COVID-19 pandemic, emergency remote teaching and social science education[1]

Tilman Grammes
Universität Hamburg

Picture 1: New biopolitics – notice boards for social distance rules

Picture: Luise Günther, Sidney Oliveira, both Hamburg

The slogan on the wall says: „Schütz ich mich – schütz ich Dich. Gemeinsam schaffen wir das!" [If I protect myself - I can protect you. Together, we can do it!]

If I protect myself - I can protect you. Together, we can do it! There is hardly a sentence that better illustrates the effects of social distancing during COVID-19 pandemic on social education and the underlying assumptions.

Corresponding author: Tilman Grammes, Universität Hamburg, Fakultät Erziehungswissenschaft, Von-Melle-Park 8,20146 Hamburg, Germany, E-mail: tilman.grammes@uni-hamburg.de

The current closure (lockdown) of a vast majority of schools worldwide is more akin to temporary remote teaching without a blueprint to follow. UNESCO (2020) reported on 4 March 2020, 22 countries in three different continents have announced or implemented school closures. In mid - February, China was the only country mandating closures. Since then, thirteen countries have closed schools nationwide, impacting 290.5 million children and youth who would normally attend pre-primary to upper-secondary classes. A further nine countries have implemented localized school closures to prevent or contain COVID-19.

Distance learning or remote teaching have had a long history since the 19th century, using the latest available media. Many of these activities apply to so-called core subjects such as maths or languages, but social studies content and aims were included as well. In the very beginning, distance learning was essentially based on correspondence by letter. Learners were sent teaching texts by post. International student correspondence started in 1897, in the context of a French-British cooperation. Besides language acquisition the social educational aim was to contribute to inter-cultural and peace education in an authentic context (Schleich 2015). The French Centre national d'enseignement à distance (CNED) was founded in 1939, to send schoolwork to students by post in World War II. Since then, the CNED offers school children, for various reasons - such as illness, travel or intensive sporting activities - unable to attend school, curriculum-compliant courses in a remote program. Centralized TV broadcasting, accompanied by programmed instruction, came up as a media technology hype in the 1960s and 1970s. Remote instruction through TV has a long tradition especially in countries with a more centralized educational system. In Turkey for example, first TV broadcast started in 1968. In the 1980s, Anadolu University in Eskisehir established a new faculty called the Open Education Faculty and all classes were broadcasted on TRT, the Turkish National State TV Channel, providing courses on various subjects including sociology, economics, government, social services and so on (https://www.anadolu.edu.tr/en/academics/faculties/2/open-education-faculty/general-info). There was no face to face instruction at all.

In recent years, massive open online courses (MOOCs) have taken their place. The MOOC *Citizenship Education* (Bertelsmann 2018) might give an example in the field of teacher training in the domain of social science education. During the current COVID-19 pandemic many schools worldwide moved to online education environments where students and teachers can interact via instant free video conference platforms such as Zoom, Google Classroom or Jitsi.

From a later point of view, the current COVID-19 pandemic and global crises could be regarded as nothing short of a controlled educational crisis experiment with online distance learning. Temporary school closures as a result of a health crisis, natural hazards or conflicts are known in educational history, however there is still little research on their effects on social education. In countries with regional conflicts, school-age children are more than twice as likely to be out of school as their peers in other countries (UNESCO 2020).

After loosening of measures during lockdown and reopening of material classrooms at school, one could see individual grade levels and their teachers entering schools, taking their first steps with classroom teaching and learning under new rules. Some of these scenes resemble initial traffic instruction for children, well known from early 1950s or 1960s when developing auto-mobility became a danger, the deaths from traffic accidents involving children increasing rapidly. Today, entrance to school is regulated by numerous symbols on the pathway, teachers wearing orange shirts like waste collectors or emergency responders and welcome each student at the school's entrance. The situation resembles the first day of school and enrolment. Red and white barrier tapes, yellow and black floor markings can be seen everywhere. Notice boards/signs with the "new rules" are posted in several places. Inside classroom, each child finds her or his name tag at their individual and now neighbourless desk (in Germany, most students share a desk for two people). The former class community is divided or even quartered. The reduced sizes of classes and/or splitting of classes in order to adhere to preventative hygiene standards may have

a more lasting impact on the culture of discussion in social studies classrooms than any educational reform project in recent years.

How to avoid an overcrowded restroom?

