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A PROJECT OF THE COLLECTIVE

| A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR | ANTWAN JEFFERSON, PH.D

It's been a while.

Since we last published a full issue of this community-based education journal, a global pandemic reached the shores of the US landing as close to home as our families, friends, coworkers, neighbors, strangers. And, the long history of racial terrorism in the US returned to national consciousness after a few decades of being covered over by more pressing political and social agendas. AND an economic crisis showed up with fervor, resulting in more unemployment than was imaginable so soon after the great recession. ANNNNND Colorado and other states in the West have seen large, destructive fires burning hundreds of thousands, even millions, of acres of natural land, buildings, homes.

For our team at DJEC, we've taken time to listen, to reflect, to grieve, to hope, to worry and to wonder. We invite you to do any number of these with us as you engage this issue. Here's one way: imagine being a young child learning about your Self and your society during these times, often called unprecedented. Imagine returning to school, but not actually returning to school, or returning to a school building and learning after a few days that you cannot return to the building for the unforeseen future. Imagine hearing your alarm clock, hopping out of your bed and landing at your desk, or dining table, or a closet so that you can go to school. Sitting across from a parent or guardian who is at work, at a neighboring desk or table. Or near a sibling who also has gone to school, a different school, but in the same place. Now, try to imagine the mental and emotional strains this new reality of school creates. Many of our readers do not have to imagine this--your experiences are what give DJEC purpose (and content).

It has, indeed, been a while. And we have, indeed, missed you.

Since we last published a full issue of the Denver Journal of Education and Community (February seems so long, eons, ago), we have taken a hiatus from full issue publication. New and disorienting stay-at-home orders meant that we were not able to invite you to host conversations in your homes, with your neighbors, to talk about important topics in education. Significant disruptions to our lives meant prioritizing stability, employment, food, sanity, peace, even while things continue(d) to change.

But we weren't just waiting around. Allan Tellis, our Chief Writer, wrote a series of articles exploring the range of consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in the lives of educators, families, city and community leaders, and mental health professionals. On our website, we decided to call this series @Issue, a new feature of DJEC focused on issues that emerge in the Denver region during times when our norms are in flux. I think that you'll find these articles informative; a bit different from our normal publication, but hopefully inspiring, informative, and compassionate.

Now that we're back to our community-sourced work (don't worry, each conversation was virtual or occurred in public parks, with at least the required six-feet of space between us), our team at DJEC hopes that this issue is worth every second that you spend reading (print or digital) about how students, families, educators have shifted to new realities in public schooling. Allan's writing captures the voices of dozens of students, educators, and families throughout the Denver metro area who talked with each other about this era of change in public schooling. And, as we have done since we started DJEC, community writers respond to Allan's article, adding their views into the particulars of the main article. We hope that this continues to represent our commitment to the centrality of community voice and the importance of multiple perspectives.

Oh, and we're working on our next issue, ready in February. We hope that you'll join us in creating that content, too. On our website, you'll see that there are opportunities to participate in the dialogues during November and December. If you're interested, all you have to do is sign up. And if neither of them works for you, or if you want to arrange and host your own, just let us know. In the meantime, happy reading.

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NEW REALITIES

By | *Allan Tellis*, Chief Writer, Denver

"Parents, community members, and educators have a sense that there are equity issues underlying education during the COVID-19 shutdown."

