 1 (2022): 47–61, <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/HE-02-2021-0027/full/pdf?title=same-storm-different-boats-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-the-wellbeing-of-school-communities> (accessed May 2022).

<sup>17</sup>See S. Singh, D. Roy, K. Sinka, S. Parveen, G. Sharma and G. Joshi, “Impact of COVID-19 and lockdown on mental health of children and adolescents: a narrative review with recommendations”, *Psychiatry Research* 293 (2020): 1–10; R.I. Silliman Cohen and E.A. Bosk, “Vulnerable youth and COVID-19 pandemic”, *Paediatrics* 146, no. 1 (2020): 1–5; and R. Montacute, *Social Mobility and Covid-19: Implications of the Covid-19 Crisis for Educational Inequality* (London: The Sutton Trust).

<sup>18</sup>Lanchester, “As the Lock Rattles”, 15.

<sup>19</sup>O'Toole and Simovska, “Same storm different boats!”.

<sup>20</sup>Susan D. Hills et al., “Global minimum estimates of children affected by COVID-19-associated orphanhood and deaths of caregivers: a modelling study”, *Lancet* 398, no. 10298 (2021): 391–402. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(21)01253–8. Epub 21 July 2021. PMID: 34298000; PMCID: PMC8293949. Our emphasis.

minoritised groups” and the fracturing of consensus with dissent (Black Lives Matter movement, Extinction Rebellion and populist counter-movements in Italy and Germany) being a response “to perceived failings in pandemic governance”.<sup>21</sup>

In short, one history of the present moment is of global turmoil and enforced behavioural change as we collectively participated in “the largest social science experiment in history”:<sup>22</sup> an experiment which documented that as the virus spread systematic, structural and social inequalities were exposed and, as Prachi Srivastava has argued, the starting points before the pandemic were already unequal and COVID laid “bare the extent of global and local inequities, existing exclusions and dysfunctions of education systems”. It follows that the long-term effects of COVID will consequently be unequal and inequitable. Learning loss and social development will be compounded for those who are already marginalised and vulnerable.<sup>23</sup>

However, what stands out compared to what we know about previous pandemics is the determination of institutions and agencies to actively collect data on people’s experiences of living with COVID-19 so as to capture the present for the future generations. *Hold Still* is a good example. In May 2020 the National Portrait Gallery (NPG), England, launched *Hold Still*, a photographic project to create a portrait of the UK during the COVID-19 lockdown. Some 31,000 images were submitted by the public in a short period of time and in September 2020 the *Hold Still* digital exhibition was unveiled to offer a communal space to “pause and consider” shared experiences of the pandemic. This was immediately followed by a nationwide community exhibition and 100 images were selected for display on billboards, digital screens, buildings and bus stops in 80 towns and cities across the UK over a four-week period. An accompanying book was published, with each selected photograph given a title and a brief comment by the photographer:

#### RAINBOW ...

Ten days into shielding, my daughter and I joined the movement to paint rainbows on the windows. It was a moment of hope, fringed by fear and uncertainty. We were holding our breath [sic] to see what would happen ... This image is one of hope, but, looking back on it, I can feel strongly the sense of worry and uncertainty of that time: knowing that due to shielding, I would be unable to work for months ...

#### LOCKDOWN 2020 RAINBOW WALL ...

I wanted to make some inspiring memories of such an unprecedented time with my 3-year-old daughter, Phoebe ... It was very worrying and disconcerting for me ... as this was all unknown territory ... We drew rainbows to display in our window ... I wanted ... to mark this historic period ... Photographs are so important and ... can help trigger a buried memory or recall a precise moment in time ...

#### HIGHER LEARNING ...

<sup>21</sup>K. M. Miller, Y. Han, M. Bayly, K. Kuhn and I. Morlino, *Confronting the Covid-19 Pandemic. Grief, Loss and Social Order* (London: LSE, 2020), 57.

<sup>22</sup>Peter Frankopan, “The year the Earth stood still”, in *Confinement*, ed. S. Barber and M. Benson (Augsburg: te Neues, 2020) 8.

<sup>23</sup>Srivastava, “Education and the Pandemic”, 3.

This is my son doing home-schooling in our small outdoor space, the balcony. This is currently our new normal . . . Space is limited, and with schools closed we tried to make as much use as possible of the outdoor space that we have . . .

