Julie Allan and Francesca Peruzzo

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Rewriting the Grammar of Schooling to Unsettle Identities

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JANISE HURTIG

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Abstract

Education has been and continues to be shaped, informed, and driven by a so-called "grammar of schooling": an approach which completely ignores the many and diverse identities that learners own, are given, and encounter. Categorising students into neat, labelled boxes; splintering knowledge into strictly defined subjects; and fracturing learning – this grammar of schooling desperately needs rewriting.

Through narratives from teachers, students, and students' families, this book explores the lived experiences of those who are forced to live with the current approach, and the consequences for their lives, relationships, and education. It also asks the question of what creative and holistic alternative approaches might look like.

Keywords

Contents

Learning objectives

1. To recognise the value of the lived experiences of education professionals.
2. To understand the idea of the "grammar of schooling" and its historical origins.
3. To recognise the impact of global dynamics on local realities.
4. To appreciate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly on disadvantaged groups.
5. To understand the role of technologies in inclusive education.
6. To become aware of the possibilities for challenging the grammar of schooling.

1
Schooling, technologies, and equity in times of crisis

> The secret wish of us all, what we think about all the time, is when will it end? But it will not end: it is reasonable to see the ongoing pandemic as announcing a new era of ecological troubles.
>
> (Žižek, 2021, p. 12)

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been, without doubt, a global catastrophe, "upending the lives of children and families" (UNICEF, 2020a) and providing an "existential threat to humanity and an equitable world" (Bardosh et al., 2019, p. 14). The pandemic has widened the gap between those already disadvantaged and others and created a "double jeopardy" (UNICEF, 2020b) for children living in poverty. It has also exposed some new, highly disadvantaged groups, including migrant workers, whom Stein, Latour, and Schultz (2019, p. 224) describe as part of the "geo-social classes". Žižek (2021, p. 20) points out that "this new

working class was here all along, the pandemic just propelled it into visibility".

Education faced, as a result of the pandemic, "an emergency of unprecedented scale" (Reuge et al., 2021, p. 2). Schools were plunged into crisis mode, forced to close with little notice, and required to redirect and recreate learning for their students at home. According to UNICEF (2021), schools across the world were closed between March 2020 and February 2021 for an average of 95 instruction days, amounting to roughly half of what children should have had. Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean had the greatest number of closures (losing 158 days of instruction), followed by South Asian countries (closed for 146 days), and countries in Eastern and Southern Africa (with an average of 101 days of closure). UNICEF (2021) estimates that 214 million students globally have missed at least three quarters of classroom instruction time, with 168 million children from 14 countries missing almost all instruction time because of school closures.

Everyone will have their own story of where they were when they learned that we were entering a pandemic and about to go into lockdown. In the interests of stimulating readers to reflect on their own experiences, we recall ours. Julie was in the last few months as Head of the School of Education at the University of Birmingham in the UK as the news from the senior leaders at the regular Monday morning meetings was becoming increasingly bleak. We were being advised to prepare for imminent closure and to make arrangements for the conversion to online learning. Expert colleagues from the medical school added their gloomy prognoses and confirmed that the pandemic was going to be "catastrophic". Despite the consensus, Julie still couldn't quite

believe that this was going to happen and as she relayed the news to the senior leaders in the School of Education, their reactions suggested they didn't quite believe it – or her – either. That was soon to change.

Francesca had recently finished her doctorate at the University College London, Institute of Education in London. Eager to contribute to make higher education a more inclusive and socially just institution for disabled students and for students from minority backgrounds, at the time, she was working as a special educational needs tutor for a local charity while publishing from her doctoral thesis and engaging with disabled student activists to bring change in higher education institutions in the UK. She remembers being on a bus on her way to the local charity when the lockdown was announced. Her thoughts went straight to her students, many of whom had multiple impairments and developmental disabilities who came from challenging family backgrounds. She wondered how the situation would impact their lives and education.

The COVID-19 pandemic has, without doubt, provoked a crisis in education, as elsewhere in public life. However, as many educationists and observers have been arguing for several years, education was in crisis long before the pandemic hit. Arendt (2006), for example, highlights the harm done to children by education through its failure to secure the vital conditions necessary for growth and development. Others (Ball and Collet-Sabé, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Darling-Hammond, 2001) have drawn attention to the huge and growing inequities, especially for minority ethnic groups, produced within a system that insists that "everyone do better than everyone else" (McDermott, 1993, p. 274).