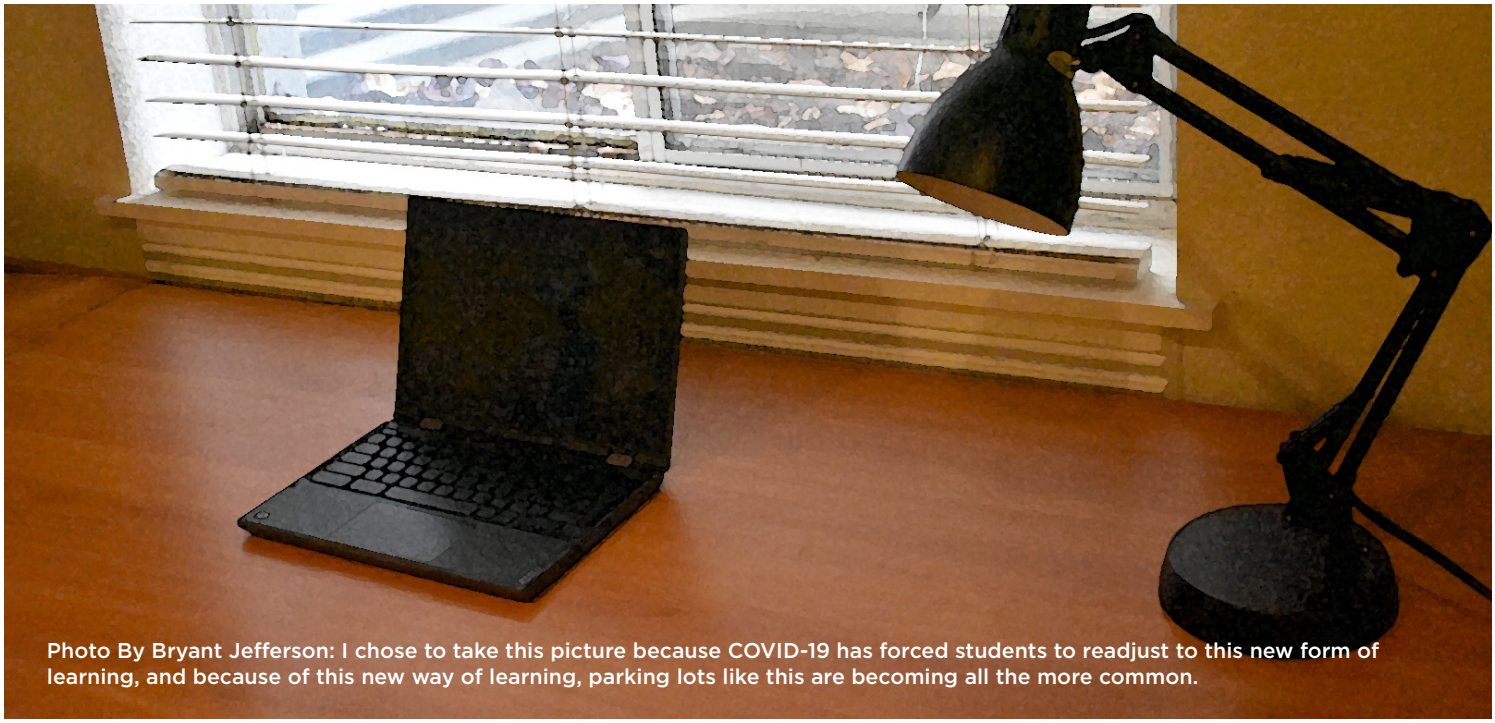

Photo By Bryant Jefferson: I chose to take this picture because COVID-19 has forced students to readjust to this new form of learning, and because of this new way of learning, parking lots like this are becoming all the more common.

For many of us, when thinking back to our school days, people and places come to mind: former teachers, coaches, classmates, classrooms, playgrounds, sporting events. For many students today, their memories of school will differ significantly, given the tremendous shifts in the reality of public schooling following the spread of the COVID-19 virus and the widespread knowledge of social, racial, economic, and environmental crises that also are unfolding. And while nearly all of us may be aware that public schooling has taken on new forms and platforms to start this school year, we may not understand what families, students and teachers are experiencing. So, we asked the question: How has the reality of public education changed over the past six months?

Parents, community members, and educators have a sense that there are equity issues underlying education during the COVID-19 shutdown. Concerns about equity existed well before the pandemic, which has left many frustrated with the lack of commitment to guaranteeing all students are supported enough to succeed in educational institutions. According to one community member, the pandemic has been "piling more and more issues on top of a system that is not in a good place and hasn't been in a good place for a while. And as a person of color, too, I think we need to reimagine public education because the way we've been doing it traditionally does not serve kids that look like me, that share my background, for the last fifty years, well enough."

The things to do school

One father noted his concern that due to the shift to in-home education, every students' learning environment is now different. These inconsistencies mean some students will have access to spaces that are more conducive to learning than others. "It's not necessarily that the parents and families are doing anything wrong. It's just wrong it's just an unhealthy learning experience because they don't have the privilege of being in a classroom that's conducive to learning, they're taken away from that. I don't know how people homeschool, it's just so many distractions and so many other elements."

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Not only are some students subjected to attempting to learn in shared, and sometimes crammed spaces, many students, especially those experiencing hardship, must complete their school tasks with inadequate resources. While varied, some estimates suggest that Denver Public Schools came up at least 3,000 laptops short to meet the needs of its students. Other students face issues of limited internet access and uncertain economic times have led to many families being unable to pay for basic utilities like electricity. Some community members have noted that this may be a good reason to push for public institutions, like libraries and recreation centers, to be made available to the public sooner if they are able to be opened safely.

Being at school

Adding to equity concerns is the fact that some students are having to navigate the difficulties of online schooling without much support. Parents noted the difficulty they have in finding time to both handle their work responsibilities and facilitate their children's learning, even when they had the support of other adults and a flexible work schedule. Obviously not all parents are subject to such flexibility in their obligations as to fully support their children and many of those students are left to figure things out on their own. As one parent put it, "pretty big disparity between the kids that have the support to handle education during this pandemic and the kids that don't and there's this huge gap and I feel like the education gap is getting wider. Another added. One woman recalled recently delivering to a home where two children under ten appeared to be there all day without adult supervision. Others expressed concern that those children were representative of many households throughout the metro area. Many students may also be doubly tasked with managing their own education and helping younger siblings adjust to online learning.

One community member from a small town added that rural communities have also had a tough time navigating the shift to online education. She described some of the difficulties experienced by rural communities, many of which mirror the problems in the metro area, but in many cases for rural areas, resources aren't as concentrated.

Unfortunately, these compounding difficulties have led to many students opting out of remaining in their local districts altogether, though it is not clear whether these changes signal transitions to private or home-based education or whether these students have enrolled in other local districts. Despite the lack of available data about where these children have gone, the enrollment decline is precipitous, and will lead to major financial changes throughout the region. One parent estimated that several thousand students are not attending DPS: "My gut tells me this is a number that should not be ignored. It might be wise to put some pressure on the school board and DPS administration to address that number because it's so much more than a number; there are individual stories behind every one of those people and we need to understand them, if we're going to be able to help get kids plugged into learning." Having thousands of absent students could mean that students who are in need of support are going unnoticed due to their lack of contact with mandatory reporters and other concerned adults. As one father noted, one of the key elements that is lost in online education is the informal start to class. He believes that without that point of contact many students who are in distress are not accounted for as they usually would be: "Abuse is all time high but reports are at an all time low because people aren't seeing the signs." While talking about the scale of the pandemic one educator noted that, "so many of these kids are affected in so many more ways than we'll ever know. The stress of their parents is going to impact them, if they're in abusive homes, they're still in abusive homes, and have been there since March because we don't know the full story and we can't see them everyday and we can't ask them the questions that we need to.".

