Asian Journal of Distance Education

On the verge of a new renaissance:
Care and empathy oriented, human-centered pandemic pedagogy

Aras Bozkurt, Ramesh C Sharma

Abstract: The many known and unknown consequences of the pandemic have generated not only a biological crisis but a social and psychological crisis as well. As one of the greatest global crises in recent human history, the pandemic has changed the way we perceive and interpret the world as we know it. The field of education too has had to undergo many changes as a result of the pandemic, but many lessons have been learned from the experience. In the three modes of education, we have historically gone through – from face-to-face to screen-to-screen and finally, to mask-to-mask education – we have discovered that most of our assumptions on education have been wrong. Emergency remote teaching and learning not only disrupted the education systems but also forced us to critically question the pedagogy. Accordingly, there has been a rupture in the normal, and what the new normal promises depends on the decisions we make. We could either simply return to the previous normal or create a new normal by reimagining pedagogy. The latter would require a process of learning, unlearning, and relearning the pedagogy in order to form it in its ideal shape. In this sense, we could start by defining the subject, the object and their interaction; apply asymmetric designs, and pursue a minimalist approach to pedagogy, where the goal would be to humanize pedagogy with care and empathy and reconstruct our learning ecologies with equity and social justice. This paper argues that transactional distance and affective proximity matter and aims to inspire minds to ignite the fire that will initiate an intellectual renaissance, through which we can heal the wounds of education and revive it, and as a global society, rise from the ashes, be reborn, and come back stronger in the new normal.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, emergency remote teaching and learning, pandemic pedagogy, pedagogy of care, care-oriented human-centered pandemic pedagogy

Introduction: A dream for a hopeful future

A rupture in the most glorious days of human history has occurred. The Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic was unexpected, unpredicted, and hit the entire globe. Nations, which were once in a race for prosperity, suddenly entered a race for survival. The superiority of humans among all creatures was once humanity's crowning glory but now in a tragic turn of events doubt has been cast on this notion. The origin of the virus remains unknown, and rather than demonstrating our superiority, the pandemic has called attention to our incompetence. In the midst of one of the most chaotic times in human history, we now dream of a future where we can rise, be reborn, and most importantly, survive.

Three waves of the pandemic pedagogy

Conceptualizing within the scope of the Covid-19 pandemic, the development of pedagogy can be outlined chronologically in three waves. The first wave, face-to-face education, began thousands of years ago and involves learners gathering together at the same time and in the same place to receive education. This mode of education has been the gold standard of education, as it allows for eye contact between teachers and students. The second wave, screen-to-screen education, emerged from the development of information and communication technologies in the new millennium. Upon the advent of computers and online networked technologies, teaching and learning on digital screens were largely adopted across the globe. The third wave, the current mask-to-mask education, has been implemented

in response to the pandemic. These masks, worn to protect against the pandemic, are now part of the new normal, and have been accepted on account of maintaining the [so called] gold standard of eye contact. These waves, in fact, demonstrate that the delivery modes of education are based on [false] assumptions (e.g., learning only occurs when you meet certain conditions) that vary by local or global realities and by the needs of societies. These waves further indicate that the context of learning and how we define it matters as in the case of emergency remote teaching and learning.

Pandemic chronicles: Emergency remote teaching and learning

The emergence of Covid-19 as a pandemic forced us to take many measures to protect ourselves from its pathogenic nature and to slow its spread across areas of society where people congregated, including areas of education. Emergency remote teaching and learning was put into practice to ensure the continuity of education (Bozkurt et al., 2020; Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020a; Hodges et al., 2020). While this ad hoc measure adopted many best practices (Morgan, 2020), it also committed many *pedagogical sins* (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020b). The disruption to traditional educational processes (Radina & Balakina, 2021) and to our educational experiences caused by the pandemic has prompted us to critically question the pedagogy applied in pre and post pandemic times (Hicks & Hamilton, 2020) so that we can be well prepared to adopt the new normal by humanizing education and guiding educational practices through care and empathy.

The New Normal

There are many characterizations of what the new normal, a term inherently relative and therefore subject to interpretation, will look like (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020b; Xiao, 2021). Xiao (2021) highlights that "*new* implies *evolving* rather than contrasting or even intending to replace the *old*, as seems to be the case in today's discourse about the future of education. The *normal* today is an evolution from the *normal* of yesterday, built on historical 'relics' of educational development." (Xiao, 2021, p. 8). Bozkurt and Sharma, likewise, note that the different iterations of normal (i.e., normal, new normal, and next normal) imply that we are going through a time of radical shifts in the way we perceive the different areas of life, including teaching and learning. Cutrara (2021) and Ladson-Billings (2021) suggest that after the Covid-19 times, we need to focus on the future and avoid the temptation to go back to the normal, as most of the problems reside in the past, or in the *normal* we once knew.

