

States of Emergency: Education in the Time of COVID-19

Guest editors

Will Brehm,

Associate Professor, UCL Institute of Education UK

Elaine Unterhalter,

Professor, UCL Institute of Education UK

Moses Oketch,

Professor, UCL Institute of Education UK

Contents

States of Emergency: Education in the Time of COVID-19	08
Will Brehm, UCL Institute of Education, UK; Elaine Unterhalter, UCL Institute of Education, UK; Moses Oketch, UCL Institute of Education, UK	
Part 1: Inequalities	15
01 Some Consequences of COVID-19 for Educational Inequalities	16
Frances Stewart, University of Oxford, UK	
02 Learning on the Mountain: COVID-19, Educational Inequities, and Community-Informed Policy in Peru	22
Kayla M. Johnson, University of Kentucky, USA; Joseph Levitan, McGill University, Canada	
03 Can Head Teacher Autonomy Mitigate the Effects of COVID-19 School Closures in India?	26
Rhiannon Moore, University of Bristol, UK; Kalyan Kumar Kameshwara, University of Bath, UK	
04 Strengthening the Education System for Equitable Learning during COVID-19 in Ethiopia	32
Louise Yorke, University of Cambridge, UK; Pauline Rose, University of Cambridge, UK; Tassew Woldehanna, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia; Belay Hagos Hailu, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia	
05 The Impact of School Closures in Crisis-affected Contexts	37
Leanne M. Cameron, University of Bristol, UK	
06 Inequalities, COVID-19 and the Private Sector: The Nigerian Education System	42
Lynsey Robinson, UCL Institute of Education, UK; Taibat Aduragba Hussain, Rising Child Foundation, Nigeria	
07 Family-school collaboration for students with disabilities in Ontario, Canada	48
Grace L. Francis, George Mason University, USA; Julia Jansen-van Vuuren, Queen's University, Canada; Navjit Gaurav, Queen's University, Canada; Heather M. Aldersey, Queen's University, Canada; Sharon Gabison, University of Toronto, Canada; Colleen M. Davison, Queen's University, Canada	
Part 2: Technology	53
08 Being Digital: How COVID-19 Changed the Higher Education Landscape	54
Ulrike Rivett, University of Cape Town, South Africa	
09 Navigating Digital Innovation and Inequities in Education Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic	58
Alesia Mickle Moldavan, Fordham University, USA	
10 “Making Visible” Inequality: Remote Learning with Technology During COVID-19	62
Helen Crompton, Old Dominion University, USA; Katy Jordan, EdTech Hub / University of Cambridge, UK; Sam Wilson, EdTech Hub / Overseas Development Institute, UK; Susan Nicolai, EdTech Hub / Overseas Development Institute, UK	
11 Teachers’ Digital Agency and Pedagogy during the COVID-19 Crisis in Delhi	64
Kusha Anand, UCL Institute of Education, UK; Marie Lall, UCL Institute of Education, UK	
12 Why is it speaking to me?”: Refugee-background Students’ Experiences of Education	68
Jáfia Naftali Câmara, University of Bristol, UK	
Part 3: States	73
13 COVID-19, Institutions and the State: Knowledge and Partnerships for Social Justice	74
Adam Habib, University of London, UK	
14 Strengthening Education Systems after COVID-19: How States Can – and Why they Must – Build Back Resilient	78
Christopher Castle, UNESCO, France; Leonora MacEwen, IIEP-UNESCO, France ; Thalia Séguin, IIEP-UNESCO, France	