This book is both a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which of course remains with us, and to the wider, and more enduring, crisis in education. By sharing the lived experiences of professionals – through the pandemic and in their careers more generally – we uncover how specific educational spaces (the school and, during the pandemic, the home) are encountered and *lived*. We also, in turn, consider how these experiences shape individuals' identities. We reflect critically on how, within these educational spaces, some of the less educational aspects of schooling – what has been referred to as the "grammar of schooling" (Tyack and Tobin, 1994, p. 453; Zhao, 2020, p. 198) – are repeated, leading to the "repetition of exclusion" (Allan, 2006, p. 121):

> The grammar of schooling, such as standardized organizational practices in dividing time and space, classifying students and allocating them to classrooms, and splintering knowledge into 'subjects', is so powerful that it has persisted despite many repeated challenges by very courageous, intelligent, and powerful innovators. It has persisted despite mounting evidence and widespread acknowledgement that it is obsolete and does not serve our children well.
>
> (Zhao, 2020, p. 198)

In spite of the persistence of the grammar of schooling, which is revealed through the professionals' lived experiences, this is, nevertheless, an optimistic and hopeful book, and we also demonstrate, through the professionals, the possibilities for rewriting the grammar of schooling. We turn now to describe the project within which we obtained the lived experiences that we report in this book.

Lived DIGITAL experiences

The research that informs this book took place within a year-long project entitled *DIGITAL (Diversifying Inclusion and Growth: Inclusive Technologies for Accessible Learning) in a time of Coronavirus.* We investigated the role of digital and non-digital technologies in promoting inclusive practices during the COVID-19 pandemic response of countries in the Global North and South. Data were obtained through interviews with educators, teachers, headteachers, teaching assistants, and leaders of grassroots organisations in England, the US, Australia, Italy, Chile, and Malaysia. Since the project took place in the middle of the pandemic, all of the interviews were carried out online by Zoom. However, we were able to visit Malaysia when restrictions were lifted and see for ourselves the spaces – and the students and staff living and working in these spaces – that project participants had described. This may explain, in advance, any possible over-representation of the Malaysian context. It certainly reminds us of the power of the physical experience of space.

By creating moments for lived experiences of teachers to be heard, and by reading these in conjunction with key theoretical ideas, we have been able to understand more acutely the extent of the injustices, oppression, and disadvantage experienced in education. We were also able to understand how teachers' actions could improve the lives of their students and alter their identities as teachers, students, and communities. The key ideas that we used come from decolonial theory (De Lissovoy, 2010; Mignolo, 2011; Santos, 2018; 2021) and from conceptualisations by the philosophers Foucault (2004; 1977), especially his

concept of epistemic grid and the relations between power and knowledge and dividing practices in education and Deleuze and Guattari (1987), in particular smooth and striated spaces, deterritorialisation, the rhizome, and lines of flight. We "use" theory here purely to help understand what is going on in the teachers' lived experiences and to explore the potential for making things better than they were before. We unpack these ideas, and how we used them, a little further below.

Decolonial theory assisted in our reading of the grammar of schooling and in drawing attention to:

> The production and validation of knowledges anchored in the experiences of resistance of all those groups that have systematically suffered injustices, oppression, and destruction caused by capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy.
>
> (Santos, 2018, p. 1)

Because decolonial theory draws attention to the structural and systemic origins of oppression, we were able to explore how some of these oppressions get translated within school and curriculum, without laying any blame on the teachers. Foucault's epistemic grid helped us to problematise and interrogate the way in which these practices become routinised, ingrained and naturalised. Decolonial theory further helped us to recognise the potential of some of the teachers' actions in altering the curriculum to bring forth new, alternative knowledges that could alter the students' subjectivities.

Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) conceptualisation of smooth and striated spaces also assisted in the understanding of the closures created within the grammar of schooling and the nature of

the spaces in which it operates. The chief function of the state, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), is to create striations in the spaces of institutions, including schools, that help to control and contain individuals. Within smooth spaces, on the other hand, "life reconstitutes its stakes, confronts new obstacles, invents new paces, switches adversaries" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 500). Deleuze and Guattari offered an encouragement to create smooth spaces, which they described as deterritorialisation. This, to them, was opportunistic rather than strategic and required invention and creativity. Having these ideas in our mind as we encountered the teachers' lived experiences, we were able to recognise some of their actions as deliberately working on the spaces of the school and the curriculum and changing them for the better.

The rhizome was introduced by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) as both a concept and a model of thought to provide an alternative way of thinking about knowledge and about the means of acquiring that knowledge. Conventional knowledge, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), is rigid, striated, and hierarchical, with a tree-like structure, and learning involves merely a transfer of knowledge (from the teacher to the student) in a process "which articulates and hierarchizes tracings" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 12). The rhizome (real-life examples of which are ginger and snake plants), in contrast, moves in messy and unpredictable ways; has multiple connections, lines, and points of rupture; and "releases us from the false bondage of linear relationships" (Roy, 2003, p. 90). The rhizome offers possibilities for rewriting the grammar of schooling in new, creative ways and we were able to recognise children's learning, depicted by their

teachers, as having rhizomic properties. We also understood the children's learning as following new lines of flight, with literally new directions and new knowledges formed within and through these lines. This kind of learning seemed to offer promise for undoing the grammar of schooling and replacing it with new, smoother alternatives:

> This is how it should be done: Lodge yourself on a stratum; experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times.
>
> (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 161)

These theoretical resources are extremely useful in understanding how and why the grammar of schooling continues to endure and in appreciating the extent of its damage. They are also crucial in helping us to imagine how things might be done differently. But it was the participants in our project, the teachers, school leaders, parents and heads of governmental and non-governmental organisations, who inspired us to believe in the possibility of rewriting the grammar of schooling – by doing that rewriting themselves. We turn, for the remainder of this chapter, to some critical reflections on three key elements of the study: schools and schooling, technologies, and equity. Schools and schooling were central to the study as the main arena in which the grammar of schooling operated; technologies were at the heart of every country's response to the pandemic, supporting the switch to learning at home; equity, and of course inequity, is a crucial

element of the impact of the pandemic responses and of the grammar of schooling before that.

Schooling

Concerns by governments, and by the public, about what students were losing out on by not being in school became converted into significant panic about "loss of learning" (Roberts and Danechi, 2022). However, as Bello (2021) points out, the notion of learning loss is merely a marketing catchphrase intended to bring financial benefits to publishers of tests and financial consultants. Nevertheless, fears about learning loss led to the commissioning of two reports on this topic from the UK-based Education Policy Institute (EPI, 2020a and b) and a study by the assessment company Renaissance Learning (also UK in origin but with a global reach) which used its own school testing software (Burrows, 2021; Williamson, Macgilchrist, and Potter, 2021). EPI (2020a and b) established that learning losses in primary school were 3.7 months in mathematics and 1.2 months in reading by the first half of the autumn term of 2020. These had reduced by the second half of that term to 2.7 months for mathematics, although reading remained at 1.2 months. By the second half of the spring term, in March 2021 and after the second lockdown, learning losses had increased again to 3.5 months in mathematics and 2.2 months in reading. The findings of the Renaissance study, showing significant learning loss, were published by the Department for Education (GOV. UK, 2021) and Williamson, Macgilchrist, and Potter (2021) note that Renaissance happens to also supply projects for mitigation of learning gaps through programmes of accelerated learning

and personalised learning plans (www.renlearn.co.uk/star-asse ssments/). Governments made available a range of measures to enable children to catch up; these included the Renaissance acceleration programmes, tutor-led programmes in mathematics and English, summer schools, and extensions to the school day. UNICEF (2020c), the World Bank, and the United Nations Refugee Agency all endorsed fully the principles and benefits of accelerated education. However, some critics considered the measures put in place to be "too late" for the pupils in greatest need (Ferguson, 2020).