Just one more example for creative social regulations and solutions (shown in German daily news): Hamburg daily news showed teachers, who place two chairs by the doors of the girls' and boys' restrooms. Students take their name tags with them when they go to the restroom and put it on one of the chairs before entering the restroom as more than two students are not allowed to stay inside at a time.

From the view of critical educational and social theory, will these "new rules" be another regime of governmentality, subjectivation and strategies of constant optimization of individual health status?

Picture 2: New seating regime in re-arranged classroom after lockdown, comprehensive school Hamburg, July 2020
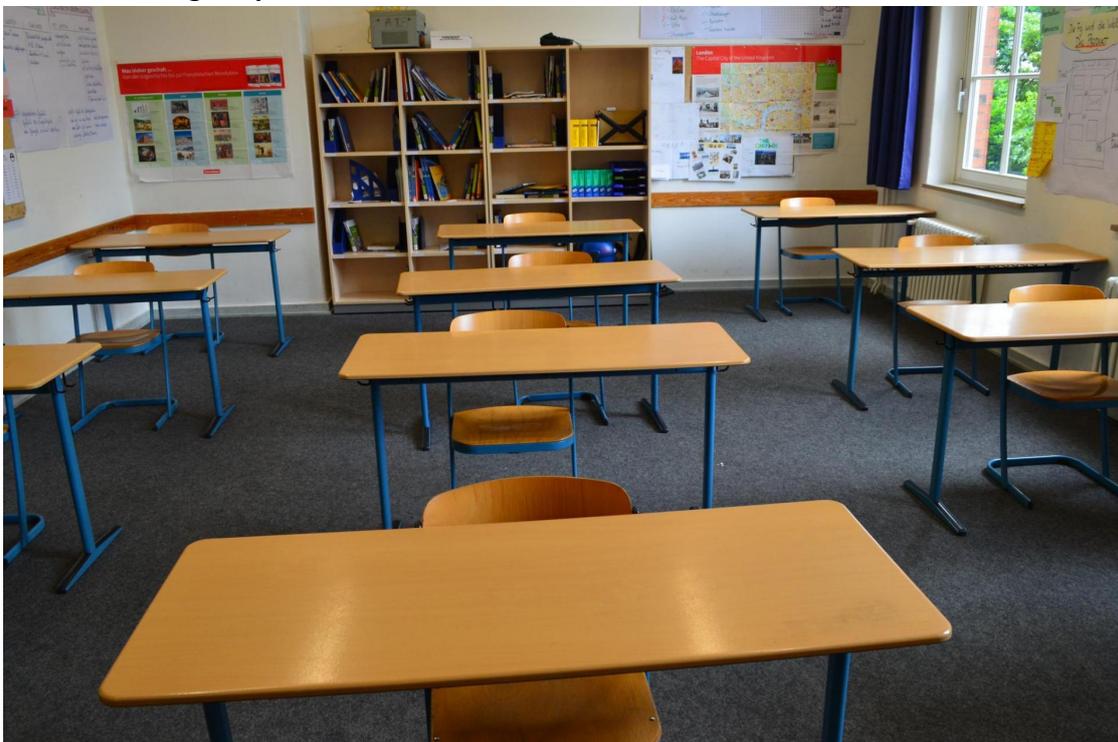
Picture: Luise Günther, Sidney Oliveira

Corona archives worldwide such as coronarchiv (https://coronarchiv.geschichte.uni-hamburg.de/projector/s/coronarchive/page/welcome) will provide examples of the first attempts and situations to commence teaching and learning with new rules, new seating charts and interior adjustments in schools and classrooms and will serve as an excellent corpus for future educational research.

To initiate research and discussion on such effects on social science education during and immediately after the COVID-19 lockdown, JSSE is proud to publish three initial articles. They represent rubrics of our journal: essay, case study and a country report. They address

educational theory, didactics as the more inner aspect ("software") and educational sociology as the more outer aspect ("hardware") of teaching and learning.

In her essay *Collateral civic education' in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic*, written in March 2020 during the first three weeks of the lockdown triggered by the COVID-19 crisis, Anja Besand (Technische Universität Dresden, Germany) raises fundamental questions of social science education theory: When do societies learn? Is collateral learning necessarily negative? Or can disruption be seen as a breakthrough innovation? Her awareness for the concept of collateral learning coined by John Dewey has a long tradition in reflection on social education. It is connected with the phenomenon of negative and discontinuous learning, which can be traced back from Socratic scepticism until fallibilism in today's epistemology of scientific discovery (English 2013). The essay pursues the question of the pedagogical and didactical collateral effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Understanding democracy as the institutionalization of uncertainty, civic education must help to train the ability to deal with ambiguity as a central civic virtue to cope with.