Even before this year of school

The stress facing children and families and schools these days not only comes from the considerable uncertainty caused by the pandemic but also from the intensity of summer defined in large part by large scale resistance to white supremacy and racism. Several incidents during the pandemic caused mass civil unrest, with many protesting against systemic racism and murders of black people at the hands of law enforcement. One school psychologist noted that students may be trying to comprehend the moment by themselves as they don't have the typical amount of access to others for decompressing or processing events in the local and national media. "They have to not only process what's going on with the pandemic, but it's happening at a time where most folks are needing to process what's happening racially and politically and environmentally also, and then not having the space to do that could be really detrimental to a lot of people."

One teacher noted that the backlash against white supremacy made him confront his own relationship to whiteness, power and educational spaces. "This summer has made me pretty reflective about my own experience as a teacher, being white in a world where I teach a lot of kids who don't share my racial and cultural identity and what that means and potentially the harm that I'm doing." Teaching the humanities in light of racial equity can be difficult as the canon used in standard curriculums often reflects the very racist assumptions progressive educators

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hope to defeat. He says navigating dialogue with students about these complicated and consequential concepts is even more difficult in an environment when many have their cameras off and the educator can not read the room.

Many students are struggling to maintain their mental health during this shutdown and it still remains unclear when they will be able to return to the typical activities they found value in. As one highschooler put it, "I feel really disconnected from people, I'm not a people person, I'm a go outside and talk with trees person, but I like being around people sometimes, it just feels really wrong I guess… seeing people doesn't make them feel real and I don't feel connected to community." Another student felt that the pandemic had shortened his highschool experience and reduced his ability to maintain the community they had established. Some students noted that strategies like exercising, talking to people about how you feel, and remembering why education is important have helped. Other highschoolers agreed, noting that motivation seems to be hard to muster especially when typical pillars of encouragement like teachers feel less accessible.

For many, heading to school provides an opportunity to have meaningful social interactions. Students, especially those that are extroverted or particularly social, have had a difficult time adjusting to their new social environment. Several people noted that they've seen improved mental well-being when kids get a chance to see one another. One community member who works with youth noted that, "kids that I have that are in Douglas County, Little Public, Boulder Valley, those schools that are back on a hybrid system, they do seem generally happier than the kids that are in DPS or APS that are just learning online all-day because I think that infuse their life with some sense of normalcy and they're able to socialize a little bit." Several others recounted stories of children whose personalities had shifted after being removed from their typical social environment. One mother noted that a family friend's child had made a dramatic shift from being outgoing and bubbly to shy and anxious during the pandemic. Importantly, the child returned to their normal behavior pattern once they returned to a small level of in-person schooling.

Parents and teachers were particularly concerned about what the lack of social interaction could mean for children's development in the long term. One parent noted that although kids are flexible and have adapted well to the new social expectations, it can be difficult for them to get a grasp on why these new standards are in place. For instance, one young girl had a tough time making sense of changes in their in-home lifestyle after her father tested positive for COVID-19. Her mother recounts that "she didn't quite understand why daddy was sleeping in a separate room for a while, why daddy can't hug me, she kept saying daddy I forgot what your face looks like." A pre-kindergarten aged girl echoed that sentiment, noting that she "did not like coronavirus" and really wanted to see her friends.

One father noted that the online curriculum was not sufficient for his children and they completed all the course work within the first few weeks. He then supplemented their schoolwork with his own curriculum to keep his children engaged. Unfortunately, not all students have fared that well with their course work. Some have had difficulty disciplining themselves and maintaining their schedules to engage in school from home. As one high schooler put it, "with having the school having to be online it's been crazy because I procrastinate a lot and I get distracted easily and so with it being online it was hard for me to stay on top of my things."

Similarly, teachers have had a tough time adjusting to life online and some have found it difficult to not be disheartened by the consequences of not interacting with students in person. "The best part of our jobs, and the best part of teaching, and why we all do that has been removed from the equation… students have been removed from it." Another teacher noted that they felt like they were teaching blindfolded and felt powerless to support the kids that were struggling the most. Several teachers expressed frustration at having to figure out how to teach to a level which is helpful to all students given the limitations of setting a curriculum and administering class in this new format. "Teaching is hard in general, teaching e-school is the hardest thing I've ever had to do," they shared.

Diving in

The digital demands of online classrooms can be especially difficult for young students who haven't developed the skillset necessary to do complicated tasks like split share apps on a computer screen. One parent noted that his elementary aged son's experience helped him understand the difficulty young people may be having in adjusting to a fully virtual format. "There was this new reality of having to see his classmates through a computer screen and none of them were happy. We see kids breaking down into tears all the time on Zoom." Similarly another parent noted that it can be difficult for kids to try to learn technological skills and social norms all at once.

Parents, especially those with younger children, are finding it difficult to navigate the demands of their working situations while helping their children succeed academically.

One mother noted that the pandemic has made clear the benefit of the de facto childcare aspect of schools; a feature which often goes unspoken. For many parents the childcare element of in-person schools allows them to more easily advance their professional lives. Another parent put it this way, "Juggling your students' crazy schedule with your schedule, it's not easy for anybody, even people who have that opportunity to work from home. It's like I have to be working and my kid has a test at one and another one at three. It's also harder for them to get their stuff done."