15	Education in the Time of COVID-19 in the Maldives: The Experience of one Small Island Developing State	82
	Aminath Muna, University of Bristol, UK; Aminath Shiyama, University of Bristol, UK; Waseema Fikuree, The Maldives National University, Maldives; Badhoora Naseer, The University of Auckland, New Zealand; Zahra Mohamed, The University of Waikato, New Zealand ; Fathimath Shafeeqa, The University of Peradeniya, Srilanka	
16	Education under Surveillance in Kashmir in the Era of COVID-19	85
	Ruhail Andrabi, Jamia Millia Islamia, India; Laila Kadiwal, UCL Institute of Education, UK	
Part 4: Progress		89
17	Rethinking Progress and Time: Japanese Nightingales (Uguisu) and COVID-19 in Kyoto	90
	Keita Takayama, Kyoto University, Japan	
18	The Pandemic Shock on an Education System: An Actor-Network Theory Perspective	94
	Pravintharan Balakrishnan, SMK Padang Midin, Malaysia; Nurul Ain Johar, SMK Seberang Marang, Malaysia	
19	Pupil Learning and Well-being in Sierra Leone’s Secondary Schools during COVID-19 School Closures	97
	Zara Durrani, Oxford Policy Management, UK; Ayesha Khurshid, Oxford Policy Management, UK; Ishleen Sethi, Oxford Policy Management, India; Gloria Olisenekwu, Oxford Policy Management, Nigeria; Sourovi De, Oxford Policy Management, UK	
Part 5: Affect		101
20	Education and COVID-19 through the Lens of Affect	102
	Irving Epstein, Illinois Wesleyan University, USA	
21	Affect and Informal Learning through Adaptation of Workplace Practice	107
	Jay Derrick, UCL Institute of Education, UK; Tanya Harris, Arts and Culture Educational Consultant, UK	
22	School’s Out For COVID: EdTech’s Capacity To Support Student Welfare During Crises	110
	Alexander Towne, University of South Wales, UK	
23	Japanese University Student Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic	113
	Phillip M. Clark, Kwansei Gakuin University, Japan; Kevin P. Ballou, Kindai University, Japan; Richard H. Derrah, Kindai University, Japan	
Part 6: Nature		119
24	The Best Vaccine: Nature, Culture and COVID-19	120
	Jeremy Rappleye, Kyoto University, Japan; Hikaru Komatsu, National Taiwan University, Taiwan; Iveta Silova, Arizona State University, USA	
25	Complexity Theory and Education in Times of Insoluble Problems	125
	Tom Pegram, University College London, UK; Julia Kreienkamp, University College London, UK	
26	Relinquishing Management: Implications of the Pandemic for the Climate Crisis	130
	Angela Molloy Murphy, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, Australia	
27	Fostering cultural emergence in a climate emergency: permaculture, education and gender climate justice	133
	Georgina-Kate Adams, The Seed, Africa, UK	
28	Intertwined States of Emergency: Education in the Time of COVID-19 and the Climate Crisis	138
	Marcia McKenzie, University of Melbourne, Australia & University of Saskatchewan, Canada; Christina Kwauk, Brookings Institution, USA	

Japanese University Student Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic

 **Phillip M. Clark**, Adjunct Instructor, School of International Studies, Kwansai Gakuin University, Japan

 clarkphillip@hotmail.com

 **Kevin P. Ballou**, Lecturer, Faculty of Architecture, Kindai University, Japan

 balloukevin@arch.kindai.ac.jp

 **Richard H. Derrah**, Associate Professor, Faculty of Applied Sociology, Kindai University, Japan

 rderrah@socio.kindai.ac.jp

Summary

In Japan, COVID-19 has resulted in the closing of physical campuses of many universities, with online learning the new normal. In this paper we focus on student experiences during the pandemic using a Communities of Practice framework, drawing on qualitative data from 133 university students, including written responses and audio recordings, fieldnotes, and analytic memos.

Keywords

COVID-19
Pandemic
Japanese Higher Education
Communities of Practice

“...if it was an exile, it was, for most of us, exile in one’s own home.”

- Camus, *The Plague*

By the end of February 2020, COVID-19 had been confirmed in Japan for just over one month, with the first case detected in early January. Based on rising public pressure and the fear of a rapid spread of the disease, on 27 February, then-Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe asked for the closure of all public primary and secondary schools. This ended the school year (which lasts from April to March) one month early. Schools were requested to remain closed until early April, which would abbreviate the 2020 school year. With COVID-19 cases increasing, the request for closure was extended until the end of May. By that time, the prime minister had declared what was termed a *kinkyuu jitai* or “state of emergency,” initially only for prefectures where infection rates seemed to be spiking, then for all of Japan. Unlike the lockdowns occurring elsewhere in the world, the Japanese state of emergency was simply a strong recommendation for businesses to curtail hours and enact social distancing protocols, and for establishments such as karaoke parlours or bars or other venues serving alcohol to reduce their hours. Sports events such as the sumo tournament in March (and then again in May 2020), professional baseball games, and the long-awaited Tokyo 2020 summer Olympics, were postponed or cancelled entirely. Citizens were encouraged to wear masks in public, to minimise gathering in groups, and avoid the so-called *sanmitsu* or “[three C’s](#)” of crowded spaces, closed spaces and close-contact settings. No official legal impositions were made, and businesses which violated the official suggestion were simply threatened with being publicly named.