Images and words combined, but it is the “faces” of Britain in 2020 that led Nicholas Cullinan, Director of the NPG, to write that *Hold Still* was “an important historical record of this extraordinary moment in our history – expressed through the faces of our nation – that will remain of utmost importance for generations to come”.<sup>24</sup>

The idea of curating visually a moment in the present for the future was not unique to the NPG. FORMAT International Photography Festival had earlier invited professional and amateur photographers to create a visual record of living through the Coronavirus crisis on Instagram through mass participation and photographers from over 90 countries submitted over 40,000 images to the hashtag #massisolationFORMAT. A large-scale photo mosaic was produced in 2021 “to commemorate this moment in history and celebrate our collective emergence into the ‘new normal’”.<sup>25</sup> On a smaller scale there have also been COVID-focused photography exhibitions in Rabat, Karlsruhe and Lisbon and artist responses to the virus in Edinburgh, Brussels, Basel and Locarno.<sup>26</sup>

From Stockholm to Birmingham museums have been collecting oral testimonies of life in Coronavirus times. The focus has not just been on capturing the voices of adults. At the Nordiska museet, the largest cultural museum in Sweden, children have been encouraged to contribute to the Corona Memory collection by answering a small set of standard questions about how their everyday lives have been affected, how their behaviour has changed and how they view the contemporary situation in relation to the future.<sup>27</sup> From Vienna to London, Edinburgh to Washington museums have also been actively seeking out COVID-related artefacts that help tell the story of the pandemic. It is an area of collecting which comes with critical ethical questions such as how institutions can ensure an adequate diversity of voices are collected and how to avoid exploiting the trauma associated with death and loss. In London at the end of 2020 the Science Museum acquired the first ever vial of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine following clinical approval along with the syringe used. Other objects collected by UK museums included lectern signage from 10 Downing Street briefings (“Stay Alert, Control the Virus, Save Lives”) face masks, hand sanitiser, COVID-themed greetings cards and anti-racist stickers and posters produced by the Chinese against Racist Virus movement. The determination to collect such material in the present moment reflects the paucity of emblematic objects

<sup>24</sup>*Hold Still. Portrait of Our Nation in 2020* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2021) Foreword, 30, 72, 100. See also the “faces” of Catalunya in the photobook edited by Xavier Bertral, *Dies Que Són Història* (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 2021).

<sup>25</sup><https://thepeoplespicture.com/massisolationformat/>. See also *FORMAT 21 Control* (Derby: Quad/Format, 2021).

<sup>26</sup>Museu Nacional de Fotografia, Rabat, Marrocos, May 2021, <https://pt.euronews.com/cultura/2021/05/11/fotos-da-pandemia-no-mundo-no-museu-de-fotografia-de-marrocos>; Karlsruhe, “Shutdown Shot”, September 2021, <https://www.swr.de/swraktuell/baden-wuerttemberg/karlsruhe/karlsruher-ausstellung-zeigt-bilder-aus-dem-leben-mit-der-corona-pandemie-100.html>; “Pandemia”, Museu Nacional de História Natural e da Ciência, July–September 2021, <https://www.museus.ulisboa.pt/pt-pt/pandemia>; “The Pandemic Revisited: Representations and Reflections, Edinburgh College of Art, June 2022; “Coronaceno: Reflexões em tempos de pandemia”, Museu do Amanha, March 2021, <https://revistagalileu.globo.com/Cultura/noticia/2021/03/museu-do-amanha-inaugura-exposicao-sobre-era-do-coronavirus.html>; *The Temporary Museum of Lockdown*, Brussels Free University, May 2021, <https://www.efc.com/efe/english/destacada/coronavirus-lockdown-inspired-art-displayed-in-brussels/50000261-4490551>; and “Corona Call”, Basel and Locarno, 2021–2022, <https://www.corona-call.visarte.ch/>. Thanks to members of the History of Education Ecologies International Research Group.

<sup>27</sup>See <https://minnen.se/tema/corona>. There is also a geomap which includes memory contributions; see <https://digitalt.nordiskamuseet.se/coronaminnen/>.

from past pandemics. At the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, for instance, the “iconic absences” include any objects relating to the Spanish flu. All such objects being collected are manifestations of COVID reality, that can be seen and touched and, as Stephen Moss notes, “are our message to the future”.<sup>28</sup> Such contemporary collecting and archiving is also a way of challenging the idea that, as one unnamed historian commented, “History will be written before COVID and after COVID”.<sup>29</sup>