In this sense, it can be argued that while the past, present and future is a continuum, what we need to do at this point is to turn our faces to the future by remembering past experiences and knowing our present circumstances. In this transition or transformation, our minds can trick and deceive us into going back to the *normal* by perceiving the past as a comfort zone and the future as a challenge full of unknowns and uncertainty. However, to see things this way would be an illusion, considering that there has been a rupture in the *normal*. That previously known *normal* no longer exists, and the *new normal* is real and here to stay, and therefore we need to reconstruct our future on solid grounds by accepting the reality of the *new normal*. In education, this means revisiting how we define the art of teaching and learning and asking open-ended questions on educational pedagogies, theories, practices, and technologies. When seeking the open-ended responses to these questions, we need to include the participation of all stakeholders in order to reach a broad consensus on these issues.

The art of teaching and learning in an educational ecology
Using the experiences gained during the pandemic and the things we have learned, unlearned, and relearned, we now need to reimagine, reengineer and reconstruct education. It is clear that we have to leave aside the notion that education is a process whereby teachers merely transmit information and learners receive it. Simply defined, an educational ecology (e.g., online, onsite, offline, physical or virtual) involves *knowing* (subjects - learners), *known* (objects - learning contents) and *interaction* (learning). While there are always unknown variables in an equation, in the case of educational

ecologies, the known variables will always be, *knowing, known* and *interaction*. Other variables in the broader ecology, like space (e.g., schools, universities, homes, networks, etc.), time (synchronous or asynchronous), and facilitators or moderators (e.g., teachers, instructors, role models, guides, coaches, etc.), are of secondary importance to that of the main criterion of giving agency to the learners.

In creating an educational ecology, teaching and learning should be relevant and contextual. This ecology of learning is composed of entities that dynamically interact within themselves or with one another. These interactions between and within entities lead to the creation of systems, and these systems, in turn, can build connections with other systems. In the natural sciences, ecology refers to a living thing, an organism, with a collective consciousness, operating in an unpredictable, complex, chaotic, nonlinear, adaptive, self-developing and self-organizing space that involves collaboration, cooperation, negotiation, creation, curation, and sharing. The climate of an ecology defines its nature, and thus, affects all living and nonliving entities. Living and nonliving entities are connected through visible and nonvisible bonds and may have symbiotic relationships. If we apply this understanding of a natural ecology to education, learning in an ecology of learning is emergent and thus may occur on a formal-informal continuum. In keeping with this analogy, information in a learning ecology cannot be solely possessed by one entity, but rather, it is a value that can be used by any entity, and information is not located in a single place, but rather, it is distributed across the ecology. The complexity, chaos, and nonlinearity of a natural ecology corresponds to the multilayered and multidimensional features of a learning ecology, where networking and cross pollinating are important functions. Power, in this environment, is not controlled but distributed and shared. As a living organism, an ecology is always on and always open, with multiple entry and exit points. Moreover, as it is a living organism, it always improves, develops and heals itself to be sustainable.

However, a rupture in our learning ecology due to the Covid-19 pandemic has occurred, and we need to revisit pandemic pedagogy and understand what it promises for the future and find ways to heal our ecology.

Care and empathy-oriented human-centered pandemic pedagogy
Pandemic pedagogy involves more than teaching and learning in a time of crisis; it also deals with how we conceptualize teaching and learning. Based on the view of learning ecologies, pandemic pedagogy provides the opportunity to apply *asymmetric designs* (e.g., teaching and learning as an emergent practice based on the needs of the learner) and to pursue *pedagogical minimalism* (e.g., meaningful teaching and learning for the sole purpose of teaching and learning and nothing else), where the focus is on adopting a humane approach of care and empathy and on equalizing power relationships in the learning ecology through equity and justice.

Pandemic pedagogy is historically related to Freire's (1985) assertion that "to transform the world is to humanize it" (p. 70). Similarly, Xiao (2021) reminds us that teaching and learning are "primarily about human beings, for human beings, and by human beings" (p. 3). Bozkurt and Zawacki-Richter (2021), supporting this notion, note that social learning design is trending, and Karakaya (2021) highlights that if we truly want to put learners at the center and promote inclusive learning ecologies, we need to adopt human-centered modalities.

