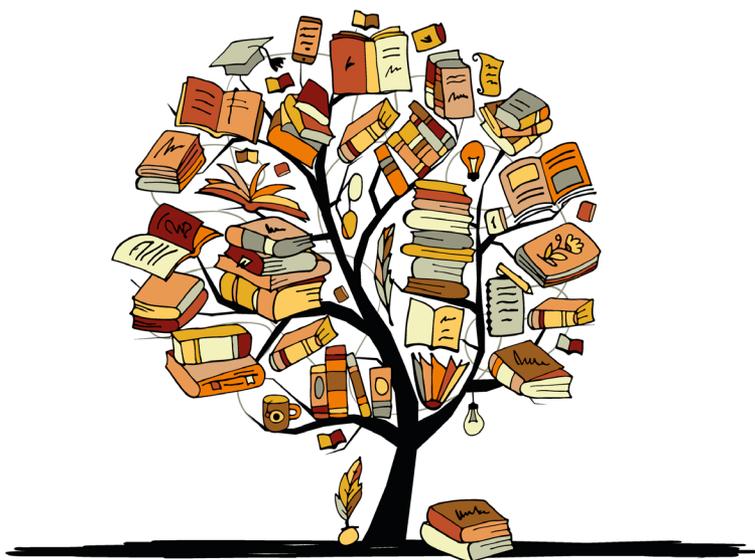


# EDUCATION DISRUPTED EDUCATION REIMAGINED

**Responses from education's  
frontline during the COVID-19  
pandemic and beyond**



Editors  
ASMAA AL-FADALA  
JULIA KIRBY  
OMAR ZAKI  
AHMED BAGHDADY  
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# EDUCATION DISRUPTED EDUCATION REIMAGINED

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## Foreword

STAVROS N. YIANNOUKA

## Introduction

HER EXCELLENCY SHEIKHA HIND BINT HAMAD AL-THANI

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**Replay of the Education Disrupted, Education Reimagined Series**

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[Part 3: School Leadership During & Beyond COVID-19](#)

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**PART ONE**  
**DISRUPTION**  
**APRIL 2020**

NECESSITY  
IS THE MOTHER  
OF INVENTION

# FOREWORD

## BUILDING THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

BY STAVROS N. YIANNOUKA

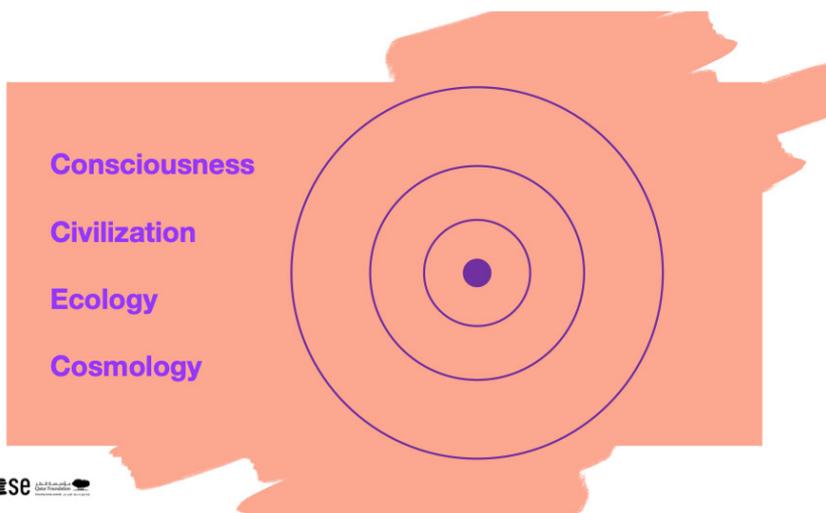


**T**hroughout the ages, wise men and women from Confucius in the East to Aristotle in the West, have declared that education is central to the human condition. John Dewey went as far as saying that “education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.” Yet, despite such lofty proclamations the past 200-odd years, which saw the very welcome democratization and spread of mass education around the world, has also seen the progressive subordination of education systems to the needs of the economy.

The current global pandemic and its immediate aftermath provide an opportunity to rethink the why, the what, and the how of education. The pandemic has shone a spotlight on our economic systems with many coming to realize that the majority of our most essential workers—nurses, teachers, cleaners, deliverymen, garbage collectors, paramedics, check-out clerks, farm workers, etc.—almost never reap any but the most meagre rewards from the system to which they are deemed essential. So, too, with education, we must begin our rethink by asking ourselves who is our education system supposed to serve, and is it meeting expectations?

The answer is quite clear. Education systems are supposed to serve everyone. Indeed, education has traditionally been viewed as the great social leveler, providing opportunities for advancement regardless of one’s socio-economic starting point. Unfortunately, that promise, never fully realized, is receding further and further from becoming a reality. Indeed, there is a strong argument to be made that education systems are now net contributors to declining rates of social mobility around the world. It’s not hard to see why. Education systems are structured hierarchies, designed to channel ‘the best and the brightest’ into the professions and occupations that offer the greatest potential for private economic gain. Elite schools and colleges, examination-based grading systems, and streaming on the basis of attainment, all contribute to a stratification of the education system that closely mirrors the economic stratification of our societies.

So, how do we begin to fix the problem. The first step is to once again recognize that the primary purpose of education is not to train the workforce of today, tomorrow, or yesterday, but to enable human flourishing. At its core, a good education should be about gaining and continuously updating our understanding of four things: consciousness, civilization, ecology, and the cosmology that envelops them. I like to think of them as concentric circles.



Our starting point—the inner circle—has to be the individual. As Descartes argued nearly four centuries ago, our individual consciousness is probably the only thing that we can be absolutely certain of. And indeed, ancient sages from the Buddha, to Laozi, and Zenon, founder of the Stoic school of philosophy, have argued that our inner world, our conscious experience in the form of thoughts and emotions, is the domain over which we can achieve the greatest mastery. And as modern psychology and neuroscience are increasingly affirming, this can have profound and long-lasting consequences for our well-being and the well-being of those around us. But mastery is only achieved through practice and perseverance. Education must therefore embrace a far deeper understanding of consciousness, or to put it colloquially, “what makes us tick” from the very beginning, and not leave this important domain of knowledge and understanding to self-proclaimed gurus and pop-psychologists. Mastery of one’s inner world and its workings ought to lead to individuals who are more resilient, tenacious, and ultimately fulfilled regardless of the particular circumstances that they may find themselves occupying.

On to the next circle—civilization. We know from evolutionary biology and from history that individual human beings thrive not in isolation but in community, and that the highest form of community is civilization. Two great present-day thinkers—Nicholas Christakis and Yuval Harari—have both emphasized this in their recent groundbreaking works. In *Sapiens* Harari articulates what he calls the unique evolutionary advantage of humanity, its superpower if you will, the ability to collaborate flexibly in very large numbers, across space and time. And in *Blueprint*, Christakis reassures us that the evolutionary

ark of humanity bends towards forming good societies, and that successful societies are characterized by amongst others: (1) The capacity to have and recognize individual identity; (2) Love of family; (3) Friendship; (4) Cooperative social networks; and, (5) Social learning and teaching. But none of this is predetermined and we must work hard to ensure that our evolutionary ark continues to bend towards individual and collective human flourishing. In order for that to happen we must all develop a nuanced understanding of what makes societies work and how we can harness our superpower to allow multiple pathways to flourishing for all of us.

On to the third circle—ecology. It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words, and just over half a century ago the world saw for the very first time an image that is worth not a thousand or even a million words but every word that has ever been written or spoken by man.



The first time the Earth was ever photographed was in 1968 by the crew of the Apollo 8 mission. Many observers argue that this single image is responsible for the birth of the modern environmental movement. I don't know if that is true or not but I would be willing to bet that for most people the Earthrise image evokes strong, positive emotions, and a feeling that this, all of it, not just any one particular little corner, is home. Unfortunately our home and our place in it is under threat from the climate crisis and there is an urgent need to harness our creativity to turn the climate crisis into an opportunity to reimagine and reconstitute the way we produce and consume energy; all the while recognizing that we cannot have a modern technological civilization with all the benefits that it pro-

vides us, without energy. Again, education must be a key driver not just of raising awareness of the profound responsibility that we have to nurture and protect the ecosystem that nurtures and protects us, but also to unlock the scientific and engineering solutions that will allow us to arrest and eventually reverse the climate crisis.

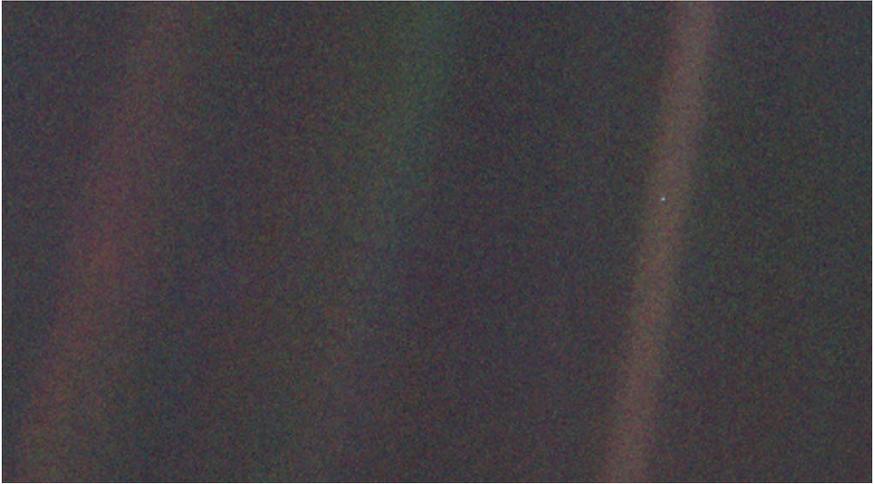
People have often wondered how does humanity fit in the ecosystem that is planet Earth? What purpose do we serve? Are we destined to destroy our ecosystem and in the process ourselves? I don't believe so. We have the capacity to define our own purpose and here's a suggestion from the actor and environmental activist Pierce Brosnan, that I find particularly compelling: "Of all the species in the world ours is the only one capable of protecting all the others."

And now we come to the final circle the one that holds all the others. Understanding the powerful physical, chemical, and biological forces that underpin reality in our universe has of course always been a key driver of our quest for knowledge and understanding. From Einstein's theory of relativity that makes GPS and hence accurate contact tracing possible, to Mendeleev's periodic table and the chemical engineering that allows us to manufacture powerful pharmaceutical compounds, to the underlying germ theory of disease first articulated by Ibn Sina and culminating after almost 900 years with the work of Louis Pasteur and Robert Koch, science and the scientific method underpin the incredible progress that we have made as a species and global civilization.

Unfortunately, while the stock of our scientific knowledge continues to grow exponentially, broad-based scientific literacy is on the decline. Education must play a part in arresting this decline, and broad-based scientific literacy must become a foundational subject at all levels of education. It is our vaccine against ignorance, fear, and superstition. But more than providing us with the knowledge to fuel our imaginations, and the tools to power our technology, science also provides us with a humbling perspective. And here I want to end this short essay by quoting one of my favorite scientists, authors, and broadcasters, the late great Carl Sagan. Commenting on another photograph of planet Earth this time taken by the Voyager 1 Space Probe in 1990, six billion miles away as it began to cross the boundaries of our solar system, Sagan said:

"Look again at that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every

king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every ‘superstar,’ every ‘supreme leader,’ every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there—on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.



The Earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena...

Our posturing, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the Universe, are challenged by this point of pale light. Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves.

The Earth is the only world known so far to harbor life. There is nowhere else, at least in the near future, to which our species could migrate. Visit, yes. Settle, not yet. Like it or not, for the moment, Earth is where we make our stand.

It has been said that astronomy is a humbling and character-building experience. There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another, and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known."

\*\*\*\*\*

**About the author:** Stavros N. Yiannouka is the CEO of WISE.

# INTRODUCTION

## ONE THING TO ELIMINATE POST- COVID-19? SCHOOLS.

BY HER EXCELLENCY  
SHEIKHA HIND BINT HAMAD AL-THANI



**C**COVID-19 has done the impossible: it's changed the way we teach and learn, practically overnight. Throughout April 2020, more than 1.5 billion learners around the world were no longer able to sit in a classroom. Education systems have responded to this unprecedented challenge with speed, adaptability, and imagination. Learning hasn't ground to a halt. But it has changed utterly.

We can't go back. How do we move forward?

Prior to COVID-19, 'schools' were simply buildings that grouped people together according to certain criteria. Post COVID-19, merely digitizing the existing curriculum isn't enough. We need to eliminate schools. Not the buildings. But the mental framework that makes us picture the process of getting a group of people, tightly packed, all moving in the same direction at the same time. That has to end.

Automation, artificial intelligence, rising nationalism, rapidly changing employer needs, and a growing global middle class demanding quality education for their children were already poised to reshape how higher education would be delivered.

With its dramatic disruption of the global economy—including institutions of higher education—the corona crisis is accelerating 10 years of change into 10 weeks. For education, this creates an opportunity that we cannot afford to waste.

Now is the time to be asking why children spend a lifetime unlearning what they learned at school; why we say we want self-motivated learners and then don't let them choose; why we talk about nurturing global citizens but fail to teach young people to love and care for their planet; why we design 'schools' for students who we think of like fish, all similarly-shaped and moving together, when we know everyone learns differently.

The 'new normal' will be shaped by the choices made in the next few years by governments, higher education leaders, academics, and a generation of students and parents. We have to get it right, because the stakes are total. Our ability to recover and progress in the decades after this crisis depends entirely on our ability to make higher education more personalized, more flexible, and more holistic.

Higher education globally should set the goal, by 2025, of eliminating the 'school' mentality. What exactly do we replace it with? We need to foster an education ecosystem with room

for many models—of teaching and learning as well as business—from startups and existing players, and find out what works. And I pledge that my organization will be a leader in this effort.

The place we can start is the element of higher education facing the biggest challenge right now: international students.

International students are expected to exceed 8 million by 2025 and are an important part of many universities' business models. After COVID-19, up to half of those students say they are less likely to travel to the U.S., UK, or Australia to study. With universities switching to online platforms for continuation, we now ask ourselves why borders should ever exist again in education. Why should a student in India or China be prevented from attending a top-rank university in another country purely because of physical distance?

Governments should ensure stability for higher education institutions in the near term, prioritizing public funding for education over other sectors, but making this financial support conditional on tangible reforms being implemented, to ensure innovation is rewarded. Why should we not use this moment to safeguard not just our present but our future, and to challenge education to disrupt itself?

Private sector investors should also step up and realize that investments in education can profit both society and those taking risks. We reward mass-customized content from Netflix. Why should we not work together to reward and encourage customized education from pre-K to post-grad level?

Education must accept that the best thing we can do for humanity is to develop individuals. Individuals whose success in life is dependent on being outliers, not conformists.

The radical reshaping of education can no longer be a distant goal. It needs to commence immediately, because without education, we cannot hope to revitalize economies or strengthen communities ravaged by this pandemic. That means securing a global commitment to providing the investment that enables education to be what it can be, and what—now more than ever—we need it to be.

It can be done, and it can be done quickly. If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it is how rapidly we can act when faced with necessity. And transforming education is a necessity.

When this pandemic is over and we all go back to our offices, our children go back to their schools and universities, let us all ensure the learning experience we build is one that is informed by the months we've spent remotely. Let it be one that embodies that values we've strived to protect during this time—the values of making learning exciting, nourishing, and at our own pace. And let us begin now.

\*\*\*\*\*

**About the author:** Her Excellency Sheikha Hind bint Hamad Al-Thani is Vice Chairperson and CEO of Qatar Foundation.

# WHAT IF KINDNESS WERE THE NEW NORMAL?

A CALL TO RE-IMAGINE THE  
PURPOSE OF EDUCATION IN  
THE POST-COVID WORLD.

BY SUCHETHA BHAT AND VISHAL TALREJA



**T**he United Nations has described the global scale of education disruption from COVID-19 as “unparalleled.” According to UNESCO monitoring, at the peak in early April, national and local closures impacted about [91.3 percent](#) of the world’s student population.

While students across the board have been impacted, it is important to understand the impact on children from marginalized communities in many developing countries, including India, which at 260 million children, has the largest school-age population in the world.

As we reached out to students from marginalized communities, stark and growing inequities emerged, including:

1. Loss of income and livelihood due to the extended lockdown.
2. Migration—the emotional toll of this on children will be manifold. Moreover, post-lockdown, many of the migrants may decide to stay back in the villages, which could lead to children dropping out of formal education.
3. Forced to take on adult responsibilities, like taking care of their younger siblings, managing household chores, organizing food, and making decisions on behalf of the family.
4. Misinformation spread through fake news and rumors. With very little and often contradictory information available about the pandemic, there is widespread fake news and rumors floating around that has caused tremendous stress and confusion. Children are asking ‘What will happen to me and my family? Will my parents die? What happens to me if I lose my parents?’
5. Heightened Violence and Abuse. The Childline India helpline received more than 92,000 SOS calls asking for protection from abuse and violence in 11 days, a somber indication that the lockdown has turned into captivity, not just for women, but also for children trapped with their abusers at home.
6. Gendered Impact. Girls would be expected to take on more adult roles in their families, their education will be deprioritized compared to boys, and they are more likely to face domestic violence and abuse at home.
7. Loss of academic learning. As marginalized populations do not have access to digital resources and tools, there is also the loss of academic learning, furthering the learning gap.
8. Impact of Trauma resulting in Failure to Thrive. The [recent news](#) of a 35-year-old migrant laborer who committed suicide because he could not provide for his family (aged parents, wife, and four children) has sent shockwaves across the country. One can only imagine the long-term emotional and mental trauma his children are going to grow up with. All the above outlined challenges faced by children/young people can and will cause tremendous trauma—mental, emotional and psychological.

We know that sustained trauma in early-years (0–10 years) results in stunting and [failure to thrive](#) and the impact of failure to thrive can

be seen for life. Children are going to carry this trauma into schools, and it is going to impact their ability to access content, engage in learning and build healthy relationships.

As the impact of the pandemic unfolds, it is becoming abundantly clear that traditional learning models have ill-equipped our children to respond to the current crisis. Some of the structural and systemic challenges in our education systems that have come to the forefront include:

### **1. The future is already here!**

The oft-repeated assumption that children would have to face an uncertain job market and a fast-changing world a few years from now is already amidst us, and this uncertain future is unfolding as we speak.

### **2. Economic growth vs. prioritizing well-being.**

Today we are rightly being forced to prioritize well-being over economic growth, for ourselves and the planet. Could this be the turning point that decides the new purpose of education in the face of this new reality?

### **3. Entrenched systemic inequities.**

When an eighth-grade student who shares one smartphone in a family of four makes a tough choice to buy an internet-pack versus groceries and is then not allowed into her online class for being five minutes late, are we not perpetuating the same systemic biases we held offline to the online world? What could be the role of education in changing this reality?

Before we rush towards reactionary solutions, there is a need to pause and reflect on these structural and systemic challenges within our current education system. While it would be easy to replicate old offline models and repurpose them towards the online mode, we must pause to ask the tough question—is this what is needed right now?

### **The way forward: The Need for a Pause**

Schools cannot go back to “business as usual” at the end of this crisis. They cannot double down their efforts to catch-up to lost time by stuffing syllabi down students’ throats. There is a definite need to reimagine the role of schools and teachers in the life of children coming from marginalized communities, with the entire ecosystem becoming trauma-responsive and invested in the well-being of all learners.

For instance, Dream A Dream has developed the Happiness Curriculum in which mindfulness- and play-based approaches have benefitted 800,000 children across 1024 government schools in Delhi. Each child

gets 35-minutes every day of a Happiness Class. During the lockdown, it has been the stories, activities, and mindfulness practices from the Happiness Curriculum that have helped children deal with the anxiety.

The mindfulness practices have helped kids to stay grounded and created a sense of calm in their communities and in the lives of their families. To continue to support learners during the lockdown, the government has introduced a new initiative called, “Every parent a teacher, every home a school” and lessons are delivered using a unique Interactive Voice Response (IVR) based system where parents /children can give a missed call to a particular number and then they get a call-back with a story or activity or a mindfulness exercise that the whole family can do together. For instance, when a parent gives a missed call (at no cost to the parent), the parent might get a call back with a recorded voice sharing a Story around friendship from the Happiness Curriculum. This will also include some reflective questions at the end of the story. The whole family can listen to the story together and then reflect on the questions being asked and discuss with each other. Parents and students have loved this idea.

As we start preparing ourselves for the post-pandemic world, our invitation is to use this pause to re-imagine how schools and learning ecosystems can be truly transformative for all children.

For example, what if learning ecosystems decide to:

- Spend the first three months when children come back to school only on re-integrating them into the post COVID-19 world, while deprioritizing academic subjects.
- Have no examinations across the board for one year.
- Invest in targeted trauma-healing of teachers, resulting in schools becoming more trauma responsive.
- Support school leaders to re-imagine the school calendar to integrate life-skills and SEL as core components to prepare children for future uncertainty.
- Change the metric of success of our education systems from academic and economic outcomes to well-being and thriving of all students, communities, and the planet.

Considering how our school and societal systems are currently designed, this is not going to be easy. Yet this is the most important call of the moment.

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# ALL EMOTIONS ARE INFORMATION

BY MARC A. BRACKETT



**W**e hear it every day, from every sector of society, and across the world. An engaged, friendly child becomes increasingly hostile. A child who was once bright and bubbly becomes lethargic and barely functional. A child who once had a sense of well-being now suffers crippling anxiety. And in the worst case scenarios, a child who was the light of someone's life became mysteriously depressed and is now gone, by their own hands.

After the fact, we look at each other and ask, "How did everybody miss the signals?"

As a culture, we are blind to the information contained in the emotion system because of an at least 3000-year-old bias. The Bible, the Stoic philosophers, and almost all of western literature, philosophy, and religion, taught us that emotions are unreliable, inconvenient, idiosyncratic sources of information, that get in the way of sound decision-making and the ability to learn.

The study of intelligence, which began around 1900, stripped its inquiry of emotions, deeming their impact irrelevant. Now we know that emotions not only inform cognition but are themselves an intelligent system.

Our own and others' research shows that those with more developed emotion skills make fewer errors in judgment, have healthier relationships, are better at pursuing genuine satisfaction, and have a greater sense of well-being. Yet, in spite of all the evidence that shows the profound intelligence and information contained in the emotion system, in spite of all the studies that prove the impact of emotion on cognition, and well-being, we continue to insist that emotion and reason are enemies.

For example, instead of acknowledging the information in emotions, many teachers are asked to focus on moderating the behavior of a classroom of 30 children, 10 of which are likely experiencing a major trauma: divorce in the family, an alcoholic parent, abuse, or the death of a close relative. There will be at least one child who is extremely anxious but feels they can't let anyone know or they'll be seen as weak. Another might be proud but is afraid that if they say so others will get mad at them. And another might be too excited to sit still because an idea is about to burst out. Our cultural mindset demands that a lid be put tightly on this emotion stew, all while these strong feelings are keeping kids from learning, boiling over, inevitably, in bad behavior, lack of attention and absorption, making class dynamics difficult.

So, where do many teachers instinctively begin to counter this problem? By believing they have to enter the classroom bubbling with enthusiasm, and smile, smile, smile: "Good morning boys and girls, isn't it just great to be alive? Aren't we just so grateful for the sun and sky and trees and our wonderful families? Our amazing classmates and the beautiful books we have to read?"

This is the result of another profound emotion system information blindness, that happiness is the only emotion we should feel, and if we are not happy, if our kids aren't showing visible signs of happiness, then we, and they have failed. What happens to a child who comes in sad because a grandparent just passed away? What happens to a child that is more temperamentally subdued?

Positive emotions do open the mind to new possibilities, creating flexibility, openness, efficiency, and a preference for variety. Joy brings the urge to play, push limits, be creative. Pride makes

us want to share good news, envision greater achievements. Love helps us explore and savor intimate moments.

But positive emotions cannot fix everything. Imagine feeling smiley and bubbly, giddy with excitement as a car cuts a corner and nearly runs us over. It's healthy fear, not joy, that makes us jump out of the way. Negative emotions have a constructive function: they help narrow and focus our attention. It's sadness, not happiness, that helps us work through a difficult problem. Too much enthusiasm won't bring needed consensus to a group—it will disperse the energy necessary for reasoning through a problem whether math or family dynamics. Sadness is good for critical work, being detail-oriented, for evaluating and fine tuning ideas with a realistic approach. Pessimism can transform anxiety into action—imagining worst case scenarios prepares you for anything. Anxiety pushes us to problem solve and take corrective action. Guilt acts as a moral compass. Peacefulness will put people to sleep if inspiration is needed to motivate. Happy, high energy enthusiasm won't be convincing when you need to make a crucial point; for that, you have to touch the forcefulness of anger. And it's anger, not empathy, that causes one child to spring into action to defend another child who's being bullied.

All emotions contain purpose and information. They help us to answer important questions like: Do I approach or avoid this person or situation? Am I welcome or unwelcome in this environment? Are my students attentive or bored? How is the way I handle my own emotions and those of others affecting the quality of my relationships, whether others trust me? Am I making a sound decision or a biased one? It's not that one emotion is all bad and another is all good—it's whether we understand the purpose of our emotions and use them wisely. Used well, all emotions become resources that can be drawn upon to make the most informed decisions.

For the last twenty years, my team and I have been working on a framework, based on Mayer and Salovey's ability model of emotional intelligence, called RULER, to articulate the skills that children, and the adults who raise and teach them, need in order to use their emotions wisely. Skills that help us to:

- **Recognize emotions:** Unpack our own and others' emotional experiences.
- **Understand emotions:** Know the causes for and consequences of feelings.

- **Label emotions:** Develop the vocabulary to be precise about emotional experiences.
- **Express emotions:** Help us skillfully express our emotions to others.
- **Regulate emotions:** Support us in using helpful strategies for managing our feelings.

Our own and others' research across the globe shows that children and adults with more developed emotion skills are better learners, make more informed decisions, build and maintain meaningful relationships, and perform better both academically and in the workplace.

Over the last decade we also have created a schoolwide, evidence-based approach to developing emotion skills, also called [RULER](#), which was designed to infuse emotion skills into the DNA of a school and improve interactions between and among school leaders, teachers, students, and families. Evidence is accumulating for RULER's positive impact on academic performance, social and emotional skills, classroom climate, bullying, teacher instructional supports, and teacher stress and burnout.