This brings us to the histories that *have* been written for this special issue *Histories of the Past and Histories of the Future: Pandemics and Historians of Education* and the insights they offer regarding past and future research agendas. The contributions naturally fall into clusters. The first cluster of articles look at the mediation and circulation of knowledge during past pandemics. As populations are often isolated and face spatial and social restrictions it applies not only to the past but also to present pandemics that (social) media play a major role in coping with a major health crisis. In “Pox and parents: educational choices in the light of smallpox epidemics in seventeenth-century England”, Susanne Spieker analyses a collection of letters of the Clark family (1667–1710) as private-public media that not only document how smallpox outbreaks impacted on the lives of gentry families in seventeenth-century England but also how letters served as tools of information and circulating knowledge. By analysing letters, Spieker’s article offers a microhistory on how information about infectious diseases has been spread and how these documents affected educational decision-making at the intersection of home schooling, educational institutions and family life. It is interesting to see how risks were consciously divided between parents, households and education institutions, and how immunity, infection rates and (past) health conditions shaped many educational decisions. Sônia Camara and Ariadne Lopes Ecar analyse print media, namely the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo*, and look at how information was shaped during the outbreak of the Spanish flu in Brazil, namely in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo (1918–1919). Print media served to stabilise the power of the medical profession while schools were declared sites of contagion and transformed into hospitals. Prevailing ignorance by the central government towards school life and the teaching profession during the outbreak of the so-called Spanish flu (1918–1919) is also the finding of Pedro L. Moreno Martínez’s analysis of one of the most popular Spanish educational journals, *El Magisterio Español*. Again teachers’ concerns were abandoned and not adequately met. Both male and female teachers lacked reliable information, continuous updates on the spread of the influenza pandemic, adequate school buildings, appropriate knowledge and professional training on how cope with and manage the situation locally.

Unheard voices and emotions of pandemics are another cluster. While print media are often accessible online within digital collections, local voices from remote areas are often silenced. Helena Cabeleira and Ana Madeira in “The noise of the living and the silence of the dead” use a public and oral history approach to pay tribute to unheard voices on education and pandemics in 1918 and 2021 Portugal. Their article reveals differences between rural and coastal urban areas. It shows that access to education and knowledge are matters of geopolitical decisions and social privilege and corresponding divides that

<sup>28</sup>Tess Thackara, “Smithsonian curators capture Covid-19 in real time”, *The Art Newspaper*, Number 330, January 2021; Stephen Moss, “Vaccine vials and a virtual hug: history of coronavirus in 15 objects”, *The Guardian*, 22 February 2021.

<sup>29</sup>Esther Addley, “How history will view the pandemic. Everything going on seems to all link together”, *The Guardian*, 13 February 2021, 20–21.

increase in times of pandemics. Another silenced theme in the history of pandemics is the emotional disruptions created by health crises. In “COVID-19 and the emotional culture of pandemics: a retrospective and prospective view” historian of medicine Enric J. Novella looks at various source materials, including medical treatises and ego-documents, from where he identifies specific emotional patterns and mental disturbances (e.g. denial, panic, loneliness, mistrust, scapegoating and hedonistic excesses) that impacted on individuals and the collective and finally culminated in a culture of fear that emerged from health crises. Novella expects that current societies will develop similar individual and collective anxieties that need attention.

National policies and emerging discourses are another cluster. Pablo Pineau and Ignacio Frechtel in “Health, illness and schools in Argentina: marks of epidemics in the history of a changing relation” detect growing bonds between education and health that were fostered by various national policies and hygiene movements and celebrated as an asset of modernity and progress. Betül Batır systematically went through an abundant number of sources to document in her article how successive health crises encouraged the Turkish State until well into the end of the 1950s to establish a set of laws and regulations to deal with issues such as health education and regular medical examinations. Kate Rousmaniere in “Unprecedented times: a historiography of pandemics in North American education” takes as her focus inspiring discourses that emerged in the United States and Canada. Rousmaniere stresses that US American and Canadian research approached the history of epidemics and education from the history of science, the history of education and the history of disability, with the latter emphasising the entangled histories of education and medicine. Rousmaniere also touches upon issues of race and gender that must be seen as overarching research perspectives while referring to indigenous populations and the discrimination of communities and individuals.

A fourth cluster of articles underline the entangled histories of education and pandemics by contributions which put specific emphasis on ecologies of education and planetary responsibility. Angelo Van Gorp, Eulàlia Collelldemont, Inês Félix, Ian Grosvenor, Björn Norlin and Núria Padrós use an ecological approach to study past pandemics. The authors identify social, institutional, cultural and material entanglements of education and pandemics in a joint “reading” of various sources originating from the European south and north which all focus on the influenza pandemic of 1918–20. Focusing on children and their environment and using a micro-analytical approach numerous overarching layers, threads and entanglements are unveiled that point to the inherent potential of an educational-ecological approach for generating new insights and understandings of the interconnections between education pasts and presents and infectious disease pandemics. In “Are new pandemics a historical fate of human evolution? Education and the contribution from a geoethical perspective” Marta Paz, Isabel Teixeira and Dulce Lima used an evolutionary approach that critically reflects on the anthropocentric era and the role of humans from a geoethical perspective. The authors concentrate on the macro level and look at how entanglements of geosciences, history, philosophy and sociology had effects on education systems and the well-being of the planet. Their approach makes us aware of how important it is to look at how disruptive geoethical norms not only impacted on but also were supported by educational thinking and practices.

