

Knowledge Production in Difficult Times

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Difficult times test us. They test both our social systems and our value systems behind them. The year 2020 has been a year of many tests. In a crisis brought on by one major global challenge of a pandemic, while yet others like climate crisis lurk on the horizon, many systems are being tested, more than they've been in recent memory. In academe, our systems of administration and shared governance, our curricula and pedagogies, our support and mentorship for students, our inclusiveness and empathy, our resilience emotional intelligence are all put to the toughest of stress tests. While academic communities seem to be spared from high levels of loss of lives, the levels of disruptions, anxiety, and uncertainty have been extreme even in academe. In fact, in many ways, the pandemic has exacerbated or exposed the challenges of normal times in ways that we're just starting to come to terms with. Graduate students are left stranded, and so are international students and scholars; people of color and minority or vulnerable populations have suffered the most. The academic landscape reflects broader patterns of inequality and injustice, instead of being able to model a different world that the rest of society could emulate. And our research and knowledge production are often agnostic to what is going on in society, even during crises like this. This issue foregrounds the pandemic's effect on education and society, including issues that scholars are starting to get a handle on.

When we started this journal almost five years ago, we were most inspired by the need to approach quality and rigor in ways that are better attuned to our time. Traditional features of academic publication, such as rejection rate, citation index, and parochial scope of citation, no longer align

with what has come to be known as the social justice turn across many disciplines. In a world where knowledge-based economy is rapidly becoming the norm rather than an anomaly across societies, knowledge production can no longer remain dominated by gatekeepers residing in and serving the interest of a few countries—or that of the few in any given society. Nations themselves can no longer be effectively served by pursuing national interest alone; there are too many shared and often global challenges that demand more than national attention and solutions. The ongoing global pandemic has laid bare the needs for producing and applying new knowledge on transnational (often global) as much as national scales. A new vision of quality that is defined by more than “rigor”—by relevance to and impact on society, by inclusion and participation of the traditionally excluded, by cause and a sense of justice, and by the need advancements in the very modes and methods of knowledge production—has become even more relevant today.

Today’s scholars (residing in any country) are conscious about the inequality and inequities in knowledge production, which are unsurprisingly exacerbated by the global pandemic. Female scientists, for instance, have reportedly produced significantly less publication than their male counterparts. At the same time, scholars in the global south are facing increasingly unreasonable demands for publishing “internationally” while their working conditions are worsening. Especially in the global south, universities and government alike are demanding publications in international journals with high citation index, giving rise to both corruption of standards and exploitation of scholars. When scholars face increasing demands without additional time, resource, or support, it not surprising that they resort to predatory or junk publication, plagiarism or data fabrication, or, more often, unproductive competitions for producing research and publication that may contribute much to their society or discipline. The pandemic is exacerbating all of these challenges, as well as exposing them. And they are likely to outlast the crisis. The emergence of a new publication landscape—including commercial publishers to predatory journal to greater postcolonial/neoliberal hegemonies—could pose new challenges to the cause of creating respect for scholars across borders.

There are, however, silver linings as well. Technology for communication, collaboration, and dissemination of new knowledge have all rapidly developed and they are being adopted by vastly increased number of academic professionals. While the inequalities of access and privilege are stark here too, the far wider adoption of tools for knowledge sharing and application is likely to change the academic landscape positively in the longer run. While the push for more publication around the world may misguide thousands of scholars, even within the regime of quality defined by the number of citations, greater engagement in research and publication could involve a lot more scholars in meaningful knowledge production than

before. It might also diversify participation in the global map of knowledge production. It may open up critical discourse about the value of knowledge to local communities and societies, before or in addition to the conventional idea that knowledge is always universal. More scholars and the economic and social agencies behind them might start asking on whose terms and to whose benefits—and by and for whom—knowledge production is occurring, what that knowledge is contributing to, and so on. On the one hand, many scholars and students are unable to do much of what they do in normal times, involving field work and labs, physical and material aspects of scholarship, mentorship and collaboration. On the other, the shaking up of many systems within academe is creating opportunities as well as challenges that we will have to grapple with, more or less productively, in the long run.

The articles and essays in this issue reflect a reckoning demanded by the disruption of the global pandemic. The contributing scholars have raised a number of local and global issues from within education, issues that have social ramifications beyond academe. They have written about a range of issues pertaining to what the world is going through, from trauma to resilience and need for adaptation, from wellbeing to success of both students and scholars guiding them, from ways to empower students and foster agency in the face of crisis, from structural racism to issues of justice and dignity for minoritized groups, from vocational learning for students to professional development for students to scholars, from issues in the discipline of music to engineering, from topics of technology and online education to topics about the post-covid world. The question that connects all of the contributions in this issue is: How can we overcome the crisis, as we also seek to address challenges and create opportunities that we see more clearly now? How do we seek new opportunities even as we counter problems that are exacerbated by this crisis? The authors collectively argue that this is a time for us to become more informed, aware, and sensitive to these challenges. It is time for us to envision action and solutions to the new challenges (ex)posed by the pandemic and many more that have persisted.

We hope that especially with the inclusion of the shorter essays, we've been able to include the voice of more (and more diverse) scholars. By creating this new space, which we intend to test a few more times, we hope to practice the idea of inclusion that past issues embraced more generally through the calls and the review process.

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editorial team; your patience and cooperation are truly appreciated. During such a difficult time, yours is a work of dedication to society and love of knowledge. Journals like this exhibit volunteerism and commitment to causes that our academe exhibits at its best. Your selfless service is cause for hope in the world, in spite of the pain and uncertainty in the world.

Finally, thank you, readers, for reading the contents of this issue. In addition to looking up the journal for your own publication, please promote it with other colleagues who may find it relevant to their work.