



Bank Street Occasional Paper Series

Occasional
Paper
Series

Volume 2021
Number 46 *The Pandemic as a Portal: On
Transformative Ruptures and Possible Futures
for Education*

Article 16

October 2021

Moving into a New Realm of Education and Parenting

Katherine Rodriguez-Agüero
Teacher's College, Columbia University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://educate.bankstreet.edu/occasional-paper-series>

 Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), [Curriculum and Social Inquiry Commons](#), [Early Childhood Education Commons](#), [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#), and the [Educational Methods Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rodriguez-Agüero, K. (2021). Moving into a New Realm of Education and Parenting. *Occasional Paper Series, 2021* (46). Retrieved from <https://educate.bankstreet.edu/occasional-paper-series/vol2021/iss46/16>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Educate. It has been accepted for inclusion in Occasional Paper Series by an authorized editor of Educate. For more information, please contact kfreda@bankstreet.edu.

educate

Moving into a New Realm of Education and Parenting

Katherine Rodriguez-Agüero

This time is unlike any other. We—parents of school-aged children—have rethought our outlooks, educational systems, approaches to social-emotional well-being, and policies within school buildings. Families have experienced high levels of anxiety, stress, and distrust in school systems regarding safety and transparency, as well as in keeping their children’s needs first. We have witnessed a shift in educators and administrators approaching parents as doers, active participants in their children’s education. Although shortfalls exist, it is the approach parents take to ensure that our return to normalcy means more than going back to the identical routine. It is our mission to create a stronger, socially just system, one where families feel empowered to stand up for equity and fight for the educational benefit of their children.

One such way parents have innovatively supported their children is in the establishment of “pandemic pods.” As discussed on *All Things Considered*, pandemic pods are a place where students can safely interact with others and receive educational support from a qualified teaching professional to complete the necessary remote learning or to supplement learning (Shapiro, 2020). Students may remain with their classmates, close acquaintances, or friends, as parents split the costs of the private learning instructor. This system of pandemic pods demonstrates the resourcefulness parents have exhibited during this time.

The question remains: How has this also produced a new sense of equity? There have been discussions about how these pandemic pods can provide scholarship opportunities for students who cannot afford the costs. As a parent, this idea intrigued me, and although I did not take the jump toward it, I reflected on the comments of those who did. These pods create systems of familial community, acknowledging that it is acceptable for parents to collaborate, share stories of struggles, and discuss what allows their families to retain a sense of sanity. Thus, pods have created a space for not only parents, but also their children, to receive social-emotional support. Children can continue to have some experiences of sustained social relationships with their selected group of pod members, engaging in developmentally appropriate, safe, and hands-on activities.

As online learning rolled out, children and their parents who previously sought out their teachers for support in the classroom were now provided with their support virtually. They could sit and experience the lessons jointly. Most importantly, this shift has allowed us to move into a new realm of social justice education. One where we, the parents, are involved in the school’s decision-making process. For example, as my toddler entered her stage of remote learning, flexibility was key, and the opportunity to share with educators what worked best for her was crucial. Schools have taken the approach to seek out family feedback through surveys and orientation sessions. Success is seen within those schools where administrators enacted these actionable steps and seriously acknowledged parents’ considerations, making it not only a priority, but also a reality. Looking at this from a social justice perspective, it is important to recognize that not all parents can voice their opinion; there may be language barriers, cultural divides, or even a lack of technological support and resources. If this is the case, it is crucial for administrators to seek methods to equitably provide parents with supports; “leadership decisions, in this viewpoint, must be continuously reflected upon to analyze whose voices and ideas are privileged

and which individuals and agendas are silenced in order to make visible the political consequences that result” (Nicholson et al., 2020). It is refreshing when I am able to receive a school notification in a language other than English or with visuals. This acknowledges the communities’ needs and puts communications with families first.