How emotion skills are taught and learned depends on age, but, unlike learning gymnastics, there is no age at which it is too early or too late to start. The parts of the brain needed to learn RULER skills are active from birth and until old age. The first step in the process is giving ourselves and our loved ones the permission to feel.

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# SYNTHESIS

## EDUCATION DISRUPTED STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINE OF COVID-19'S EDUCATION CRISIS

BY JULIA KIRBY



**T**he global disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is unparalleled. Overnight, entire economies, education systems, and social infrastructures came to a grinding halt, laying bare the interconnectedness of our modern world and the vulnerability that comes with it. As widespread physical lockdown lurks as an ever-present reality, the question arises how to develop systems and societies that possess the resilience needed to thrive under conditions of constant uncertainty.

In the domain of education, unprecedented mass school closures affected more than three-quarters of the world's students. At the

height of the crisis in April 2020, UNESCO reported that over 1.5 billion children were out of school. Simultaneous shocks to health and financial systems further heightened uncertainty and fragility, exposing the inequities and deficiencies of our global schooling systems, and highlighting the interdependence of education and learning with the well-being of our communities.

Just as governments scrambled to rally first responders to equip their health systems for the onslaught of the virus, education officials at all levels, in addition to parents and caregivers, mounted their own rapid response plans to keep children learning remotely. The education stakes were high, even if less obvious than infection and mortality figures. [Research from the Brookings Institution estimates](#) that even in a wealthy developed country like the United States, the average learning loss for K-12 students due to just four months of school shutdown during the COVID-19 pandemic amounts to roughly USD \$33,464 in future earnings per student—the equivalent of 63% of the average annual salary. The overall economic impact is even more enormous, at an estimated USD \$2.5 trillion, or 12.7 percent of GDP.

In less wealthy countries, the stakes are even greater and extend far beyond economics. At the outset of the crisis, [UNESCO warned](#) that the risks of wide-scale school closures in the developing world could far outweigh the benefits, especially for girls, who are 2.5 times more likely to drop out of school than boys during prolonged school closures. Indeed, [data collected by Plan International](#) during the Ebola outbreak that swept through West Africa in 2014-2016 showed that school closures had a devastating impact not only on learning, but also on child protection and safety, demonstrating the reality that school provides students with so much more than just a curriculum.

In wealthier settings, the education response to COVID-19 largely meant that entire curriculums migrated online, with parents standing in—where they could—as supervisors of home learning. However, for poorer countries and communities, which even before the crisis were confronting wide-scale health, economic, and social fragility, the experience has looked vastly different. COVID-19 has presented more of a struggle for survival than one of convenience, with many students unable to access any education at all.

What follows in this section of the anthology are snapshots from the frontline of the COVID-19 education crisis. Based on presentations delivered at a WISE-Salzburg Global Seminar virtual convening in April 2020, the essays in this section describe the experiences

of six NGOs working on the frontlines around the world, including in Canada, India, Italy, Kenya, Morocco, and South Africa. Despite the diversity of these contexts, their experiences share many similarities and speak to a set of basic themes that lie at the heart of the education response to COVID-19: innovation born of necessity, the importance of well-being, inequity in our world's education systems, and human resilience.

### **Necessity is the Mother of Innovation**

As Nadine Trepanier details the work of the Ontario Principals Council during the height of the COVID-19 crisis in her contribution to this collection, she refers to the old proverb “necessity is the mother of invention.” I would take this a step further to say that necessity is the mother of innovation. This certainly has been true of education during this crisis, and it is a consistent theme of our contributors. Amid the tragedy, disruption, and fear brought on by the pandemic, new channels of innovation, creativity, and systemic transformation have also emerged at unprecedented levels. Around the world, school systems as a whole have been forced to rethink learning models at a pace and scale never before seen, and rapidly build, test, and pilot new structures to accommodate a completely different reality.

A central feature of these innovation journeys is collaboration, reflecting the fact that amid crisis often comes unity. For 2018 WISE Award winner Partners for Possibility, innovation has meant forging ahead with over 40 new partnerships in regions across South Africa in order to reach more under-resourced school principals than ever, ensuring that they have virtual engagement and support, including stress reduction and psychological counseling, during the crisis. For Teach for All in Morocco, innovation has been born out of collaboration with community leaders and parents in rural regions to develop and deliver curriculum content via WhatsApp, SMS, and voice notes that enable schools to reach all students, even those with illiterate parents and caregivers or who lack access to digital platforms.

In India, Azad Oomen and Baidurya Bhusan Sen have used the disruption of the crisis to innovate how their organization delivers digital professional learning to school leaders by focusing on building online communities of practice. Core to their mission is providing a safe space for educators to collaborate, share ideas, and feel connected and supported as they do the difficult work of translating broad government directives into institutional-level strategies to meet the needs of their schools and learners.

## **Well-being Matters**

Another lesson reflected in these pieces, and the series as a whole, is that well-being matters. And this is true not only for students, but also for teachers, parents, and the entire education ecosystem. A key takeaway from the COVID-19 crisis is that the health of our education systems is inextricably linked with the health and well-being of our communities, whether it be economic health, physical health, or social and emotional health.

In Kenya, as detailed by our 2020 WISE Award Finalist Deborah Kimathi, the organization Dignitas has prioritized the social, emotional, and physical well-being of the students and families they serve in their COVID-19 response strategy. Working with some of the most disadvantaged communities in Kenya, Dignitas found that 79% of serviced households had no income at all during the crisis, making education secondary in their list of concerns. “The struggle of this pandemic,” she writes “is not for comfort, but for survival.” For children in these communities, especially girls, school offers more than education, being a key source of physical and mental well-being, including protection from early marriage, pregnancy, sexual and labor exploitation, and other forms of abuse and trauma.

Similarly, in South Africa, Partners for Possibility adopted the approach of ‘Maslow before Bloom’ when they developed their rapid response strategy, and made sure to collaborate with food relief organizations to facilitate deliveries to families. They also produced a series of digital support tools for stress reduction and psychological support.

Even in a less disadvantaged context, like Canada, social and emotional well-being has played a central role in education efforts during the crisis. Recognizing the emotional and psychological stress on school leaders, the Ontario Principals Council engaged in a multi-level response to support school leaders in its network, including through the delivery of a wellness program for members and their families.

## **Economic Inequality has Severe Consequences for Education**

However, by far the biggest lesson of COVID-19 for global education—and one that can be found throughout these essays—is that inequality permeates our systems. Students in economically and socially disadvantaged communities were far less likely to have access to quality remote learning programs during the crisis than students in more advantaged communities. As rightly pointed out by Lorenzo Benussi and Marcello Enea Newman in their piece “The

Elephant in the Room,” school closures have undeniably caused the most damage to “the members of our educational community who were already unfairly treated by our systems to begin with: social-economically disadvantaged children and children with special educational needs and disabilities.” In fact, it has become clearer that our systems were already failing these children prior to the pandemic.

For Deborah Kimathi in Kenya, the central question as leaders begin to think about reopening schools is: What comes next for the children furthest behind? When schools reopen in the Fall, will those who have had access to online or home learning be that much further ahead of others? And, for marginalized communities in Kenya and elsewhere, there is the stark reality that many students may never have the opportunity to return to school due to the economic devastation wreaked by this pandemic.

### **Systems Are Fragile but Humans Are Resilient**

Robyn Whittaker and Gail MacMillan conclude their essay on the South African experience by observing crucially that “systems are fragile but human beings are resilient.” This theme too is central to all the stories captured in this volume and series. People and governments are capable of great achievements—in leadership, in innovation, and in humanity. Just as countries have come together at the global level to defy history and science to create an effective vaccine against COVID-19 virus at unprecedented speed, the world is also in need of the same urgency, economic commitment, and political will to build back better our education systems. Please enjoy the articles that follow.

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# THE NEW NORMAL

## ONLINE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

BY BAIDURYA BHUSAN SEN AND AZAD OOMMEN



**D**uring the COVID-19 pandemic, school leaders have played a central role in shutting schools, ensuring student well-being, engaging students in learning, and planning for eventual school re-opening. As there was no playbook for this transition, we engaged school leaders through a series of virtual workshops to guide them. This article contributes to the nascent nature of online professional development for school leaders by offering practical lessons to other organizations.

Our work with 154 school leaders across India since April 2020 is centered around three C's: content, community, and coaching. We kept these three pillars in mind as we designed our virtual program. The learning around each of these is presented below.

## **Engaging Content**

**Be clear about the behaviors you want to shift.** In the early stages of COVID-19, we conducted a survey of school leaders that informed our work. The three main areas that we found that they needed support in was safety and wellbeing of students, transitioning to online learning, and school finances. We synthesized these findings with the knowledge we had from our experience to come up with the scope of the content for our virtual workshops.

**Balance content between what they need to do and what they need to know.** Content should be relevant to their needs but also point them in new directions when required. During the initial phases of COVID-19 shutdowns, we found that school leaders knew that they needed to engage learners but did not know how to go about it. We created a simple process using Maslow's Hierarchy to create a pathway for them to move from checking on students' wellbeing to learning.

**Keep it simple.** Recognizing we are dealing with adult learners, we designed workshops to elicit knowledge from the peer network. We made the online classes conversation-friendly while being task-oriented. This meant giving adequate time for school leaders to share their experiences engaging with different aspects of their role. The trainings ended with concrete action steps that school leaders committed to themselves.

## **Building Community**

**Build Trust.** When we started the series of virtual workshops, not all of our school leaders knew each other so we had to create a warm environment in which they felt safe being open and vulnerable. We were deliberate about building trust by ensuring there were enough ice-breakers and "getting to know each other" activities.

**Create multiple avenues to engagement.** We knew from our experience in building community in offline settings that we needed different pathways to creating engagement. We used two pathways. 1) Sourcing and sharing practical tools and resources that school leaders had adopted; and, 2) Inspiring each

other by recognizing successful outcomes and highlighting instances where school leaders had overcome challenges.

**Let magic happen.** We wanted to provide unstructured space for these workshops to evolve as we ourselves were learning how these could be most effective. We put in place enough structure to inspire confidence that we were clear about the standards and objectives we were seeking to achieve. However, we also found that giving time for the school leaders to discuss issues they were facing made the magic of feeling connected to each other happen.

### **Supportive Coaching**

**Invest in relationships.** Our workshops are built around three pillars—tasks, processes, and relationships. Relationships are the hardest to replicate virtually. We encouraged participants to keep their video on to promote familiarity among each other and us. We also kept “open time” after the call when school leaders could stay on to connect with the trainer or peers.

**Provide additional support beyond workshops.** We know that when school leaders leave workshops they need additional support to implement ideas. There are multiple ways to achieve this function such as incoming helplines, outgoing support calls, and chatbots. We followed up with school leaders through phone and video calls and found that these methods are as effective as a physical meeting. In addition, we kept “support hours” where any SL could drop us a query on WhatsApp and we would respond.

**Track progress.** We invested in data systems to track our workshops and coaching so that we could follow-up in a targeted manner with school leaders. These systems also provided us the basis for measuring our effectiveness and continuously improve our virtual workshops. We chose to measure three processes—user engagement, change in behavior, and outcomes. We used a combination of Net Promoter Score, qualitative feedback, data on implementation after every call, and student surveys to create a comprehensive data system.

As we look to schools re-opening, school leaders will be translating broad government directives into community-level strategies to meet the needs of their learners. We see online professional development of school leaders as a low-cost, high-scalability approach to preparing them for this challenge in India.

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**About the authors:** Baidurya Sen is the Co-Founder of Alokit. Azad Oommen is the Co-Founder of Global School Leaders.

# LOVE IN A TIME OF COVID-19

## SNAPSHOTS FROM THE FRONTLINE: INTERVENTIONS, PRACTICES, AND RAPID RESPONSES

BY ROBYN WHITTAKER AND GAIL MCMILLAN



**F**or a decade, Symphonia for South Africa (SSA) has mobilized active citizenship, fostered cross-sectoral collaboration, and built social fabric around the critical issues facing South Africa. Our flagship programme Partners for Possibility (PfP) focuses specifically on the country's education crisis.

PfP is a leadership development programme that partners principals of under-resourced schools with business leaders in co-action and co-learning “thinking partnerships”. Together the partners undertake an immersive and transformative leadership journey—to create a better future for South Africa's children.

COVID-19 has presented opportunities to PfP because the programme is specifically designed to develop adaptive leader-

ship. The programme enhances resilience and creativity and unleashes the transformational leadership capabilities of both school principals and business leaders, equipping them to become change agents in deeply VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous) environments. Our delivery team and current participants have, therefore, been able to rapidly and successfully adapt to the sudden radical change precipitated by the pandemic.

Additionally, the programme focuses on relationships and support for human beings. We firmly believe that our partners, particularly school principals, have never needed support more, and we are committed to doing whatever is necessary to meet their need.

## **Our four-fold crisis response has included:**

### **1. Crisis Management**

When lockdown began, we contacted PfP principals to ascertain their primary concerns. These included:

- Food insecurity among learners and their families.
- Stress, anxiety, and psychological trauma.
- Challenges with remote learning, particularly where connectivity is limited.

We immediately began identifying and quantifying food needs in PfP school communities and collaborating with food relief organizations to facilitate deliveries to families. To date, over 20,000 food parcels/vouchers have been delivered, with exceptional leadership by PfP principals being key to this.

Simultaneously, SSA CEO, Dr. Louise van Rhyn, produced a series of support tools—focusing on self-care first—for stress reduction, psychological safety, and coping techniques. These have been greatly valued and are influencing how principals support their teams.

### **2. Critical Needs—Short Term Support and Care**

We have focused on ensuring that our partnerships remained connected, supported, and encouraged and have shared many resources on how they can support their teams and make practical and educational resources available to their school communities.

We have worked closely with principals (particularly those lacking experience with technology) to increase their familiarity and comfort with technology, so they can remain connected virtually and benefit from the online support being offered. This has rapidly accelerated their adjustment to unfamiliar technology.

We have shared many valuable resources with schools via A Better Africa (Knowledge Management platform) including COVID-specific information; online learning material, information on team and community support; guidelines for managing food distribution programmes and preparing schools for reopening. Links to this material have been widely shared using accessible tools, including WhatsApp.

### **3. Change Management—Medium-term Response**

This crisis also presented a major challenge to PfP because the programme was designed to be high touch. However, we have completely reworked every aspect to enable the entire programme (including 1:1 partnership meetings, formal training, and Community of Practice meetings) to run virtually and maximize the online expertise that our participants are developing.

We have harnessed technology to support and enhance trust and relationships, enable connection, and ensure that partners feel deeply supported. The level of their engagement has been remarkably high and they greatly appreciate the support provided. Principals, in particular, note that it has enabled them to cope and respond in ways they would never have imagined possible. While our business leaders also face unprecedented complexity, they have become profoundly aware of the acute needs within many South African communities.

### **4. Future Focus—Long Term Response**

As well as reworking our programme to deliver it in a social distancing context, we have completely revised our processes for launching new partnerships and have continued engaging with the business community, encouraging them to support education through partnering in the PfP programme. We have been amazed at their positivity.

Rather than waiting until we could resume the “normal” implementation of PfP, less than six weeks after this crisis began, we have enrolled and launched over 40 new partnerships in regions across South Africa. We have supported the principals to ensure they have the skills needed for virtual engagement,

and we regard our role in assisting them to move to technological competence and confidence as perhaps the greatest gift of this period.

COVID-19 has highlighted the fact that humanity matters. People are capable of great leadership and innovation—and the growing recognition that systems are fragile, but human beings are resilient, will lead us towards a deeper commitment to human-centered education. We are being offered the opportunity to understand that trust, care, and relationships are essential elements in enabling our school leaders, teams, and learners to not just cope, but thrive, in complexity.

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# WHAT NEXT FOR CHILDREN FURTHEST BEHIND?

BY DEBORAH KIMATHI



**A**s education actors around the globe consider the current crisis, I have been struck by the possibility of building back better. How can we leverage lessons from this season of crisis to do better for all children in the future? There are five key lessons from Dignitas' initial response that I know have a much longer-term application.

What is not counted, measured, and spoken to will not be given the necessary attention. Data that can inform evidence-based de-

isions is critically important. Those in power, or holding important resources, cannot invest their power and resources otherwise.

We have a moral obligation to stop the children furthest behind being left behind completely. The crisis of COVID-19 has exposed the systemic inequality that exists globally. For many of the communities in which Dignitas works in Kenya, the struggle during this pandemic is not for comfort, but for survival. COVID-19 has brought with it severe social, health, and economic hardship, and these hit the [poorest communities](#) the hardest. In these communities, 63% of families were unable to access public education pre-COVID-19, as a result of poverty and systemic exclusion. Marginalized by poverty, these are the same families excluded from a myriad of essential health and education services now.

Our [recent survey](#) demonstrated that 79% of households in our communities currently have no household income and, understandably so, education is third in their list of most pressing concerns, after food and nutrition, and household finance. For the 83% who did list education as a pressing concern, there are other barriers—only 35% of parents have completed secondary education, and 71% of those struggling say they don't have access to learning resources.

This raises critical, urgent questions of 'What happens next?' When schools reopen, will those who have participated in on-line or home learning be 'ahead' of others? How will schools assess progress and promote students to the new school year? How many girls will be married or pregnant, never to return to school? How many families will end up on the street, their children never to return to school? How many children will have died from starvation? How many children will be so scarred by the trauma, violence, and anxiety of this season that learning never really resumes?

Our response has to be strategic, at the correct pace, and of excellent quality. Twenty years in education and child protection in the development sector have taught me that quality is not synonymous with perfection. Quality is listening to our school leaders, our learners, and their communities. Quality is coming alongside school leaders, families and learners as friends and partners, and not being so patronizing as to classify them all as 'beneficiaries' as if the learning, value and growth was a one-way street. Quality means thinking holistically about solutions. Quality means evidence based. Not so that Dignitas can tick boxes, or report a certain number, or gain acclamations; but

so that we are all authentically pursuing the best for those we partner with.

You can't have quality interventions without a quality workforce. [Dignitas' recommendations](#) to Kenya's National COVID-19 Education Response Committee focused on exactly this. Leadership matters; the human capacity within a system matters. Without equipping and empowering the workforce, any interventions will only be temporary and surface level.

It is not business as usual. We have to innovate. We have to throw away the box (as opposed to simply thinking outside of it). I have found innovation to be a space of hope, a space for optimism. How can we change the systems that have been consistently ineffective, consistently unequal, and consistently blind to the social and emotional needs of our children, teachers, and school leaders?

We are stronger together. Dignitas has found this to be a fruitful season of learning and impact because we have pursued strategic partnerships and collaborations that enable us to respond well to crisis. Thought partners, action partners, resource partners. As soon as schools closed, our partners [Global School Leaders](#) helped us to survey [200 School Leaders](#) in Kenya as part of a global initiative. In collaboration with regional education actors in [RELI](#) Dignitas helped to develop a list of eight [recommendations](#) to cater to children in marginalized communities during the COVID-19 crisis.

With a laser focus on these five principles, and in an effort to reach and protect children furthest behind, Dignitas is currently [remotely training and coaching](#) 300 educators as [Community Champions](#) who are working to protect and promote children's learning and well-being across 6,000 households during school closures. Whilst everything else is disrupted, our vision to ensure all children have the opportunity to thrive and succeed remains core to our COVID-19 response.

Learning is no longer confined to school buildings, and neither is educational leadership. Let's be sure to apply these learnings so that we continue to reach children out of school, beyond the end of COVID-19 school closures.

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**About the author:** Deborah Kimathi is the Executive Director of Dignitas.



# THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

BY MARCELLO ENEA NEWMAN AND LORENZO BENUSSI



**T**hroughout the past months we have participated in many round table discussions and webinars with our colleagues from around the world, comparing and reflecting on our countries' different responses to the COVID-19 pandemic through the lens of education. At Fondazione per la Scuola della Compagnia di San Paolo, we also recently had the honor of convening one such online event, featuring some of the most [influential thinkers](#) in the educational world today. Among our speakers there was overwhelming consensus around the idea that the current crisis could be seen as an opportunity for us to radically re-imagine educational paradigms and build a better future on the other side of the pandemic.

The juxtaposition of these two concepts, crisis and opportunity, can lead to some unease: it does not feel right to rejoice in

the generative potential of crisis, when we are still in the midst of the destruction it is causing. In our field, this is particularly and most sadly true if we consider the long-lasting harm which school closures are causing on the least privileged children. We do not yet have a clear picture of the extent and scale of this damage, but we know for certain that remote learning is disproportionately affecting the members of our educational community who were already unfairly treated by our systems to begin with: socio-economically disadvantaged children and children with special educational needs and disabilities.

At Fondazione per la Scuola della Compagnia di San Paolo we are well aware that our educational system has tragically been failing the children who need it the most since before the COVID-19 pandemic. More recently, school closures have made these issues even worse, more visible, and, consequently, more discussed in the media. In a small way, we could call this good news. Open and public discussion of the inequality ingrained in our current system is the first step towards imagining a fairer one. It is sad that this couldn't have occurred earlier.

Another step in the right direction has been the heroic response of teachers, headteachers, students, and parents to the abrupt transition to remote learning made necessary by school closures (schools in Italy closed since early March). With the support of the government and of third sector organizations such as ours, schools rapidly implemented an unprecedented country-wide rollout of digital technologies for remote teaching and learning.

Starting March 4th, the first day that schools closed, we organized and delivered more than 40 webinars, hosted by teachers, for teachers (with an average attendance of +1200 teachers per webinar). These webinars featured lesson plans which we gathered from teachers on a daily basis, as well as tutorials on the most common and easiest to solve barriers to entry to broadcasting technologies and online classroom management. They represented a platform for teachers to support each other and to share effective practice from the very start of the emergency, before a more structured institutional response was possible.

Over less than four months, we produced 61 hours of live professional development content which reached more than 50,600 participants. All of this content is now available on an [online repository](#) with a dedicated search engine, to allow teachers to rapidly find the answers to their training needs.

The webinars were also a way for us to continuously communicate with schools and to monitor their progress in the transition to remote learning, as well as to identify trends across our school system, looking for signals to amplify as the situation developed. Our daily dialogue with schools let us identify a series of virtuous mechanisms, which we will strive to keep in place after the crisis is over:

**Schools acted as developmental organizations:** teachers relied on each other for assistance and for the discovery and adoption of new pedagogical approaches, which could work in a remote learning setting. Also, collaboration grew tighter between teachers and headteachers.

**A surge in digital competence in the entire educational ecosystem:** as EdTech adoption transformed from a want to a need overnight, all actors of the educational ecosystem have had to adapt and increase their digital competency. This added digital competency will unlock a whole new toolkit of pedagogical practices for the post-COVID world.

**A focus on what matters the most:** school closures and remote learning have spurred public debate and renewed awareness of the importance of all those aspects of the educational experience, which are especially hard to replicate remotely: the pastoral function of schools, schools as communities, learning by doing, and learning with peers.

This last point is especially important. There is a new thirst for discussion and debate in the educational field, with room for ambitious new visions and paradigms, which give importance to the things that matter most. The crisis has revealed structural failings of our educational system, which were always there to begin with: educational inequality, obsolete pedagogy, and insufficient collaboration between different actors in the ecosystem.

This crisis is an opportunity because it has made these issues more visible and made them subject to public debate and discussion. Now, we can no longer ignore the elephant in the room, nor can we hope that incremental or reparatory actions will make it go away. To have an educational system which works for everyone, we need a new educational system. Now is the time to imagine it together.

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# CONNECTING THROUGH PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

BY NADINE TRÉPANIÉ



**A**s part of its response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Ontario Principals' Council offered daily professional learning sessions to its members. Following a short survey, the daily sessions were offered to school leaders regardless of their affiliation. These sessions have been well received and provided some learning opportunities, not only for school administrators, but also for the association itself.

While Ontario is unique, it is not so different from other jurisdictions in regard to handling of the COVID-19 crisis. Nevertheless, to better situate the reaction of the Ontario Principals' Council

(OPC) to this crisis, the timeline for government reactions to the crisis is outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1

*Timeline for Ministry of education announcements in Ontario*



The day following the initial announcement, the OPC began to reflect on how to best support its members through these unprecedented times. During the week following the first announcement, OPC embarked on a multi-prong approach to support members. This included ongoing weekly calls with school district member representatives to check in and understand the issues on the ground, continued one-on-one support for specific situations, regular meetings with education partners, advocacy with the Ministry of education on behalf of principals and students, and increased promotion of the wellness program offered to all members and their families. In addition, attention was given to the professional learning needs of school leaders. During the first week of school closures, while students and staff were on Spring Break, a survey was developed to discern the needs of members in regard to professional learning. The response rate was 9%, a significant increase over the 1% response rate for a similar professional learning survey in September 2019. What the professional learning team heard through that survey was that members wanted professional learning on leadership strategies specific to emergency remote teaching, pedagogy, management, and wellness.

Professional learning has always been an important mandate for the OPC. However, it is usually planned several months in advance and innovations in professional learning take time to operationalize. In this case, time was not a luxury the association could afford. With some urgency to serve our members, the results of the survey were used to launch a “Just in Time” professional learning series with daily offerings beginning April 1, 2020, as well as three book club opportunities. The themes for each of these sessions were first identified through the survey and then through feedback forms from each session. Facilitators were recruited amongst members with expertise, independent contractors, professional speakers, and researchers. Each session began at 8 am and several formats were used depending on the topic: two-hour workshops, one-hour webinars, and group discussions. While these sessions were designed with OPC members in mind, they were made available to all school leaders at no charge. All sessions were recorded and made available to OPC members through the members’ website and to registrants through an email link. Since May 19, sessions have been ongoing with a reduced schedule of three sessions per week through the third week of June 2020.

These learning sessions were meant to provide principals and vice-principals with opportunities to learn with and from one another as they face a global crisis. At least 20 administrators are present at each session with some sessions having over 200 participants. The feedback has shown that the sessions start each day with positive messages and have helped to keep principals and vice-principals engaged. Almost all the participants report that the sessions have provided support with issues specific to the pandemic or as they consider their leadership practices as school leaders. In addition, participants reported that the sessions helped with their wellness as they were able to connect with colleagues outside their school districts and have candid discussions about some issues they face as administrators while sharing their own practice.

As an organization, there have also been some important takeaways from these sessions. Notably, the importance of offering professional learning beyond our membership and daring to innovate in those opportunities. The series in itself has been a learning opportunity for the OPC’s professional learning team. At the same time, many of the individual sessions have contributed to a better understanding of the needs for future professional learning. As a result of these sessions, the OPC will expand its offerings in the Fall to include regular discussions with researchers and small group exchanges between colleagues,

not to mention some deeper professional learning projects that will support cohorts of leaders throughout the school year.