Emergency education is not a new concept and emergency situations are not limited to pandemics (Aguilar & Retamal, 1998; Kagawa, 2005; Pigozzi, 1999). However, the Covid-19 pandemic was unique in terms of its global scale and it disrupted our learning ecologies and exacerbated pre-existing inequalities (Rosso, 2021), leading to trauma, anxiety, and stress (Bozkurt, 2021; Talidong & Toquero, 2020), and thereby justifying the need for human-centered pedagogical designs (Baran & AlZoubi, 2020; Mehta & Aguilera, 2020; Robinson et al., 2020). Robinson et al. (2020) highlight the necessity for inclusive designs to remove contextual barriers and further stress the importance of creating an environment where learners are listened to and cared for. As learners may feel especially vulnerable during difficult times (Ashfaquzzaman, 2020), a number of researchers have called attention to the

important role of empathic communication (Baran & AlZoubi, 2020; Barbour et al., 2020). Schwartzman (2020) expands the role of communication, arguing "the communication discipline has a particularly vital role to play in crafting a post pandemic world that can foster resilience while strengthening and expanding the scope of mutual care." (p. 515).

A humanizing pedagogy is further valuable insofar as it acknowledges learners as individuals, rather than as merely receivers of information, as explained in the *Banking Model of Education* (Freire, 1970). In the Banking Model, the educational system "promotes passivity, acceptance, and submissiveness and turns students into objects that must be filled by the teacher" (Salazar, 2013, p. 130). Rather than educating passive receivers, that is objects, that fit the society, a humanizing pedagogy acknowledges learners as subjects and focuses more on liberating and co-liberating the souls and minds of learners so that they can change and transform the world.

The pandemic has forced us to adapt to new conditions and has "taught us new vocabulary and new ways of doing things" in a short time (Koseoglu, 2020, p. 277). We have realized that [possible] dark future scenarios lie ahead for us (Costello et al., 2020) if we do not make the right decisions or turn back to the problematic old normal rather than building a new normal, where we can humanize education.

Currently, and unfortunately, inequity and injustice are at toxic levels, especially in less developed parts of the globe. Being a global problem, we need to act on it collectively. Supporting this notion, Salazar (2013) argues that "the individual and collective development of critical consciousness is paramount to the pursuit of humanization" (p. 131). In effect, the pandemic can be a collective awakening to promote agency and social change.

Transactional distance and affective proximity
Spatial and temporal distances have always been an issue in [online] distance education (Moore & Kearsley, 2012). To mitigate the problems associated with these issues and to support distance education modes like blended and hybrid learning, educational technologies have been widely adopted in the educational landscape (Crompton et al., 2021; Pelletier et al., 2021). Although most efforts have been aimed at using technology to reduce spatial and temporal distances, transactional distance (Moore, 1993), referring to psychological and communicational distance, is actually more important than spatial and temporal distances, and there should be efforts to reduce it.

From the perspective of care-oriented, human-centered pandemic pedagogy, our efforts should focus on affective aspects of teaching and learning. In ecologies of learning, *affective proximity* is equally as important as *transactional distance*. In addition to psychological and communicational distance, learning ecologies should be informed by care and empathy to provide affective proximity. In human-centered learning designs that ensure affective proximity, learners would recognize their individuality and their social interactions would increase to the extent to which they know themselves. In this sense, affective proximity is important not only for providing meaningful learning experiences but also for social self-actualization, as the learner is the subject. It is, therefore, crucial to ask how do we define distance and what does proximity mean?

Conclusion: On the verge of a new renaissance

The world, and hence, the educational landscape, has never been innocent and never will. Inequity and injustice are inherently human. We can, however, dismantle inequity and injustice by looking to the future, not to the past. The past exists to learn from and not to make the same mistakes, while the future holds out hope for the better. With this understanding, we can argue that the old normal is problematic because it perceives learners as *objects* rather than as *subjects*. If we wish to raise individuals who will change and transform the world, then it is imperative that learners are seen as *subjects* in order to facilitate their intellectual liberty and growth. Now, more than ever, we need critical minds that question

the world around us, but most of the educational systems see learners as passive receivers and use education to shape their minds, not to liberate them. Moreover, perceiving learners as *objects,* pacifying, silencing and assimilating them, and ignoring their potential, value and their place as unique individuals is *dehumanizing* and should be rejected on all grounds.