Parents are faced with the tough task of deciding whether they should make online education continue to work for their families or send their children back to school during a pandemic. One mother noted that part of the intensity of the moment is everyone trying to perform high level risk analysis at the same time. Through working through her own decisions and conversing with others she has observed that "everyone is trying to figure out what's going to be best for them, for their jobs, for their kids, for the school." Some parents have been quite impressed with district procedures put in place to maintain safety at their children's school; others however, have encountered less trust inspiring scenarios, especially in facilities that were already scarce on resources. One community member described the difficulty her sister was having in balancing child care needs and maintaining a safe environment for all members of her household, "[She] doesn't feel comfortable with them going back to daycare and I totally understand that because I don't feel like the daycares there in Aurora that are for low income parents, single moms, and things like that, I didn't see that, that daycare was doing the things as far as hygiene that needed to be done, so I feel like they would've been at risk and then they've got a grandmother who has cancer so they couldn't be in the household and go to school."

Schools and districts have been given a wide breadth of autonomy, meaning people dealing with different institutions have had vastly different experiences. Some have found these discrepancies to be unjustifiable and would prefer best practices be implemented in all schools in order to make sure all students have access to quality environments. One mother voiced her frustration at the lack of central focus stating, "localized responses, on not even just a district level but different schools within the same district are doing things completely different, and to me, I understand the value of local control in a lot of ways, but also it feels like there are so many things that some schools are doing that are working that other schools aren't doing or implementing, it just feels like why aren't we having a more coordinated response."

It can also be difficult for parents to know how much clout to give their child's preferences in terms of going to school or staying home. As one mother put it, "it's a hard conversation for kids to have and know the repercussions of whatever their decisions are, particularly for the kids who are like I think I can do this from home, I think I can focus, and I'm a good learner. I think they are missing a lot of the social stuff." That decision has also been difficult for college students who have to also weigh out their financial investment when assessing whether they should return to school in person, or if they should re-enroll at all. A college student who is not returning to her university explained her decision suggesting that, "it doesn't make sense to me to go pay tuition and everything and a lot of universities are still charging room and board." Students are unsure about the effectiveness of various policies universities are implementing and may find the cost of admission too high given the traditional aspects of college, like socializing and attending lectures. are suspended due to the pandemic.

Many parents are nervous about sending their children into high contact, public environments but also realize that long term online schooling may present insurmountable difficulties. For some families, though, there have been some benefits of the new online arrangement that they hope not lose as Covid restrictions start to dissipate. After experiencing a new and more flexible schedule for several months, many community members feel that they don't want to return to the previous sense of normalcy. For many families, work and school responsibilities keep them apart for the majority of most days. One mother noted that having her children around all day brought more clarity to the notion that many days educators see her children more than she does. Another mother noted that she had the opportunity to see how her children learn in a more intimate way than she had ever observed. Having the flexibility to structure time around the needs of the family has allowed people to have unique bonding experiences that they would not normally get to have. One mother observed more familial interaction during the shutdown. She noted that, "everytime we went out, I saw more families, like mom, dad and kids than I ever have in the middle of the day going on bike rides, going on walks, being together and everyday that gave me hope."

The pandemic has dislodged some of the predominant notions about the way society should be structured. The United States has demonstrated its commitment to individualism but the turbulence of recent times have left many wondering if it is time to call that devout commitment into question.

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As one father put it, "the US is the most individualistic society that has ever existed on this entire planet.

We need to pick it up faster because it's time to take care of each other." Some are hoping the need for a more flexible, and perhaps reasonable, schedule is recognized by major institutions and can lead to an increased work-life balance.

However, if that shift occurs through more online working, parents hope employers also account for home office expenses in terms of pay.

Photo By Bryant Jefferson: I chose to take this picture because a school bus used to be considered a regular mode of transportation to and from school, but is now no longer used.

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FROM AN EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVE

By | *Yuzo Nieto*

"This would prove to especially difficult because of the intrinsic in-person nature of teaching instrumental methods to beginners."

Photo By Bryant Jefferson: I chose to take this picture because no matter who you are or where you live, COVID-19 has greatly impacted everyone's way of life and how they interact with others.

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In response to the intriguing set of ideas presented in this article, my humble perspective as an educator, educational leader, graduate student and parent of two elementary aged children is to agree with much of what has been discussed here. It is obviously very natural for us as humans to focus on the cornucopia of problems that arise while living through a time of a global pandemic, climate change and long overdue nationwide civil unrest surrounding structural oppression from institutional apparatuses. In fact, historical analyses of human thought surrounding the idea of apocalypse indicate a certain "obsession with the end of the world" (Aveni, 2016), which has been echoed in film, media, music and art countless times (e.g. with songs by artists such as R.E.M, Johnny Cash. Wilco, 2MX2, etc.). Especially when daily routines become so radically transformed by events such as massive nationwide quarantines in conjunction with an unrelenting spread of forest fires that transform our skyscape into an afternoon on Mars, one's ability to remain positive and hopeful during such drastic shifts in day-to-day life becomes fleeting at best. But as many of the voices represented in the main article have seen and articulated, opportunities can arise even in the most difficult times, like "the rose that grew from concrete" (Shakur, 2000), and I believe it is vastly important for our collective mental wellness to retain focus on these opportunities, as challenging as that might be.