The final cluster of articles continues with the theme of reflecting on entanglements and ecologies of education and pandemics by suggesting unprecedented approaches to future histories of education. In “Emerging ecologies and changing relations: a brief manifesto for histories of education after COVID-19” Karin Priem draws upon photography as an active intervention into compromised environments. She suggests rethinking the normative legacy of enlightenment and liberalism and shifting our research agendas away from anthropocentric world views that have placed great emphasis on human sovereignty, freedom and progress without reflecting their ecological consequences. The article argues that anthropocentric approaches to history of education have neglected the openness and vulnerability of the human body and its ethical, cultural and social proximity to other living creatures and the material world. Also, by means of visual analysis, the paper sets out to propose a manifesto for a post-anthropocentric research agenda that anchors history of education and the history of pandemics in intertwined ecologies of the living and material worlds. As we have argued earlier in our Introduction the COVID-19 crisis has also focused our attention on how the present can be historically preserved for future historians of education. Tizian Zumthurm and Stefan Krebs in “COVID-19 digital memory banks: challenges and opportunities for historians of education” put a spotlight on public history projects and digital sources collected through community response. While focussing on education and young people and the abundance and opportunities on offer in digital collections, they warn that imbalances and silences can only be countered by digital-source criticism and a close look at the metadata of sources. The final article is by Noah Sobe and deals with COVID-19’s disruptions and UNESCO’s imaginations of the school of the future. Sobe concludes that what has been defined as a state of disruption can actually be analysed as a permanent crisis that unfolds in education at local, national and global levels. After all, according to Sobe, education systems are “systems of difference”, and COVID-19 is one element among wider disruptive ecologies of difference.

In *The Pandemic Century. A History of Global Contagion from the Spanish Flu to Covid-19* (2020), Mark Honigsbaum reminds us that “the only thing that is certain is that there will be new plagues and new pandemics. It is not a question of if, but when. Pestilences may be unpredictable, but they *will* recur”.<sup>30</sup> So where do we go from here? Is there a way forward for historians of education and their researching and writing of pandemic histories of the present and the past? Reflecting on these questions we found ourselves revisiting the 2020 article “History of education and Covid-19: the crisis of the school according to African, American and European researchers”. Here among the writings of 18 historians of education we found comments on the need to recognise that the relationship between the past, the present and the future is continuous, and that there are different layers of time which co-exist and influence our fears, desires and hopes; that we need to understand the emotions, conversations, words and gestures that define a moment in time and identify changing relational combinations and their impact on institutions and agencies; that pandemics make highly visible the embedded inequalities in education and society in general, and that we should actively seek out the voices and experiences of those who are socially marginalised and at the same time interrogate the

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<sup>30</sup>Mark Honigsbaum, *The Pandemic Century. A History of Global Contagion from the Spanish Flu to Covid-19* (London: Penguin Books, 2020), 283.

policy and pedagogical assumptions which were already reproducing inequalities; that education is a site of contestation from which new inequalities can emerge and it is the mechanism by which a culture transmits itself across the generations and that schools through ideological and material consumption interface with both the state and manufacturing economies.<sup>31</sup>

These observations collectively taken together and then read alongside the content of the articles collected here and described above confirm for us that the most fruitful and rewarding way forward to studying past and future pandemics lies in thinking ecologically. As we assess and try and make sense of the myriad consequences of living in “pandemic times”, of confronting exposure, transmission, transmutation and loss, and looking to community and collective futures we believe we cannot study pandemics and their impact on education and children’s lives without widening the aperture of our research. We need to identify and explore the filaments and threads that connect and bind unencountered microbes and pathogens with local conditions, social and political structures, knowledges and ideas, policies and practices, assumptions and emotions, dialogue and rhetoric, reactions and responses, rights and representation, the spatial and the temporal, the material and the environmental, and human and non-human relations. Adopting an ecological approach will help us not only actively engage with histories of the present and the importance of contemporary collecting, but also offer the possibility of new understandings and new insights into the dynamics and consequences of past pandemics.

Endings are just as difficult as beginnings. Final words then we leave to the global historian Peter Frankopan: “And that is why we come back to studying history time and again – because reliving painful times is more comforting than living through them”.<sup>32</sup>

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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<sup>31</sup>Tony Honorato and Ana Clara Bortoleto Nery, “History of Education and Covid-19: The crisis of the school according to African (Akanbi, Chisholm), American (Boto, Civera, Cunha, Kinne, Rocha, Romano, Rousmaniere, Southwell, Souza, Tabora, Veiga, Vidal) and European (Depaepe, Escolano, Magalhães, Nóvoa) researchers”, *Acta Scientiarum. Education* 42, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.4025/actascieduc.v42i1.54998>.

<sup>32</sup>Frankopan, “The year the Earth stood still”, 9.