We are living in a world of many colors, not shades of one single color, and thus, diversity, sensitivity, inclusivity, and heterogeneity are essential elements of any educational recipe. For humans, care is vital, as humans, by their nature, want to care and be cared for. When we blend care and empathy, we can truly understand each other and nurture our social and also educational communication channels.

In the educational kingdom, context is the king, content is the queen, quality is the crown, and care and empathy are the kingdom itself! This kingdom is built upon and ruled by the founding principles, equity and justice, and is committed to inclusivity, diversity, and accessibility. The inhabitants of this kingdom are self-directed and self-regulated learners, who are empowered with agency and autonomy, pursuing meaning, knowledge and wisdom to realize themselves, transform their environments, and make their learning ecology a better place, not only for themselves, but for everyone and everything.

The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in many unwanted consequences, yet we now are at a time of resetting the world, where we can turn the Covid-19 crisis into an opportunity. We can ignite the fire that will initiate an intellectual renaissance marked by equity and justice in the educational world, where these twin pillars of virtue would serve as a social compass to navigate through the days ahead. We, therefore, need to keep asking open-ended questions and seeking open-ended responses.

References

Aguilar, P., & Retamal, G. (1998). *Rapid educational response in complex emergencies: a discussion document.* International Bureau of Education. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED431675

Ashfaquzzaman, M. (2020). Pandemic pedagogy in post-COVID age. *Communication Education, 69*(4), 534-535. https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2020.1804130

Baran, E., & AlZoubi, D. (2020). Human-centered design as a frame for transition to remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education, 28*(2), 365–372. https://www.learntechlib.org/p/216077/

Barbour, M. K., LaBonte, R., Kelly, K., Hodges, C., Moore, S., Lockee, B., Trust, T., Bond, A., & Hill, P. (2020). *Understanding pandemic pedagogy: Differences between emergency remote, remote, and online teaching.* State of the Nation: K-12 e-Learning in Canada. https://k12sotn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/understanding-pandemic-pedagogy.pdf

Bozkurt, A. (2021). *Handbook of Research on Emerging Pedagogies for the Future of Education: Trauma-Informed, Care, and Pandemic Pedagogy.* IGI Global. http://doi:10.4018/978-1-7998-7275-7

Bozkurt, A., & Sharma, R. C. (2020a). Emergency remote teaching in a time of global crisis due to CoronaVirus pandemic. *Asian Journal of Distance Education, 15*(1), i-vi. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3778083

Bozkurt, A., & Sharma, R. C. (2020b). Education in normal, new normal, and next normal: Observations from the past, insights from the present and projections for the future. *Asian Journal of Distance Education, 15*(2), i-x. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4362664

Bozkurt, A., & Zawacki-Richter, O. (2021). Trends and patterns in distance education (2014–2019): A synthesis of scholarly publications and a visualization of the intellectual landscape. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning, 22*(2), 19-45. https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v22i2.5381

Bozkurt, A., Jung, I., Xiao, J., Vladimirschi, V., Schuwer, R., Egorov, G., Lambert, S. R., Al-Freih, M., Pete, J., Olcott, Jr., D. Rodes, V., Aranciaga, I., Bali, M., Alvarez, Jr., A. V., Roberts, J., Pazurek, A., Raffaghelli, J. E., Panagiotou, N., de Coëtlogon, P., Shahadu, S., Brown, M., Asino, T. I.

Tumwesige, J., Ramírez Reyes, T., Barrios Ipenza, E., Ossiannilsson, E., Bond, M., Belhamel, K., Irvine, V., Sharma, R. C., Adam, T., Janssen, B., Sklyarova, T., Olcott, N. Ambrosino, A., Lazou, C., Mocquet, B., Mano, M., & Paskevicius, M. (2020). A global outlook to the interruption of education due to COVID-19 pandemic: Navigating in a time of uncertainty and crisis. *Asian Journal of Distance Education, 15*(1), 1-126. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3878572

Costello, E., Brown, M., Donlon, E., & Girme, P. (2020). 'the pandemic will not be on Zoom': A retrospective from the year 2050. *Postdigital Science and Education, 2*(3), 619-627. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-020-00150-3

Crompton, H., Burke, D., Jordan, K., & Wilson, S. W. G. (2021). Learning with technology during emergencies: A systematic review of K- 12 education. *British Journal of Educational Technology.* https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.13114

Cutrara, S. (2021). Beyond Pandemic Pedagogy: Thoughts on deconstruction, structure, and justice post-pandemic. *The Councilor: A Journal of the Social Studies, 82*(1), 1-29. https://thekeep.eiu.edu/the_councilor/vol82/iss1/1

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* Continuum.