When the onset of the initial COVID-19 quarantine was first announced, I was in the midst of completing part one of my comprehensive doctoral exam in music theory, filming a music video for a new release with my 10-piece afrobeat music ensemble, and wrapping up the first half of a semester teaching a methods class to music education undergraduates whose primary instruments were not flute, saxophone and/or clarinet focusing on preservice preparation for a career that entails directing wind ensembles. And despite the obvious quixotic nature of putting oneself in such a trifecta of obligation, the pandemic definitely threw a major wrench into this already demanding time for me. It was no surprise that I felt terribly compromised, especially at first; however, in order to remain steadfast in the face of this adversity, my mind quickly began searching for any possible opportunities that could come out of this - especially in terms of my students and the class I was teaching. Given that spring break had just begun, the university initially decided to take all classes online for the two weeks following the break: creating a situation in which teachers needed to use the break to plan. Halfway through that week (and subsequently halfway through my initial curricular changes) it was announced that we would be online for the rest of the semester. This would prove to especially difficult because of the intrinsic in-person nature of teaching instrumental methods to beginners – hand positioning, tone production, physicality in relation to instrument – but also because most students had rented instruments from the university which was now demanding that all rentals be returned immediately (which in hindsight did not make much sense considering it would create a situation in which a bunch of spitty instruments from a gamut of various people/places were all condensed in one small room). In short, I was to develop curriculum for and teach music to beginners not only online, but without instruments.

But as challenging as this task was, the only thing I could do to navigate it was to use it as a catalyst and opportunity to essentially "reimagine education" (as echoed in the main article in this issue). Since I had already begun this reimagining by implementing constructivist learning theory and culturally/community responsive pedagogy (CRP) as the template for the class itself (when it was in-person), this became the common thread between the previous learning environment and the new one. I quickly realized that in the spirit of constructivism and CRP, instead of just telling my students what was going to happen, I asked them. For some, this request was off-putting because it made them feel as though this grad student was making them do all of his work for him; however, the majority of students saw it as an opportunity to create the education that they wanted; to see themselves in their own curriculum. Consequently, their responses were much more dynamic and compelling than what I would have had them do – we decided that the rest of the semester would involve focused independent studies that ranged from composition and part-writing exercises for those specific instruments and voicings as an exercise in teaching songwriting; creating curriculum around teaching these instruments to specific grade levels; researching the instruments they were not able to play because of the pandemic, using narrative inquiry with students in class who had played that instrument; and so forth. And despite the challenges and a continuous state of building the plane while flying it, much of the work both informed and exceeded my expectations for what could be accomplished both in this class and as a function of the PK-12 curricula and learning environments and that my undergraduate students, and me as an administrator/founder, would be entering into shortly.

Subsequently, as I assume most of us have experienced to some degree or another, this experiment in malleability created opportunities that would inform my career at large. It pushed me to jump headfirst into my dreams of founding/launching my own K-8 (and beyond) charter school, Radical Arts Academy of Denver (RAAD), serving students in the far northeast Denver who have an immense wealth of talent but limited access to the arts by providing

a place to get one's soul filled; a place where one's identities and passions are their guides. Furthermore, as a result of and means for continued research, these findings from my university experience last semester largely informed RAAD's spring pilot which will explore creative ways of delivering arts education by using co-created learning models to address the combined needs of teachers, students and community in relation to current/future realities of COVID-19 by pairing preservice arts educators of dance, music, theater, creative writing, visual art with artistically-inclined students in far northeast Denver.

And in light of everything, as I sit in my living room gazing at the stillness of a fall snow on the sill of my window, I cannot help but fear the cold months ahead and yearn for the lovely weather and freedom to enjoy it on my own terms as someone who has worked from home now for the majority of 2020, but am hopeful for the opportunities that will inevitably come.

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Yuzo Nieto: Chief Executive Arts Officer - Radical Arts Academy of Denver (RAAD); Doctoral Student / Graduate Student Professor of Music Education – University of Northern Colorado.

Yuzo Nieto is a doctoral candidate in the music education department at the University of Northern Colorado (UNC) with a focus in educational leadership and policy studies, and co-founder of Radical Arts Academy of Denver (RAAD). He has also served the far-northeast area of Denver as both a full-time public school music director and as a general elementary teacher for 10+ years. In addition to his research and coursework at UNC, Nieto teaches culturally/community responsive educational models in music pedagogy for current music education majors at UNC. Additionally, he is a father of two elementary aged children and leader of an original 10-piece Afrobeat / Chicano hip-hop / Soul music ensemble called Pink Hawks. With the combined experiences of being a parent, student, teacher and artist in the Denver/Colorado community, he aims to launch Radical Arts Academy of Denver in 2023: a K-8 charter school with an arts-integrated curriculum that aims to close opportunity gaps for students who have limited access to legitimate arts education.

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FROM A SCHOLAR PERSPECTIVE

By | *Willam Anderson*

"All I've known since March is work and home and I'm tired of both dem places."

Photo By Bryant Jefferson: I chose to take these pictures because these places, which would normally be full of people, are completely empty due to the dramatic change.

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The US experience with the COVID-19 pandemic (itself resulting in the loss of more than 210,000 lives) has come with a laundry list of other challenges: economic and employment catastrophe, social isolation, schools in disarray, and a restructuring of all that seemed normal only eight months ago. The voices of community members throughout the Denver metro area, represented in Allan Tellis' writing, indicate that another challenge also has emerged, one that maintains the status quo even in these turbulent times.