Reay (2020, p. 311) argues that the pandemic has accentuated "two seismic fault lines" in English education, with one coming to have precedence over the other. She suggests that one fault line, that sees education as having inherent value in and of itself, is gradually being eroded in favour of a view of education as merely a means to economic and productive ends. Reay argues that the economic imperative has been driven by a government desperate to restart the economy and fearful that children will no longer be fit to support the economy and drive the country's recovery. Whilst Reay's argument is compelling, our view is that the problem goes much deeper and lies in a fixation with schooling and what goes on in schools rather than with education, leading to schools becoming sites of "division, exclusion, normalisation, and categorisation" (Ball and Collet-Sabé, 2021, p. 3). This situation of dysfunctional and damaging schooling has little to do with the teachers' practices or professionalism and everything to do with the way schools are forced to operate to sort and select, to channel and organise students, and to ensure lines of accountability are prioritised and adhered to. Ball and Collet-

Sabé (2021, p. 1) conclude that schools have become "intolerable" institutions. We remain much more optimistic that schools can become more focused on educating than on schooling children. We are, however, concerned about the ease with which schools, in their role of *loco parentis* and entrusted with responsibilities in relation to children, assume full control over the bodies and minds of the children and young people in their charge (Allan and Harwood, 2022).

Schools are highly structured organisations that are intensively scrutinised and subjected to regimes of accountability. The low levels of trust that ensue create tensions (2103) relating to performativity, with increasing pressures upon teachers. The "centre" (governments and municipalities) and its demands create fear for teachers and school leaders:

> Work in many schools is dominated by a continuous fear of inspection and an obsession with meeting centrally set targets so that the balance of the curriculum is disrupted and education can become the incessant process of preparing for the tests and being tested.
>
> (Booth, 2003, p. 36)

Elliot (2001, p. 202) suggests that the auditing and accountability processes visited upon schools creates a kind of "colonisation" that leads to "pathologies of creative compliance in the form of gamesmanship around an indicator culture". In other words, they force school leaders and teachers to concentrate on how well they are seen to be doing against a set of indicators, amidst a "tyranny of transparency" (Strathern, 2000, p. 309). Furthermore, they lead to the adoption of policies of equality that ensure the same for all, rather than equity, providing differentially for each

individual. As we discuss later in this chapter, the emphasis on equality creates significant disadvantages for selected groups.

The space of the school that the child or young person encounters is both "sedentary" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 474), requiring passivity from them, and "impossibly circumscribed" (Roy, 2003, p. 82). Schools operate along striated lines, even to the extent of compelling students to follow the lines and arrows depicting a one-way system. A series of "order words" (Deleuze and Parnett, 1987, p. 22) restricts their senses and forces them to respond to the sounds that dominate the school space. The most audible of these are the recurrent bell (or more modern equivalents), signalling a change of class and activity, and the teacher's constant verbosity:

> Teachers declaim, explain, clarify, define and preach endlessly. They flit from one thought to another, slip in a cherished question, repeat the elicited answer, nod the head, point the finger, make all manner of movements, and so on and so forth.
>
> (Depaepe et al., 2000, p. 77)

The dominance of the auditory blocks out other sensations for the students and leaves little room for how they *feel*.

Technologies

The technologies that are moving towards the digitalisation of our lives (Žižek, 2021) have generated both suspicion and intrigue in equal measure. On the one hand, there are concerns about the incremental "surveillance capitalism" (Žižek, 2021, p. 13) exercised upon us by state and private organisations and used in the governance of individuals and populations: "The

subjectivities nurtured by these techniques of governance are frequently not those of choosing individuals" (Johns, 2021, p. 53). On the other hand, there is hope and curiosity about the potential of brain-related technologies, including the "wired brain" (Žižek, 2021, p. 13) and artificial intelligence, to enhance lives with minimal effort (Southgate, 2021). Wyatt-Smith, Lingard, and Heck (2021, p. 2) introduced the phrase "digital disruption" to capture the ambivalent ways in which technologies have penetrated teaching and testing in education, signalling that "a great technological and data juggernaut" (Lingard, Wyatt-Smith, and Heck, 2021, p. 4) has been released and is gaining increasing control over individuals' lives and futures. Three possibilities for what these futures might entail for the student subject are offered by Macgilchrist, Allert, and Bruch (2020). These are the "smooth users, competent subjects" (p. 77) whose access and use has increased through data analytics and artificial intelligence and who are expected to fit in seamlessly to the digital future created for them: "digital nomads, exploiting digitalisation for individualism" (p. 80) and increased mobility, whereby schools and schooling become superfluous; and "collective agents, in institutions as spaces for exploring new forms of living" (p. 82). It is possible to envisage each of these student subject futures becoming reality, although the "smooth user, competent subject" remains the most likely in the absence of any individual activism or community engagement.