The case study *Exploring teaching and learning about the Corona crisis in social studies webinars* by Sören Torrau (Friedrich-Alexander Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany) follows the tradition of lesson documentation in JSSE. This case is a unique document of an unexpected situation, an uninten-tional crisis experiment. Daily teaching and learning routines can be detected on a micro level. This document attempts in no case represent the standard of digital teaching in Germany, but looks at the more or less spontaneous and temporary so called emergency remote teaching (ERT) (Hodges et al., 2020). ERT is defined as a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances. Given these explorative observa-tions, does emergency remote teaching make school open to on-going change, or on the contrary stabilize the traditional basic struc-tures and functions of subject teaching and learning? Will this cause a rollback to teacher center-ed classroom culture, as a long-term effect? And, if so, is it a wake-up call to go back to the basics, the understandable transfer of know-ledge as the core task of didactics?

Picture 3: "New rules"

Picture: Luise Günther, Sidney Oliveira

The slogan says: „Wir sind mit Abstand das tollste Team!" [We are by far/ with distance the best team!] – the word "mit Abstand" is drawn in red and white, the colour of the barrier tapes.

   While the German educational policy builds on individual, school-based solutions locally, countries like France or Turkey (as mentioned above) have put a lot of effort into centralized remote teaching. The country report *More than a virus: How COVID-19 infected education in Turkey?* is a team effort by Melisa Akbulut, Uğur Şahin and Ali Can Esen (İstanbul Üniversitesi – Cerrahpaşa, Turkey). The report focuses at the social conditions of digital learning and provides data concerning social disadvantages caused by unequal distribution to digital access. It asks the question, if there is a deepening in educational inequalities as a consequence of the pandemic?

   Furthermore, the report enables readers to follow exciting social studies lessons from a centralized digital broadcasting station, the EBA TV [Eğitim Bilişim Ağı – Education Informatics Network] in Ankara. As a reader, even if we do not understand the language spoken, it is a clever methodological approach to rely on the visuality of slides to discover the basic structures of teaching and learning. Here as elsewhere, COVID-19 functions like a sociological crisis experiment, making the indispensable routines and the taken for granted perspectives of education in organizations like schools visible right away. It is amazing to see, how even a highly performative element of national culture, the Turkish children's day in commemoration of the foundation of the Republic in 1923, can be transferred to an emergency remote teaching situation.

   Socio-political rituals convey trust and stability in education. A sidelong glance to China, where the earliest experience with school lockdown during COVID-19 pandemic could be gathered, shows, that even the Monday morning flag raising ceremony was kept as a core element of national citizenship education and quite naturally integrated in centralized remote teaching. In the USA where flag ceremonies are a routine part to start the school day, they have also been integrated into remote teaching in some areas in New York.

Picture 4: Student at home, participating in local flag ceremony online from balcony

Picture: http://jyj.nantong.gov.cn/ntsjyj/xsqyw/content/b6f9ea30-48d5-4c2e-91c1-c2d054557559.html

> **An online morning flag call in Hai'an schools, China**
>
> *Hai'an is a district of the district-free city of Nantong in the Chinese province of Jiangsu. On February 17, 2020 at 8:00 a.m., 50,000 primary school and high school students in Hai'an took part in an online morning flag campaign by video camera at home. A head student or school social worker (it is not stated in the original text who gave this speech) under the national flag*:
> "All students. Because of the outbreak of the pandemic, we must have extended to start school. However, loving the motherland will never be extended and postponed! Today we are doing a serious and uplifting morning flag ceremony online together. Please get up all! Direction to the national flag! Raise the national flag! Sing the national song! Attention, ceremony! Pioneers salute for young pioneers!" With the musical accompaniment of the national anthem, all schoolchildren look seriously with pioneers salute to the rising national flag on the screen.
> (retrieved 05.04.2020 from http://jyj.nantong.gov.cn/ntsjyj/xsqyw/content/b6f9ea30-48d5-4c2e-91c1-c2d05455 7559.html)

A scenario for the time to come: Will there be strong public support for a team of expert teachers in educational institutions like CNED in France or EBA TV in Turkey, doing a very professional job, replacing thousands of more or less engaged teachers around the country? Will a new "lesson industry" promote further standardization of education like factory working? Will schools without bodies replace face to face teaching? This is what might be expected from the COVID-19 lockdown for educational politics in future. Not replacing school as we know it, but a great deal of "lesson industry".