Freire, P. (1985). *The politics of education: Culture, power and liberation.* Bergin & Garvey.

Hicks, T., & Hamilton, E. (2020). Pandemic pedagogy: Some questions about being "successful" and getting it "right". *Michigan Reading Journal, 53*(1), 59-62. https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol53/iss1/15

Hodges, C., Moore, S., Lockee, B., Trust, T., & Bond, A. (2020). The difference between emergency remote teaching and online learning. EDUCAUSE Review. https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning

Kagawa, F. (2005). Emergency education: A critical review of the field. *Comparative education, 41*(4), 487-503. https://doi.org/10.1080/03050060500317620

Karakaya, K. (2021). Design considerations in emergency remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic: A human-centered approach. *Educational Technology Research and Development, 69*(1), 295-299. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-020-09884-0

Koseoglu, S. (2020). Access as pedagogy: A case for embracing feminist pedagogy in open and distance learning. *Asian Journal of Distance Education, 15*(1), 277-290. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3893260

Ladson-Billings, G. (2021). I'm here for the hard re-set: Post pandemic pedagogy to preserve our culture. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 54*(1), 68-78. https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2020.1863883

Mehta, R., & Aguilera, E. (2020). A critical approach to humanizing pedagogies in online teaching and learning. *The International Journal of Information and Learning Technology, 37*(3), 109–120. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJILT-10-2019-0099

Moore, M. G. (1993). Theory of transactional distance. In D. Keegan (Ed.), *Theoretical principles of distance education* (pp. 22–38). London: Routledge.

Moore, M. G., & Kearsley, G. (2012). *Distance education: A systems view of online learning.* Cengage.

Morgan, H. (2020). Best practices for implementing remote learning during a pandemic. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas, 93*(3), 135-141. https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2020.1751480

Pelletier, K., Brown, M., Brooks, D. C., McCormack, M., Reeves, J., Arbino, N., Bozkurt, A., Crawford, S., Czerniewicz, L., Gibson, R., Linder, K., Mason, J., & Mondelli, V. (2021). *2021 EDUCAUSE Horizon Report Teaching and Learning Edition.* EDUCAUSE. https://www.learntechlib.org/p/219489/

Pigozzi, M. (1999). *Education in emergencies and for reconstruction: a developmental approach.* UNICEF. https://pesquisa.bvsalud.org/portal/resource/pt/des-15098

Radina, N. K., & Balakina, J. V. (2021). Challenges for Education during the Pandemic: An Overview of Literature. *Educational Studies Moscow, 1*, 178–194. https://doi.org/10.17323/1814-9545-2021-1-178-194

Robinson, H., Al-Freih, M., & Kilgore, W. (2020). Designing with care: Towards a care-centered model for online learning design. *The International Journal of Information and Learning Technology. 37*(3), 99-108. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJILT-10-2019-0098

Rosso, J. D. (2021). How loss teaches: Beyond "pandemic pedagogy". *Humanity & Society,* 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0160597620987008

Salazar, M. (2013). A humanizing pedagogy: Reinventing the principles and practice of education as a journey toward liberation. *Review of Research in Education, 37*, 121–148. http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/0091732X12464032

Schwartzman, R. (2020). Performing pandemic pedagogy. *Communication Education, 69*(4), 502-517. https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2020.1804602

Talidong, K. J. B., & Toquero, C. M. D. (2020). Philippine teachers' practices to deal with anxiety amid COVID-19. *Journal of Loss and Trauma, 25*(6-7), 573-579. https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2020.1759225

Xiao, J. (2021). From equality to equity to justice: Should online education be the new normal in education?. In A. Bozkurt (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Emerging Pedagogies for the Future of Education: Trauma-Informed, Care, and Pandemic Pedagog*y (pp. 1-15). IGI Global. http://doi:10.4018/978-1-7998-7275-7.ch001

About the Author(s)

- Aras Bozkurt; arasbozkurt@gmail.com; Anadolu University, Turkey. https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4520-642X
- Ramesh C. Sharma; rc_sharma@yahoo.com; Ambedkar University Delhi, India. https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1371-1157