The governing body for education in Japan, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT), released guidelines for public schools on new hygiene and social distancing protocols, and created a plan to provide financial assistance to businesses and schools (MEXT, 2020). On 25 May, lowered infection rates prompted the government to issue a reprieve from the state of emergency hoping that the new protocols had achieved their purpose in curtailing the spread of the disease. Thus ended the first of what was to be a series of waves of infection throughout the country, each wave met by new suggestions for emergency measures, though none reaching the severity of the lockdowns occurring elsewhere in the world. Throughout this period, university administrations were left to determine their own policies. In this paper we discuss the effects of synchronous remote learning on students at two institutions of higher education.

The centrality of affect in Japanese universities

In contrast to countries such as the United States and Canada, where a belief is that a large focus of universities should be learning outcomes, in Japan, university is viewed as a milieu for students' personal and professional growth through the development of human relationships. This mainly occurs, not in the classroom, but in clubs or circles (see Cave, 2004), part-time jobs, the assorted activities of zemi (roughly translated as "seminar classes"), informal consultations with professors, and even drinking parties. In Japan these activities associated with students' lives in any country are seen as not a sidebar to university life, but as its primary, "hidden" role (Kelly, 1993). As Poole (2010) has suggested:

... (in Japan) although students and professors are in a formal, contractual relationship through university tuition fees, it is not teaching and learning that organize activity, but the activity of college life that organizes teaching and learning. Both students and professors are focused on the activity of college life, which in turn provides opportunities for learning, not the reverse. (p. 10)

Within the "activity of college life," Japanese university students navigate commonplace concerns such as which classes to take, which teachers can help with employment in what fields, and, how to adapt to the hierarchical conventions of "joining society" (shakai sankai; see Roberson, 1995), and learn how to speak acceptably. In other words, interactions and relationships in university have the potential to affect the entirety of students' subsequent lives. Access to these relationships, however, is a negotiated process. Students thus enter a community and participate in shared activities or practices of other students – learning values, understanding expectations, and adopting words or phrases associated with these activities. In the process of developing an identity within the university student community, they absorb information from the collective memory, and make meaning

from this. They, in essence, "become" Japanese university students through a process of joining a community of practice which entails various forms of affect.

The Communities of Practice framework, associated with the work of the sociologists Lave and Wenger (1991), conceptualizes learning through a process similar to that of apprenticeship. Starting with simple tasks, members participate in the community by learning vocabulary, routines, and methods from more experienced members, gradually becoming experienced members themselves. Wenger (1998) moved towards recognizing the negotiation of meaning within communities and stated that "meaning is always the product of its negotiation, by which I mean that it exists in this process of negotiation. Meaning exists neither in us, nor in the world but in the dynamic relation of living in the world" (p. 54). He defined three dimensions of community: "mutual engagement" (community norms), "joint enterprise" (a shared understanding the community's domain) and "shared repertoire" (the knowledge and activities used to pursue the joint enterprise) within which meaning is negotiated in a particular setting. These dimensions may be linked to three elements of affect described by Epstein (2019; this issue): intensity of encounter, meaning-making and assemblage. Mutual engagement and intensity of encounter are entailed by the interpersonal interactions and rules of engagement utilized by community members. Meaning-making is inherent to the joint enterprise of a community, and "a shared yearning for coming together" (Epstein, this issue). Assemblage is innate to the shared repertoire of a community of practice.

Students entering Japanese universities negotiate meaning within three dimensions of a community (Wenger, 1998). The first of these, mutual engagement, consists of the shared activities and interactions members engage in to develop and learn from one another – students commiserating across desktops over assignments, for example, or, for first-year students, simply following others to the right room on the right day. Joint enterprise, the second dimension of community, includes a myriad of personal and interpersonal aspects inclusive of, but also transcending, the objective of university graduation. Complex practices such as finding one's place, thinking about the future, or simply having fun, do not require agreement by all members within the community, but do require the mutual negotiation of these practices. This, in turn, develops mutual accountability. The final dimension, shared repertoire, consists of strategies learned and developed over time by a community of practitioners. In the case of Japanese university students this could be shared knowledge of what clubs to join or what zemi to take. The COVID-19 pandemic has radically altered the negotiation of meaning and practices within these three dimensions of the Japanese university community of practice and within the theory of affect.

To examine how online education shaped these processes of meaning making and affect for students in two Japanese universities, we collected data from 133 students enrolled in three different departments at two private universities in Japan, both of which utilized synchronous remote learning. Fall 2020 was the second of two semesters in which participants had conducted all university obligations online (including course registration, class work, and passive receipt of syllabi instructions). Data include student voice recordings, essays and short answer responses, collected as part of student coursework, as well as our fieldnotes and analytic memos. Some responses were translated by the authors into English from the original Japanese.