To be innovative is to take risks. To take risks is to be willing to fail and learn from those failings. Together, with a team of passionate professionals and engaged administrators, innovation becomes possible. It is a privilege to create new opportunities for professional learning that support the work of principals and vice-principals as they work to ensure students' academic success and wellbeing.

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**About the author:** Nadine Trépanier is the Director of Professional Learning at the Ontario Principals' Council (OPC) and a doctoral student at Western University.

# TEACH FOR MOROCCO'S COVID-19 RESPONSE “STAY SAFE AND KEEP LEARNING”

BY MOHAMED IDRISSE



In light of increasing cases of COVID-19, the Moroccan Government announced on March 13, 2020 that classes of all schools (early childhood schools, primary schools, secondary schools, inclusive schools, and private schools) would be suspended until further notice.

In response, Teach For Morocco (TFM) launched a virtual teaching plan for early childhood education under the theme “Stay Safe and Keep Learning” to ensure that the nearly 1000 early

childhood learners in the TFM school community would continue their schooling during the pandemic. As the first step, the TFM team organized several virtual meetings with fellows, parents, school leaders, and the Teach For All global network partners in order to tackle the challenges of implementing quality online education, particularly among more marginalized students in rural areas. In these areas, just 28% of children aged 4-5 are enrolled in preschool (compared to 43% nationally). Over the course of these first meetings, participants worked with TFM staff to define the problems, brainstorm solutions, and suggest plans.

TFM cares about the health and well-being of our entire community and we, therefore, took a holistic approach to building our response strategy, including engaging local officials and parents in the work. We prepared 10-week plans so that we could have a clear support plan in place until the end of the school year.

Even before COVID-19, our teachers built strong relationships with parents. TFM teachers maintained daily in-person contact with parents and prepared files on each student containing information on their circumstances, their family compositions, living standard conditions, their parents' literacy level, etc.

During the pandemic, TFM has relied heavily on WhatsApp to teach and communicate with students and parents. The biggest challenge came post-school closures. Since Morocco, especially in the more rural areas, is a very conservative society, it was hard to convince all parents to join a WhatsApp group for learning. Many parents didn't understand the value of the technology and how learning could continue through this mechanism. It also wasn't acceptable culturally to engage with the mothers via WhatsApp.

Using the information we had gathered in our students' files helped our teachers to identify the influential mothers and leaders in the community and we were able to elicit their help in convincing the other mothers to join our WhatsApp groups. Using WhatsApp also allowed us to coordinate with illiterate parents by using voice memos.

Additionally, TFM launched a Web-TV e-learning platform on our website as a new way to reach parents and allow them to view video lessons developed by our fellows without having to download heavy video files on their smartphones. Furthermore, TFM launched an SMS platform that enabled parents and students to follow up on lessons via SMS and work without the

internet. Through this mechanism, we have also been able to reach students beyond our immediate community, as there has been a high demand for support.

As an organization, we have managed to keep our partners and donors informed about our COVID-19 response by organizing several virtual meetings and sharing TFM's communication updates. One outcome of this crisis has also been that our fellows have become community leaders. Many examples were given of fellows who made videos where they gave information, increased awareness on COVID-19, and shared messages via WhatsApp and Facebook groups on how to wash hands and how to exercise and play sports from home.

The TFM mentoring and evaluation team have also found that social emotional learning during this pandemic has been crucial. To accommodate this need, we have provided support and coaching to our fellows so that they can teach the characteristics of resilience, collaboration, empathy, and creativity to learners. We have also found that this situation has been an opportunity to teach parents how to engage in taking turns in speaking with their children, to record conversations, and send them to TFM's fellows to get their feedback.

Another unintended outcome of this crisis has been increased collaboration and mutual appreciation between parents and teachers. Before the pandemic, parents only knew teachers by name, and interacted with them just five minutes a day at school pick-up and drop-off. Now, parents, in particular, have a much stronger appreciation for their children's teachers and tell them what's going on in their lives, ask them questions, and reach out to them for advice on other personal issues.

One thing that became clearer to us is that during this period the work that we are doing is tremendous. It requires all of us to work together. What we are doing is more important now than before.

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**About the author:** Mohamed El Idrissi is the Founder and CEO of Teach for Morocco.



# SYNTHESIS

## EDUCATION DISRUPTED LEADING EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS THROUGH TIMES OF CRISIS AND UNCERTAINTY

BY ASMAA AL-FADALA



**O**ver the past four months, as COVID-19 has swept across the globe, many politicians and news media have adopted war metaphors to describe the challenges that countries and communities are facing. The United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Gutiérrez recently embraced the comparison [during his remarks at a G20 virtual summit on the COVID-19 pandemic](#). He stated: “We are at war with a virus—and not winning it. This war needs a war-time plan to fight it.”

In this metaphor the enemy is the virus, and our frontline strategy to fight it has been to “flatten the curve” through physical lockdown, with our soldiers being the brave healthcare workers in the hospitals and clinics who are working tirelessly trying to mitigate illness and save people’s lives.

But like all wars—as this one has continued to wage on—as one front seems to die down another one erupts. For example, as we have seen the flattening of the illness curve in some places, we have also seen the economic hardship curve spike in others, with dire long-term consequences on people’s lives and livelihoods. The same holds true for education. As we are beginning to face the prospect of reopening schools—in some places this is already happening—the data on the last three months is starting to come in and we are seeing signs of learning loss on an unprecedented scale that could take the equivalent of years off of the productivity and future earnings of our students, especially those who are the most vulnerable.

Importantly, as our students, teachers, and school leaders prepare to usher in a new academic year, many are wondering what school and learning will look like in a post-COVID-19 world in which uncertainty is the ‘new normal’. From the research I lead at WISE, we have found that time and again, the data has shown that school leadership is a key factor in the health of education systems. But at a time when the structures and systems of the traditional school model have been completely unraveled, has good leadership become ever more critical to building back better, fairer systems?

Last year we published a report, co-authored with James Spillane on [Educational Leadership: A Multilevel Distributed Perspective](#), which seems incredibly relevant now. In fact, one unprecedented outcome of the crisis has been the emergence of an extreme distribution of the traditional education roles—teacher, leader, and learner—across the entire learning ecosystem to ensure that learning has continued to happen during a prolonged period of wide-scale school closure. Over the course of a semester, the traditional hierarchy of the schoolhouse has flattened, and students, parents, teachers, and school leaders are now working side-by-side on leading learning. As we come out of this crisis, and see the new school year unfold in a reimagined, post-COVID-19 space, how will these roles and responsibilities of educator, leader, and learner re-emerge? Which aspects of education are likely to revert to the ‘old normal,’ and which will remain?

In April 2020, WISE and Salzburg Global Seminar held their first convening in our Education Disrupted, Education Reimagined series, which focused specifically on exploring the immediate to

mid-term education responses from the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic. We invited practitioners, researchers, and policy makers from around the world to share their perspectives on the impact of the pandemic on education systems globally. This section of the anthology is populated with essays from five contributors to our April event, who are working as educational leadership policy makers and practitioners. The pieces featured share the thoughts and experiences of these experts and examine the immediate, mid- and long-term consequences of COVID-19 on school leadership. What emerged from the discussion was a set of themes for policymakers to take back with them as they began to think about how to build their systems back better after the crisis. These themes included:

**1. The central importance of well-being, social and emotional learning, and the hidden curriculum in education.** One thing that we've been reminded of over and over again during this crisis, is that education is a social experience and part of the magic of learning comes from the learner's interaction with their teacher and their peers. As all contributors agreed, well-being should be a core goal of education so we can help people develop resilience and live satisfying lives even in adversity. We need to develop more than just academic skills in our schools. We need to develop the skills and competencies needed to better manage our responses to the challenges that life brings; we need to be able to continue to learn, live, and thrive amidst uncertainty and crisis.

Deborah Netolicky in her article: *Leading from Disruption to the 'Next Normal' in Education* emphasizes this point when she writes about the need to address the well-being of learners and educators during this time more than ever before. Educators are in complex situations, so we need to think about humanity before learning.

Similarly, Daniela Labra Cardero of *Atentamente* writes that the COVID-19 pandemic has made the need for social and emotional learning imperative for both young learners and adults. She also warns that this crisis has increased mental illness and emotional problems, including depression and anxiety. Like Deborah, Daniela reiterates that we need to bring the human component back into education, so that we teach our youth to be better able to live with ourselves, with others, and the planet.

**2. The role of teachers as collaborators and co-designers.** One thing that I have seen from an educator's standpoint during this time is the important role of teacher collaboration—collaboration between and among teachers but also between teachers, school leaders, parents, and even policymakers. Collaboration has been a key characteristic—across the board—of successful education re-

sponses to this crisis. In my own research and work with schools, I have seen the power of such collaborations, even in normal times. Teachers and school leaders should be supported, empowered, and welcomed into policy discourse as collaborators and co-designers. Top-down bureaucracy stifles creativity, innovation, and change in the classroom.

Deborah Netolicky supports this view in her piece, and through the brilliant metaphor of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* explores the theme of teacher agency and leading through a crisis. Deborah writes: "at the end of Carroll's novel, Alice refuses to bow to the Red Queen's authority. She realizes by this point that the trial is 'nonsense' and that she has the power to end its madness". The current COVID-19 scenario is offering opportunities for teachers to realize their own power to act and to innovate. In leading this crisis, teachers need to be supported and empowered to innovate their own solutions to the challenges that they are facing.

Similarly, Gregory J. Moncada of Qatar Academy for Science and Technology writes in his essay that despite a school's best efforts, including advanced planning, professional development, and open lines of communication, a teacher's way of thinking about and approaching learning during this crisis is ultimately shaped by their in-school ideas and experiences. Thus, in his experience encouraging teachers to build on those, design solutions relevant to their students, and mirroring those in-school experiences have allowed them to iterate quickly and improve student learning and well-being during this time.

**3. Education can and must be reimaged.** Education has notoriously lagged behind the world of business and industry in its ability to adapt and innovate—this crisis has given us the opportunity to change that. If there was ever a time to try new things, test ideas, and innovate, it is now. Amongst the trauma that this pandemic has caused, so is a unique opportunity to build a better education. For the first time in 150 years, we get to blow up the industrial model of education and think anew.

Even prior to the pandemic, one topic that is often a source of fierce debate, and even acrimony, in education circles is the role of assessment. Educators and policymakers alike have endlessly debated the what, how and why of assessment for years, largely agreeing on the need for change, but with little to no consensus on what change should look like and how it should be implemented. In Beatriz Pont's essay, *Reimagining Assessment*, she writes that this crisis is providing us with the rare opportunity to take a critical look at assessment and innovate. In many systems world-wide nor-

mal assessment cycles were changed or even dropped completely during the pandemic. Out of necessity, schools were left to find new and innovative ways to measure student learning, providing a unique opportunity to design and develop new methods. Moving forward, as we emerge from the crisis, system leaders will need to ultimately decide what is next for assessment, but we may well find that this time of innovation and new thinking has impact far beyond the crisis itself.

In the case of China, reimagining education means a future where AI is an ever-present reality. Xueqin Jiang suggests in his piece—*After COVID-19, Will Chinese Education Achieve Artificial Intelligence?*—that in a context like China investing in AI for the right reasons, including developing teachers and enabling collaboration between urban and rural schools, could help build a better, more equitable system. He adds that while Chinese policymakers have wanted to implement AI in education for years, the EdTech field has always been too fragmented to implement AI in a systemic way. The COVID-19 crisis offers a good opportunity for policymakers to step in and consolidate the various EdTech platforms controlled by local governments in the country.

**4. What type of leadership do we need?** It is clear to me that to lead schools and systems through the COVID-19 crisis, we need to reprioritize our values. Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, conversations among education policymakers and experts had already turned toward building a 21st century learning paradigm, a model that marries the acquisition of academic skill with the building of behavioral competencies such as agency, collaboration, problem-solving, creativity, and life-long learning. The outcome of this approach—the so called 21st century learner—would be a resilient, agile, and collaborative problem solver capable of taking on the challenges of our ever-changing world. If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it is that the time to implement such a future-forward approach is now. In a world in which schooling can be disrupted or entirely suspended overnight, agency and problem solving will serve students better than the rote memorization of facts.

But if we are serious about accelerating such transformation of our learning systems, it is also necessary to consider the implications for our educators and school leaders. Indeed, the COVID-19 crisis has shown that radical change in education can happen, but you need the right leaders to make it successful.

Gregory J. Moncada in his piece about leading his school through the crisis refers to “preparedness leadership.” He explains that the role of preparedness leadership is to understand how to respond

to the unique context of crisis, and, in his case, that meant using data to support their actions and to also engage with a variety of communication tools. This method, he writes, helped his teachers move forward with confidence during a time of uncertainty where answers weren't always evident.

In Beatriz Pont's piece she describes the role that leadership teams have played in creating environments that support teachers, students, and their families during the pandemic. In times of uncertainty, building a network of leaders, with shared roles and responsibilities has offered schools and communities a means of support and coherence.

Similarly, Daniela Labra Cardero in her piece calls for 'motion leadership'—a term often used by the likes of Fullan and others—in leading through crisis. For her, the primary role of school leader during these times should be to maintain a sense of belonging and coherence for educational communities. In motion leadership, the leader understands his or herself as a learner and supports teachers in forming a community of learners through trust and relationship building.

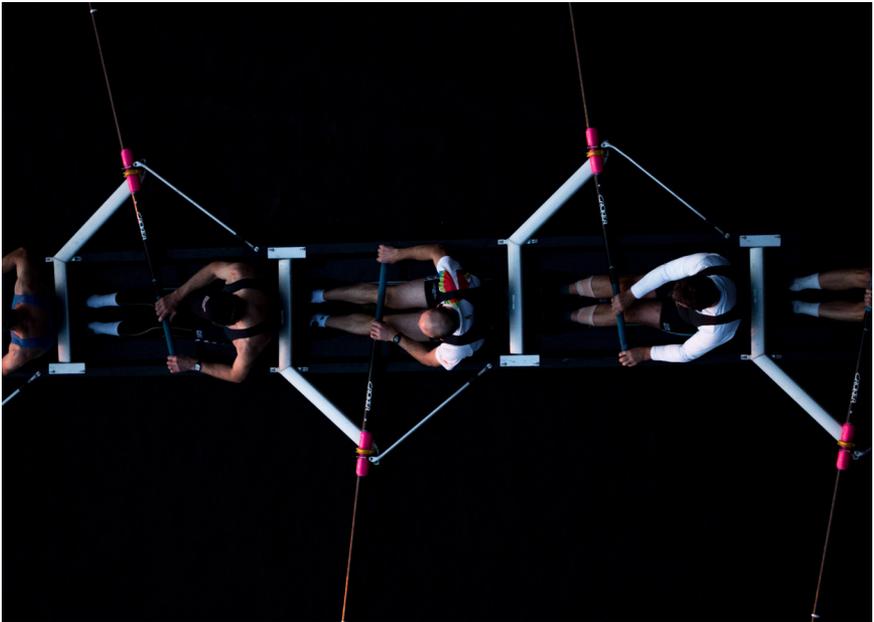
In conclusion, it is clear that all of our contributors agree on what kind of changes need to be made to our systems, what type of educator leaders are guiding our schools. The final question becomes where do we go from here? Now that we know 'what' kind of education we need, we need to turn our focus to the 'how' of building back better systems for the future.

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# PREPAREDNESS LEADERSHIP

BY GREGORY J. MONCADA



**T**he COVID-19 pandemic acted as a crucible for educational practices across the world and at Qatar Academy for Science and Technology (QAST), the pressure to rapidly transform and respond to the needs of our students, teachers, and community was no different. We felt we were current and QAST's initial steps went smoothly. Within days, however, it was clear that our way of thinking about what was effective learning was inadequate. Despite our best efforts, advanced planning, professional development, and open lines of communication, our way of thinking about distance learning was shaped by our in-school ideas. Thankfully, we had a preparedness mindset and this allowed us to make a quick succession of changes that led to improved student learning and well-being.

Early on at QAST, we employed a new criterion of administrative practice without actually knowing what it was: Preparedness Leadership. In our effort to understand how to respond to COVID-19, we were preparing early using data and communication tools. Our preparations helped us move with confidence, even though we did not know all of the answers.

Preparedness Leadership, is based on the premise that we can never predict the future and therefore never be perfectly prepared. However, we realized that we could be current, or up-to-date in our use of online delivery systems, lines of communication and other digital tools. To be current, we determined that we needed information about our learners, teachers, parents, and community. Our school mission would shape our decisions.

We had four priorities: 1) insuring the learning and well-being of our students, 2) that our teacher well-being would be supported by training and responsive conversations; 3) communication with our parents was early, open, and bilateral; and, 4) information was gathered avidly within our schools, peers, and international community.

Data and communication were at the heart of our approach. We set up a texting group with members in different parts of our organization with connections to business, educators in COVID countries ahead of us, and our local embassies. This allowed us to have timely information and discussions with our community and develop with confidence the means to respond to some possible scenarios. Even though we could not make any predictions, we did have confidence in our mission and how we would approach challenges that we knew would come. Our communications to students, teachers, and parents anticipated the transition to distance learning. This clarity, in turn, buoyed the confidence of our students, teachers, and parents immensely.

Weeks before our transition, we realized we could never be adequately prepared. There were too many variables. We pivoted by asking questions: What did our students need to learn about the digital platforms? How would we deliver our hands-on work? How would we assess student work? Were our teachers ready to deliver online lessons? Can we train and test their readiness? What did the teachers need to learn? What would we communicate with our parents? These questions and many more were understandable and we collected our data and acted on it before we began distance learning. By doing so we believed we were current, though remained ready to adjust to the kinds of details we could not know.

Once we transitioned to distance learning, the fog of rapid change caused an instantaneous myopia focused on solving immediate problems. Our first daily timetable was similar to our in-school schedule. This was exhausting for our learners and for our teachers. The hours of preparation alone prevented our teachers from delivering their very best. Students began turning in late work of lower quality and our teachers reported that they were working around the clock to fulfill their obligations. The stress on our learners and teachers gave us pause. We knew we would have to change...quickly.

Our fog lifted when we surveyed our learners, teachers, and parents on the third day of distance learning. Conducting the surveys so early was counterintuitive though upon reflection, it was the one true innovation that worked. The data spoke volumes and before any aversion to change set in, we trained teachers on a more useful teaching platform and then initiated these changes days later. We changed our guidelines on class times, homework, synchronous classes, and a myriad of other practices. And then we did it all again the following week. Within two weeks, we had landed on a mission-focused flow of teaching and learning that was compassionate and learning filled.

Our mission guided our approach. As a STEM school dedicated to participating and engaging in Qatar's long-term goals, our students developed 3D printed PPE prototypes using our in-school 3D printers. Students developed public information videos on how to go to the grocery store safely based on the science and propagation of the virus. Student and teacher well-being were paramount and our administrative team called parents to find ways to support each student, we held weekly advisory group sessions that attended to the stresses students were experiencing, and each administrator and the counselor held weekly office hours for teachers, students, and parents. To date, our students continue to learn and all have demonstrated growth. Our teachers became more effective on at least three video conferencing systems and a new balance of work and reflection emerged.

We are now asking what is worth keeping when we emerge from our homes and start in-school lessons once again. How will we prepare for our new normal prior to a vaccine? With our preparedness mindset and one foot in the future, we will not be able to predict the next challenge, though we will be ready for it nonetheless.

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**About the author:** Dr. Gregory J. Moncada is the founding director of the Qatar Academy for Science and Technology (QAST).

# LEADING FROM DISRUPTION TO THE ‘NEXT NORMAL’ IN EDUCATION

BY DEBORAH M. NETOLICKY



## Running Twice as Fast

**2**020 has brought worldwide disruption to multiple sectors in ways we could not have imagined when the calendar ticked over on January 1st. Education is one field in which reform has, by necessity, been happening at a rapid rate that some have described as “building the plane while flying it.”

Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* is a text I have previously explored as a metaphor for education and school leadership (Netolicky, 2015, 2016, 2019), and here I use it as a springboard to explore leading education during a pandemic. In

the novel, the Red Queen tells Alice: “it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else you must run at least twice as fast as that!”

COVID-19 has educators running twice as fast in order to educate students amidst changes to our world that sometimes seem as fantastical as Wonderland’s fictions. In some ways we are realizing the nonsensical-ness of ‘education normal’ and wondering why we do what we’ve always done. In 2020 educators feel in some ways as though we, like Alice, are tumbling down a steep, unfamiliar rabbit hole. We have been innovating while in constant motion; prototyping, testing, and refining new pedagogies, technologies, and pastoral models with students in real time.

### **Too Big and Too Small**

In her adventures, the character of Alice grows and shrinks. She often finds that she is too big or too small for her surroundings. The current global pandemic has turned our worlds topsy turvy and brought into question our feelings of connection and belonging. Many students, families and teachers have felt disconnected or like they don’t fit with the current reality.

At this time more than ever, educators need to consider and address “Maslow before Bloom” (Doucet et al., 2020). That is, we need to put safety, health, and well-being before formal education, curriculum, pedagogy, and especially assessment. Community, connectedness and relationships need to be at the forefront of education decisions and practices. This is a time to focus first on the humanity in education, from a position of seeking to understand and accommodate for the complex circumstances of those in our communities.

### **Reclaiming Agency**

At the end of Carroll’s novel, Alice refuses to bow to the Red Queen’s authority. She realizes by this point that the trial is “nonsense” and that she has the power to end its madness.

The current COVID-19 scenario is offering opportunities for teachers to realize their own power to act and to innovate. Transformational professional learning happens not when we are enjoying ourselves, but often when we are deeply uncomfortable (Netolicky, 2020b). Those who argue for flipping the education system (Evers & Kneyber, 2016; Rycroft-Smith & Dutaut, 2018; Netolicky et al., 2019) assert that professionals within schools

should be supported, empowered, and welcomed into policy discourse, not dictated to by top-down bureaucracy, so that teachers themselves can be active participants in hopeful alternatives to the education system. COVID-19 has illuminated that the teachers on the ground in our school systems around the world are the education system, and they are currently learning, adapting, and leading while reshaping and flipping the education system from the ground up.

Education leaders of schools and systems are currently “leading fast and slow” and tapping into the shared moral purpose of the profession, in which service to our students is at the centre; teacher expertise, agency and autonomy; and meaningful modes of teacher collaboration (Netolicky, 2020a). They are thinking productively about solutions to education inequities. Schools are responding sensitively to their own local and national contexts while joining together in global discourse about how best to address students’ changing educational and pastoral needs during this time of crisis and constant change.

### **Painting the Roses Red**

In Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, the gardeners are found painting white roses red. As educators we can ask: Are recent changes to education and schooling skin-deep, a mere paint coat to cover what’s beneath, or are we beginning to plant an entirely new garden of ways to address education issues of curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, success, and equity? In considering our “next normal” we can mindfully consider what we want to hold onto that we lost during this time, and what we are glad to reconsider or remove from our ways of doing and being in education.

At the end of the novel, Alice awakens and realizes that her experience was all a dream. She returns to her “dull reality.” Our challenge now is to ensure that our tackling of this emergency is not a dream that passes as we return, unthinking, to our previous version of “normal.” We should carve out time and space to deeply consider the purpose and possibility of schooling and education, before we rush back into school as we used to know it.

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# AFTER COVID-19, WILL CHINESE EDUCATION ACHIEVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE?

BY JIANG XUEQIN



## EdTech and China's Left-Behind Kids

**C**hina has 69 million “[left behind](#)” rural children. They are left behind literally because their parents work as migrants in wealthy cities, which do not permit non-residents to attend public schools. They are also left behind figuratively because as China’s economy roars ahead their future is uncertain. Rural schools do not attract good teachers. And as more families move to urban centers, rural schools are forced to close down.

The Chinese government believes that EdTech is the solution. Today, over 90 percent of rural areas have broadband [access](#), and urban teachers can livestream their lessons into rural schools.

The results have been disappointing.

The main issue is that the content produced in urban classrooms does not meet the needs of rural ones. But there is a solution on the horizon: Artificial Intelligence.

In the past decade, AI has changed the way we live and work by identifying the hidden patterns interweaving human society, and using user feedback to customize the way we connect and buy (think of the Amazon recommendation engine). While the theories underlying AI have been with us for decades, it is the confluence of three forces that has enabled AI to become an everyday technology.

- Moore's Law, which states that the processing power of a micro-chip will double every two years. This has enabled the rise of Big Data.
- The prevalence of smartphones, which permits billions to access and interact with the internet. This has allowed the internet to collect data on our habits and preferences.
- The rise of Big Tech, which means that all this Big Data is centralized and consolidated. That's why the leading AI companies are Google, Facebook, and Amazon in the United States, and Alibaba, Baidu, and Tencent in China.

AI is most readily achieved in a centralized system that allows for Big Data collection, and has immediate feedback loops. Of all the school systems in the world, Chinese education is the most AI-friendly because:

- China has a cultural obsession with test scores. Because schools only care about test scores, this allows for limited parameters and a defined output, which is crucial for AI. Tests also provide a feedback loop to train and test the AI system.
- China has a different concept of privacy. This allows any and all data to be collected. Chinese schools [have used](#) facial recognition technology and brain scans to analyze students' attention levels.
- China has a centralized curriculum, which allows for regularity, homogeneity, and scale in data collection. From grade one to university, fifty students sit in a classroom, and are lectured to. The static and repetitive nature of Chinese pedagogy permits it to be mathematically expressed, and analyzed by the AI system.

While Chinese policy-makers have wanted to implement AI in education for years, EdTech has always been too fragmented for AI purposes. The COVID-19 crisis offers a rare opportunity for Beijing to step in and consolidate the various EdTech platforms controlled by local governments.

AI in education promises to help “left behind” children, while at the same time it also risks further alienating them. The success of AI in China’s education system is highly dependent on the approach China’s government takes in introducing it into the system.

## **China’s Choice**

An AI system in education can focus either on improving test scores, or improving classroom teaching.

Improving test scores seems the easier choice, with the most immediate benefit. Imagine a system in which students are doing test questions all the time. With its database of every test question ever written, the AI system can figure out students’ knowledge gaps, and then pepper students with customized tests. They will not understand the material, but their test scores will go up, and that’s all that matters.

Such a system would mean that Chinese education becomes “slave to the algorithm,” and teachers lose their professional autonomy, becoming nothing more than ICT assistants. This will mean that China’s “left behind” children become truly so.