As my daughter’s remote program began to roll out activities to do at home, it became clear that I needed resources not readily available. During the earlier part of Spring 2020, resources were scarce. There were few open department stores and limited internet delivery options, or sometimes none, which led families like mine to become outside-the-box thinkers. How could we engage and educate our children without these materials? Yes, this was a minor dilemma, yet it unleashed our innovative creativity. We invented new games and utilized at-home items to engage in play. Sofa cushions were stacked up to build forts, slides, and if you had a toddler like mine, the best hiding spot! Old boxes were recycled and made into cars, airplanes, and house structures for action figures. For a moment, we all needed to unleash our inner child. School administrators and educators, looking back at what happened during the spring of 2020, brought lessons learned forward to planning for the 2020–21 school year. Their mindsets had to account for families with internet difficulties, lack of technological support, multiple children who might use the same devices, and limited home resources. Certain schools prepared accordingly, providing materials for students, arranging pickup schedules, and engaging families in technology workshops before beginning remote learning. There has been evidence that these shifts are in the right direction, and that states that took these actionable steps and implemented these strategies may have prevented further learning loss (Harwin & Furuya, 2020). These shifts move schools into a new realm of familial outreach and education.

Another mindset families are leaving behind is “I don’t use technology.” In fact, this movement has taught them the importance of technological advances and support. Yes, there’s still room for improvement; however, compared to a year ago, parents have learned their way within this technological realm. At the same time, managing the balance between work and homelife, which sent many parents spiraling between deciding among in-person learning options, pandemic pods, or online instruction at home, has allowed parents to reconsider their priorities. Parents have grown to become advocates for their children and for ways they can obtain what their children need. Parczewska (2020) found that “The added value of home education is that parents rediscovered their children and children rediscovered their parent” (Results section, para. 3). Hence, the familial household environment has permanently shifted, as both adults and children recognize aspects of themselves they had previously ignored. Parents began to see education broadly, beyond the Common Core Standards; this includes children learning through participation in key activities, such as sports, artistic projects, or household chores like clearing the table, cooking, and caring for younger siblings or pets. In New York, standardized tests were placed on hold, and an alternative system for assessing students’ knowledge in an array of subject areas was created. Without the biased, one-sided assessments of standardized tests, students of Color and diverse learners are demonstrating the unique ways they learn materials. They’re excelling within their classes without the added pressures of those examinations. Educators, freed from having to focus on helping students pass and score highly on the tests were thereby able to shift their curricular approach and recognize students’ diverse learning styles.

Our newly found voice as parents has driven us to shift the education perspective toward a newer realm of family empowerment, socially just educational curricula, and innovative teaching practices. Students and their families now claim ownership over their schools’ next steps and educational supports,

becoming more powerful advocates than ever before. As we move into this new realm of education and parenting, we ask ourselves, how can we continue to grow and ensure that we remain empowered to have a voice regarding practices in schools in the years to come? The skills learned during this time reshaped our education system, including the roles of administrators, educators, families, and students. Pandemic pods are a new educational format. Technology use is part of our daily lives, whether for remote schooling or remote work. The familial system modified itself to the demands of this time period, bringing the members closer together. My daughter has the opportunity to stay at home, learn alongside her parents, and experience a unique teaching style. As a parent, I cannot help but wonder how these benefits will continue to level the field for diverse learners in the early childhood years. It also encourages me to look toward the future as we contemplate the steps taken to undo socially unjust educational practices.

REFERENCES

- Harwin, A., & Furuya, Y. (2020, September 1). *Coronavirus learning loss risk index reveals big equity problems*. Education Week. <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/coronavirus-learning-loss-risk-index-reveals-big-equity-problems/2020/09>
- Nicholson, J., Kuhl, K., Maniates, H., Lin, B., & Bonetti, S. (2020). A review of the literature on leadership in early childhood: Examining epistemological foundations and considerations of social justice. *Early Child Development and Care, 190*(2), 91–122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2018.1455036>
- Shapiro, A. (2020, July 28). *'Pandemic pods' raise concerns about equity* [Radio broadcast transcript]. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2020/07/28/896334963/pandemic-pods-raise-concerns-about-equity>
- Parczewska, T. (2020). Difficult situations and ways of coping with them in the experiences of parents homeschooling their children during the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland. *Education 3–13*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2020.1812689>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Katherine Rodriguez-Agüero is a doctoral student at Teachers College, Columbia University. She works as an early childhood instructional coordinator for the Department of Early Childhood Education in Brooklyn, New York City. Rodriguez-Agüero is an advocate for the rights of multilingual learners and their families within the school system. Her work entails supporting early learners' diverse needs, coaching educators in early childhood pedagogy, and creating developmentally appropriate curriculum to support school administrators at a district-wide level. She is a mother of two, a 4-year-old daughter and a 6-month-old son.