Classroom communities

The data from Fall 2020 expressed a resigned submission to the inevitable, what might be called *gaman* [perseverance or patience] in Japanese – which is not to say that students were content. The most consistent complaint regarded the lack of interaction with peers. “I think the difference between taking classes online and in a classroom,” wrote one student, “is the difference between having friends and not having friends; being able to do things and not being able to do things.” For first-year students a common refrain was that, despite seeing others’ faces in online classes, they did not feel that they knew anyone. “I had never (physically) been to university...so I had no friends,” wrote one student. He continued, “Therefore, there was no one to consult when I was in trouble.” Students who had attended university normally the year before noted that the typical between-class commiseration with peers was gone, particularly in language classes where the mandate to speak only English during class limited interaction: “In classroom lessons, I can make friends by having conversations with friends in Japanese during breaks. This makes it fun to talk in English during class. However, it is difficult to do online because I have a compulsory conversation only in English when I take classes.”

Comments about interaction with teachers varied, with some appreciative of teachers’ efforts and others disappointed in the style of teaching and lack of feedback, or frustrated by technical issues such as dropped connections, broken audio or frozen screens. Others lamented the lack of engagement: “There were some classes where the teacher spoke only one-sidedly, and it was hard to concentrate at times, so there were times when I wished we had more time to think for ourselves.” Viewing classes through a video screen also fell short of satisfying the requirements of a classroom for many students. One student wrote: “I didn’t feel like I was taking a class, but just watching.” In some cases, even “watching” was not part of the class, as in when students (or teachers) did not use their video function: “I had to communicate with classmates and teachers only by writing messages. Without seeing their face it is almost the same as studying

alone.” Another suggested that the normal confusion in class when confronted with unfamiliar material was made worse: “When I stay home all the time...there is no one to talk to about assignments or things I don’t understand.” One comment which summed up many was: “The worst thing about studying without going to campus is that I don’t feel like I’m studying.” These accounts echo Epstein’s (this issue) perception that “more and more students, parents, and teachers are discovering that the performativity embedded in remote learning technologies is a questionable substitute for the interpersonal interactions that comprise typical classroom activity.”

Club communities

Clubs are considered an important part of Japanese university culture, and university graduates who have been involved in clubs develop useful life skills (Amano & Poole, 2005; Shinobu, 2014). By no means frivolous extracurricular activities, clubs serve many purposes – primarily a means of socializing young people into practices of the culture of the working world it is intended they will later inhabit. Clubs are, to some Japanese students, so important that they are “the main purpose” in attending a university (McVeigh, 2002, p. 216). Clubs reinforce everything from hierarchical roles (such as the *senpai/kohai* relationship; see Enyou, 2013) attached to all Japanese social interactions, to the importance of maintaining close group solidarity (*nakama zukuri*), to providing practice in cultural norms regarding the social drinking of alcohol (Cave, 2004; McDonald & Sylvester, 2013). The sudden retraction of these avenues of socialization is a potential impediment for many students for whom club membership was important. In answer to the question of what was the biggest disappointment in the time of COVID-19, one student wrote succinctly: “I’m most disappointed that there are no club activities where we can meet other people directly.” Not only were newer members unable to find *tutelage* under the guidance of their seniors (*senpai*), but senior students were in turn unable to guide new members. One second-year student wrote: “We cannot invite freshmen to our club this year because of the pandemic. Some freshmen are willing to join our club, but I haven’t met them yet.” As Epstein (this issue) has noted, “it is deeply ironic that the invocation of social distancing as a response to COVID-19 is justified by the promise of future assemblage and more direct social engagement at a later time.”

Access to mentors

Some students noted with disappointment that the limitation of student-student or student-teacher interactions created barriers to planning their future. Of the various classes offered in Japanese universities, *zemi* are some of the least academic but most practical, allowing students access to mentorship and connections for future careers. *Zemi* teachers shepherd students through their final theses (*sotsugyō ronbun*), host

guest lectures, social events, and training camps (gasshuku) so members can interact. For students in their second year, consultation on choosing a zemi became much more difficult without familiar contexts. “I can’t meet my classmates, teachers, and friends,” complained one student, “we can hardly have a chance to talk to teachers outside of classes. That made it difficult to decide next year’s zemi class.” For students who participated in “virtual” zemi, the experience was no better: “I was very sad,” wrote one student, “I have a seminar as a third-year student, but I haven’t seen all of my friends, and I felt it was a shame that we didn’t become close even though we were in a small seminar class.”