To understand why, let’s talk about the 1995 book *Meaningful Differences* by the two American researchers Betty Hart and Todd Risley. For over two years, they recorded the words spoken at home in professional and poor households, and coined the phrase “30 million-word gap by age three.”

A technologist would think there’s an easy solution here: design a robot to converse with a poor child.

Hart and Risley argue that would be the wrong approach. It doesn’t matter how many words are said. What matters is how words are said. Poor parents treat their children as subordinates: “Don’t touch that!” Rich parents treat their children as equals: “Let me explain why touching that is dangerous.” That’s why Hart and Risley think poor parents should play board games with their children.

Let’s look at a classroom example of this idea. In 1968, in response to the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., an American third-grade

teacher named Jane Elliott conducted an experiment to teach her white students about the corrosive effects of discrimination. For one week, students with brown eyes sat at the front of the class, and received endless praise. Students without brown eyes sat at the back, and received harsh criticism. At the end of the week, Elliott discovered that the brown-eyed students became more motivated to learn, and the other students became less so.

As a teacher trainer, I encourage teachers to recognize their hidden biases, and build emotional connections with students. I tell them to always keep calm, smile at every student once a day, and laugh as much as possible.

An effective AI system could test and verify these hypotheses, and assess the impact of emotional connectedness on test performance. It could spot patterns that are invisible to the human eye. Does regular eye contact affect motivation? Does tone of voice? What if every student has a chance to speak up in class?

Emotions are the real information superhighway, and it is emotional connectedness that undergirds any effective EdTech system.

I consult Chengdu Experimental Primary School and Chengdu #3 Kindergarten, two flagship public schools that connect to hundreds of schools in poor rural areas. Their teachers livestream their classes, email lesson plans to partner schools, and offer feedback over instant messaging.

This system works because teachers visit the rural schools once a semester and become friends with the teachers they train. The rural teachers are invited to visit Chengdu often and sit in on classes. Technology has not replaced teachers—it has helped teachers build a collaborative support community.

An AI system, no matter how effective, cannot change the destinies of China's "left behind" children by itself. What's really needed are progressive government policies that help these children emotionally connect into a supportive community.

China will use COVID-19 to embrace AI in education. How China does so will determine the future of its children, and perhaps even the future of education itself.

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**About the author:** Jiang Xueqin is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (RSA).

# EDUCATION LEADERSHIP IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY: RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

BY BEATRIZ PONT



**T**he COVID-19 pandemic has raised many challenges to our education systems. Yet, it also presents an opportunity to re-consider the delivery of education and schooling by those in educational leadership positions. School leadership teams play a vital role in creating the environments that support teachers, students and their families to continue to be connected and learning during the COVID pandemic, whether in school or at home. In times of uncertainty, they can build community, coherence and equity around schools.

Those in educational leadership positions around schools, either at the local, regional or national level can provide support, technology and guidelines in preparation for next steps. Schools, their teachers and leaders require those in education leadership positions around

them to provide clarity and vision in terms of learning and curriculum requirements, health and safety guidelines, training and resources to be able to define learning solutions that will allow their schools to flourish in times of uncertainty. If these are available and well communicated, schools can be trusted to shape their responses and get on with education in their schools, whether live, remote or a combination that will allow their students to continue learning.

With the experience of the COVID-19 crisis, we can look back to the short-term impact on the role of educational leaders. As schools closed, the physical schools disappeared, and reduced not only direct or live learning opportunities, but also the social interaction of students with friends, peers and the teaching professionals in schools. In short periods of time, across many countries, educational leaders at different levels worked to reconfigure education continuity through remote approaches, either using existing technological resources, TV, radio, mobile phones, paper or home schooling. Education professionals adapted to new ways of teaching and interaction with students from their own homes. With the need for social distancing, planned student assessments, especially high stakes exams and those needed to gauge transitions into next stages of education, were dropped or replaced. These decisions were made in a very short time, with limited information or evidence available and reduced capacity to interact with many different education stakeholders to shape responses. Overall, they rose to the challenge and many children across the world continued learning and/or interacting with their teachers online, or through other means. But inequalities increased, as children in more disadvantaged homes had fewer resources to follow remote learning approaches.

In such times of complexity, with little information, school leaders and teachers engaged with creativity and professionalism to maintain their links with students. Without the physical school, the role of school leaders had to focus on preserving the school community, finding the right technology to connect teachers, their students and families, and making sure that the learning was adapted and coherent. Underpinning the learning, they had to respond to staff and student well-being.

This experience can be canvassed for system and school leaders to respond in times of uncertainty to continue education provision, whether in schools, hybrid or online learning approaches, or other solutions. While there is limited research evidence on education delivery during pandemics, there is data and broader evidence that can help shape steps to take. Education leaders can build on the lessons learned as a bridge to configure what schooling could look like in the future.

On one hand, schools and their staff overall have managed to make the transition to remote learning creatively and resourcefully, demonstrating their professionalism. Governance arrangements that give decision making to schools in the delivery of education appears warranted when capacity and resources exist. Schools and their leaders can have autonomy and trust to continue delivering education in ways that are consistent with their school objectives, if they have the supportive conditions in terms of technology, resources, capacity and health criteria. This can be enhanced by promoting networks for education professionals to share ways of teaching and interaction with students from their homes, but also providing training and capacity building for this new environment. System leaders can consider giving schools guidelines and allow them to plan their own actions at the school level.

While remote learning approaches appear to have been more or less successful as an immediate response, it has also shown the role of schools as a community, which is, in addition to learning, a vital aspect of schooling. School leaders need to work to preserve and enhance their school community by shaping the school vision collectively and actively communicating with teachers, students and parents.

As inequities have increased especially for the more disadvantaged, the role of schools as providers of a level playing field has been more evident than ever. Schools contribute to student health, well-being and equity. A key focus of many school support measures adopted during school closures have been on providing meals, or looking for ways to support student well-being. As schools and their leaders consider responses in times of crisis, these concerns should be at the core.

COVID-19 has allowed school professionals to experience learning beyond the physical building, broadening the borders of school buildings to reimagining education. Those in educational leadership positions need to consider how to weave remote learning into the teaching and learning experiences of their schools. While the use of technology to support this will be key, engaging and consulting students in shaping these new approaches will be at the heart of success.

Education leaders at different levels needed to define the essential learning to deliver in remote environments. Decisions were made based on different criteria, such as teacher availability, subject ease to deliver remotely, online platforms or materials available. In times of emergencies such as COVID, education leaders will need to decide their learning priorities in the short, medium and longer term, which will vary greatly depending on the level of education.

Student assessments have been dropped or replaced, leading to search for different ways to gauge student learning. In the future, this will require thinking at different levels of the system at national, regional/local and school, on what and how to assess student learning. School leaders can help bring coherence in the grading of their students across their school, using formative or other school-based assessments. System leaders will need to define the “what next” for assessments clearly and provide clear guidance. In the future, artificial intelligence may have an important role.

These are just some of the issues that schools and system leaders will need to consider in times of uncertainty in the delivery of education. Overall, COVID-19 has magnified many of the challenges and issues in education that existed before, such as learning content for the 21st century, inequities, assessments, the use of technology or investing in teacher professionalism. Education leaders in schools and at the system level have the opportunity to consider how to weave in lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic to reimagine the delivery of education in ways that are suited to the 21st century. They have done it quickly in times of need, and can now take a bit more time to reimagine and reshape the future. Now is the time to rise to the educational leadership challenge.

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**About the author:** Dr. Beatriz Pont has worked on education policy reforms and school leadership internationally throughout her career.

# EDUCATING FOR WELL-BEING

## THE NEED FOR SYSTEMIC SOCIO-EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND MOTION LEADERSHIP

BY DANIELA LABRA CARDERO



**T**he COVID-19 pandemic has made evident the need for systemic social and emotional education, for children, teens, and adults. Mental and emotional problems like distraction, depression and suicide, loneliness, and a lack of purpose that were already affecting people's minds and health, are increasing. We lack strategies to deal with them personally, in education, and as a society. We need to learn how to be more human; better able to live within ourselves, with others, and the planet.

Well-being can be cultivated: it should be a core goal of education so we can help people develop resilience and live satisfying lives even in adversity. We need tools to better manage the ways we relate to challenges; learn from the crises, and still thrive. Social and emotional competencies (SEC) help the development of well-being and should be integrated systemically into education through social and emotional learning (SEL):

- Articulated and on-going age-appropriate content, from early childhood to higher education.
- Extensive teacher training in SEL curriculum and SEC development.
- Training and involvement of principals and other educational leaders.
- Parent involvement: Since SEL develops strongly through modeling, parents should also be supported and integrated in the development of self and children's SEC.

One main role of educational leadership in these times is to maintain a sense of belonging and coherence for educational communities. A starting point—based on best leadership practices—could be engaging fully in what Fullan and others calls motion leadership: where the leader understands his or herself as a learner and promotes that teachers form a community of learners by facilitating generative relationships of trust, collaboration, and creativity that allow meaningful conversations—those that address what matters most to the whole educational community. Leaders can find a sense of agency, purpose, and belonging as enablers for their communities, allowing time and space to jointly address the current social and emotional situation of students and teachers and, from there, co-create a shared vision about the main point of schooling within the actual context and for the future.

- Continuous educator peer learning that addresses not just the necessary technical and administrative work but most centrally, the pedagogical and socio-emotional issues impacting the core of education: students' learning.
- Space to hear and integrate students' voices and promote parent participation, understanding education is everyone's responsibility.

Leaders can help their communities co-create a clear vision of what success means for their students, based on high standards, and allow for all the educators, students, and parents to commit to that vision.

Since AtentaMente's core mission is to share well-being tools, we have offered our programs online, for free. As the pandemic evolves, we share these tools through the following programs.

- Educating for Well-being: An educator SEL training program and classroom curriculum, emphasizing adult development of SEC, now fully online (systemic, scalable, evidence based and sustainable)
- Stresstoolbox for adults in general and for Health Providers in particular.

Our programs are based on current scientific knowledge, stressing the importance of developing four core capacities that are pillars of wellbeing the ABCDs: Attention, Benevolence (bondad), Clarity, and Direction.

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**About the author:** Daniela Labra Cardero is the founder and Director of AtentaMente.





**PART TWO**

**REIMAGINE**

**JUNE 2020**

ACCELERATING  
INNOVATION  
THROUGH CRISIS

# INTRODUCTION

## REIMAGINING EDUCATION

BY DOMINIC REGISTER



**T**here is a fantastic quote from the German philosopher Hannah Arendt “Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it, and by the same token save it from that ruin which except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and the young, would be inevitable.”

This seems particularly prescient at this moment. We are in a time with the potential for great ruin but also great renewal. At the beginning of August UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres described the pandemic as having led to the largest disruption of education in history. Over a billion children have been affected, with the most vulnerable—“learners with disabilities, those in minority or disadvantaged communities, displaced and refugee students and those in remote areas at the highest risk of being left behind.”

This is also a moment of convergent crises, the pandemic, the climate crisis, the learning crisis that predates the pandemic, the mental health crisis for young people, intergenerational conflict, and in many parts of the world an escalation of the struggle for racial justice, the realization that there was still so much to do to meet the Sustainable Development Goal targets. Both the causes of and at least part of the necessary responses to these crises interconnect around issues of sustainability, social justice, and inequality. In the same article Guterres also says “We are at a defining moment for the world’s children and young people’ and that ‘we have a generational opportunity to reimagine education.”

This idea of a generational opportunity is compelling and a return to the status quo in education seems increasingly unlikely. Education is often characterized as a conservative sector, but we have seen many examples during the first phase of this pandemic of change happening quickly. Innovations around teacher communities sharing resources on messaging services, or on-line learning, or the use of radio and television have happened around the world.

“Build back better” resonates because our societies, our cities, our education systems could be so much better than they were before the great disruptions of this year. There are radical lessons to be learned from the recovery from the Great Recession of 2008, especially around sustainability, social justice, and addressing inequality. Pre-pandemic our school systems simply did not work for far too many young people—250 million school age children were out of school and only a quarter of secondary

school children were leaving school with basic skills in developing countries. Many people would go further and argue that the vast majority of students' school experiences were not right for the 21st century, the wrong things were still in the curriculum, the process of learning hadn't caught up with the reality of 21st century life for many students. Curricula around the world were too crowded, which makes it impossible to introduce new ideas around (for example) social and emotional learning, or education for sustainable development—how can we introduce new things when there is already not enough time in the day?

There is a momentum at the moment around curriculum reform and rethinking learning environments, the “what” and the “where” of school. This is evident in many of the essays that follow. The “how” of school is being addressed in a great many different experiments around the world at the moment. One of the purposes of the conference series that has led to this book was to share insights that come from these experiments as they are happening.

Technology is central to a lot of this thinking and will undoubtedly play a major role in the future of education in many societies. There is real risk here of exacerbating existing inequalities or creating new ones, and new educational paradigms need to be very sensitive to these risks.

Virtual or online learning is not a long-term replacement for all of the different functions that school can play in young people's lives. In her autobiography Malala Yousafzai wrote about how “we realize the importance of our voices only when we are silenced.” Something similar is true of many parents' reaction to school shutdowns, that it was only when schools were taken away that their true importance became clear. The experience of school is unique and is not going to be replaced by online or remote learning, however necessary those may be at the moment. School, and teachers, play a vital role that transcends the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next. In some case this has been referred to as the “hidden curriculum” and one of the consistent themes in these reimaginings is how that can be made more visible and central to the purpose of school in the future.

The experience of school and the contents of curricula will play a fundamental role in determining a lot of the character of our societies in the future—the extent to which these societies prioritize compassion, empathy, and open mindedness rather than their opposites. The reimagining of curricula creates the space

to also think about all sorts of necessary changes that link the solutions to the convergent crises outlined at the beginning of this essay. How can we align what happens in school to the needs of more sustainable economies, post pandemic, but still dealing with the longer-term challenge of the climate crisis? How can curricula change to address issues of mental health, well-being, and happiness? What might a curriculum of hope look like?

In a great essay called “Hope in the Dark” the author and activist Rebecca Solnit points out that “inside the word ‘emergency’ is ‘emerge’; from an emergency, new things come forth.” If we believe that there is a way past or through these convergent crises and that better, fairer, more fit for purpose education systems are possible, then the process of reimagining becomes a powerful, optimistic, hopeful exercise. But, (as Solnit also writes) “hope just means another world might be possible, not promised, not guaranteed. Hope calls for action; action is impossible without hope.” There are some remarkable experiments in education taking place at the moment. In many cases, these are both born out of necessity and a desire for change. We need to act to change the status quo because it wasn’t working pre-pandemic, it can’t work during the pandemic, and learners around the world deserve something better post-pandemic. The urgency of responses to the COVID-19 pandemic has unexpectedly created a space for rethinking education. It is our responsibility to use this “generational opportunity” to change our education systems for the better.

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**About the author:** Dominic Regester is a program director at Salzburg Global Seminar and member of the Executive Committee of Karanga.

# LEARNING FOR A NEW WORLD

BY ANDREAS SCHLEICHER



**A**s the world becomes increasingly interconnected, so do the risks we face. The COVID-19 pandemic has not stopped at national borders, and affected people regardless of nationality, level of education, income or gender. But that has not been true for its consequences, which have affected the most vulnerable hardest.

Education has been no exception. Those from privileged backgrounds found their way around closed school doors to alternative learning opportunities, supported by their parents and eager to learn. Those from disadvantaged backgrounds remained shut out when schools shut down.

In a way, this crisis has exposed the many inadequacies and inequities in our education systems—from the broadband and computers needed for online education, through the supportive environments needed to focus on learning, up to our failure

to attract the most talented teachers to the most challenging classrooms. But as these inequities are amplified in this time of crisis, this moment also holds the possibility that we won't return to the status quo when things return to "normal". It is the nature of our collective and systemic responses to the disruptions that will determine how we are affected by them.

Real change often takes place in deep crises. Where school closures are needed in the short term, we can mitigate their impact for learners, families and educators, particularly for those in the most marginalized groups. We can collaborate internationally to mutualize open online educational resources and digital learning platforms, and encourage technology companies to join this effort. We can rapidly enhance digital learning opportunities for teachers and encourage teacher collaboration beyond borders. Perhaps, most importantly, we can use the momentum to reshape curricula and learning environments to the needs of the 21st century.

We live in this world in which the kind of things that are easy to teach and test have also become easy to digitize and automate. The future is about pairing the artificial intelligence of computers with the cognitive, social and emotional skills and values of humans. It will be our imagination, our awareness and our sense of responsibility that will help us harness technology to shape the world for the better. Success in education nowadays is about identity, about agency and about purpose. It is about building curiosity—opening minds, it's about compassion—opening hearts, and it's about courage, mobilizing our cognitive, social and emotional resources to take action. And those will also be our best weapons against the biggest threats of our times—ignorance—the closed mind, hate—the closed heart, and fear—the enemy of agency.

These days, algorithms behind social media are sorting us into groups of like-minded individuals. They create virtual bubbles that often amplify our views but leave us insulated from divergent perspectives; they homogenize opinions and polarize our societies. So, tomorrow's schools need to help students think for themselves and join others, with empathy, in work and citizenship. They will need to help them develop a strong sense of right and wrong, a sensitivity to the claims that others make on us, and a grasp of the limits on individual and collective action. At work, at home and in the community, people will need a deep understanding of how others live, in different cultures and traditions, and how others think, whether as scientists or artists. And whatever tasks machines may be taking over from humans

at work, the demands on our knowledge and skills to contribute meaningfully to social and civic life will keep rising.

The growing complexity of modern living, for individuals, communities and societies, means that the solutions to our problems will also be complex: in a structurally imbalanced world, the imperative of reconciling diverse perspectives and interests, in local settings but with often global implications, means we need to become good in handling tensions and dilemmas. Striking a balance between competing demands—equity and freedom, autonomy and community, innovation and continuity, efficiency and democratic process—will rarely lead to an either/or choice or even a single solution. We need to think in a more integrated way that recognizes interconnections, our capacity to navigate ambiguity has become key.

Creativity in problem solving requires our capacity to consider the future consequences of our actions, with a sense of responsibility and with moral and intellectual maturity, so that we can reflect on our actions in the light of experiences and personal and societal goals. The perception and assessment of what is right or wrong, good or bad in a specific situation is about ethics.

That brings us to the toughest challenge in modern education: it's about how we incorporate values into education. Values have always been central to education, but it is time that they move from implicit aspirations to explicit education goals and practices, so they help communities shift from situational values—meaning “I do whatever a situation allows me to do”—to sustainable values that generate trust, social bonds and hope. If education doesn't build foundations under people, many will try to build walls, no matter how self-defeating that will become.

The bottom line is, if we want to stay ahead of technological developments, we have to find and refine the qualities that are unique to our humanity, and that complement, not compete with, capacities we have created in our computers. Schools need to develop first class humans, not second-class robots.

But to transform schooling at scale, we need not just a radical, alternative vision of what students need to learn, but also effective learning environments in which those knowledge, skills, attitudes and values are developed. This is not accomplished just by letting a thousand flowers bloom; it requires a carefully crafted enabling environment that can unleash teachers' and schools' ingenuity and build capacity for change. And it requires leaders who tackle institutional structures that too of-

ten are built around the interests and habits of educators and administrators rather than learners. We need leaders who are sincere about social change, imaginative in policy making, and capable of using the trust they earn to deliver effective reforms.

Technology will be an integral part of the future of learning. Technology can build communities of learners that make learning more social and more fun. Technology can build communities of teachers to share and enrich teaching resources and practices, and also to collaborate on professional growth and the institutionalization of professional practice. It can help system leaders and governments develop and share best practice around curriculum design, policy and pedagogy. Imagine a giant crowdsourcing platform where teachers, education researchers and policy experts collaborate to curate the most relevant content and pedagogical practice to achieve education goals, and where students anywhere in the world have access to the best and most innovative education experiences.

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# SYNTHESIS

## REIMAGINING EDUCATION THOUGHTS FROM THE FRONTLINE OF COVID-19'S EDUCATION CRISIS

BY OMAR ZAKI



**R**arely in human history does an event help expose the inadequacies of our systems all at once. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed failings across the board. In the words of United Nations Secretary-General [Antonio Guterres](#), COVID-19 is “exposing fallacies and falsehoods everywhere: The lie that free markets can deliver healthcare for all; the fiction that unpaid care work is not work; the delusion that we live in a post-racist world; the myth that we are all in the same boat.” And in education, as my colleague Julia Kirby summarized in Part I of this E-book, COVID-19 has shown that “inequality permeates our systems. Students in economically and socially

disadvantaged communities were far less likely to have access to quality remote learning programs during the crisis than students in more advantaged communities.”

The pandemic has shone a light on various problems in our education systems but has also presented an opportunity for ideas on how to address these challenges under the [build back better](#) mantra. After the pandemic’s jolt to the education system, all kinds of thoughts about how education will change were heard, everything from the hopeful—more support for teachers; to the expected—digital and distance learning is the new normal; to the extreme—are schools as we know it over? Regardless, this unique moment seems to have led to a reevaluation of what education really means and what we equip our learners with now so they can persevere in this uncertain world.

The following section provides a synthesis of essays from experts and program leaders from the field of education. These are based on presentations delivered on Day two of the [Education Disrupted, Education Reimagined event on April 16, 2020](#). The essays give the thoughts of individuals based in Hong Kong, India, the UK, and the USA. Each writer agrees that COVID-19 has provided a unique opportunity to self-reflect and take action to improve education in their respective areas. The key themes that can be drawn from these pieces are: student agency; social and emotional learning competencies in the early years; and, leadership in times of crisis.

## **Enhancing Student Agency**

Two of the thought pieces looked at the importance of greater student agency in our reimagined education. Aaron Eden, the CEO of Applied Tinkering, believes the crisis has reinforced his view that, “robotic search-engine-like-humans are not the ones who will have jobs and choice in their lives.” The ever-growing complexities of our world require human traits, such as creativity, empathy, agency, and curiosity, as opposed to what he calls “algorithmic thinking, regurgitation, and blind deference to authority.” For Margot Foster, Director of Professional Practice, COVID-19 might have just provided the shock to our daily behavioral patterns, habits, and routines to “see our students anew, to know them as learners for the first time.” Like Aaron, Margot ponders on how to change schooling from what is essentially a “transactional, unspoken contract between teacher and students, of transmission and receipt of information.”

If we are to change the old dynamic of coercion-based, non-consensual education, then according to Aaron, we need to shift away from “authoritarian, assembly-line education,” and instead focus on creating “anomalous spaces” that are accessible to any students

that want to enter them. This transition from an “Other-Directed education to Self-Directed education,” doesn’t mean parents and teachers are out of the picture, but rather it means moving away from the assumption that we as adults decide what is important and force kids to do it. It means going from “a position of equity and co-creation instead of command-and-control.” The idea is that through these spaces you can build a community of learning based on a different value system, one that embraces an ethic of engagement and allows students to engage with people who want to be there. The “anomalous spaces” can take the form of a standalone school, an academy in a district or a school-within-a-school or a three-week intensive experience. For Mr. Eden, in order for these spaces to become available, they would need to be mandated at a policy level.

In her work in South Australia, Margot Foster was involved in a [research project](#) from 2010 to 2013—involving 484 teachers—to see how deeply held the unconscious contract was between teachers and students. Their findings discovered that increased student agency in learning as “a key driver for, and outcome of the pedagogical change needed to improve statewide academic achievement.” This is well understood, however the project showed a culture of “relationship-rescue,” in which teachers worked hard and designed great lesson plans, but with little cognitive demand. Teachers were ‘rescuing’ their learners from hard thinking. The pilot showed that to shift from a transactional approach to a student-centered pedagogy that grants learners their agency, teachers need to see their students in a different light, as Margot puts it, “as constructors of meaning, as bringers of ideas, and knowledge.”

Margot and Aaron’s ideas are thought provoking, they raise serious questions about some of our outdated education systems and whether they largely ignore the real needs of its students. Has the system been more concerned with teaching methods than with students’ minds? Or more enthusiastic about the tools than about the quality of learning? Have teachers unknowingly taken their students down the easy path to avoid hardship, at the cost of their mental preparation for the difficulties ahead?

## **The ‘Core Purpose’ of Education**

Many have called for a reappraisal of our education system, believing now is the time to change it from an assembly-line to the labor market, to one that endows its learners with life values. For Leslee Udwin, Founder of [Think Equal](#), now is the time to “recalibrate our values” and “misguided priorities,” an example being society’s notion of success being measured by the accumulation of material

wealth. Therefore, in her words, we need to urgently, “reform the education system, which must inevitably be the prime motor of this humanism and of sustainable development and human progress”.

In addition to numeracy, literacy and testing, education should provide children a foundation in life skills or social and emotional learning ([SEL](#)). Why not? After all, the consensus is clear that education is more than just a pathway to the labor market. As Leslee puts it, education has a vital role to “nurture children to live fulfilled, healthy, happy, dignified, and respectful lives.” For her, however, there is a missing subject that should be in the ‘core purpose’ of education, which is to teach children the values of tolerance, non-violence, and valuing one another on the basis of equality and inclusion. Education ministries and policymakers are grasping the importance of psycho-social and emotional skills and competencies. Yet from the list of SEL skills, they tend to favor creativity, communication, and problem-solving and often leave out other competencies such as gender equality, emotional literacy, empathy, and peaceful conflict resolution.

In order for SEL to have positive outcomes later in life, according to Leslee, it has to start at the early years, before the age of six. This leads to her critical point about the mismatch between our “undervalued, [under-paid](#), and under-trained” early years teachers and the expectations that they will provide a holistic quality education. Correcting this mismatch will take too long according to her, therefore we need to be realistic and teach SEL prescriptively. In its work, the Think Equal Programme has curated some 90 lesson plans and written 22 narrative picture books and training sessions on how to use their resources. The easy lesson plans come with step by step instructions for teachers to follow, so no need for experts in SEL.

In a nutshell, we have a duty of care to our young people, they have the right to a foundation for positive outcomes in life. Think Equal and other life skills programming seek to make SEL a mandated part of early years education. Moving forward in the post-COVID-19 world, Leslee’s case makes a lot of sense, in a world with already so many inequities and social divisions, teaching our children about equality and empathy as young as 3-6 years, sounds like a good place to start.