In 2021, the United Nations recognised children's rights to access technologies (and to be protected from them) by endorsing General Comment No. 25 on children's rights in the context of a digital environment (UNCRC, 2021):

> The rights of every child must be respected, protected and fulfilled in the digital environment. Innovations in digital technologies affect children's lives and their rights in ways that are wide-ranging and interdependent, even where children do not themselves access the Internet.

Pangrazio and Sefton-Green (2021) argue that the word "digital" is usually an unnecessary adjective, but when placed in front of "rights", "citizenship", and "literacy", it "exerts a normative effect" (p. 17). This is achieved by presuming progress, increased scale and size, changes in human dimensions, and new norms and expectations, and precipitate, Pangrazio and Sefton-Green suggest, new forms of governance, control, and accountability. Williamson, Macgilchrist, and Potter (2021, p. 117) have observed the "disruptive and transformative force" of educational technologies on education systems across the globe. They attribute much of this to market influences and the return sought by investors as they attempt to transform education. Although there is consensus about the transformative potential of technologies for education, there is also recognition that they can expose children to harm (UNCRC, 2021; Williamson, Macgilchrist, and Potter, 2021). Meaningful digital access can enable children to realise civil, political, cultural, economic, and social rights, but it can also lead to the denial of these rights if digital inclusion is not enacted (UNCRC, 2021).

Illich (2009) has identified the negative consequences arising from a misplaced belief in technologies as a remedy for crises – realised through mere escalation. Instead of resolving the crises and associated problems, more information, datasets,

and management systems are demanded and supplied (see also Selwyn, 2017). Technologies and tools are recruited to work for people (even though they often create obligations and constraints) rather than being designed for people to work with and Illich calls for technologies and tools to have a degree of "conviviality" (Illich, 2009, p. 11) to ensure freedom for individuals:

> I chose the term 'conviviality' to designate the opposite of industrial productivity. I intend it to mean autonomous and creative intercourse among persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment; and this in contrast with the conditioned response to the demands made upon them by others, and by a man-made environment. I consider conviviality to be individual freedom realised in personal interdependence and, as such, an intrinsic ethical value.
>
> (Illich, 2009, p. 11)

Whilst it is claimed that technologies can foster greater equity in education through the increased accessibility of learning opportunities and the enhanced learning effectiveness for those with greatest need (Selwyn and Jandrić, 2020), it is also acknowledged that achievement gaps can remain unchanged or even widened by a lack of access to devices or to connectivity (Selwyn and Jandrić, 2020; Southgate, 2021). Learning analytics, used to design systems to detect students at risk of drop out, and personalised learning programmes that help maintain student engagement (Murphy et al., 2020), as Bello (2021) reminds us, generate profits for the private companies behind them.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, forcing widespread school closure and the shift to learning at home, attention turned to technologies and how they might support students' learning. The impact of missing school was anticipated as much as it was actually experienced, and this is because, through the "growing pretensions of school" (Illich, 2009, p. 64), physical, in-person attendance has become valorised more than the learning that takes place when the students are there. The pandemic, in denying students access to schools and schooling, exposed their two-fold purpose:

> not only to grade people for jobs but to upgrade them for consumption. As industrial output rises, it pushes the education system to exercise the social control necessary for its efficient use.
>
> (Illich, 2009, p. 62)

The huge expansion of networks, public-private partnerships, and government-financed outsourced contracts provided emergency technological solutions – to schools and in support of home learning – but also began to lay the ground for more permanent forms of engagement with technologies (Williamson and Hogan, 2020; Peruzzo, Ball, and Grimaldi, 2022).

