

Education and digital inequalities during COVID-19 confinement: From the perspective of teachers in the French speaking Community of Belgium

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Abstract

To curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government and the federated entities of Belgium suspended all face-to-face learning starting 14 March, 2020. A continuity of learning was to be ensured by teachers through distance-learning. However, teaching during the confinement period was complicated for teachers: the respect for policies and rules differs from one teacher to another and there has been a lack of follow-up on online learning for some learners. The purpose of this article is to contribute to initial responses to the vast question of educational inequalities created and exacerbated during the crisis. More particularly, this article provides a situational analysis of some potential causes for inequalities in primary and secondary schools and identifies differences between the two education levels. Our analysis draws on responses from almost 500 teachers participating in a large-scale survey in the French speaking Community of Belgium. The analysis focuses on teaching practices and observations made by teachers during the confinement period. Various factors contributing to inequalities are identified as well as differences between the two levels of education. Relevant factors include the technological equipment available to students, and the use of pedagogical practices such as *differentiation* and *Remediation-Consolidation-Surpassing* (RCS). After confinement, at the beginning of the 2020–2021 school year, teachers have faced more diverse classes, with learners who have experienced very different confinement situations. In light of our analysis of survey responses, we highlight the role of the technological equipment used by the teacher as a factor that increases inequalities.

KEYWORDS

COVID-19 pandemic, primary and secondary education, distance learning, inequalities in teaching and learning, digital inequalities, French speaking Community of Belgium/Wallonia-Brussels Federation (FWB), Belgium

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