## **Leadership in Times of Crisis**

The pandemic has exposed a crisis of leadership at such a crucial time. This was made evident by the indecisiveness of some national governments at the start of the pandemic, their failure to take concrete actions—informed by the scientific and medical experts—early

on fueled uncertainty and collective fear. Global leadership has also been lacking. Rather than countries coming together, each country took their own path. What about in education? COVID-19 has hit school leaders hard and tested them emotionally, cognitively, and practically. School leaders had to mobilize quickly in response to the closure of schools. In the midst of this ‘chaos’, Allan Walker and Darren Bryant from the University of Hong Kong, say the crisis has, “challenged established leadership norms, even those bred during previous disruptions.” Given the lack of precedence, “leaders have few roadmaps to guide their actions—there are few go-to answers as things change almost day-to-day.”

In times of crisis, the most effective leaders are not those with all the answers, but those who can confront uncertainty through sets of conflicting tensions. According to Walker and Bryant, a tension is “a situation which has no clear resolution or answers but presents multiple often contradictory pathways, which tear them in different directions.” Those who are able to manage the tensions intentionally but flexibly, are able to lead their communities through the crisis. Some of the common tensions facing school leaders, according to Walker and Bryant include: managing normality while managing disruption; promoting innovation while seeking consistency; caring for people while maintaining standards; and, caring for self while caring for others.

Adding on to these lessons, in her book [Forged in Crisis](#), business historian Nancy Koehn, discusses that real leaders are those that acknowledge people’s fears, then encourage resolve; they give people a role and purpose; tend to energy and emotion (yours and theirs); and, they emphasize experimentation and learning. This last point ties nicely with some of Walker and Bryant’s points, according to Koehn, experimenting and learning means strong leaders “get comfortable with widespread ambiguity and chaos” and don’t follow a ‘crisis playbook’. Instead, they commit to navigating their followers ‘through the turbulence, adjusting, improving and re-directing as the situation changes and new information emerges’.

### **‘Don’t Waste A Crisis’**

As we shift through these uncertain times, one is reminded of the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who said that, “only when it is dark enough can you see the stars.” The COVID-19 pandemic has reaffirmed the importance of universal healthcare; the need for government to support the economy in times of crisis, and it has brought our attention to the essential workers we take for granted—the healthcare staff, the emergency services, the grocers, the cleaners, and more. But we also cannot take for granted the educa-

tion workers. As governments prioritize stabilizing economies and buttressing healthcare systems, we cannot afford to let education be put on the backburner. Already children have lost precious time. At present some [1.725 billion learners](#) are affected by COVID-19.

The pandemic has disrupted everything, while much of this disruption leaves us in uncertainty for the foreseeable future, it has already led to new channels of innovation and creativity that has accelerated at unprecedented rates. School systems have been challenged to rethink the traditional methods of learning and to pilot new structures to accommodate the new reality. So, we must ask ourselves what we can learn from this to improve our system in the future?

Our authors and their respective ideas and experiences leave us food for thought. In the education reimagined let us trust our learners and grant greater student agency to enable students to learn and fail on their own—they will be better for it. Let us inform the next generations in their early years about the values of equality, empathy, social and emotional learning competencies, so they can grow up in a more caring and fair society. Finally, let us remember that in times of crisis, real leadership (be this in terms of school, faculty, or higher education leaders) is not about having all the answers but confronting uncertainty head on but flexibly, while guided by a set of values.

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**About the author:** Omar Zaki is a Senior Research Associate at WISE.

# SEEING LEARNERS ANEW DEVELOPING STUDENT AGENCY IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

BY MARGOT FOSTER



## “Don’t waste a crisis”.

I’ve heard this statement many times during the COVID-19 months. To me, this means thinking about how we work with new worldviews about teaching and learning, having had the rug pulled out from under us.

If deep learning requires an emotional shock/trigger, then having our daily behavioral patterns, habits and routines blown apart could be just what was needed to see our students anew, to know them as learners for the first time.

It has often been said that the greatest barrier to changing schooling has been the universal experience of it—a transactional, unspo-

ken contract between teacher and student, of transmission and receipt of information. A transaction so common, it's difficult to re-imagine, to unlearn, to change.

In South Australia [SA] between 2010 and 2013 we learned how deeply held this unconscious contract was. A four-year classroom-based research project, involving 484 teachers, the 'Communities Making a Difference National Partnerships: SA Teaching for Effective Learning [TfEL] Pedagogy Research Project' revealed the complex inter-relationships at play between teachers' pedagogy, learner engagement, and achievement.

The research findings related to:

- Teachers' observed pedagogical repertoire.
- The relationship between teachers' worldviews and the quality of pedagogy.
- Baseline student characteristics and the impact of these characteristics on student engagement and achievement.
- The relationship of quality of pedagogy and specific Teaching for Effective Learning (TfEL) elements on student characteristics—disposition to learn, interest, positive affect, negative affect and negative social functioning.
- Student perceptions of teachers' pedagogy.

Insights gleaned from this research identified increased student agency in learning as a key driver for, and outcome of the pedagogic change needed to improve statewide academic achievement.

This then became a focal point for a number of departmental initiatives at the time. One of these was the SA TfEL Pilot.

The SA TfEL Pilot was a partnership between the department's Teaching and Learning Services and 10 schools willing to explore innovative ways to develop student agency in learning. The central principle of the initiative was that the participating school leaders and teachers would partner with students from scratch. This would not be consultation with students, but a genuine, generative design partnership.

Why was this the non-negotiable principle of the TfEL Pilot? The answer lay in the research findings related to teachers' worldviews and the quality of pedagogy. We were looking for ways to support

teachers in developing their pedagogic repertoire that enabled learners to develop stronger learning dispositions and resilience in the face of complex, unfamiliar, non-routine learning challenges.

At that time however, 2000+ hours of classroom observation revealed a culture of ‘relationship-rescue’ where learners often were engaged in enjoyable activities with little cognitive demand. Our teachers worked hard, designed great activities, and cared for their learners, but the unintended outcome had become a culture of ‘rescuing’ them from doing the hard thinking. The interviews revealed significant ‘under-expectation’ of our students. This was a complex interplay of teacher beliefs, pedagogy and resultant student learning characteristics. The research showed that:

**Key finding 2.1:**

Teachers’ beliefs and assumptions about their role have an impact on their practice. Three orientations to practice were identified:

- Content coverage and control: the teacher’s role is to cover the curriculum.
- High relationship—low challenge: the teacher’s role is to care for the students.
- Responsive—learning and student-centered pedagogy: the teacher’s role is to ensure learners learn meaningfully.

**Key finding 2.2:**

Teachers’ epistemic awareness has an impact on their approach to teaching: a ‘teaching as script’ approach, which places emphasis on a controlled, sequential progression and following a pre-planned approach, and a ‘teaching as design’ approach, which is characterized by a responsive, personalized approach to learners’ needs in order to achieve desired learning outcomes.

**Key finding 2.3:**

Teachers who have a ‘teaching as design’ approach demonstrated a more highly developed pedagogical repertoire. Making visible the ‘under-expectation’ of our learners was key to changing practice towards a more responsive, highly developed pedagogical repertoire.

Hence the core principle of the TfEL Pilot. If teachers and leaders authentically partnered with students to design new ways of working, they could see what they brought to the table, they could see them anew.

The pilot schools did this in a number of ways, these are just some.

- Craigmore High School set up the ‘5 x 5’ – a new form of PLC at their school. 5 students and 5 teachers designing units of work and seeking feedback from the students about re-designing for engagement and stretch.
- At Seaview High School, teachers developed ‘un-googleable questions’ for their subjects with students to ratchet up the degree of thinking challenge.
- At Gilles Street Primary school, students provided feedback to teachers about what did and didn’t work for them as learners of mathematics, with teachers subsequently sharing their plans as to how they would respond to the feedback.
- At the Marion Coast Partnership of Schools [EY to Yr 12] students and teachers designed the Student Learning Rounds where students observed in classrooms to gather examples of stretch thinking and ways of getting ‘unstuck’ in learning – then sharing these insights with teachers and leaders at staff meetings and parents at governing councils, with teachers adopting and adapting practices from colleagues that students found effective.

We learned that changing practice is hard. We also learned that to shift from a ‘coverage’ transactional approach and begin to build a more dialogic, student centered pedagogy, teachers needed an epistemic ‘jolt’ and to see their students anew—as constructors of meaning, as bringers of ideas, and knowledge and experience...Only then was it possible to see that the prevailing transmissive pedagogy of coverage rendered their learners invisible, allowing no opportunity for them to develop agency and power in their learning.

We needed to make space. When the TfEL Pilot schools made this space through their co-designs, for many, the blinkers that made their students invisible started to fracture.

I wonder...Will the context of COVID-19 and the ‘jolt’ of losing the transmissive classroom routine and having to rethink our learning designs have been enough disruption for teachers to see their students anew and to value making space for them where agency can grow?

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**About the author:** Margot Foster is Director of Professional Practice at the South Australian Education Department.

# LEADING IN CRISIS

## THE TENSIONS THAT FORGE

BY ALLAN WALKER AND DARREN BRYANT



**W**orking successfully through crisis depends on real leadership. As unpredictability flows across every organizational plan, school leaders are tested emotionally, cognitively, and practically. This has been no more apparent than through the fragility induced by the ongoing coronavirus emergency.

The crisis has generated conditions throughout our communities that have twisted understandings and challenged established leadership norms, even those bred during previous disruptions. Leaders have few roadmaps to guide their actions—there are few go-to answers as things change almost day-to-day. Given the absence of previously tested traditions, the leaders who appear most successful are not those who believe they hold complete answers, but those who see their leadership as treading uncertainly through sets of dissonance-fed tensions. A ten-

sion is a situation which has no clear resolution, no absolute answers; but rather presents multiple often contradictory pathways, which tear them in different directions.

Those who manage the tensions intentionally, yet flexibly, seemed to be able to at least walk their communities through the crisis in positive ways. Table one lists some of the most common tensions confronting leaders in this crisis. Four of these are now teased out in a little more detail.

**Table 1: Crisis induced leadership tensions**

- Managing normality while managing disruption
- Looking for speed while looking for sense
- Promoting innovation while seeking consistency
- Pushing innovation while searching for coherence
- Caring for staff while caring about learning
- Spreading decisions while making decisions
- Learning while unlearning
- Making decisions for ‘us’ while watching for others
- Caring for people while maintaining standards
- Caring for self while caring for others

## **Leader Tensions**

**Managing normality while managing disruption.** When faced with crisis, people look to their leaders for a sense of normality or security, they need to know things are OK. So, leaders are called upon to become and maintain a stability platform upon which people can live and work—a values-based platform which people can ‘feel’ while much around them seems to crumble. On the other hand, leaders must help people manage the disruption to their lives and work and ensure their students and communities do not freeze up, and can react in sensible, positive ways.

**Promoting innovation while seeking consistency.** Dealing with crisis requires creative thinking and bold action. This does not just flow from leaders, but from throughout the organization. As the unpredictable rules, leaders give staff space to design and enact innovations in their areas of responsibility and care. But, concurrently, leaders are responsible for maintaining a measure of consistency across the organization. This entails working to see that the best ideas don’t just take hold in patches but are spread for the benefit of the entire community, regardless of where they came from.

**Caring for people while maintaining standards.** When crisis strikes a leader's first duty is to care for their community—teachers, students and others. This means doing everything possible to secure peoples' safety—physically, psychologically, and relationally, and keep uncontained fear under perspective. Providing care is a nonnegotiable, if fear reigns things will quickly spiral downward, however, crisis cannot be reason to drop standards. Even, if not especially, during crisis, organizations must retain their purpose and the expectations which define this—leaders are the guardians of standards and expectations. Even as context churns leaders must hold to high standards.

**Caring for self while caring for others.** This sounds simple, but it is not. The tendency of committed leaders in crisis is to plough everything into the care and sustainability of their people and community, too often at the expense of their own wellbeing. While this feels like the right thing to do and is sometimes even expected, it can actually be counterproductive. Organizations in crisis need leaders who are sharp, alert and together, and this won't happen if leaders don't care for themselves physically and mentally while riding through the crisis

### **Forged in crisis**

Many claim leaders are forged in a crisis. That is, crisis tells us who we really are as both people and leaders. Tussling with the tensions, which inevitably fasten themselves to crisis may well be the process through which we are forged. Leading through the continuity of disruption is not about balance, it's not even a matter of evenness—it's about having the right values to work iteratively through the mire of uncertainty which manifests as tensions—it is here we are forged for the future.

Our experience tells us that the leaders who best do this can be labelled as pragmatic visionaries. Those who maintain both a short and future-pointed purpose, become the stability platform upon which others' work and lives rest, care, stay relationally connected, are humble about what they can do, maintain their energy, have and provide hope, and are mentally tough.

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**About the authors:** Allan Walker is the Joseph Lau Professor of International Educational Leadership at the Education University of Hong Kong. Darren Bryant is Head of the Department of Educational Administration and Policy at the Education University of Hong Kong.

# ACCELERATING ACTION FOR SYSTEM-CHANGE IN EDUCATION

BY LESLEE UDWIN



**T**he apparent pause in the earth's spinning brought about by the global Coronavirus pandemic, is a time for profound reflection and reappraisal of the most fundamental things we used to take for granted. It is a time to recalibrate our values and the entrenched socio-cultural norms and misguided priorities according to which we have been slavishly and unthinkingly operating. It is a time to reflect on what happens when our focus on accumulating wealth eclipses our humanity and threatens our very survival. This is the time to forswear the cynicism and indifference we have become so inured to, and to commit ourselves to new values and a new humanism and, above all, to active steps that will achieve this. We need urgently to reform the education system which must inevitably be the prime motor of this new humanism, and of sustainable development and human progress

generally. What must distinguish the legacy of this time in our history will not only be the reimagining of education, but an actualized system change that immediately and urgently starts to deploy concrete programmatic tools for tangible outcomes.

There is a missing dimension to education. In addition to numeracy, literacy and testing—the hallmarks of our outmoded and broken education system—we need to give our children the foundation in “life skills” or “social and emotional learning” (SEL). Education has an obligation to nurture children to live fulfilled, healthy, happy, dignified and respectful lives as responsible and equal global citizens. It is my absolute conviction, that this ‘missing subject’ should in fact be the core purpose of education (and in particular of early childhood education), teaching our children the values of tolerance and non-violence, to love and to value one another on the basis of absolute equality and inclusion and to respect and safeguard our common home, the earth.

The question of when to start mediating SEL is of paramount importance. Most SEL programmes start at 6, 8 or even later. Just as no architect would start building from the ground floor up, without building solid foundation first, SEL must start in the earliest possible years (and certainly before the age of 6) if we are to build critical foundations for our children which will result in positive outcomes later in life. Certain trajectories of activity in the developing brain, e.g. habitual ways of responding and emotional control, which are crucial ingredients in anti-social attitudes and behaviors, flatline at the age of 6 (Council for Early Child Development ref Nash 1997, Early Years Study 1999; Shonkoff 2000). If we get in before that diminishing point, the returns are enormous and well documented in terms of increase in academic performance and pro-social behavior, and reduction in intergenerational inequality, gender-based violence, teen pregnancies, perpetrating of crime, depression, suicide and even physical health risk factors (e.g. cardiovascular disease).

Education ministries and policymakers around the world are becoming increasingly clear about what psycho-social and emotional skills and competencies should appear on any half-way decent SEL list. Still entrenched in the notion that education should merely be a path to the labour market, they tend to choose from amongst: self-regulation, collaboration, resilience, creativity, communication, self-care, and problem-solving. They more regularly tend to miss out gender equality, critical thinking, emotional literacy, peaceful conflict resolution, celebration of diversity, self-esteem, inclusion, empathy, environmental

awareness and such other skills underlying human dignity, sustainable development and wellbeing. Even when they recognize what is needed, what they seem to be struggling with, are the practical aspects of how to mediate this 'new subject', and they are often still unaware of what resources are required and available.

Teachers are at the coalface of the changes we need to make, and their role could hardly be more important but having only recently realized the critical importance of early childhood education, we have hitherto considered its practitioners to be little more than babysitters. Thus, there is a serious mismatch between our under-valued, under-trained and underpaid early years workforce and our expectation that they will be able to deliver holistic quality education in response to a list of lofty outcomes and objectives which we have only recently delineated. It will take decades for us to fully and seriously train the early years workforce. Until then, I believe, we have to teach SEL prescriptively. It is every child's fundamental right to get a minimum level of SEL, and they should not have to depend on variances in teacher training, skills and talents brought about largely due to our negligence.

This is why the [Think Equal Programme](#) which has been curated and created with input from global thought leaders in the field, consists of lesson plans with step by step instruction for the teachers to follow. Far from needing to be experts in SEL, they need only know how to read. Think Equal provides tested and practical resources which fire teachers' imaginations, stimulate them, and empower them to mediate SEL over 30 weeks to 3-6-year-old children. It provides (free or at direct cost) 3 age-appropriate levels, each level with 22 narrative picture books, 90 lesson plans and accompanying resources. Think Equal educators are supported and guided throughout their first year of teaching the programme. Their training is a mere 2 days, in which they are initiated in the brain science, purpose and potential impact of the programme and in how to use the resources. They in fact train 3 times a week, every time they teach, by following the prescriptive lesson plan instructions. This approach enables a system-wide change that is practical, immediate, replicable, scalable and sustainable.

In conclusion, there is a clear moral, ethical and rights-based imperative for us to finally commit to concrete ameliorative action, not only theoretical frameworks and intentional objectives. We have a duty of care to children in the early, vulnerable years and they have the fundamental right to a foundation for positive outcomes in life on an even playing field. Children have

the right to not grow up into rapists or bullies, because they were handed down prejudices and were not equipped with the competencies and skills they require to fulfil their potential and succeed in life. Think Equal and other life skills programming provide the opportunity to ensure children grow up with these rights recognized and actualized. Social and Emotional Learning must be brought front and center as a mandated third dimension to our Early Years education. Only then will we stand a chance of disrupting the cycle of discrimination and violence which is handed down generationally, for lack of intervention. As Gandhi said: 'If we are to reach real peace in the world...we shall have to begin with the children'.

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**About the author:** Leslee Udwin is the Founder of Think Equal.

# THE FUNDAMENTAL SHIFT NEEDED TO TRANSFORM EDUCATION

BY AARON EDEN



**T**he cries are resounding: “Education must emerge from this global crisis transformed.” For most of us making those calls, what we mean by transformed is, ultimately: more human (and within that notion, we include more equitable). We are echoing the cries of John Dewey and countless other educators for over a century that our global system of forced, mechanistic, assembly-line education is reducing human potential. The current crisis has reinforced what was already so abundantly clear: that robotic, search-engine-like humans are not the ones who will have jobs and choice in their lives moving forward; that the complexities of our world require deeper connection to our most human traits—such as creativity, empathy, agency, and curiosity—not the algorithmic thinking, regurgitation, and blind deference to authority that our system so effectively engenders with its current methods and targets.

But we've been trying for decades. Why is our dominant paradigm of coercion-based, non-consensual education going to change this time? Yes, many parents have seen first-hand the meaninglessness of much of what is being asked of their children while being forced by circumstance to reluctantly educate from home. They've seen too the effectiveness of their own education belied by the fact that they do not feel equipped by it to educate their own children. Will that be enough to force a dramatic and lasting paradigm shift in how we educate our young humans?

I predict it will not, unless we do two things.

The first is that we must stop trying to gradually, incrementally shift our entire schools or school districts away from authoritarian, assembly-line education in lock step, and instead focus on creating what my team calls "anomalous spaces" that are accessible to all who want to enter them but that do not require that everyone make the shift to them at the same time if they are not ready to choose to.

The transformation we are really talking about in education, if we truly break it down, is a shift from Other-Directed education to Self-Directed education. No, this does not mean adults disappear and children run rampant destroying everything and playing video games all day. It means shifting away from an assumption that coercion and non-consensuality are okay in education—from a belief that the role of adults is to decide what is important and force kids to do it—to one that affords basic human rights to children and approaches education from a position of equity and co-creation instead of command-and-control. When we open up spaces that are entirely built on this fundamentally different value system—this ethic of engagement—and engage in them with people who want to be there, we can build beautiful learning communities that enrich the whole child (and adult!) and enhance rather than snuff out our most valuable human characteristics. These spaces can be standalone schools, an academy in a district, a school-within-a-school, or at the smaller end a three-week intensive, immersive experience into this way of relating with learning and with the people you share space with. I have built all of these types of environments, and also worked in and with many schools that try the incremental, universal approach, and the difference is as stark as night and day in the quality of the results.

The second thing we must do is to mandate at a policy level that these spaces be available, as a human rights issue, to every family that prefers it to the conventional model. The reason we need

a mandate is that, for example, over the last six decades or so there have been heroic battles in school districts all across the United States where alternative schools or immersive programs have been started as the result of intensive efforts by parents and teachers to create these spaces. Most survive initially on the sheer passion of their founding families, teachers, and district sponsors; however, most either fade to being alternative in name only, or disappear entirely, as the constant battle of swimming against the tide of the dominant paradigm and its establishment momentum batter them down.

In short, if we are going to see the transformation called for after this crisis, or at any time, we are going to have to realize that the change we are talking about is fundamental. For it to have any chance of happening, we have to acknowledge that the change we want is not a new set of WHATs—like design thinking, or technology, or mindfulness, or maker spaces—but a critical HOW. That critical HOW is a shift from power-over to power-with, from domination and command-and-control to equity and co-creation. And we must recognize that for it to truly flourish into its possibility, that HOW must have its own space, opted-into by those that choose it, and guaranteed as a choice to recognize the right of every family to have access to Self-Directed rather than only Other-Directed education.

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**About the author:** Aaron Eden serves on the board of the Institute for Applied Tinkering, and works with the managing team of the Alliance for Self-Directed Education.



# LOVE THE QUESTIONS

BY ANDREW FRISHMAN



**B**e patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves..., Live the questions now. -Rainer Maria Rilke

Revisiting Rilke's advice to love and live questions prompted my own reflection on our current task of developing answers to the many questions requiring an urgent response at the expense of identifying the important questions we may not be asking. Could it be that this urgency is causing us to do our transformation under the lamppost rather than seek the challenges in lesser traveled but much more important pathways?

Has this need to redesign schools and schooling in this hopefully temporary pandemic provided an opportunity to not only seek new answers to perennial questions but to identify new questions as well?

Might this transformation we are crafting be less about revolution and more about devolution, a slow unwinding of the current paradigm?

Our mission at Big Picture Learning (BPL) is to “activate potential” at all levels of the education system, but most of all the potential of our students. BPL pursues this mission through three broad strategies that have become our signature: 1) deep personalization—one learner at a time; 2) relationships—learning in, with, and through a community of learners; and 3) real-world learning—learning in authentic contexts and settings. Many of BPL’s school design components—advisories, learning plans and portfolios, and performance assessments, for example—are now not only employed widely in BPL’s network of 60+ schools in the U.S. and more than 100 internationally that provides a vibrant set of “proof points” for our work. Many non-BPL schools have embraced one or more of these components in their own school designs.

At Big Picture Learning, we strive to create new answers to the perennial questions about learning and learners and schools and schooling. The current pandemic has forced us to dig deeper to ensure our design remains relevant in the new normal whose features are still emerging. Even as we do that work, however, we are also devoting some energy to identifying the important questions that are yet to take center stage.

Let me share a few questions that are challenging us.

Why are most schools and curriculums designed in a way that presupposes deep and sustained student motivation and engagement, when the reality is that most students report high percentages of disengagement?

We look where few educators look, or where few education organizations allow educators to look—at the power of students’ interests and dispositions as the sources of deep motivation and engagement, the secret sauce of deep and sustained learning.

- hould we resist the natural quest to “return to normal”? Is that quest possible or even desirable?
- Should we lessen our efforts to predict and anticipate the new normal, or should we seize the opportunity to design that new normal?
- What school design components should be part of the new normal, perhaps even help to shape the new normal?

Several years ago, two of my BPL colleagues identified a set of 10 “Expectations” that students have of their schools. They

sought to step outside of the Big Picture Learning school design to create a set of requirements to assess the design of any school. We have used these Expectations to assess our own BPL design as well as those. We believe Big Picture Learning delivers well on these Expectations.

Over the years, we have found three of the Expectations to be particularly central—interests, relationships, and practice, confirming in practice the research that Benjamin Bloom documented in *Developing Talent in Young People* (1985). How to wrap a curriculum around each and every student’s interests and strengths? How to help each student develop numerous and varied relationships with adults and peers doing learning and work they want to do? How to help students engage in deep and sustained practice in their interests, facilitated by the relationships they form? We have found that schools that wish to address these three Expectations particularly and all 10, will need to create opportunities for students to “leave to learn,” to do their learning and work in real-world settings and contexts—the community and workplaces.

Our question is how well will our designs for the new normal meet these Expectations?

As we are all practicing a healthy distancing in our COVID-19 world, we are employing technology to provide learning at a distance. How can we listen carefully to what the technology can do? For example, might there be new blends of technology-enabled one-on-one tutoring (another of Bloom’s recommendations) and online learning individually and in a variety of small groups?

Sociologist Elise Boulding once said: “If one is mentally out of breath all the time from dealing with the present, there is no energy left for imagining the future.” At Big Picture Learning, we are devoting a good part of our energy to seeking the questions that will open us to imagining the future and keeping our work vital and compelling.

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**About the author:** Andrew Fisherman is the Co-Executive Director of Big Picture Learning (BPL).



# SYNTHESIS

## USING THE CRISIS TO REIMAGINE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS AND PRACTICES

BY DOMINIC REGESTER AND OMAR ZAKI



**T**he Nobel Prize winning economist Milton Friedman once wrote: “Only a crisis—actual or perceived—produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes the politically inevitable.”

We are unquestionably in the midst of multiple global crises at the moment. The global COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, has changed education in the short term at least, and is acting as fuel for the

imagination for longer term thinking about ways in which education systems and practices could be different. Amid all the fear and unknowns, however, new channels of innovation and creativity are also accelerating at unprecedented levels due to the situation. Around the world, school systems have been forced to completely rethink traditional learning models in a way that was previously unimaginable and rapidly build, test, and pilot new structures to accommodate a completely different and uncertain reality. When the dust settles, COVID-19 may present itself as a microcosm of what's to come and what future school systems and future learners are up against.

In the essays in this section, five of the contributors to the 'Education Reimagined' Day of the April 2020 WISE-Salzburg Global Seminar virtual convening, share their thoughts on how education systems can and need to change. As we get closer to the start of the new school year in September in many parts of the world we are seeing a dramatic increase in the level of discussion about education in mainstream media. Opinion pieces abound about the purpose of schooling, about where learning should happen, how that learning is delivered, who contributes to it, and fundamentally what societies value most about their education systems.

