

Covid in Cartoons

(<https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/covid-in-cartoons>)

Bringing together an interdisciplinary team of researchers at the University of Leicester and external partners Shout Out UK and Cartooning for Peace to collaborate on a UKRI COVID-19 rapid response grant (2021-2022).



Pedagogy and the COVID-19 Pandemic: the Covid in Cartoons project

(<https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/covid-in-cartoons/2022/01/11/pedagogy-and-the-covid-19-pandemic-the-covid-in-cartoons-project/>)

Posted by fl47 (https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/covid-in-cartoons/author/fransiska_louwagie/) in Covid in Cartoons (<https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/covid-in-cartoons>) on January 11, 2022 (Tuesday, January 11th, 2022, 1:48 pm)

Education is amongst the many things impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Young people were required to spend part of their 2020 and 2021 schooling at home. Across the UK some were often confined to small spaces, experiencing anxiety from uncertainty, and struggling to meet the demands of schooling. As students have returned to school in the 2021-22 year, the primary focus has been on the 'catch up' aspect of their compromised learning. For young people between the important ages of 15-18 this is geared towards preparing for the taking of missed exams, addressing some low marks from lockdown assignments, and ultimately trying to ensure that students do not get 'too far behind'.

(c) Osama Hajjaj (Jordan) – Cartooning for Peace

What can be built into education to support the non-academic needs of young people in this transition back to 'normal'? This blog describes the proposition of political cartooning as tool for youth education in making spaces for young people move through, and hopefully beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic. We address this by answering the following questions:

1. What does it mean to develop a 'recovery' curriculum that builds resilience?

2. How can we, as educators, employ critical consciousness and creativity as mechanisms to support a wellbeing-focused return for young people?

Within the AHRC-funded project Covid in Cartoons (<https://le.ac.uk/covid-in-cartoons/>) we work with cartoons as a tool to open up a space for young people to dialogue about their experiences. The four-part mini-course aimed at 15 to 18-year olds has been developed as a collaboration between the University of Leicester, Shout Out UK (<https://www.shoutoutuk.org/>) (SOUK) and Cartooning for Peace (<https://www.cartooningforpeace.org/en/>). It teaches students about cartooning techniques such as symbolism, irony, and satire. Throughout the course students are asked to critically examine the social and political aspects of the pandemic. Such criticality, rooted in humour, is thought to develop their way of seeing the pandemic in such a way that they can more easily express and discuss their own experiences. A set of qualitative and quantitative research efforts have been designed to track and evaluate the mini-course and its ability to support young people in this transitional moment between pandemic and post-pandemic life. In doing so we also gather information on how young people in the UK actually experienced the pandemic and what their perspectives are on the social and political issues that surround this time.

Context Specificity

How does such a project respond to the nuances of young people's needs? We begin from a perspective that both recognises the globalised aspect of the COVID-19 pandemic and focuses on the student context in England. In developing the course, we paid attention to issues of vulnerability and diversity, ensuring material is accessible to students with low levels of political literacy and those who represent the diversity of UK populations. Project partner Shout Out UK (<https://www.shoutoutuk.org/>), as a political literacy organisation working with British young people, has been well placed to inform this process. One challenge has been to find content that is accessible to students, especially in relation to political critiques or humour. Such perspectives are often context-specific, and international cartoonists tend in part to respond to their regional interests. The UK, however, is a superpower in the global context as well as being an epicentre of viral spread.

(c) Kak (France) – Cartooning for Peace

Critical Consciousness and Creative Expression

Through the course we link the global and local by showing the UK's role in shared experiences of lockdowns as well as during the vaccine race (see fig 2). Broader as well as individual issues are carried into the personal perspectives of students. Throughout the course students are encouraged to draw their experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic or their critiques of political management surrounding the events. In the final session they are supported by professional cartoonists who share their own journey of chronicling COVID-19 in newspapers and online. The cartoonists deliver a tutorial session where they teach the students to draw their own ideas in conversation with the professional. Cartoonists come from around the world and are also able to share their context with the students, such as those in Mexico, the Philippines or Tunisia. It is our aim that this range of artists and artwork will inform the points of view of students, fostering a sense of global diversity through creative work.

Partnering with Cartooning for Peace, a network of international cartoonists, ensures that students get access to creative excellence through the different artistic approaches to political cartooning. Professional drawings provide a companion to the above-mentioned student drawings that are developed in the 'sketch and reflect' components throughout the course. In their own work students are encouraged to focus on the commentary made more than artistic merit. Because the focus is indeed on expression as well as critical consciousness (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5892452/>) (the ability to critically think about one's own political & social circumstances and take agency to change them) the course is relevant for students across arts, politics, sociology, and medicine tracks in their education.

Responsive adaptability

Pedagogical development in ongoing times of uncertainty means that the course must be agile. Originally conceived as an online delivery, we have been able to deliver in-person and hybrid options when COVID-19 related restrictions allowed it. The course can be delivered by SOUK education team or the teachers themselves. It is not guaranteed that the schools will always have the resources or technology to fully realise the online version, particularly as the project aims specifically to work with less privileged institutions. In addition, the online format is new for some cartoonists, who are however well versed in delivering workshops. The team responds to this by regularly evaluating the successes of the delivery and adapting the course accordingly.


(c) Rodriguez (Mexico) – Cartooning for Peace

All together the mini course aims to reflect young people’s experiences and to build their critical consciousness. Whilst the many variables and constant changes in the course conditions may make it harder to anticipate or isolate certain outcomes, we have been able to track the course through qualitative and quantitative research to evaluate its effectiveness. Ultimately the data will provide visual and narrative insights into young people’s experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic in the ongoing time of transition to post-pandemic living.

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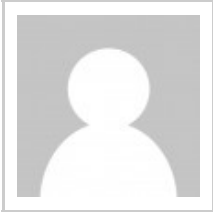
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