In a time when the voices of the people most impacted by this virus (disproportionately Black and Brown people) should be as important as ever, linguistic barriers are still being erected, effectively shutting out the voices of the most vulnerable among us. What I mean by shutting out of voices is the taking away of opportunities for groups of people to be able to communicate their reality in their own terms. For many residents throughout the Denver region, especially those who may lack material or fiscal resources to leverage in order to be heard, their voices represent an important resource that should produce individual and collective power. These voices are an intrinsic and human resource that can lead efforts to improve our social community and collective condition; when we fail to hear these voices, we lose the opportunity to improve. When municipal and educational leaders silence or fail to acknowledge the resource of community voice, the result is another example of disenfranchisement.

As oppressed and marginalized people are fighting daily for legal justice, economic justice, and health care justice, the fight for what Dr. April Baker-Bell calls "linguistic justice" wages on (2020). This fight for linguistic justice is a fight against, "white mainstream English…how white ways of speaking become the invisible--- or better, inaudible---norm" (pg.3). This norm has kept the voices of those that do not choose to speak in white mainstream English out of the conversations about their health, their employment, and their overall experience during these all-but-normal times.

BEV (Black English Vernacular) (also see AAVE, BE as recognized forms of Black speech) is my first and home language, and I can speak best to the silencing of Black voices that use varieties of this home language best. Historically the variations of the English language that Black people use has and continues to be under scrutiny (Hopson, 2003). This scrutiny comes in many forms, from the mocking and over exaggeration of the language in minstrel shows in the late 1800's and early 1900's, to the what Baker-Bell describes as the "Anti-Black linguistic racism" that has been a ubiquitous practice in public education since Blacks were allowed to participate (Baker-Bell, 2020). According to a growing body of research, anti-black linguistic racism gets at the root of this current dilemma: "anti-black linguistic racism describes the linguistic violence, persecution, dehumanization, and marginalization that Black Language-speakers experience in school and in everyday life" (Baker-Bell, 2020 pg. 11). Throughout this pandemic era, Black folks all over the country have been crying out about the ills the pandemic has caused (and illuminated). Unfortunately, these voices are only heard in the immediate context of the people who exercise them. Generally, we do not see the raw and unfiltered voices of Black folks on the news, in the newspaper, or on news websites. But there is much to be learned.

Absent from our public view are the voices saying: "dis Rona is some bulllsh*t", and "why da hell can't dese folk get it together and find a way to fix all dis?".

Are these the normal speak print (digital) media share or examples of Black folks using white mainstream English? No. Does it make their truth any less significant or true? No. The deliberate absence of Black voice in Black vernacular silences a people that are being disproportionately impacted by a global crisis. These voices being excluded overlooks the reality behind the statistics of Black people's circumstances, and as leaders and educators work towards solutions to reopening or keeping schools closed, this exclusion has kept the voices of the students regulated to the echo chambers of their homes and digital classrooms.

Schools and society at large have already embedded toxic language correction practices in education and day to day interaction. Common school practices include disallowing and habitually correcting Black students' use of their home BEV languages, substituting them with "academic language." Such corrections happen often, not because students are using English wrongly, but rather, "despite the vitality of Black Language, teachers continue hearing what's not said and missing what is (Alim & Smitherman, 2020 pg. 175). To prepare their children for their time outside of home and school, the oh-too-common "talk" Black parents give their children on how they should sound when talking with the police, or going on a job interview are subtle and not so subtle reminders that the way they are heard could cost them their lives and livelihood. These versions of speech correction are wrong during a non-pandemic time, but most definitely prove to be evermore insidious when telling a young person to correct their articulation of a global crisis, and its impact on them and those they care for. This lost educational opportunity affects teachers and students, and it affects our larger society.

I have yet to come across a news article on any platform that has given Black students the opportunity to speak their thoughts and ideas about returning to school using their home language. I have asked students about returning to school, and they have provided me insight that is powerful. When asked should we go back to school physically, a Black female senior responded, "S**t, if it's safe. Y'all can't have us back in the

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school if we only gonna have to come back home in a week." Another student, also Black and female, responded to the same question saying, "I don't care, I jus have to get out dis house. Y'all don't understand, I have been stuck in here since March and I just need to get away. Get outta dis space, get outta my head. I jus have ta get out. Its some bull. All I've known since March is work and home and I'm tired of both dem places. I'm like, if I can go to work, I should be able to go to school." A Black male student offered additional thoughts: "if we don't know what the best thing to do is, why are we making all these plans that are going to have to change? We're wasting time, and y'all messin up people's lives, cuz dey don't know what dey doin. Get'n our hopes all up, just to say, nah". As stated in the main article of this journal, when a high school students speaks to the social and emotional toll online school is having on his life, "I feel really disconnected from people, I'm not a people person, I'm a go outside and talk with trees person, but I like being around people sometimes, it just feels really wrong I guess... seeing people doesn't make them feel real and I don't feel connected to community."

These voices and voices like them in other home languages, whatever they may be, deserve to be heard at this time, especially in schools. While the main article here in this journal issue captures these voices, it should not be unusual. All people deserve the opportunity to articulate their truth in whatever language forms allow them to express it the best, especially those who are often ignored. "People evolve a language in order to describe and thus control their circumstances, or in order not to be submerged by a reality that they cannot articulate" (Baldwin, pg. 1, 1979). Space for our students and their communities to articulate their realities must be made, if we are interested in participating in improving those realities.