Before the pandemic we knew lots of things in education weren't right and that school failed too many learners around the world. The changes that the pandemic has already wrought in education have created a new political impetus for education reform. A window of opportunity exists at the moment to improve education globally.

## **Convergent Crises**

The pandemic is not the only crisis the world is facing at the moment. In his piece Louka Parry makes the link with the climate crisis and wildfires in Australia. David Ng also talks about environmental considerations having a significant impact on future outcomes as Singapore "needs to balance its urbanization need for resources with sustainable practices."

Thomas Hatch makes the compelling point that "the pandemic has highlighted the critical challenges that many children face, but those challenges existed long before." In many parts of the world responses to COVID-19 are creating new partnerships across health, education, and employers—but these need to be sustained. Joysy John also talks about inequality in her essay, pointing out that (as of May 2020 in the UK) "Children from better-off families are spending 30% more time on home learning than those from poorer families." Urvashi Sahni, writing about India "where only 36% of the population has access to the internet and only 12.5% of students

have access to smartphones” warns us of the risk of the digital divide accentuating inequalities already present in the system. This is a universal risk.

The five authors are writing from Australia, India, Singapore, the UK, and the USA, from inside and outside of government, from academic and activist perspectives, and from positions of institutional leadership. Despite this diversity of perspectives there are certain consistent themes or topics that emerge across their essays. If education is to be successfully reimagined then smart money could be placed on curriculum reduction, increased attention to social and emotional learning and greater community involvement in education being prominent parts of the post-pandemic education landscape.

## **Social and Emotional Learning**

SEL skills and behaviors are key human capabilities that allow individuals to manage their emotions, work with others, and achieve their goals. They are the skills and behaviors that underpin issues like well-being, compassion, equity, justice, self-regulation, tolerance, and creativity ([to name but a few](#)). SEL came up repeatedly during the April conference and features prominently in all of the essays.

Urvashi Sahni wrote about the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership. She makes a powerful observation that countries with “highly democratic leaders” (e.g. New Zealand, Germany, and Iceland) have generally coped better during the pandemic. All of these countries, she points out, have leaders that have been highly consultative, empathetic, and humble—interestingly, they are also all women, “highlighting a need for more female leaders and female perspectives in leadership.”

Sahni and several of the other authors talk about the importance of SEL in the curriculum. As Parry puts it “we must centralize the well-being of students and teachers in both policy and practice, seixog on the power of impact, evidence—informed social and emotional learning.” Thomas Hatch makes the compelling point that curricula around the world are already overcrowded—every subject could be cut in half to ensure all learners can achieve critical academic goals and to create time and space for the acquisition and development of social and emotional skills.

Joysy John writes about the extrinsic motivational factors that can help students to persist in their learning—both during the pandemic and throughout life. She focuses on student choice, agency, and autonomy.

SEL is not a new topic but it is central to an awful lot of thinking about what we actually need to value most in education as we move through and beyond the pandemic.

## **Assessment**

All of the authors talk about the need to rethink assessment, how we need to “measure what we value rather than value what we measure” (Parry). What we assess and measure gets to the very heart of the purpose of education, the “goal of education is not just to know, but to live” (Sahni).

In this context David Ng makes a strong case for a deeper understanding of school contexts and non-academic outcomes—including economic, social, and environmental aspects. Urvashi Sahni includes some fantastic examples of ways in which students at Study Hall Education Foundation have been supporting each other and collaborating.

## **Technology and Where Learning Happens**

School closures have forced learning to take place in many different contexts. Several of the authors link this to increasing community involvement in education and the increasing realization that learning can happen in a much wider variety of settings than just school. The pandemic is unquestionably creating remarkable opportunities for developing our understanding of effective deployment of technology in education, or as John puts it the pandemic has created “the world’s largest online learning experiment.”

Even before the pandemic many countries were entering or were already in a period of profound change. Writing from Singapore, David Ng talks about the fundamental shifts in how people live, work, and learn. Technology was already having a profound effect on the local economy “where organizations compete on intangible assets such as intellectual property, data, and user networks.”

David Ng’s essay focuses on different approaches for measuring future-ready outcomes. As we move into a more uncertain future then these kinds of models that help us think about the kind of education we will need to meet our future economic, social, and environmental concerns will become more and more valuable. John also writes persuasively about the importance of investment in teachers’ skills—long a characteristic of some of the strongest school systems, but something which is going to be essential as teachers adapt to new ways of supporting learning.

## **“Nothing Will Change, Unless We Change It.”**

As Thomas Hatch puts it “nothing will change, unless we change it.” The pandemic has created an opportunity to rethink or reimagine what happens in schools. It is our responsibility to take that opportunity in order to create schools that are more equitable and that address the full range of children’s developmental needs. The essays in this section offer some fascinating insights as to how this potential can be realized.

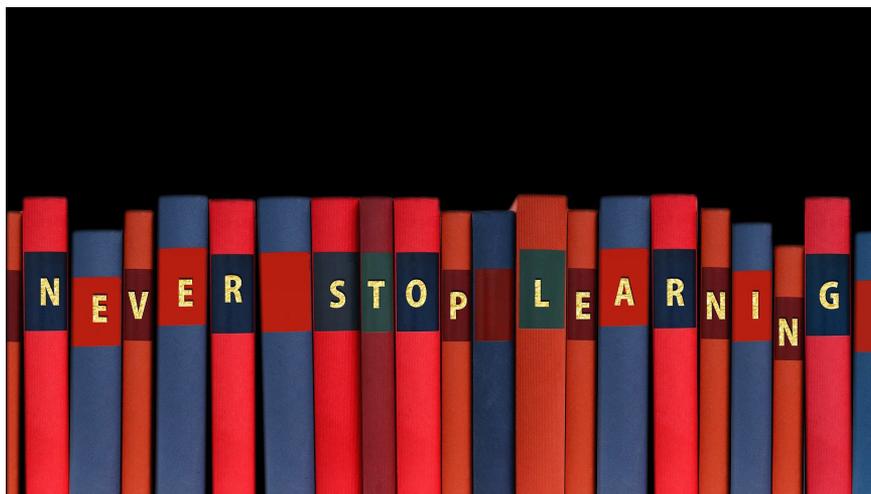
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# THE NEW SUCCESS FOR OUR LEARNING FUTURE

BY LOUKA PARRY



**C**risis both disrupt and reveal. Every single human being across our globalized world has been impacted by COVID-19, and this moment has revealed deep structural inequities and outdated principles and priorities across societies. This is particularly true for our understanding of schooling, and how it reflects our emerging learning economies.

If this moment offers us anything, it is a collective opportunity to reframe, reimagine and remake the learning experience for all. Our adaptive capacity for life-long and life-wide learning is already our biggest asset, and we must attend to the development of the right mindsets and skill sets to work well and live fully.

The question really is, how might we seize this moment to create a new definition of success for learners, for schools, and for society? How might we [re]design schools and universities, sectors and social systems so that we equip learners with the skills they need for school, work and life into this uncertain and unpredictable future?

## **The Current Reality**

The future just kicked in the door. In my home country of Australia, we were just coming off the worst wildfire season in our history, one that saw forests and bushland as big as some countries literally go up in smoke. Beyond the first order health impacts of Covid-19 are the second and third order impacts of economic dislocation, exploding unemployment, and increased anxiety. Add to this the social movements taking a stand against structural racism and inequality and we have one of the most disruptive years in living memory. And, it's only June.

One would be forgiven for thinking the world is ending.

But it's not all dire news. Empty streets, closed stores and overwhelming compliance with physical distancing comes from a deep understanding of how connected we really are. Less pollution and better air quality have saved thousands of lives, many environmental ecosystems have improved and many societies are asking the right questions: what does it mean to be a citizen? How do we create a safer, fairer and healthier society? What are schools really for?

Some of the learning stories coming out of this time are deeply inspiring, with tens of millions of teachers pivoting overnight to keep learning going, radically upskilling and changing to virtual models of delivery. Videos of teachers driving through suburbs to wave to their students from cars, to innovative new ways using virtual environments like Minecraft, provide inspiration in this moment of collective challenge.

## **The New Success**

As the emergency teaching turns into transitions of either back to physical school, or longer-term virtual options, it is also an opportunity to ask ourselves what we are fighting for.

What is success to us as a school, system or society? We must centralize the wellbeing of students and teachers in both policy and practice, seizing on the power of impact, evidence-informed social emotional learning.

Now is the moment to redefine success in better terms. Schools are not just about economic preparedness; the ultimate goal for schooling is to empower young people with the knowledge, skills and dispositions that enable them to thrive—to create wellbeing by design.

With many systems foregoing their standardized assessment, now is the time to shift assessment focus towards the developmental progressions of key human capabilities, ones that are now in sharp relief. Skills like self-regulation, arguably the most important skill as the compliance of a classroom setting, is replaced by virtual options.

My contention is that we must think holistically about the role of knowing, doing and being in our work as teachers, leaders and policy makers.

## **How We Get There**

All powerful change starts with a powerful question. For us right now, we should ask:

- What is our new success? (Belief)
- How do we create an experience that enables that? (Behaviors)
- How do we know if we are on the right track? (Boundaries)

By reimagining our beliefs on success in school, we can liberate ourselves from what schools are to what they could be. If we frame success as the holistic development of an individual, we can start to shift our behaviors and tend to the social and emotional capabilities alongside the cognitive—to create inspiring, meaningful and connected experiences of schooling. Then we need to set boundaries for our impact. Can we begin to measure what we value rather than value what we measure? Can we expand our understanding of assessment to beyond ‘the test’ or ‘the grade’? When we start with [re]imagination, something that we all had in spades as young children, we can liberate ourselves and create enabling learning ecosystems.

Thankfully, there are already many students and teachers who are co-designing impactful learning experiences. We need to properly amplify these practices and prototypes so they become part of the emerging mainstream. Across the board, the empowerment of young people and teachers by supporting co-agency and wellbeing through a sense of belonging, connection and autonomy is just simply an investment we have to make. To refuse to liberate young people and educators is to miss the untapped potential of passion-led learning.

The question is, who do we want to become as leaders, educators, schools and systems? By asking the right questions and

centralizing social and emotional learning once and for all we can move closer to a schooling experience through which all learners thrive.

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**About the author:** Louka Parry is the CEO and Founder of The Learning Future, and an Executive Committee member of Karanga.

# EDUCATION IN INDIA DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS: AN OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN AND REINVENT

BY URVASHI SAHNI



**O**n March 25, 2020, the Government of India ordered a lockdown of the world's largest democracy. 1.3 billion people were asked to stay at home with no sense of how long it would last. Schools, colleges, and universities had closed a week earlier, affecting 320 million Indian students, and were instructed to begin teaching online; being an unprecedented situation, no one quite knew what to do. Suddenly confined and already panicked by the spread of an unknown disease, parents, students, teachers, and leaders of educational institutions struggled to cope. Teachers were unprepared for online teaching. In a country where only [36% of the population](#) has access to the internet and mere [12.5% students](#) have access to smartphones, the digital divide posed a great barrier to online learning.

[Study Hall Educational Foundation](#) (SHEF) runs a network of schools and education initiatives in and around Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, directly impacting 7,594 students, and 100,000 indirectly. Most are on the wrong side of the digital divide; the majority are girls. During this time, SHEF has successfully contacted only 58% of its students from poorer communities; of these, 56% have access to a smartphone and internet, while 44% have access to basic phones.

## **The Critical Role of Leaders**

A crisis tests the leadership of any institution, whether a relatively small organization like ours (400 people) or a country. Given the novelty of a situation with no certain path forward, the skill, resilience, agility, and level of concern of the organization and its leadership are tested.

SHEF follows a democratic model of consultative leadership. All decisions are taken collectively, and the leadership communicates and engages with all stakeholders (students, parents, and teachers). Furthermore, SHEF is self-reflexive, seeking feedback and acting responsively. Leaders perceive themselves as mentors and coaches, and have the humility to recognize that they don't know everything; they are continuously learning.

Because this model is embedded in its culture, SHEF's leadership responded holistically and thoughtfully. They have been consultative, decisive, innovative, empathetic mentors for their teams. Admitting that the circumstances were new for them, too, they saw the crisis as an opportunity to learn. First, they calmed fears by providing information and assuring others they were all in this together. They then coached their teams, guiding and encouraging them, and finding solutions collectively. Most importantly, they remained connected with their teams, allowing for swift response.

## **A Holistic Relational Response**

SHEF believes [the goal of education](#) is not just to know, but to live. Education should enable students to answer the question, "Who am I and how am I related to the universe and others in it?" For 34 years, we have developed curricula, pedagogies, and an organizational culture of care to this end. Taking a whole child approach, teachers welcome children's lives into the classroom—their needs, challenges, opportunities, fears, and hopes. They nurture students' social and emotional well-being, along with their cognitive development.

This crisis has been no exception.

In order to reach all students, teachers developed an army of digital volunteers—students, parents, and alumni with phones—to take messages to those nearby who don't have phones. Primary communications focused on fear management and connecting families in need to government relief measures; many teachers provided aid personally. Helplines were set up for counseling and reporting cases of domestic or sexual violence. Alumni and students were taught how to make reusable cotton sanitary napkins.

After basic needs were met, teachers turned to the curriculum. As many students lacked internet access, they got creative. For students with smartphones, they made short videos; for those without, they used messages and calls. They sent pictures of the textbook for students to safely share with others nearby. Conscious of the digital divide's embedded gender divide, SHEF established a smartphone library of donated used phones that girls could borrow to access learning materials. Teachers report that frequent contact with parents strengthened their bond with the communities enormously, and that fathers are more engaged with their daughters' education as a result.

A testimony to the culture of care constructed over three decades, it is our awareness of class, gender and caste inequalities, our history of inclusive response, and our close community connections that enabled us to mitigate the digital divide and care enough to reach ALL our students.

## Lessons Learned

**Leadership is critical.** Globally, it has become evident that countries with highly democratic leaders (e.g., New Zealand, Germany, Iceland)—consultative, empathetic, humble, and engaged with their constituencies—who best managed the crisis. Developing leadership that exemplifies these qualities is crucial. It is also noteworthy that these leaders were primarily women, highlighting a need for more female leaders and female perspective in leadership.

**Curricula and pedagogies need urgent reform.** For decades, organizations like SHEF have advocated for a deeper, broader, and wider approach to education. Our curricula must shift from its disproportionate emphasis on cognitive development and information transfer to focus on developing resilience, critical thinking, creative problem-solving, entrepreneurial imagination, and a [critical socio-political consciousness](#). Additionally, [lessons of](#)

[equality](#) should have a pride of place in the official curriculum. The crisis has highlighted India's inequalities like never before, demanding our attention.

**Technology is here to stay!** It affords us a great opportunity to universalize and improve the quality of education. We need fiber optic highways in the poorest communities. Women particularly need access to digital devices and connectivity. Teachers must be prepared for online teaching. Governments should prioritize and address the digital divide.

**A community-based approach to education.** While technology is important, it takes more to educate a child. School can no longer be the only place where teaching and learning happen, and communities play an important role as education moves out of classrooms. With technology, people can participate as facilitators, mediators of digital videos, and creators of teaching/learning resources.

**Organizational culture is key.** Developing a caring, democratic, consultative organizational culture is very important; however, it is not built overnight. It takes time to cultivate. Such a culture must permeate the entire organization and become its DNA.

### **“A Brave New World”**

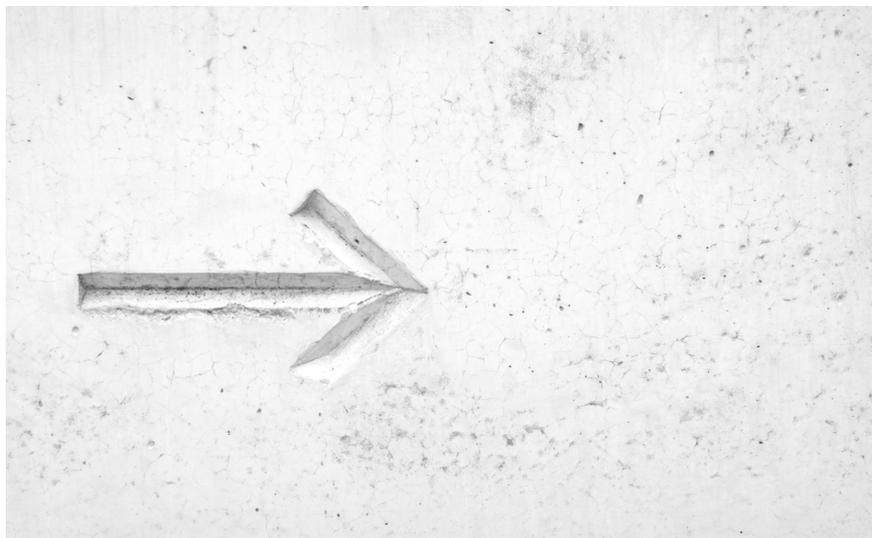
The crisis is far from over, the coronavirus continues to rage and spread, leaving behind huge challenges, and an economic and humanitarian fallout that will impact many of us for several years. It has also taught us a great deal, reinforced old learnings and necessitated new innovations. We can only survive this crisis and emerge stronger if we look at this as an opportunity to learn, self-reflect, be resilient of course, but also reimagine and reinvent our world bravely.

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# FUTURE-READY LEARNERS' OUTCOMES AND ASSESSMENT

BY DAVID NG



**A**s schools strive to be relevant and globally connected, school reform takes on both local and international contexts. International contexts have become widely associated with comparative results from international tests, such as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which purport to measure certain aspects of educational quality. New ways of looking at school reform involve a deeper understanding of contexts and non-academic outcomes, including economic, social, and environmental outcomes.

## **Contexts that determine future outcomes**

Fundamental shifts in the economy, the social sphere, and the environment at the global, regional, and national levels are re-defining how we work, live, and learn in Singapore. For example,

rapid technological advancements globally are reshaping business models where organizations compete on intangible assets such as intellectual property, data and user networks. Another shift is Singapore’s ageing population and low birth rate. This demographic change will lead to a shrink in the growth of the local workforce and place strain on the social fabric of Singapore. Also, Singapore faces the challenge of maintaining peace and harmony in its religiously diverse society. On the environmental front, Singapore needs to balance its urbanization need for resources with sustainable practices to reduce carbon footprint. These contexts—economic, social and environmental—have great implications for the future outcomes that we want our education system to develop in learners.

### Future-ready outcomes to meet the contexts

The following table summarizes the trajectories of Singapore’s economic, social and environmental contexts and the skills, knowledge and values required of learners for these trajectories.

Context	Trajectory	Skills, Knowledge, Values
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High value manufacturing</li> <li>• New and novel services (High-tech services requiring IoT, blockchain etc.)</li> <li>• Commercialization of innovative solutions</li> <li>• Competitive advantage through purposeful and radical adoption of technology and digitalization in services and manufacturing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills mastery</li> <li>• Lifelong, life-wide and life-deep learning</li> <li>• Innovation</li> <li>• Value creation</li> <li>• Technology adoption</li> <li>• Digitalization</li> <li>• Creative thinking</li> </ul>
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased religiosity: the threat of religious extremism</li> <li>• Increased immigration: the need for integration and acceptance of newcomers</li> <li>• Racial issues: the need for racial harmony</li> <li>• Aging population: the need for continuous education</li> <li>• Misinformation and influence of social media platforms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tolerance</li> <li>• Mutual understanding</li> <li>• Mutual respect</li> <li>• Logical reasoning (critical thinking) skills</li> <li>• Rootedness</li> <li>• Information assessment literacy</li> </ul>
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased urbanization: increased consumption of energy and matter</li> <li>• Global environmental problems: the need for reducing carbon footprint</li> <li>• Renewable energy</li> <li>• Energy efficiency through green and innovative solutions</li> <li>• High-tech water solutions for meeting the increasing water needs</li> <li>• High-tech and green farms for increasing local food produce</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills mastery</li> <li>• Innovation</li> <li>• Value creation</li> <li>• Technology adoption</li> <li>• Digitalization</li> <li>• Creative thinking</li> <li>• Sustainable lifestyle</li> </ul>

## **Literature on measuring future-ready outcomes**

Measuring the future-readiness of learners is crucial in building a successful future-ready initiative. There are many options to measure future-readiness. The key here is that a single method of measurement is unlikely to provide a comprehensive snapshot of all the aspects of future-readiness of an individual, a school, or a system. Triangulation is important because different measurements study different aspects of the construct to give a fuller picture. A number of scholars have described ways by which 21st century skills, a construct related to future-readiness, might be assessed. Generally, the methods can be classified into the following—self-rated, direct-assessment (multiple-choice, closed-ended computer-based items), open-response, teacher judgment and reporting.

## **Potential of an analytic model to measure future-ready outcomes**

Modeling can be used for measurements of non-traditional educational outcomes. Machine learning is a method of data analysis (modeling) that automates analytical model building. It is a branch of artificial intelligence that is based on the idea that systems can learn from data, identify patterns and make decisions with minimal human intervention. Machine learning has made much recent progress due to the development of new learning algorithms, theory, and by the explosion of data and availability of low-cost computing. The explosion of data nowadays demands methods that are capable of handling them adequately and efficiently. Humans are prone to error when manually handling large amounts of data without automation; hence, machine learning has a significant edge over traditional methods of data handling in this respect. Machine learning, therefore, fits well with the dynamic systems theory where system boundaries in an educational organization interact asymmetrically and interconnectedly to impact learner quality outcome measures.

Successful school reform must include outcomes that fulfil all three purposes—economic, social, and environmental—with a keen awareness of the future perspectives of these purposes. Future-ready learners will need to learn deep competencies and cultivate habits of practices that will continue to be valuable long after graduation as the future landscapes of Singapore continue to evolve and change.

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**About the Author:** David Ng is an Associate Professor and Associate Dean of Academic Quality at the National Institute of Education (NIE) at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

# CREATING A BETTER FUTURE THROUGH EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

BY JOYSY JOHN



‘Civilization is a race between education and catastrophe.’

-H.G. Wells

**O**ver 1 billion children [are out of school](#) in over 140 countries around the world due to COVID-19. Schools, teachers and governments have responded in creative ways to ensure students continue their education during this difficult time. EdTech companies are offering their products for free to support online learning. Though students need to be motivated and have the infrastructure to access the learning content. School closures have disproportionately affected the most disadvantaged students, who often do not have the devices or home environment to effectively transition to online learning.

## **The risk of children falling behind**

Existing inequalities in children's physical and mental health, educational attainment and living conditions will worsen as a result of the crisis. A recent [Teach First survey](#) showed that only 2% of teachers working in the most disadvantaged schools believe their pupils have adequate access to online learning and are therefore at risk of falling behind. Children from better-off families are spending [30% more time on home learning](#) than those from poorer families.

## **Teachers to the fore**

Teachers have invested significant time and resourcing into moving their conventional lessons to online platforms, demonstrating creativity and adaptability in the process. Teachers are an untapped source of innovation in schools and should be recognized for their work. For example, Nesta's [Classroom Changemakers Award](#) identified 15 teachers in the UK who are building their students' creativity and problem-solving skills through their math and computing classes. This approach can be extended across the entire curriculum.

## **Motivating students in this new era**

What motivates students to persist in their learning? Student choice, agency and autonomy are crucial to prepare them for life-long learning.

What evidence is there that technology will improve educational outcomes? As Rose Luckin, Professor at University College London, [says](#), "there are many reasons to worry about the prospect of scaled remote learning". How best to measure what works and why is just one aspect of our current work at Nesta as we test and learn what has been effective during the pandemic, where the biggest online learning experiment is in progress.

## **Purpose of education**

Preparing students for the workforce is not enough. Education should shape better citizens to sustain themselves, others and the planet. It should help learners to develop the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes they need to adapt to a fast-changing world. Nesta is calling for a [broader, fairer and smarter education system](#) which makes better use of technology, people, data and evidence. The most important challenge here is to create equal access to any new system for the entire student population.

## Role of the wider community

Learning does not happen solely within the confines of the classroom. Parents and the community have a crucial role to play in supporting learners on their quest for knowledge. A great learning environment promotes curiosity, collaboration and reflection. For example, [School21](#) in the UK gives learners an opportunity to apply what they have learned to real-life problems in their community, present their ideas to decision makers and improve from feedback. It is not just about learning facts, theory and formulae but being able to apply that knowledge.

## Preparing for the future

The best education systems in the world recruit the best teachers and continuously invest in their skills. For example, in Singapore, Estonia, Australia and Finland teachers support and encourage creativity and critical thinking in their students. In these systems, teachers use technology to complement learning, work on developing a growth mindset in learners and provide opportunities for interdisciplinary, real-world problem-solving. Policymakers and civil societies need to find ways to empower teachers to drive change, and emphasize collaboration and creativity to ensure fairness in education. For example, in Finland education policy encourages collaboration not competition; it guarantees equal opportunities and good public education for all while facilitating network-based collaboration between schools and non-governmental associations and local communities.

What does success look like? In '[Education 2030](#)', OECD sets out the competencies necessary to transform our society and shape our future. As a society, we need to have a shared understanding of what values we want and how these values manifest in our words and actions. Policymakers need to enshrine these values for our teachers and learners, encouraging both to experiment, learn and grow.

In order to address inequality within the education system, curriculum, assessment and teaching methodologies need to complement each other. [Key skills and values](#) should be around collaboration, interdisciplinary learning, risk-taking, resilience and creativity.

## How do we get there?

How will schools rebuild post-COVID-19? What is the role of schools in an uncertain world? Vital issues involved in this con-

versation are around equality of learning opportunities, emotional resilience for learners and use of evidence-based technology solutions. The factors that will help us to achieve this are:

- A [culture of experimentation and innovation](#) in teaching methodologies.
- Strong leadership with bold aspiration to [measure important skills](#).
- Technology evidence and training [to support](#) learners, teachers and the system.

Change is possible. [Karanga](#), the global alliance for social and emotional skills, states that we can collectively achieve a better future. We need an education system fit for the 21st century; one that emphasises the skills, values and knowledge needed to adapt to a new world.

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**About the author:** Joysy John leads education innovation at Nesta.