Finding the good; affect and meaning-making

Not all responses were negative. For many, virtual instruction meant that they did not have to fight through crowded public transport: “I enjoyed the fact that I didn’t have to commute to school, so I could use the time as I wished.” Another wrote: “I was able to change/convert the time I used to spend commuting to school into free time for myself.” One student took a reflective, almost philosophical stance: “Compared to last year, when I went to school mechanically, I think I’ve started to think and act more on my own.” One student poignantly reflected on her original goals for attending school, and how the pandemic had forced her to alter them: “I entered this English department because I wanted to go to study abroad. But now I don’t know if I can... I realized that I will not have any career at all. I thought that studying abroad would expand my horizons... But I think there are other ways such as going to get a certificate or participating in volunteer work, so I realized I have to take action now to satisfy myself.” In a sense, students re-evaluated how they, as suggested by Epstein (this issue), made “sense of the world” and their connections within it.

Conclusion

Participants in this study proved themselves acutely aware of the vacuum effect of the lack of assemblage and decidedly low intensities of encounter during their time in virtual classrooms. Mutual engagement consists of norms of a community, which in a usual school year would be recurring, and to some degree predictable. During the pandemic all such norms were altered. Even teachers were left without a clear understanding of how to approach dealing with students, or other teachers. They were faced with an unprecedented environment where basic ideas such as how and when to conduct a class became fluid. In the video classroom, that closest simulacrum of a physical lesson, interactions for all class members were limited to teacher-determined academic oriented activities. Assemblage then became, for students, a passive sitting in front of a computer and waiting for figures to appear on the screen. Some students, in their hopes for club activities to someday resume, relied on the “promise of future assemblage” (Epstein, current issue).

Joint enterprise, or a shared understanding of the norms of a Community of Practice, was muted. While students may have had a chance to commiserate in such virtual venues as so-called “breakout rooms,” these instances were brief and could end at any moment. They were limited to the scope of whatever assignment may have been given by an instructor – assuming students had understood well enough or were sufficiently animated to complete the lesson at such times. Once the lesson ended – or more precisely, once the teacher decided to end the Zoom meeting – rather than any social interaction, screens went black, and students found themselves again isolated in their real-world rooms. To suggest that these “encounters” between students, if that is what we can call them, were of “low intensity” seems an understatement at best.

Any shared repertoire, or knowledge and activities used to pursue the joint enterprise, could, based on this lack of any real assemblage, only be shared virtually. In order for such a shared repertoire to manifest, students would need to take action (via tools such as email or instant messaging) beyond the context of not only the classroom but the university space. The physical environment of the university campus and its hallways, coffee shops and other social gathering places was simply no longer accessible.

Researchers in higher education often focus on the university in academic terms, and in research concerning the pandemic, effects on the education system are viewed in terms of classroom learning and affect. In Japan, we argue that while the pursuit of academic rigor is by no means absent from higher education, an equally important purpose of the university remains the extra-classroom personal development of the student, providing opportunities for social exploration and learning which can be used to facilitate movement into the world of later employment and life as a citizen.

University administrators’ decisions to close or limit entrance to school campuses and facilities will not completely eliminate the opportunities for such communities of practice to develop. But student perceptions suggest that limitations imposed as a result of the pandemic may have altered these communities in dramatic ways, the consequences of which have yet to be determined.

References

- Amano, I., & Poole, G. (2005). The Japanese university in crisis. *Higher Education*, 50(4), 685-710.
- Cave, P. (2004). Bukatsudō: The educational role of Japanese clubs. *The Journal of Japanese Studies*, 30(2), 383-415.
- Enyo, Y. (2013). *Exploring senpai-kohai relationships in club meetings in a Japanese university*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.
- Epstein, I. (2019). *Affect theory and comparative education discourse: Essays on fear and loathing in response to global educational policy and practice*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Kelly, C. (1993). The hidden role of the university. *A handbook for teaching English at Japanese colleges and universities*, 172-192.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press.
- McDonald, B., & Sylvester, K. (2013). Learning to get drunk: The importance of drinking in Japanese university sports clubs. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 49(3/4), 331-345.
- McVeigh, B.J. (2002). *Japanese higher education as myth*. M.E. Sharpe.
- MEXT. (2020, April 7). *Package of Emergency Economic Measures*. MEXT.
- Poole, G. S. (2010). *The Japanese Professor: An ethnography of a university faculty*. Sense Publishers.
- Roberson, J. E. (1995). Becoming shakaijin: Working class reproduction in Japan. *Ethnology*, 34(4), 293-313.
- Shinobu, C. (2014). *Daigakusei no jiritsu to shakai-sei no ikusei: Zeminaru to kurabu sakuru wo jirei to shite* [Developing autonomy and sociality of college students: A case study of seminars and clubs/circles], *St. Andrew's University Departmental Bulletin*, 55(4), 335-376.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge University Press.