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A Colorado native that attended Metropolitan State University for his Bachelor's degree, the University of Phoenix for his Master's degree in education, and is currently a doctoral student at the University of Colorado Denver studying education. He works at The Manual High School in Denver, Colorado as a social studies teacher, teacher-leader, and is an adjunct professor for Colorado College in the Education department. He was a member of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's Teacher Advisory Council from 2014-2016, and is currently a member of the National Geographic Teacher Advisory Council. He is a dream chaser, reader, runner, lover of history, music, and junk food. A quote that sums up his teaching philosophy is: "Of all of our studies, History is best qualified for our research" (Malcolm X).

FROM A STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

By | *Jennifer & Jessica Aggrey*

"A Call for Districts to Relinquish Their Power."

Photo By Bryant Jefferson: TI chose to take these pictures because these places, which would normally be full of people, are completely empty due to the dramatic change.

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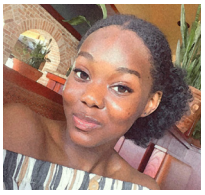
Reading the first paragraph, we wonder what the writer means by "It is no surprise that we are in a global crisis." Just in early March 2020, Colorado was still living almost oblivious to the virus. Schools were still open, and people rarely put on masks. Our mother had even traveled from Denver to Ghana, West Africa a month prior in February, so it certainly did come as a surprise to us when schools were abruptly closed just weeks later.

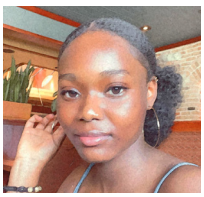
We agree with the writer's assertion that "unique" family "experiences" are made more obvious due to the whole coronavirus situation. Since most schools transitioned to the virtual setting, we've heard of students who have to babysit and help their siblings while also helping their younger siblings. This becomes problematic when students are forced to turn on cameras during remote learning, as well as when they are asked to contribute verbally to the class, only for there to be sounds of children in the background when they unmute their microphone. We've seen students that have had to do online school in closets just to fulfill the need to be in a quiet environment. We've also heard of students who had to buy their own computers in order to do online school. As twin sisters who attend to a school where laptops are distributed to every single student at the beginning of the year, this was especially concerning to us, The inequitable school systems of Colorado may actually be making the pandemic harder for different populations of students to deal with.

One example of this that we would like to note is the amount of support during college applications that seniors are receiving during the pandemic. Prior to the emergence of COVID-19, our high school had a stellar reputation for providing 12th grade students with quality college counsel during the college application process. Fortunately, my college counselors have been able to adapt to the pandemic, and have been aiding seniors via Microsoft Teams. For instance, our college counselors hold virtual College Success seminars every other Wednesday for the sole purpose of assisting 12th graders with their college applications, as well as financial aid and scholarship opportunities. Our college counselors started setting meetings with us and other students in July 2020, weeks before the academic year even started. With this support, we have are able to start applying to scholarships as well as get personalized feedback on our personal statements months before we even started the college applications. However, not all high schools in Colorado are providing their students with this amount of support. In fact, as of October 2020, a few of our friends in neighboring schools had not even completed-- or in worse cases, started-- their personal statements. The pandemic already has students unsure of their future and what it may hold, so it's essential that twelfth graders are receiving support during their transition from high school to college, a time that also comes with its own sense of uncertainty.

As mentioned in the article, many parents find it difficult to pay electricity bills. This hardship definitely expands towards Wi-Fi expenses. On morning we write this, the Daily Mail website published the story of a nine-year-old boy who has to sit outside his school every morning in order to use his school's Wi-Fi and participate in online school. Fortunately for him, he lives within walking distance from his school, so he didn't have to travel far. As a result of his story going viral, a good samaritan offered to pay for Wi-Fi in his house. However, there is a very high chance that there are other children having to sit outside their schools in order to get an education during this pandemic. What happens to them when it becomes too cold to be outside? What happens to other children who do not live within walking distance of their schools? It is very critical during this time that the government provides assistance to the families that cannot afford to provide their children a stable environment for online school. No student should have to go through these obstacles in order to receive an education.

Ultimately, as emphasized in the article, the issue of inequity has become more prominent during the pandemic. Many families have been left on their own to live with the many obstacles that the coronavirus has brought along. It's important that the inequities in Colorado, as well as the whole country's school systems, are not only acknowledged but also addressed as an issue, so that every student in the U.S. has equitable access to quality education during and following this pandemic.





Jennifer and Jessica Aggrey 12th graders in Denver Public Schools

Jessica Aggrey: I'm seventeen years old and I've been with YAASPA since 2016. I am currently a senior at DSST GVR High School. I love YAASPA because it gives young people the opportunity to lead and work on issues we're passionate about.

Jennifer Aggrey: I'm a senior at DSST: GVR High School. I've been an active member of YAASPA since 2016. I enjoy spending my free time reading and writing.

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EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTION

By | *Shant'a Johnson & Ali Larson*

"The trust required of parents towards their schools is extremely difficult to build across computer screens."

Photo By Bryant Jefferson: I chose to take these pictures because these places, which would normally be full of people, are completely empty due to the dramatic change.

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It would be impossible to capture the impact of Covid-19 on our children's education within the confines of one article. The effects have been felt far and wide, perhaps more deeply than anyone could have anticipated. The sentiments of the students and parents captured in Allan's writing for this month's issue capture widely shared experiences while also only scratching the surface.

Many of us, both educators and parents alike, have seen a general decline in the rigor and challenge students deserve due to the difficulty of remote learning, ever-changing environments and expectations, and the like. In addition, we know that students lost nearly three months of learning at a critical moment of the school year this Spring, during the unsteady shifts to remote learning for unknown lengths of time. Teachers now have to make up for lost time while also teaching to the standards of their own grades, all while dealing with the frustrations and limitations of remote platforms. It is undeniable that we are seeing learning loss across the board.