# FOUR STEPS TOWARDS THE FUTURE

BY THOMAS HATCH



I began my work in education 35 years ago studying how young children develop their strengths and interests in free play in preschool and kindergarten. Ever since then, I've been working with schools, districts and education systems to understand why it's so hard to improve schools and create learning environments that support all aspects of children's development. From that work I've learned that the disruptions to schooling that so many have experienced this year will not necessarily lead to rethinking or reimagining what happens in schools. In short, nothing will change unless we change it. But there are several critical steps we can take right now to make the schools we have more efficient, more equitable and more

effective and lay the groundwork for transforming education as a whole as we move into the future.

### **Make the commitment to address issues of equity**

The pandemic has highlighted the critical challenges that many children face, but those challenges existed long before the latest pandemic. Millions of children have been living in crisis, enduring deprivation, and facing trauma every day. There are students who can't get to school, students who are chronically absent, students who fail to get the learning opportunities they need, and we have never made the changes required to enable them to catch up. Given that reality, responding to this crisis begins with recognizing that in addition to facing a global climate emergency, we face an equity emergency that we can work on directly and continuously. Addressing that emergency depends on building on and sustaining the partnerships across the health, education, and economic sectors that are already mobilizing to work on the current crisis.

### **Expand our priorities to support all aspects of children's development**

We can rethink the goals and content of schooling, not just the medium of instruction. It's not just a question of when and how to teach online, it's a question of what to teach and how to make sure that students have an opportunity to pursue key purposes and goals that we've never made room to address. We can't just shoehorn socio-emotional learning, critical thinking, and global citizenship into an already crammed school day; we have to make these kinds of goals a central part of the design of all educational opportunities.

### **Cut the curriculum in half**

To create the space and time to support children's development more broadly, we can cut the curriculum in half in every subject. Following a "less is more" philosophy, we can narrow our focus and make sure everyone achieves critical academic goals - whether that focus is on learning to read, learning about fractions, or learning how and why viruses spread. But we can also make room in the school day so that every student has the time to reflect on their experiences and the challenges they've faced; to develop coping strategies; to get outside and explore their environment; to connect and build positive relationships with their peers and teachers; and to get engaged in meaningful and constructive work in areas they care about.

## **Break down the barriers between learning “inside” and “outside” schools**

We can reinvent the school schedule and make space and time for powerful learning inside and outside schools. As we learn how to support the development of foundational skills more efficiently both “offline” and “online,” we can create a condensed school day that opens up possibilities for education in museums, community organizations, outdoor explorations, and businesses. In the process, we can shift the focus from getting children into schools to taking advantage of the learning opportunities all around.

None of this is easy, and none of it is impossible. This work begins, even in our isolation, as we reconnect, establish the relationships, and develop the shared commitment and collective responsibility to work together in the service of the common good.

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**About the author:** Thomas Hatch is a Professor at Teachers College, Columbia University and Co-Director of the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching (NCREST).





**PART THREE**  
**NEXT STEPS FOR**  
**THE FUTURE OF**  
**SCHOOLING**  
**AUGUST 2020**

SPECIAL  
UNITED NATIONS  
CONTRIBUTION

# FROM CRISIS TO OPPORTUNITY

## CHARTING A NEW COURSE TO FULFILL THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

BY STEFANIA GIANNINI



**A**s the international community embarked on the last decade of the Sustainable Development Goals, the world was confronted with the most severe global challenge since the creation of the United Nations. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed our world's fragility and interdependence, affecting every country, community and family. However, the degree to which the consequences of the crisis were and continue to be felt varies considerably, and call for a new era in global solidarity and cooperation.

COVID-19 hit the most vulnerable populations hardest, putting them at even greater risk of being left behind on the path towards a sustainable future for all.

The pandemic glaringly exposed the dramatic consequences of inequality: of digital inequalities that deprive millions from learning; of gender inequalities that expose girls to heightened violence; of social inequalities that leave the poorest behind, of geographical inequalities between rural and urban areas.

The 2020 edition of the Global Education Monitoring Report identifies an exacerbation of exclusion during the COVID-19 pandemic and estimates that about 40% of low and lower-middle income countries have not been able to support disadvantaged learners during school shutdowns. This comes as 258 million children and youth were already out of school prior to the pandemic.

The crisis revealed the striking magnitude of the global digital gap. With almost universal school closures, access to the internet has become a prerequisite for safeguarding the right to education. Today, however, half the world's population is still not connected and close to 500 million learners, or almost 47 % of all primary and secondary students targeted by national on-line learning platforms, do not have access to the internet at home.

While countries around the globe closed schools in rapid succession, they have been much slower in making the sensitive decision to reopen. Assessing the risk of infection, evaluating the consequences of school closures, monitoring the effectiveness of distance learning and elaborating catch up strategies are critical dimensions to be considered. The reopening of schools is indeed far from automatic, requiring careful preparation, while recognizing that the longer schools remain closed, the higher the risk of learning losses and exclusion.

As dramatic as this crisis remains, it has surfaced extraordinary potential to genuinely transform and rethink education.

Today, the education crisis has deepened but so has the latitude for change. The pandemic revealed the inestimable value of schools and teachers in society, including as bulwarks against inequality. COVID-19 did as such create a momentum to break with 'business as usual' to re-imagine the education of the future. We must recognize that we are at a turning point. Today, we have the opportunity to decide on the kind of education that will strengthen inclusion, resilience and peace. Some of the answers are currently in the making. The commitment and speed with which governments acted almost overnight to set up a diversity of distance learning alternatives, is a true revolution in the delivery of education on which we must build to strengthen national education systems.

In many ways, this crisis has brought a reality check on recurrent debates of the past years. On fears that teachers can be replaced by technology, it revealed the paramount influence of the human factor in education. On the belief that technology only advances private sector interests, the UNESCO-led COVID-19 Global Education Coalition, counting 140 partners, illustrates a joint commitment to the provision of free distance education. On the perception that education systems are resistant to change, learning continuity was ensured via radio, TV, internet platforms and many additional, often hybrid, learning modalities. This experience is not a parenthesis but will affect how education is conducted in the future. The momentum of solidarity must be upheld as we reach a new phase in the crisis and plan the so-called 'world after'.

The future of education and the future of society are inextricably linked.

If the global community does not rally behind education, there will be serious setbacks for students and societies at large. Children and youth face a deeply uncertain future. Economic recession is looming, unemployment is slated to increase and climate change remains an existential threat. Education, in this context, must be a pillar of recovery, included in stimulus packages and protected from domestic and aid budget cuts. Failure to act now to protect and promote education as an investment in humanity's sustainable future bears the risk of sacrificing an entire generation, calling for strengthened political leadership to prioritize education going forward.

Now is the time to take action and strengthen the resilience of national education systems to ensure we build back better.

First and foremost, we must acknowledge that all attempts to build back better must be rooted in the conviction that the global pandemic will not be defeated by health measures alone. Public health and public education are interconnected and two key pillars for a better society. This holds in particular for financing decisions, which must be grounded in the powerful evidence that education is a catalytic force for the promotion of all dimensions of human well-being.

Second, the crisis has revealed the centrality of connectivity, highlighting that education and digital divides are mutually reinforcing. In the context of the crisis, we have witnessed a spirit of innovation, transformation and impressive creativity to ensure learning never stops. Governments are already planning the future along the lines of hybrid learning solutions combining traditional face-to-face and online learning. This requires not only appropriate infrastructure but

access to digitalized curricula, digital skills training for teachers and students and measures to protect privacy, calling for adequate resources for education.

Third, a key lesson learned is that the center of any educational process is the human relationship between a student and teacher. At the peak of the pandemic and beyond, teachers adapted to a radically new educational reality, which called for the expansion of their skillset to ensure learning continuity, as well as the safety and well-being of students. To build back better, the paramount role of teachers must be recognized and built upon. The education systems best prepared to respond to crisis will be those capable of valuing their teachers, granting them more autonomy, and giving them the conditions to work collaboratively.

Finally, the crisis has heightened the urgency to reassess what makes a quality education, beyond the curricular basics. Just as this crisis has shown how interconnected we are, it has also unleashed a wave of misinformation, fake news and hate speech. More than ever, education needs to be reimagined to endow students with skills for critical thinking, for scientific literacy and the mindsets to act as global citizens.

Reimagining education starts with defending the right to education everywhere.

This is a matter of justice, of human rights, of a vision of public education as the greatest wealth of every society. Education can “Save our Future” and empower every individual to build a more resilient, inclusive and sustainable world. It is precisely this conviction that has brought key international players together to drive a global campaign to protect and prioritize education as a prerequisite for peace, equality, human wellbeing and green growth. Going forward, we must build on this momentum to steer the future on the right course and foster political leadership, as well as unprecedented commitment to public education, common goods and global solidarity in an attempt to leave no one behind as we reimagine the world post-COVID 19 and beyond.

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# SYNTHESIS

## RESPONSES OF UN ORGANIZATIONS TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS

BY AHMED BAGHDADY AND MARYAM AL-KHALAF



**T**he outbreak of COVID-19 took the world by surprise and disrupted almost all aspects of life for people around the world, including education. School closures and learning remotely, where possible, seemed like an immediate natural response to the crisis. However, it is much easier said than done. Not all education systems had the human resource capacity or infrastructure to make such a massive shift in a short time. Responses at the system and school levels varied around the world, as featured in previous articles in this series. Some countries were well prepared and equipped to deal with the major challenges brought about by this crisis, whereas oth-

ers struggled to ensure that learning continues, let alone with quality, while schools are closed.

Although the significant learning loss seems like the most immediate outcome of disruption in education, other outcomes might be as severe or even more severe with longer term implications. Repeated grades, school dropout, increased domestic abuse and early marriage for girls are examples of such outcomes. This would be the case for children in disadvantaged communities, those in conflict zones, refugees, and other vulnerable groups in different parts of the world. Health and mental well-being of students can also be affected by school closures, lack of activities, and loss of learning.

In this article we discuss efforts of various UN organizations to address the negative impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the most vulnerable groups, including refugees, and providing quality education in emergencies. This synthesis is based on presentations delivered by representatives of UNESCO, UNICEF, UNCHR and UNRWA at a WISE-Salzburg Global Seminar virtual convening in April 2020. The articles in this anthology describe how these UN organizations responded to the crisis to ensure access to quality education for all, especially the most vulnerable groups.

### **The long-term severe impact of COVID-19 beyond learning loss.**

In his article about UNICEF's response, Robert Jenkins, Chief of Education, described the COVID-19 crisis as an unprecedented global health emergency, which caught "most of the world's education systems unprepared". He indicated that this pandemic will certainly disrupt children's education, even if policymakers put strategies ahead for distance learning. Robert provided examples of how school closures can lead to negative educational outcomes, such as significant losses in learning, increase in grade repetition, and school dropout. It can also eventually lead to serious damage to students' mental and physical health.

UNICEF's response to the current crisis mainly focused on ensuring safe school operations, continuity of learning, and child health and well-being. UNICEF also conducted an online survey for 134 country offices to track the global education response to the pandemic, which turned out to have positive outcomes for remote learning. Nevertheless, some of the least developed countries were left behind as they did not have access to most of the digital tools and UNICEF is currently engaged in addressing this issue. Their educational response also looked at how schools reopen, which is the most challenging topic giving the past examples of global epidemics, which showed that students are more likely not to return to school.

## **Refugee children are the most affected worldwide.**

Among the children affected as a result of school closures are an estimated seven million refugees. Refugees were already facing many barriers to education even before the pandemic began. Half of them did not have an opportunity to join schools, and as they get older it became harder for them to get proper education. Rebecca Telford, Chief of Education Section at UNCHR, explains in her article their efforts to respond effectively to the crisis by focusing primarily on access to quality education and protecting the most vulnerable students. Rebecca proposed new approaches to deal with COVID-19, which will give us an opportunity to reimagine education systems. These approaches include looking at opportunities to respond to the crisis at a global level, responding to the needs of refugee families, realizing how the pandemic is increasing inequality, looking at simple and fast solutions, protecting the education workforce, focusing on how schools reopen, and finally protecting girls and ensuring equality. Rebecca emphasized how important it is to ensure equality for refugee children who can contribute to societies in the future.

## **Palestinian refugees are struggling but UNRWA is trying to support them and their teachers.**

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) has provided education program for registered Palestinian refugees for nearly seven decades both in times of peace and times of conflict. However, the agency had never faced a crisis of this scale such as the one caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis led to schools and Vocational Centers closing in all the Agency's Fields of operations (Jordan, the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria). As a result, the UNRWA had to rethink its delivery of education in emergencies (EIE); an approach put in place back in 2011 to enable children who have been impacted by wars or conflicts to continue to have access to education.

Caroline Pontefract, Director of Education, explained how UNRWA prioritized specific areas in which they can fully support students and teachers at the same time. One of the areas is psychological support where UNRWA has always emphasized face-to-face and social interaction as key dimensions. Another area is safety and security where they provide students with knowledge about how to stay healthy and safe including specific practices in the COVID-19 context. Monitoring and evaluation is another area where UNRWA continued to conduct surveys and studies regarding the experience of children, teachers, and parents during the crisis. A final area is Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in which

they support students with their self-study experience but at the same time, provide exposure to practical elements through website links. UNRWA's main goal now is to move forward and to learn important lessons from this pandemic.

### **The UN can and should play a major role in building the future of education post crisis.**

The Director of the Global Education Monitoring Report (GEMR), Manos Antoninis, summarized the education crisis into two main points: First, inequality has long existed but was somehow obscured in classrooms. The current crisis has brought it to light. Second, the crisis caused people to make tough decisions in critical areas such as education, medical and economic support. Manos argued that education solutions unfortunately left many young people behind. Here comes the role of the United Nations to protect education especially for the most affected children, even though their role was questioned during this crisis.

According to Manos, the four main missions of the UN can translate to education: 1) provide peace and security; 2) protect human rights; 3) deliver humanitarian aid; and 4) promote sustainable development. Undoubtedly, the UN system faces significant challenges whether in how it is structured or how it should operate. Manos provided four areas in which the UN can demonstrate leadership in education: First, it should prioritize those who are at risk of exclusion. Second, the UN needs to protect human rights and deliver global public good. Third, when the schools reopen, they need to pay attention to education policy issues that were neglected before. Finally, the UN system should protect education services, acting as one. Overall, the UN must remind the world that education is one of the greatest tools for re-building a more inclusive and more resilient world.

The impact of the crisis on education and other aspects of life is clearly severe. However, the various efforts outlined above provide a glimpse of hope for recovery in the future. It is important to highlight the need for all UN organizations, governments, donors, and communities to realize both the potential of education for rebuilding societies post crisis and the critical need for cooperation among all stakeholders.

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# COVID-19, EDUCATION AND THE UNITED NATIONS

## RESILIENCE, ADAPTABILITY, AND COOPERATION

BY MANOS ANTONINIS



**I**n the course of 100 days, uncertainty over the deadline of the COVID-19 pandemic led governments around the world to impose lockdowns and curtail economic activity, threatening billions of livelihoods. One key measure to limit the risk of contagion was school and university closures. At the peak of the closure period in April 2020, 91% of the global student population was affected in 194 countries.

COVID-19 thus precipitated an education crisis, which can be summarized in two points. First, the upheaval has been fueled by deep and multiple inequalities that long existed but were somewhat obscured in classrooms and were suddenly brought into sharp relief. Second, the crisis has confronted millions of people with stark choices and tough decisions, which help

some but can cause grave damage to others. Just as individuals had to decide whether to respect or evade quarantine restrictions, medical staff needed to choose among patients' competing needs and authorities had to decide how to allocate economic support, the management of education also posed moral dilemmas. The disruption of learning confronted policymakers with the 'do no harm' principle—the requirement that no plan or programme should be put in place if there is a risk of it actively harming anyone at all. Unfortunately, many of the education solutions tried pose a risk of leaving many children and young people further behind.

The consequences of the crisis for education are both immediate and gradual. Education systems responded with distance learning solutions, all of which offer less or imperfect substitutes for classroom instruction. Closures interrupted support mechanisms from which many disadvantaged learners benefit; forcing these learners to spend more time at home may not have been conducive to learning. Economic difficulties resulting from lockdowns are expected to have medium- to long-term impact. Governments will need to respond to the loss of revenue in the ensuing recession and to competing, urgent demands from various sectors. Households, especially those near or below the poverty line, will also need to make hard decisions about resource allocation, which may lead to withdrawing children from school.

### **What is the role for the United Nations in this context?**

The foundations of the United Nations' existence have been questioned in this crisis, often by those same detractors who have systematically put constraints to the work of the organization established more than two generations ago, instead of supporting their adaptation to the needs of the 21st century.

With the potential exception of international law, the other four key missions of the United Nations translate well in education. First, the link with peace and security may be the least apparent. But there is a continuing case for fighting the causes behind misinformation and hate speech, perhaps more now than ever before. Second, the crisis poses a unique opportunity to address human rights protection issues related to privacy, as technology firms enter mainstream education through online education platforms. Third, the UN System has huge experience in delivering humanitarian aid and needs to mobilize its mechanisms, while learning from past lessons. Finally, just as the crisis is bound to provide a setback delaying the achievement of the

SDGs, including in education, the UN System needs to seek out sustainable solutions to global development. Equity and inclusion are the bedrock of sustainability—and yet they have suffered in recent weeks.

Undoubtedly, the UN System faces challenges. First, the global context has grown increasingly unfavorable to multilateralism; one need look no further than the World Health Organization (WHO), which is now facing what UNESCO has faced twice in its history—the withdrawal of the United States. Second, the shift in the balance of power towards technology firms has been a particularly difficult one for the UN System to handle. For instance, the Education Coalition, rapidly established by UNESCO to coordinate the COVID-19 response, has included several technology firms as members but without clear engagement principles for them to commit. Third, this emergency has been generalized, testing the response capacity of the UN System and its ability to play an insurance function. Governments need recommendations but contexts are highly differentiated in a global crisis, affecting the relevance of potential guidance from school re-opening rules to the conduct of examinations. Education is not health. The lack of clinical practices and protocols to be followed constrains response options.

**There are four areas in which the United Nations can demonstrate leadership in education.**

Given this background, what is the scope for UN System action in education? There are four areas, some of which have not received sufficient attention. First and foremost, the UN needs to prioritize and champion those at risk of exclusion. Learning continuity responses worldwide may have overemphasized on-line distance education modalities. While countries rightly want to make an opportunity out of a crisis and prepare themselves for the future, large populations are not prepared for that. The UN needs to champion the ‘do no harm’ principle and those learners that are furthest behind, putting pressure on governments to put those learners first who may not even have access to a radio or television.

Second, the UN needs to deliver global public goods and protect human rights. Using private digital services for education should not mean accepting the terms and conditions that are being used for their private customers. The UN should lead the discussion for protecting privacy, the rights of the child, equity, and non-discrimination. Principles that will protect learners who use online learning platforms should respect their right

not to be identified and not to be the targets of advertisement. Their data, whether documents or conversations, should be protected.

Third, as schools reopen, the UN will need to refocus attention to education policy issues that matter but are commonly neglected. It needs to urge governments to put values at the heart of teaching and learning, many of which were cherished during the response to the pandemic but which may be quickly forgotten: solidarity, empathy, equity, trust, and appreciation of our common humanity. The UN System has processes in place to draw countries' attention—it needs to mobilize them, armed with the fresh lessons of the pandemic. As the Joint Statement on the COVID-19 Crisis issued by the International Commission on the Futures of Education emphasized, the global health pandemic 'will not be defeated by health measures alone'. The UN System needs to remind governments to appreciate the importance of human interaction and well-being, or of learning outside school. Countries will need to invest in teaching students how to use technology—to respect others, to protect their freedom of expression, and to process information.

Finally, the UN System should rally to protect education services, acting as one. A global recession means lower public revenue and expenditure. We don't know how much budgets are going to be diverted or how long austerity will be in place to recover the costs of the emergency measures. The financial crisis we are facing will be worse than the great financial crisis of 2007-08. Now more than ever the UN must remind the world that education is one of the greatest tools for re-building a more inclusive and more resilient world. The international education architecture has been fragmented, which means that multilateral organizations involved in education need to also make their transition. The joint action that has emerged by UN-ESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank in the context of the Global Partnership for Education support is a step in the right direction that should be built upon.

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# THE UNRWA EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES RESPONSE TO COVID-19

BY CAROLINE PONTEFRACT



**F**or nearly seven decades, the UNRWA education programme has provided education for registered Palestinian refugees in the Middle East, whether in times of peace or times of conflict. With over two million children educated over these years, the scope and quality of UNRWA education has become renowned.

Although used to operating in crisis, the Agency had never faced a crisis such as that caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. From March 2020 onwards the UNRWA schools and Vocational Training centers closed in all the Agency's fields of operation—Jordan, West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria—with 533,342 school students, 8,270 technical vocational trainees, and 1,840 teacher training undergraduates having to continue their learning at home as best as they could. UNRWA had to rethink its delivery of education in emergencies (EIE). The UNRWA EIE approach had,

from 2011 onwards, enabled children impacted by the nine-year conflict in Syria, the wars in Gaza, or by the ongoing occupation in the West Bank, to continue to have access to quality education. With the imperative of avoiding transmission through lockdown in the UNRWA host countries, any model of EIE had to be very different in that children could not be brought together for any reason, academic or psychosocial.

For the COVID-19 response, the overall EIE themes, and the holistic nature of the approach remained as pertinent as ever. Within the three notions—alternative learning modalities, including self-study; psychosocial support; and, safety and security, underpinned by robust monitoring and evaluation—were still relevant in this context. However, the specifics of the themes had to be rethought in the COVID-19 context. In addition, there was the need to consider the 8,270 students in UNRWA Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) to see how best they could continue their studies, along with the 1,840 in two UNRWA teacher training institutions.

With health and safety addressed to some extent by the government-imposed lockdown and school closures, the immediate need was continuation of children’s learning. The speed and efficiency with which the fields developed and rolled out self-study/remote learning material was impressive. This was an area where there was a level of familiarity both with the concept and the practice. Capacity had been built over the years and materials already existed both in terms of self-study—UNRWA TV, the Interactive Learning Programme, and some text-based learning materials—and handbooks and guides for teachers and parents on supporting children’s self-study.

Quality assurance of all material was undertaken at an agency level against five criteria: nature of approach, i.e. of the self-learning; teacher support; student assessment; neutrality—important for UNRWA as a UN Agency—and accessibility of the SLM. Written and verbal feedback that was given to the field teams and to the HQ team is now being used to create a guidebook for field teams on how to develop self-study materials. For accessibility to online material, studies were carried out in different fields and at the end of the lockdown period, at the Agency level through a parent phone survey. Results confirm the challenges that many children have with access and show the importance of a diverse approach to remote learning, one which ensures that all children have access to learning whilst work continues on strengthening access to, and effective use of, higher end technology.

The other dimension of the remote learning model, teacher support, was not straightforward, with no physical face-to-face teacher-student communication possible, and connectivity for virtual dialogue limited. However, many teachers were actively engaged throughout the lockdown using WhatsApp to communicate with the children, developing additional self-study material, and using quizzes to assess progress. A study is now being undertaken to find out more about the nature and scope of teacher support in order to help provide a clear steer and to determine capacity development needs.

## **Psychosocial Support**

Psychosocial support is an area which the UNRWA education programme, and the Agency as a whole, prioritizes with UNRWA wide policies, frameworks, and tools. School counsellors are in place, but at a very limited ratio of one counsellor to 10 schools, although project funds have helped increase this number. For children living through the COVID-19 lockdown, the psychosocial needs and how to address them was again new territory. UNRWA has always emphasized face-to-face support and social interaction with peers as key dimensions of psychosocial support.

Work began at HQ level on a resource guide for school counsellors: 'Supporting Students during the COVID-19 Crisis: A Guide to Learning, Health, Safety and Psychosocial Resources.' The Education Department at HQ sought to filter the vast amount of information available globally and the Guide was developed to collate and curate these resources, from trusted sources and selected for their quality and credibility, and provide the fields with a quick reference to these resources.

Materials were categorized into three main themes: keeping children safe; providing mental health and psychosocial support (PSS); and, supporting children to stay healthy.

The guide, along with establishing an agency-wide group of school counsellors, enabled discussions around the challenges, the actions they were taking, and thinking together about what more could be done. One example of supporting the most vulnerable children was for the counsellors to connect with them by phone, listen, and suggest games and activities that might help them. Social media was also used by counsellors to send supportive messages as well as games to all their students.

As children were working through the self-study materials, one important approach was to ensure that they were part of the

psychosocial support, either implicitly through the language used, the attractiveness of the material and inclusion of open questions, or explicitly by adding an activity into the worksheet. The importance of this integration will be addressed in the guide on developing self-study material.

## **Safety and Security**

For conflict-based Education in Emergencies, safety and security refers to evacuation plans and risk assessments, whereas for COVID-19 it had to be about staying safe through health and hygiene knowledge and practices. Awareness raising was taking place globally and nationally, so UNRWA education needed to supplement this in ways appropriate for young people. Health messages were integrated into some of the self-learning material, with encouragement for students to develop their own messages—whether through art or text—in an agency competition.

Another approach was to use the familiar characters of the UNRWA Human Rights Conflict Resolution and Tolerance (HRCRT) toolkit and videos, through a video telling the story of UNRWA members of the school parliament in one school carrying out a plan to raise awareness of COVID-19 in the school and community.

Schools were thoroughly cleaned and disinfected after their closure with planning now ongoing on how to maintain this level of cleanliness once the schools reopen.

## **Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)**

With the urgency to deliver education in the new context of COVID-19, the need for evidence followed as soon as possible with surveys and studies to find out what was the experience of the children, the parents, and the teachers of the COVID-19 education response.

To measure this, UNRWA had to consider how it could continue to collect data against the universal indicators it uses to measure and report upon the quality, inclusiveness, and equity of the education programme. It had to look to its existing Bank of Education in Emergencies Indicators, developed with UNESCO and other UN agencies, and partners. But crucially, it had to undertake new surveys to evaluate specific COVID-19 responses. Here, in the first instance, the focus was on: student accessibility to ICT devices, to connectivity, to electricity; parent engagement and perceptions of self-learning; and, how teachers and counsellors are supporting students as they learn remotely.

These studies were carried out alongside the quality review and evaluation of learning materials and an in-depth review of technological tools being used for the dissemination of self-learning material and for student support and encouragement; the review was based on a set of parameters, related to three main dimensions: technical, pedagogic and child safeguarding. The findings of these studies will feed back into the COVID-19 response, whatever level this may be at, and facilitate evidence-based decision making and practices.