The effects of the relocation of learning to the home have been felt differentially, with some finding it horrid, oppressive, and stressful, while others have enjoyed some of the freedoms afforded by the new home-based learning environment (Gourley et al., 2021; Williamson, Macgilchrist, and Potter; 2021; Watermeyer et al., 2021). It is not only the teachers who have such mixed experiences; students have

also encountered learning at home and online in different ways and with different degrees of success. There are many stories of success in the ways in which technologies have been used to engage learners at home, many of them involving play and creativity (Corona Showcase, 2021; Pandemic Play Project, 2022; Williamson, Macgilchrist, and Potter, 2021). There have also been many instances of schools adapting quickly and efficiently to online learning and succeeding in supporting all learners at home. Indeed, we will share some of the success stories that we uncovered in Chapter 3. It is clear, however, that access to technologies, in the form of devices and connectivity and support to develop the skills to engage effectively with the technologies, has been uneven and inequitable. The digital divide (Starr, Hayes, and Gao, 2022; Gorski, 2005) can be said to be operating at three levels: the first and most basic level is access to the Internet; the second level involves inequalities in use, skills, and purposes of the use of technology; at the third level there are uneven opportunities for individuals to improve their life chances by reinvesting the resources and knowledge they have acquired online (Ragnedda and Muschert, 2018). The digital divide has had a profoundly detrimental impact on black and minority students and students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Students with special needs have also been adversely affected as a result of the inaccessibility of some technologies (Bradley, 2021). An increased role of businesses in education, leading to new forms of network governance and heterarchical relations (Peruzzo, Ball, and Grimaldi, 2022, see also Ball, 2012), has sought to reduce the digital divide. There is little evidence of success so far, and there have been significant problems in the supply and functioning of

appropriate technologies to children and families (Good Law Project, 2021). At the same time, there have been huge financial gains for the private sector (Carr, 2021; Williamson, Macgilchrist, and Potter, 2021). Furthermore, technology companies have gained a stronger foothold through what Mollicchi et al. (2020, p. 279) call "resilient, infrastructural forms of dominance". This has raised concerns, once again, about the impact of the involvement of the private sector in public education (Teräs et al., 2020; Lingard, Wyatt-Smith, and Heck, 2021).

Equity

There have been many calls, over recent years, for the privileging of equity over equality in society. Equality means giving everyone the same thing, and equity is giving everyone whatever they need to succeed. As an anonymous source quoted by RISE (Research on Improving Systems of Education) puts it, "equality is giving everyone a pair of shoes. Equity is giving everyone a pair of shoes that fit". However, both equality and equity are underpinned by principles of fairness and social justice and, as such, are both "equally" well intentioned. Christopher James of the W. Haywood Burns Institute distinguishes between the treatment of individuals on an interpersonal and on an institutional basis and thereby finds an important role in equality:

> I'm not saying that equality is not our ultimate goal. I am saying that to start treating, say, the Black community "the same as everyone else" at this point in history will not go far enough in terms of achieving true equality. In racial justice, equality should be the interpersonal standard. On an individual basis, we should all treat

each other the same regardless of race. However, on a systemic level – including individuals acting in an official capacity within systems – the standard must be equity.

<div align="right">(MacArthur Foundation, 2021)</div>

In education, the distinction between equality and equity is extremely important. It is not just that equity is better, but that the espousal and practice of equality can be deeply damaging. Education policies that promote equality dominate the educational landscape and are defended on the basis of a "desire for translation, agreement and univocity" (Derrida, 1992, p. 78). However, they create a forgetfulness of certain people, most notably those with special needs, black and minority ethnic students, and individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. When, through equality, these groups receive the same as everyone else – identical treatment rather than adapted treatment – they are simply left without enough.

The consequences of being left without enough are stark. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the disparities and heightened vulnerabilities among students with special needs, black and ethnic minority students, and indigenous and disadvantaged students (Qureshi, 2020). In considering each of these groups in turn, we will reflect on how they experienced the pandemic. We want to be clear, however, that the inequities for these groups were already deeply embedded in education systems throughout the world. COVID-19 simply made things so much worse.

