Book Review

'LESSONS FROM LOCKDOWN: THE EDUCATIONAL LEGACY OF COVID-19' BY *TONY BRESLIN*

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The book 'Lessons from Lockdown: The Educational Legacy of COVID- 19' is written based on the three realities that the education sector in the globe had been facing due to the outbreak of COVID-19 - firstly, the shock of COVID- 19 to the education and training systems is long-standing; secondly, this shock had shown ramifications of pedagogy and purpose of education; and, thirdly, that this shock extends across every kind of educational setting from kindergarten to university, from community learning to professional and vocational training. The shock of the pandemic reaches every education system irrespective they are state-run or voluntary sector or private business with a variation in the magnitude of shock they could absorb. This is praiseworthy how the author, Tony Breslin, an adviser, writer, media commentator, and public policy analyst specialising in education and participation, has differentiated education from schooling. As opined
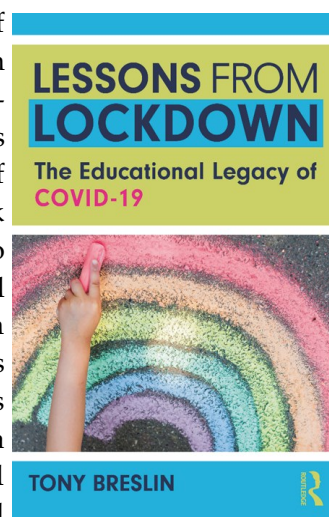
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by the author, it is prevalent for the books and papers that address education actually speaks for schooling and, quite specifically, the schooling of children and young people. While the statutory schooling years lay the foundations for fulfilling potential in adulthood, 'education' has no endpoint that causes the need to re-school the society and reskill the individuals as the COVID-19 shock has shifted the education system to a new normal state.
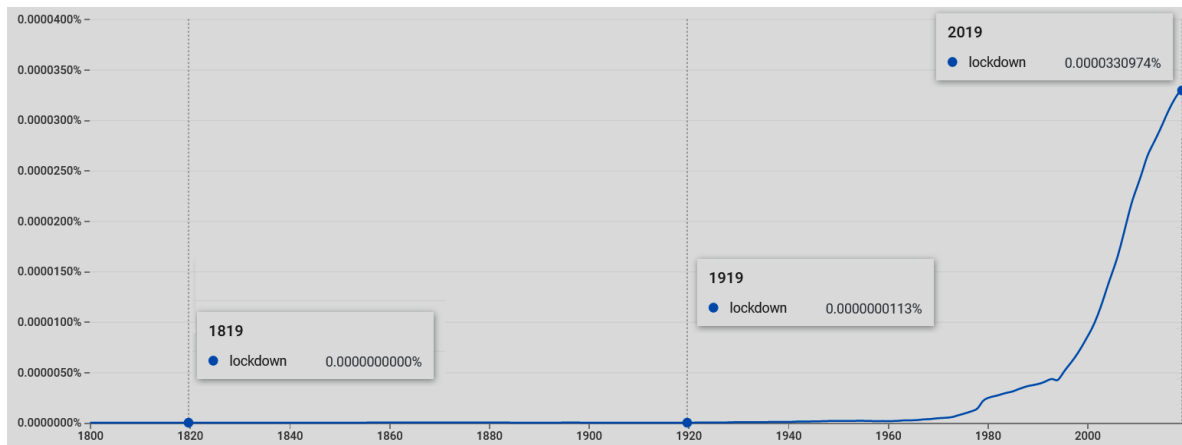

Fig. 1: Google NGram captures annual frequencies of the search string 'lockdown' (case insensitive) from 1800-2019 (Source: Recorded and transmitted by Google, which is available under the URL https://books.google.com/ngrams/)

The focal theme of the book, as the title depicts, is 'lockdown' which means " the confining of prisoners to their cells, typically in order to regain control during a riot" or "a state of isolation or restricted access instituted as a security measure" (See Oxford Languages under the URL https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/). However, the latter has the drastic increase in the frequency of being mentioned in the literature recorded by the Google NGram Chart (Fig. 1), which is the 'gift' of the COVID-19 pandemic. Lockdown is probably the most debated issue in casual discussions, the most sensitive issue for planners, the most serious issue for the administration, and the most frightening issue for the daily wage earners and the people lying at the lowest strata of the economy. Amidst all these things, this book takes its own track and finds some important aspects of the lockdown which are likely to prove especially pertinent for its legacy. While the closure (or partial closure) of educational institutions and training facilities during the lockdown has created the space for the professional reflection to teaching and educational leadership, the suspension of various regular inspectorates, the cancellation of the written papers, the alternative methodologies for performance tables in various settings and may other such things indicate the impact of their absence, and, which ultimately force the policymakers to assess whether their reinstatement is urgent or unnecessary. Moreover, the sudden emergence of new pedagogies in home-based learning and online (or blended) evaluation systems online needs experiments for the educational and training strategies and facilities of days to come. While most of the examples in this book are taken from the United Kingdom, the readers could be able to resemble well the scenario of their own countries' education scenario.