The impact on our families is direct and far-reaching. It cannot be overstated what kind of toll this pandemic has had, and will have, on both the education and mental health of our students and their caregivers. Now seen under the bright spotlight of a crisis, disparities in access, resources, childcare, and stability of employment and/or housing are adding to the already inequitable opportunity gaps present in our schools. This growing divide itself also contributes to mental health decline in both caregivers and educators as we do everything in our power to make sure all students are progressing and growing equitably in unconducive settings. These growing gaps are a crisis in themselves and yet our families are also dealing with myriad issues requiring their immediate time, attention, and energy. The additional tolls being taken by financial strains, the balancing of work and remote learning, childcare issues, and the ever-present fear of Covid-19 are stretching our families - and schools - to their limits.

Schools have often been a community hub that provides so much more than academic instruction. At their best, schools serve as a clearing house of sorts, helping connect families with resources and supports they may not find or receive elsewhere. A school community (both staff and the greater community at-large) often helps to meet the needs of families in order to set their child(ren) up for success.

The shift to remote learning has removed the opportunity for many families to be served in valuable and critical ways. It is much more difficult to check-in with families or learn of urgent needs when they aren't coming to school regularly or at all. The ability to build relationships has been negatively impacted, affecting so much more than just academics.

The trust required of parents towards their schools is extremely difficult to build across computer screens. New families that don't know the staff are less inclined to ask for support. Other families may not know who to contact or may not have time/energy to reach out. For me (Ali), this has been one of the biggest shifts I've seen and felt in the past six months: the decreased ability of a school to meet the needs of its families and students. Whether it be support with meals, mental health, transportation, or housing assistance, schools have a much more difficult time identifying needs and providing support. This is a critical setback in the education of our students. As Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs suggests, students will have a more difficult time learning if their basic needs aren't met. This has always been the case, and it has been exacerbated in our current social and educational context as families search for new ways to be stable. And if we're having a more difficult time assessing/identifying these needs due to the constraints placed on our schools and staff (remote communication, decreased time together, extra demanding workloads, ever-shifting regulations, etc.), we know many needs are going unmet. All of this leads to increasing the opportunity gap and placing even heavier burdens on schools and families long term.

The impact that COVID and remote learning has had on families intersects with various systemic sectors. I, (Shant'a) acknowledge the privilege of being able to work from home and support my middle school student through their remote learning time, and how being able to keep steady employment secures our housing situation, which is a basic need and right. Every family, every child should have stable housing, without question. I also understand that this is a cycle for my own child, in that home stability aids in their consistent engagement during already unpredictable times.
Having worked in the past supporting students experiencing homelessness through their educational journey, and now working in the public housing sector, I am keenly aware of t he strain remote learning is placing upon working families. For instance, a single mother working in the culinary industry has a first grade student with speech learning needs. The mother has no choice but to stay home due to not having any other caregiver accessible to support and care for her child. Having to make the choice of staying home to support and care for her child puts their housing and other basic needs at risk. These are decisions many families are having to make.

As well, the requirements to access remote learning (i.e. consistent wi-fi connection, appropriate technology equipment), creates even more of a barrier to accessing educational experiences virtually, and greatly emphasizes the connection of housing stability toand a student's educational success.

When we think of the many tools, and structures that a school puts into place to support the focus and engagement of a student, the idea of every student's home replicating this environment can seem daunting.

The inter-sectoral impact that remote learning can have upon housing, and employment is pushing other public and private entities to extend their already limited resources to create safety nets for student success. Public Housing Authorities across the nation, before the pandemic, took to addressing the educational needs of students by creating partnerships with tutoring and other educational programs. Now these partnerships have shifted from afterschool programming to offering on-site support during school hours that also includes meals for students who may not have access to food during school hours at home.

Remote learning, with all of its challenges, is also pushing society to change educational supports, practices and structure in a way that has not been done in the more than 100 years of public schooling. To face these challenges and honestly address them head- on can address the inequities that already were present in the system of public schooling in its current form. It could be that the true solution is right in front of us, as clear as the challenges are now.

Shant'a Johnson

Ali Larson

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OUR CHILDREN NEED CHAMPIONS.
WE NEED YOUR VOICE.
JOIN US FOR CHANGE.

BACKGROUND

The Denver Journal of Education and Community is a community education journal focused on topics of education in the greater Denver area. By engaging in community discourse, and connecting this content to scholarship and policy, DJEC hopes to contribute to local education thinking by offering a balanced and well-informed perspective.

THE CHALLENGE

- Important voices of students, family members, and community members are persistently absent or under-represented.
- Opportunities abound for high quality, community-based education thinking and leadership.
- There is high value in building and sustaining a model of community members creating content reflecting their perspectives and experiences.

THE PURPOSE

Content for DJEC is sourced from residents throughout the metro Denver area, including those who are directly and indirectly involved in the school-based education of children. By sharing their experiences, exploring solutions to persistent and emergent challenges, and thinking (dreaming) together about public education, our public sense of community grows while public education improves. To achieve this, residents are invited to host conversations with their neighbors, familiar and unfamiliar, and share these conversations to cultivate journal content.

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN:

- To host a conversation, visit **EducationAndCommunity.com/host**
- To participate in a conversation in your community, visit **EducationAndCommunity.com/events**
- To support the journal, or to subscribe to its digital content, you can visit **EducationAndCommunity.com**

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