Students with special needs experience, somewhat paradoxically, both neglect of, and excessive attention to, their needs and to them as learners. On the one hand, neglect comes through

the forgetfulness of them that arises within and through those policies which, as we argue above, privilege equality. The excessive attention to their needs emerges within a highly pathologising and deficit-oriented "SEN industry" (Tomlinson, 2012, p. 267), the growth of which has been "irresistible" (Tomlinson, 2012, p. 267). Children with special needs are, thus, both neglected and rendered highly visible. Teachers work under enormous pressure and try to do everything they can to meet the needs of all children in their classrooms. The support that teachers receive, however, from the "big glossies" (Brantlinger, 2006, p. 45), textbooks that reinforce children's pathologies and from resourcing models that require children's deficits to be specified and measured, reinforce a view of diversity as something that is both problematic and to be *managed*. Consequently, teachers have reported feeling confused about what inclusion is supposed to be and do, frustration that they cannot meet all children's needs, guilt at letting children and their families down, and exhaustion (Allan, 2008).

Schools' response to the pandemic, following government guidance, was to prioritise those children deemed "vulnerable", and these were not necessarily always children with special needs (although it usually included those with the most significant needs) but were most importantly those who might be at risk were they to be left to learn at home. The UK government's definition of vulnerable, for example, included those "on the edge of receiving" social work care or support, adopted children, those who were at risk of becoming NEET (not in education or training), children in temporary accommodation, young carers, children experiencing difficulties in engaging with learning at home (for example because of no access to technology devices

or the Internet or a lack of study space), care leavers, and those needing support for their mental health (GOV.UK, 2019). School places in the UK were available to the children of key workers, for example those working in the health sector. Not all teachers were able to secure a school place even though they were doing the vital work of teaching other people's children. In other countries, the option was not available since the majority of schools were closed (UNICEF, 2021).

Black and minority ethnic students across the world experience higher exclusion rates, lower attainment rates, and more frequent placement in special schools (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Darling-Hammond (2001) suggests that in the US, black children are more likely to be taught by less effective or inexperienced teachers. Furthermore, according to Ladson-Billings (2021, p. 69) "teacher discretion" operates in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas, affecting student outcomes. That the problem of inequity "resides squarely inside the schools" (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 69) is not without question: "These schools suspend, expel, retain, assign to special education, and deny entrance into gifted/talented and [Advanced Placement] courses for Black students" (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 69).

Some contrasting approaches to "race" and racism can be seen in the US and the UK. In the US, there is what Annamma, Connor, and Ferri (2016, p. 156) call "color-evasiveness", oriented to a "goal of erasure" (Annamma, Connor, and Ferri, 2016, p. 156). In the UK, on the other hand, there is a kind of "inexplicitness" (Kirp, 1979, p. 289) – or avoidance – of "race" and racism. Inexplicitness denotes a "preference for consensual, incremental decision making, which is threatened by the confrontational, potentially revolutionary,

nature of a racial orientation" (Kirp, 1979, p. 289). Each term, and the approach associated with it, is "neither innocent nor passive" (Gillborn, 2019, p. 114), and each translates into school practices which are governed by whiteness, representing "an enemy in plain sight" (Gillborn, 2019, p. 117). The basis of the enmity within education systems lies, as Annamma, Connor, and Ferri (2016) point out, in the legacy of efforts to *prove* the inferiority, in terms of ability, of certain groups on the basis of their "race". These efforts were first documented by Du Bois at the start of the twentieth century (Du Bois, 1920; 1989 [1904]) and remain ingrained in systems of categorisation, labelling, and classification (Artiles and Trent, 1994; Erevelles, 2000; Baglieri and Llavani, 2020). Consequently, in addition to the disadvantages for black and minority ethnic students described above, they are also disproportionately represented in special education (Annamma, Connor, and Ferri, 2016; Harry and Klinger, 2014).

All of these inequities for black and minority ethnic students existed long before the COVID-19 pandemic, but have undoubtedly been made worse. The pandemic has had a disproportionately greater impact on black and ethnic minority populations (Garg, Kim, and Whitaker, 2020; Owen, Carmona, and Pomeroy, 2020; Herenkohl et al., 2021), with high proportions of deaths. This is associated with the social disadvantage of many black and minority families and the effects of low incomes, limited access to health care, and the likelihood that their working environments were poorly protected from COVID-19, especially in the early stages (Owen, Carmona, and Pomeroy, 2020; Yancy, 2020, McGeehan, 2020). The impact of the pandemic was to expose the nation's vulnerabilities – the educational