Against this backdrop, how will social science education and citizenship education be changed? What is the impact of physical distance and virtual participation on topics or forms of learning in a domain that focuses on political and social debate, discussion and understanding? How does the meaning of the body and physicality change in political and social situations? Does physical distancing entail social distancing? Are collectivity and solidarity being devalued in favor of individualization and self-referentiality or are there opposite effects? Who owns the virtual classroom and who sets the rules? What are the consequences for social and civic relationships among the students? Do they change their perspectives on the political and social world or is existing experience of moving in virtual worlds simply extended to the school world? In which way are the educational systems and school conditions of observation, power and control affected? Will a generalised virtualisation of citizenship education silence critical students or encourage them to speak up? What happens to the opportunity of informal, silent, unobserved communication among peers and of their ongoing reaction to steps, material, tasks etc. mostly predetermined by the teacher? Will learners' opportunities for intervention and interruption, resistance and disobedience disappear or, on the contrary, increase? Will the teacher or the virtual teaching agent dispose of new techniques to make imparting the model of a good citizen smoother and more efficiently or will their efforts disappear into the void of the private cells where students are technically connected to virtual lessons without being collectively involved?

For further outline of these initial observations and research questions please note: A current call for papers (JSSE 2021-4) on classroom ethnography invites to further contribute to these questions more in depth. Case studies could connect to previous issues on Socio-political Rituals in Schools (JSSE 2019-1), School Democracy (JSSE 2018-1) or Digital Tools and Social Science Education (JSSE 2016-1). Editors of JSSE thank all the authors in this special issue for their spontaneous readiness to present explorative material and initial ideas.

   Beyond the special topic part, this JSSE issue presents two further papers. In *Developing Cognitive Complexity and Value Pluralism within Prevention Curricula: An Empirical Assessment of the Living Well with Difference Course for Secondary Schools in England* Sara Savage, Elle Gordon, Alexander Ward, Lucy Tutton and Emily Oliver discuss the results of an intervention study in the context of the prevention of violent extremism. They analyse the impact of a four-session-course on critical thinking about contested social issues in form of in-group and out-group tensions. The study shows an increase in integrative complexity—a measure of how people process information—and of students' ability "to engage with difference constructively". An important observation for social science education is that the experience of meta-cognition fosters a consciousness of the social nature of thinking.

   What are the conceptions of knowledge the school subject of Civics is based on? Ninni Wahlström, Carl-Henrik Adolfsson and Bettina Vogt show in their paper *Making Social Studies in Standards-Based Curricula* that imparting knowledge as stressed in the Swedish syllabus is legitimised not only by its academic relevance but clearly aims at improving social efficiency with respect to the roles as citizen and employee. Knowledge, then, is converted into measurable performance of students and subjected to a strong and detailed classification of quality levels of knowledge which changes practices of teaching and learning and fosters fragmentation and instrumentalism in the classroom. The authors reveal that the conceptual characterisation of the syllabus as "social studies as social science" turns out to be dominated by "the rationalism of social efficiency" and suggest "social studies as performance-based generic competences" as new category into the typology of social studies.

REFERENCES

Online (all retrieved on 15-6-2020)

Bertelsmann 2018: MOOC Citizenship Education. Demokratiebildung in Schulen. https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/de/unsere-projekte/jungbewegt/praxishilfen/schule/mooc-citizenship-education/

Centre national d'enseignement à distance: https://www.cned.fr/maclassealamaison

Coronarchiv: https://coronarchiv.geschichte.uni-hamburg.de/projector/s/coronarchive/page/welcome

Unesco 2020: 290 million students out of school due to COVID-19: UNESCO releases first global numbers and mobilizes response. https://en.unesco.org/news/290-million-students-out-school-due-covid-19-unesco-releases-first-global-numbers-and-mobilizes

Print

English, A. R. (2013). *Discontinuity in Learning: Dewey, Herbart and Education as Transformation*. New York: Cambridge UP.

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

Schleich, M. (2015). *Geschichte des internationalen Schülerbriefwechsels. Entstehung und Entwicklung im historischen Kontext von den Anfängen bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg.* [History of international student correspondence. Developments in historical contexts from beginning until WW1]. Münster: Waxmann.

ENDNOTE

[1] A very big thank you to Amy Benzmann (Hamburg) for help with language edit and to Luise Günther and Sidney Oliveira who took the photos from a comprehensive school in Hamburg.