In the first chapter of the book entitled 'Schools during lockdown', the author had brought to fore the sequential phases of change in the procedure of operation of the education system as well as the behavioral change of the students, educators, and the administrations. The scenario of the early March in the UK, as elaborated by the authors, had somehow happened in almost the same way in every corner of the globe – some faced it in early February or some, like India and South Asia, during late March.

"As February gave way to March, and news of the struggles to contain the virus in Italy began to dominate UK press coverage, the view that COVID-19 was merely another far-off concern began to wilt. Some parents started to withdraw their children from school, teacher absence rose as members of staff took on shielding responsibilities or became fearful for their own vulnerability, long-planned and richly anticipated school trips planned for the summer and autumn were postponed, as were parents' evenings and school-based training sessions for school governors; and the teacher union conferences, a long-standing feature of the Easter break, were cancelled." (p. 3, Chapter 1)

However, by September, the situation turned to a critical condition with so many lacks and difficulties from all parts of the system.

"Some schools and teachers were more adept at providing appropriate work, some young people lacked the equipment to access the virtual provision, whatever its quality,…some equipment faltered at either end of the home– school connection – sometimes because of a failure to understand how to use it, rather than a fault with the equipment itself – some battled with limited and crowded home spaces and others battled with the balance between working from home and supporting the learning of their child or children." (p. 11, Chapter 1)

As time proceeds, people could realize that the predictions about the impact of the virus would become short to the realities that would be forthcoming. The increasing death tolls which were crossing gradually to double or even triple by months; the horrors, panics, and reactions of the society had been taking a deep concern in the public minds; education would soon become secondary than escaping from the fatalities.

The book made a vivid discussion on parental engagement and the experience of 'learning from home' amid the prevailing crisis. While a group of parents opined that the option of online parental consultations might sit easier with work and family commitments, however, another group opined oppositely to argue that schools shouldn't be in the role of 'allowing' parental engagement, that it should be an implicit and explicit aspect of the relationship between any parent and any school and that it would take on additional importance in special education settings. However, after the prolonged discussion, the author set to conclude, at the end of the second chapter, that lockdown, despite a degree of demerits, has produced promising and successful parent engagement, which would likely enhance empathy between parents and schools.

Globally, the interplay between education, economics, and inequalities is at the core of the debate about the closing and opening of educational institutions. The third chapter of the book deals with this debate exclusively, and the author has proceeded to fathom the impact of school closures on the most disadvantaged children and young people. The author has tried to explore the impact of the closure on different student cohorts. Here, schooling is argued to be economical, social, and childcare necessities, evidenced by the experience of lockdown that could indicate the social value of schools beyond their role as hubs of education. Schools are the places, not in the UK but also in many developed and developing countries, for children to meet and interact and as childcare facilities. It enables parents to work and society to function, as the author argued. So, when the lockdown is concerned, it reasonably didn't create the educational inequalities that it has exposed, although it may well have deepened the inequalities that pre-existed in the mass education system. It requires the policymakers and professionals to consider the childcare services of the schools as a function of schooling, not a by-product. The educational consequences of poverty are polit-ically undeniable. A concerted effort to enhance inclusion, participation, and attainment could recover the loss faced by the education institutions.

The author concentrated on the curriculum and grades in the following multiple pages. However, the fourth chapter disseminates valuable discussion regarding what do one means by

curric-ulum, what is the purpose of any curriculum, and what do one means by a broad and balanced curriculum. However, there is very little focus on discussing why the curriculum is concerned with the lockdown except for the argument that the pause that the lockdown has forced might have provided space to the teachers for the curriculum design, which had rarely been afforded to them so far. In the following chapter, the discussion orbits around the decision related to setting the schedule of the examination, the mode of examination, and the algorithm of assigning marks in the case if the written examination would not be possible. Regarding this algorithm, the author had a very valid concern:

> "If written papers are not to be used, multiple lessons from this year's experience need to be learned, especially the impact of algorithms and their apparently disproportionately negative impact on already disadvantaged students and on those in improving schools. Moderation and standardisation, whether carried out by humans or machines, should improve the accuracy of grading judgements but they must not do so at the cost of further enshrining long- standing and socially patterned inequalities." (p. 87, Chapter 5)

In the following chapter (i.e., Chapter 6), 'Catching up on 'lost' learning', the author warns that there might be a mindset amongst the people or majority of them as if the lockdown have stricken all children and young people with a learning deficit that needs to 'catch up.' With this negative mindset, when the students would re-join the education institutions, the primary responsibility of the educators would be not to encourage the negative mindset, instead remind the students about the body of new knowledge they have been facilitated amidst the lockdown.

Children and young people have missed a significant amount of formal learning during the lockdown, and there will be gaps to address, but the language of 'catch-up' ignores the alternative learning that some have bene-fited from. The focus on 'recovery' risks an over-focus on the deficit side of the balance sheet and portrays schooling as merely the 'filling of empty vessels' with 'knowledge'; policymakers and system leaders need to address this austerity of curricular and pedagogic thinking. The author well explains the risk of encouraging negative mindsets:

> "If a deficit mindset is allowed to flourish, not just in classrooms but staffrooms, there is a risk that this will translate into reduced aspirations and low aspirations are always the enemy of high achievement, especially among those already disadvantaged." (p. 99, Chapter 6)

At this outset, the author recommends for a diagnostic approach which the schools need to be encouraged to capture both the learning losses and the learning gains amidst lockdown; and, through catch-up programs, the needs of specific cohorts and individual students to be identified and meet-up in a justified way.

Besides catching up with the curriculum, the author (Chapter 7) proposes a robust policy for emotional recovery, which is rarely discussed in the books and articles dealing with the education system amidst the pandemic outbreak. However, emotional recovery is more complex and more challenging than that of the curriculum 'catch-up', although not impossible for the educators to implement. The author argues the importance of the emotional recovery of the children on the ground that while a majority of the children and young population have missed out educationally, they have lost out socially, physically and, emotionally, too, as have endured anxiety, pain, and other losses. A plan for the emotional well-being of children may be a key to enabling all children to reconnect with education in the post-pandemic world. Beyond disagreement, inclusion and well-being are prerequisites for learning as there are no alternatives to it known so far.

The following two chapters deal with the issues that complement each other, i.e., a discussion on the aspect of leadership and governance in Chapter 8 and a detailed outlining about the inspection, research, and system performance in Chapter 9. However, while the former has

elaborated the scenario during the lockdown, the latter is more dealing with the agenda of reopening the educational institutions in the UK. Though the author has succeeded to portray the situation of the UK well, these two chapters have comparatively more relevant to the education system of Europe and USA and other developed nations; however, in terms of the materials it contains, these chapters could connect very little with the educational systems in the Global South nations except the section entitled 'Headship during lockdown: the logistical challenge'.

The concluding chapter emerges the most relevant questions whether the new digital learning age will open up a new horizon or the education system will entrench the divides that have remained an unfortunate reality for the education system in almost every corner of the globe. Both directions have probabilities to happen.

> "Access to technology in comfortable homes helps the better off to *de-risk* COVID- 19, especially where parents can or do work from home and are experienced in using blended strategies in their daily lives; the inability to access such technology in cramped homes coupled with the need and requirement to work on- site puts disadvantaged communities at greater risk." (p. 168, Chapter 10)

The author argues for schools to develop and periodically update a blended learning strategy in due course that could clearly outline how digital and online technologies support learning both in and beyond the classroom, making assessments and maintaining liaison with parents in a balanced way. The policymakers should prioritize, at this outset, to narrowing the digital divide that would be the key initiative to closing the attainment gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children. Furthermore, at the end of the discussion, the author reasonably argues for all-around efforts to every stakeholder associated with the education system to keep the "teaching profession and schooling system prepared for tomorrow, and for a world as yet unknown."

The book is graced with an attractive style of discussing the content involving all the stakeholders. Throughout the books, the readers will feel a sense of logic, and possibly there are no areas for the readers to feel bored with the overlaps of discussion, redundancy of information, and extravaganza of datasets. Although the core construct of the book is built on the situation of the UK, most of the part could connect the readers with the situation of their own countries of origin. The book has its value for the policymakers by way of carefully considering the recommendations that the author has made for each scenario taken for each chapter. The key attraction is the author's insightful commentary of the real scenarios and the gesture of taking the challenge to find out the path for a universal education system that would work for everybody.