### **Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)**

Perceptions as to whether VTC students could continue their studies during the lockdown were generally negative, with TVET being very hands-on and practically based, with skill development that could not be achieved through remote or online learning. Although TVET students undoubtedly need hands-on experience at various stages of their studies, the UNRWA TVET team could see possibilities for self-study for the non-practical elements of the course, but also for providing some exposure to the practical elements, through website links. A TVET platform has been established and the VTCs are uploading materials onto this in parallel with a study on students' access to ICTs.

Going forward is the priority now, taking the lessons learned from the education in confinement, to discuss with partners across the region and the global implications for two education imperatives—catch up learning and school reopening. UNRWA, like other education systems across the world, now has experience in providing education during a pandemic and will continue to do so and to learn from its own practices and from those of its host countries, its UN sister agencies and other partners. Whatever the model deemed most appropriate for reopening schools the lessons learned through delivering education in lockdown will help UNRWA to ensure that students' learning, psychosocial support, and safety are addressed.

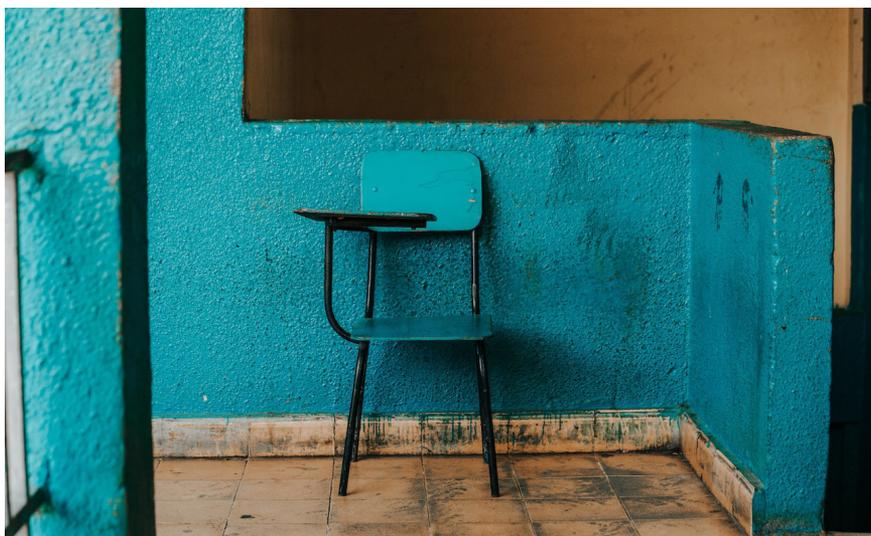
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# SUPPORTING ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION FOR REFUGEES, DURING COVID-19 AND BEYOND

BY REBECCA TELFORD



**A**round 90% of the world's school-age children have been affected by school closures, including an estimated seven million refugees. Refugee children were facing significant barriers to education even before the pandemic: around 50% were out of school, with enrollment reducing significantly as students get older and transition through to secondary school and beyond.

During this crisis, UNCHR has striven to maintain a strong focus on education, preventing a backslide in gains around access to quality education and maintaining the protective impact of education for the most vulnerable. Across the world, UNHCR operations have worked with partners, governments, and other stakeholders to ensure that disruptions to learning are minimized, and to guard against COVID-19 exacerbating inequalities in the long-term.

**Look for opportunities to work toward inclusion.** Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic is a global crisis, education responses are managed at the national level. Through the Global Compact on Refugees, which sets out an approach to support governments hosting refugees to include them into national systems, UNHCR has worked with national governments to respond to the needs of refugees in their COVID response planning.

**Respond to the needs of refugee families and communities more broadly.** UNHCR's mandate is first and foremost around protection, and immediate activities focused on community mobilization and dissemination of accurate and localized information. In addition, UNHCR mobilized a wide-range of efforts around mitigating the negative socio-economic impacts of the crisis on families and communities, including efforts to ensure the continuity of support services such as food that would have otherwise been provided to children at schools.

**Recognize how the pandemic is increasing inequality.** As with national governments and many other actors, UNHCR has supported digital remote learning opportunities during this time. This includes creating wrap-around services to host government responses, such as local language versions or additional content, which is more familiar to refugees. However, many of the online and distance learning solutions are not accessible to refugee communities, especially those in remote locations who may not have the hardware, power, or connectivity needed to access these and risk falling further behind.

**Rolling out simple, effective solutions—fast.** Using radio to broadcast lessons from teachers, activities and stories for whole families to share, and health messaging about how to prevent COVID-19 is a proven low-cost way to continue supporting refugee families with accurate information and materials. That said, many refugees (and some camps) need additional support to access radio sets, boost FM signals, and create familiar content in local languages or formats.

**Protect the education workforce.** Continuing to pay teacher salaries where these are not covered under government systems is an investment now to keep children learning where possible, and to safeguard a smooth return to school as quickly as possible. Investing in teacher training and support aims to prepare them to cope with the additional responsibilities and new approaches.

**Continue to focus on getting back to school.** Even with significant investment, the extent to which learning can continue at the

same pace as school will be limited, especially for marginalized populations. Whilst school reopening depends on national policies and the ability to follow health-related protocols, preparing for a return to school with additional support for the most vulnerable children is crucial. From accelerated and remedial classes or clubs, to using classroom technology to catch up children on specific skills, there are a range of options.

**Protect girls and work toward equity.** Experience from school closures in response to other disease outbreaks has shown that the most vulnerable children are at the greatest risk of not returning to school, and that adolescent girls are often most affected. The Malala Fund’s report “Girls, Education and COVID-19” [estimates](#) that, if dropouts follow the same rates as post-Ebola, around 10 million more secondary school-aged girls could be out of school after the crisis has passed. For refugee girls, whom were already half as likely as their male peers, it could take generations to catch up.

With these approaches, COVID-19 may offer an opportunity to reimagine education systems. For UNHCR this means a situation where refugee children can contribute to the future, for the good of all. The pandemic has seen the value of education and dignity—from policy shifts across European countries, which fast-tracked recognition of refugees’ medical qualifications to nurses who came to Kenya as refugees and were supported to complete their tertiary education. As the High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi [noted](#), “Refugees...are ready to step in and contribute, if allowed. In this way, they can show their solidarity, and give back to the communities sheltering them.” Such future contribution will only be possible if we can seize this moment and guard against the exacerbation of existing inequalities.

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# HOW DID EDUCATION SYSTEMS RESPOND TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?

BY ROBERT JENKINS



**T**he COVID-19 pandemic has led to an education emergency of unprecedented global scale. Although previous health emergencies such as the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic and the Ebola outbreak in 2014-2016 have caused short- and long-term school closures in several countries, the COVID-19 crisis caught most of the world's education systems unprepared. Countries around the world have, in real time, grappled to develop and implement distance learning alternatives that will keep all children learning.

Whether or to what extent school closures contribute to reducing the spread of COVID-19 remains unclear, as the disease itself is not yet fully understood. What is clear is that school closures disrupt children's education and the vital services that schools often provide, including nutritional support, health services such as vaccinations, and water and sanitation.

In terms of educational outcomes, disruptions in schooling can lead to significant losses in learning, increases in grade repetition and school dropout. In the United States, even short, unexpected school closures due to winter weather have been shown to negatively affect primary-school children's learning achievement, and research shows that student learning during longer term disruptions such as those following Hurricane Katrina can take upwards of two years to recover to pre-disruption levels.

School closures also expose students to risks in the areas of their nutrition, mental and physical health, and protection. Studies show that girls' exposure to sexual violence increased dramatically when schools in West Africa were closed during the Ebola crisis, and that countries like Sierra Leone experienced significant increases in adolescent pregnancies and reductions in girls' enrollment once schools reopened.

UNICEF's technical support to governments in their education response focused on safe school operations, child health and well-being, continuity of learning, safe school reopening and opening better schools. The tools and guidance developed include a [decision tree](#) to support selection and implementation of remote learning solutions based on internet connectivity and the availability of off-line programs such as radio/TV. Key challenges in ensuring that distance learning solutions would keep all children learning during school closures were addressed. These included mitigating inequitable internet access by adopting blended digital and non-digital options, developing defined learning assessment methodologies where they were lacking, enhancing existing radio programmes that had limited content and ensuring that solutions are accessible to children with disabilities.

Since late March, UNICEF has tracked the global education response to COVID-19 through a regularly updated online survey of country offices. The survey focused on practices employed by countries to address continuity of education, child health and well-being and the safe re-opening of schools. Through mid-May, among the 134 UNICEF programme countries surveyed, efforts to address continuity of education were the most prevalent, with 93 percent reporting engagement in that area. Most

countries reported using a combination of digital and non-digital methods to reach children with remote learning. Among those identified in the above-mentioned decision tree, countries drew upon an average of 3.7 different remote learning methods to expand reach to all children, with TV education broadcasts and government supported online platforms being the most common. Nevertheless, vulnerable or marginalized children are still being left out in some settings, and UNICEF is actively engaged in addressing this. For example, in Rwanda, UNICEF is working with an NGO, Imbuto Foundation, to reach out to girls via telephone in targeted districts to ensure their inclusion in remote learning and provide support and academic tutoring.

In addition to providing access to continued learning, ensuring children's health and well-being has been a key part of UNICEF's education response. Sixty per cent of countries report efforts to provide psychosocial support to children, and 42 per cent are taking steps to support nutrition and compensate for the loss of school feeding programs. Countries have also broadened their education response to prepare for school re-opening and ensure school safety as the crisis has evolved. Risk communication and community engagement to keep students, parents and staff informed about the virus and preventive measures is a key strategy that two-thirds of countries plan to employ, and the provision of WASH kits or other hygiene-related interventions was also commonly cited. However, as of mid-May, only 43 percent of countries had plans to monitor student and staff health, and even fewer reported planning outreach initiatives to children who do not return to school. Previous experience with the Ebola health crisis has shown that the most vulnerable children are more likely to not return to school, making it crucial for countries to focus on such measures as schools reopen.

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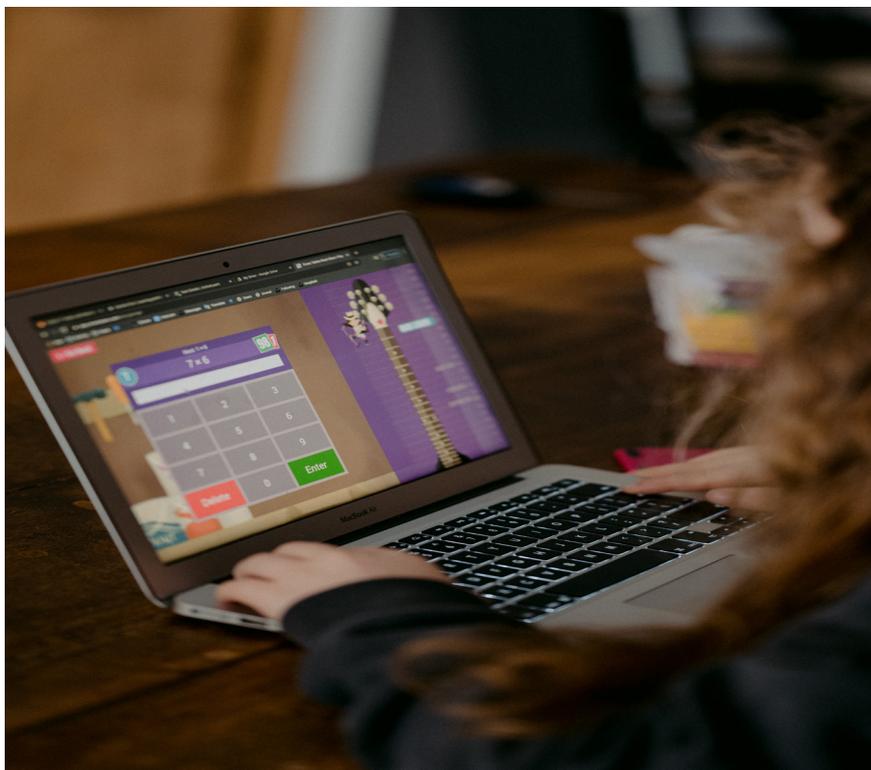
**About the author:** Robert Jenkins is Chief, Education and Associate Director, Programme Division at UNICEF.



# SAVE OUR FUTURE

## RESPOND TO THE EDUCATION EMERGENCY TODAY

BY THE RIGHT HONORABLE GORDON BROWN



It's said that you can survive for 40 days without food, eight days without water, and eight minutes without air—but you cannot survive for a second without hope. Hope dies not just when a food convoy can't get through to a beleaguered town, and not just when there are no ventilators for someone who is suffering from the most extreme form of COVID-19. Hope can die when young people don't feel they have the chance to plan and prepare for the future.

Although we are in the midst of the most devastating health emergency of our lifetime, we must also face the fact that the current education emergency threatens the hope and life chances of millions and millions of young people around the world.

Here are the harsh facts: 1.6 billion children—90% of all students in the world—have had their education disrupted. One billion are still locked out of schools now. And sadly 50 million children are forcibly displaced, some as a result of the pandemic. Most are not in school and have little hope that even when schools reopen, they will ever step foot in a classroom.

The suspension of education is not a temporary setback, with schooling and learning returning to normal once the pandemic subsides. For many, it is a permanent loss of potential. A child who is out of school for more than a year is unlikely to ever return, and girls are 2.5 times more likely to drop out than boys. Some 20 million adolescent girls may never return to school and lost schooling could mean \$10 trillion in lost earnings for this generation of students.

The worst impacts are not being felt equally among children. The most vulnerable populations face a double-blow—they are shut out from schools and the digital divide shuts them out from online learning efforts. Prolonged periods without education put young people's childhoods at risk of being lost to child labor, early marriage, violence, recruitment by extremist groups, and discrimination. The compounding effect threatens to widen and entrench inequalities, with damages reverberating for generations.

World Bank estimates suggest that government budgets for education could drop globally by more than \$100 billion below previously projected levels for 2021. In sub-Saharan countries, only \$188 is spent per year to educate a child—roughly \$3 dollars a week. To cut this already meager budget is a recipe for disaster—for our children and for our future.

So massive is the crisis that a coalition of more than 180 local, national, and global organizations have joined forces on the [Save Our Future campaign](#) to amplify the voices of children and youth. They are calling on world leaders to protect and reimagine education in a post-COVID world. Building on the UN Secretary-General's statement on Education and COVID-19, campaign partners are developing a joint white paper which will be launched at the Global Education Forum in September with concrete proposals to support countries to build back more equitable, resilient, and sustainable education systems.

As global health, economic, and social protection expenditures crowd out funding for education, we must remember that education is vital to lifting people out of poverty, ensuring healthier families, advancing racial and gender equality, increasing security, and creating a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world.

Investing in education unlocks opportunities for employment and higher levels of economic growth. Education also leads to better health outcomes because an educated mother is far better equipped to take care of her children and less infant and maternal mortality is the result. So, we must urge countries not to cut their education budgets.

And the international community and all countries should support four initiatives that, taken together, recognize and measure up to the scale and urgency of the education emergency and build back better for a more equitable and resilient future.

First, national governments must protect their education budgets and reaffirm that they will not cut them to meet other priorities.

The second is ensuring poorest countries have the funds to invest in education by granting them debt relief: this is the quickest way we can get more money into education as well as health. In the 76 poorest countries of the world, \$86 billion must be spent in debt servicing payments over the next 18 months. If we put a moratorium on these debt interest payments until the end of 2021, this \$86 billion from private creditors, public sector creditors, and the multilaterals could be reallocated to fund critical education and health needs.

The third is calling on the IMF to issue \$1.2 trillion in Special Drawing Rights—its global reserve asset—that would be available to the countries who are most in need of funds to spend on education.

And the fourth is urging the World Bank to increase support for low-income countries through a supplementary International Development Association (IDA) budget. And for lower-middle-income countries—countries that house the largest numbers of out-of-school children and refugees—donors should follow the lead of the UK and the Netherlands and support the International Finance Facility for Education (IFFEd) which will in time, generate up to \$10 billion of additional resources for education. This is in addition to—and complements—the replenishment over the next two years of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and Education Cannot Wait (ECW) and continued support for

the UN agencies focused on education and children led by UNESCO and UNICEF.

A human tragedy is unfolding if we do nothing and leave education completely underfunded without the resources necessary for children to flourish in the future. We must work together to ensure that education—and the hopes of our young people—are not shortchanged.

We must all use our voices to remind decision-makers that education is the best buy for a robust recovery and long-term growth. The COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated in the most stark terms that we are all truly connected and interdependent. Let's hope this crisis can galvanize global efforts to reimagine and reinvigorate learning systems so that the fundamental human right of educating every girl and boy around the world is fulfilled. This is the silver lining we must commit to—for the health of our children, our planet, and to #SaveOurFuture.

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**About the author:** The Right Honorable Gordon Brown is the UN Special Envoy for Global Education and Education Commission Chair. He is the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

# SYNTHESIS

## NEXT STEPS FOR THE FUTURE OF SCHOOLING

BY JULIA KIRBY AND BASSIM HIJAZI



**F**or an unprecedented six months, global physical lockdown has made disruption an ongoing reality for 90% of the world's education systems. As students, teachers, school leaders, and parents cautiously navigate the opening of the new academic year—some through virtual school programs, others through “hybrid” learning models, and some resuming face-to-face instruction—all are wondering what indelible mark, negative or positive, the COVID-19 crisis will leave on learners, schools, and education systems.

What is clear is that learners, particularly those from vulnerable populations, have suffered and will continue to suffer the most. Indeed, as Former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown writes in his introduction to this chapter, school closures around the world represent not just a “temporary setback,” but a “permanent loss of potential,” especially for those on the wrong end of the global digital divide. In many places, a confluence of detrimental factors, including public health emergencies, economic hardship, and social unrest, will make it difficult for many children to return to school when and if they reopen. In a [recent interview](#) with the Washington Post, Alice Albright, chief executive of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), observes, “Because so many of the children who are out of school are the most marginalized, once they are out of school, they are likely to be out for good. It is not easy to revert back.”

Of course, the consequences of lost student potential will not stop at the world’s poorest. Lost schooling for a generation of students could cost the global economy an estimated “\$10 trillion in lost earnings,” according to the signatories to the global [Save Our Future](#) campaign. Even in wealthy and industrialized nations, the detrimental long-term impact for learners is real, even if less grave. In the U.S., where digital access is widespread, [emerging research suggests](#) that America’s remote learning experiment has, by and large, been a failure, with most students having fallen academically behind during the pandemic, and some losing up to a year in academic gains. As Darleen Opfer reports in her piece below, only 12% of teachers in a nationally representative survey said that they covered all or nearly all the curriculum content they would typically have during the academic year.

Another group severely impacted by COVID-19 education disruption is parents. [Working mothers](#) in particular have borne a disproportionate brunt of the childcare and homeschooling burden during the pandemic. A [recent study](#) by the University of Kent and the University of Birmingham shows that the increased workload on parents during the pandemic, including conflicts between work commitments and family, has negatively impacted mental well-being, especially for mothers, and that more resources are urgently needed to support mothers at home and in the labor market during and after the crisis.

The impact of school closures has thus been felt widely and deeply not only by learners, but the entire learning ecosystem. How, then, will the experience of the pandemic change how education is approached and delivered? Can we expect to see signs of substantial change as the 2020-2021 academic year unfolds? Will societies and governments invest the time and resources needed to make education part of essential social and economic recovery efforts as we

build back after COVID-19? And what systems will be put in place to anticipate and head off disruption caused by future crises, now that it has become so clear that the state of the economy, public health, and even social order are tied to a functioning school system.

Based on presentations delivered at the second edition of the WISE-Salzburg Global Seminar Education Disrupted, Education Reimagined convening series in June 2020, the essays in this section document the research and experience of key education stakeholders from government, NGOs, and research institutions during the pandemic. Despite the diversity of contexts—Sierra Leone, Finland, the U.S., Bangladesh, and Kenya—the research, experience, and insights shared have four key commonalities that will be essential to education’s “build back better” approach. These are: 1) the need to make education central to global social and economic recovery agendas; 2) the recognition that schools provide an essential service to society and that teachers must be treated as essential workers; 3) the importance of examining education success stories as we approach the new academic year; and, 4) the conclusion that while technology no doubt has a central role to play in education, there is no substitute for physical presence in schools and human interaction.

### **Education Must be Central to Social and Economic Recovery**

In their introductory articles, former Prime Minister Gordon Brown and UNESCO Assistant Secretary-General Stefania Giannini both call upon governments to ensure that education is put at the center of social and economic recovery from COVID-19. As the latter points out, “if the global community does not rally behind education, there will be serious setbacks for students and societies at large.” As this crisis has made exceedingly clear, public health is inextricably linked to education, as are the economies of nations. Society cannot progress and thrive without functioning schools.

In Sierra Leone, the direct link between education and public health outcomes is abundantly clear after the “experience of two life-threatening health emergencies necessitating school closures,” writes Staneala Beckley, Chairperson of the Sierra Leone Teaching Service Commission. She emphasizes that, in addition to providing an academic curriculum, schools are of central importance to educate children about health, hygiene, and disease control.

### **Marshaling Social and Political Will to Prioritize Education**

What will it take for governments to make education central to social and economic recovery plans and to provide the funding and re-

sources equivalent to other essential services such as public health? According to our authors, it would take social recognition and political consensus that education, and importantly schools and teachers, are as essential as a vaccine to recovering from this crisis.

Olli-Pekka Heinonen, former Minister of Education of Finland and current Director General at the Finnish National Agency of Education, writes that current public debate over the what, when, and how of schools re-opening has highlighted the fact that, in many societies, there is no shared view of the purpose and function of education. This problem, he argues, must be reconciled with. He asks, “the recent public debate proves that we do not have a shared view of many of the basic questions. What is the task of schools? What does compulsory education include? Who is responsible for the well-being of children and young people? How does the education system function as a system and how are the roles in decision-making determined?” It is only when governments and members of society can agree on these essential questions, that social and political can be marshaled to make the necessary investments in education required to build back better after the crisis.

Asif Saleh, Executive Director of BRAC, echoes this sentiment in his contribution, observing that “education in Bangladesh has, for the most part, stopped” due to COVID-19. Not only are tens of millions of students falling academically behind, he writes, but thousands of students, if not more—especially girls—may never return to school again. According to Saleh, “less than 57% of households, which BRAC students live in, have access to televisions, and less than 40% have access to the internet,” which makes the delivery of remote schooling programs particularly challenging, despite the incredible work of local and international NGOs such as BRAC.

Sara Ruto and Rajarshi Singh tell a similar story in their article about Kenya, where parents “are fighting an uphill task of supporting their children’s learning, given their need to work from home and manage an extremely tumultuous economic situation.” Ruto and Singh argue that, in a “re-imagined future,” governments would partner with the private sector to provide comprehensive support, including access to digital devices and “adequate social safety nets,” to support education and families during times of crisis.

### **Highlighting Education Successes in addition to Failures**

Amid the darkness of the COVID-19 pandemic, bright spots in education have persisted or emerged. Highlighting these successes and learning from them will be as key to education’s post-COVID-19 recovery as identifying and rectifying failures.

In her contribution, Darleen Opfer contends that, despite substantial consensus and evidence surrounding the failure of remote learning in the United States over the past six months, “some schools, even those serving large populations of low-income students, were able to provide high-quality instruction.” According to Opfer, key to a school’s success is what she calls “the four Cs”: coherent instructional systems, collaboration, continuous improvement, and communication. All of these characteristics, she notes, are largely reliant on a school’s culture. For instance, schools that “had preexisting high levels of collaboration” among teachers prior to the pandemic more effectively delivered remote learning. The same holds true for communication, coherent instructional systems, and continuous improvement. What will be essential going forward is to ensure that these characteristics are injected into schools and professional training programs for educators and leaders, to ensure that the schools and systems that emerge are more prepared and resilient for the next crisis.

Similarly, Beckley writes that, in Sierra Leone, delivering successful remote education during the Ebola crisis, and also during COVID-19, meant being able to mobilize teachers in cohesive teams. With the announcement of school closures on March 31, “armed with past knowledge and experience of the education response to the Ebola epidemic, teams of subject teachers had been quickly mobilized, and infrastructural requirements assessed” to implement the nationwide strategy for remote education delivery.

### **Beyond COVID-19: Towards Restoring Face-to-Face Human Interaction**

This crisis has created an opportunity to reassess many aspects of the education system we may have taken for granted. While it is essential to identify successful strides in migrating our education to the digital space, leaders need to continue pushing for a safe and timely recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Ensuring the restoration of the economy is, of course, a critical imperative. Still, a [report by McKinsey](#) suggested that the quality of well-being around the world had dropped to the lowest level since 1980 in April 2020. Human beings are social creatures by design, and losing the ability to communicate beyond the screen may be a much more severe casualty in learning than we have yet to realize. We must ask ourselves when would be the right time to return to school?

As Gordon Brown puts it, “the suspension of education is not a temporary setback, with schooling and learning returning to normal once the pandemic subsides. For many, it is a permanent loss of potential.” Olli-Pekka echoes this concern and stresses that “school must

make an even stronger transition from solving individual problems to strengthening the resilience and the ability of the school community and the community in which children grow up to control tensions.” In other words, we must attempt to reform school into a more holistic and meaningful model that may not need to remain restricted within its quarters. Asif Saleh describes how Bangladesh is taking a chance to reconfigure and reform for the future physical classroom. “As we transition into the new normal, we will gradually bring in the technology, train our teachers, and make changes in the physical classroom set-up.”

Finally, Stefania Giannini highlights “the center of any educational process is the human relationship between a student and teacher” and that in the process of building back, “the education systems best prepared to respond to crisis will be those capable of valuing their teachers, granting them more autonomy, and giving them the conditions to work collaboratively.”

While we may have witnessed a “spirit of innovation” adapting to digital frontiers during the pandemic, ultimately, the end goal is to look at ways to incorporate our learnings from the digital space and implement technology as a supplementary tool for human interaction rather than vice-versa. The pandemic has accelerated the need to unlearn and relearn our habits and traditions, and it has generated more frequent conversations on paving the way to a reimagined education structure. In a time of ongoing uncertainty, what the outcomes of these conversations and the insights shared from our authors have made undividedly clear is that our education systems are a core pillar of what feeds into the societal and economic structures we stand on today. If we want to rebuild our structures to be more resilient, we can no longer afford education to be an afterthought.

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**About the authors:** Julia Kirby is Manager, Research and Content Dissemination at WISE. Bassim Hijazi is Digital Media and Podcasting Officer at WISE.

# THE FOUR Cs FOR SUCCESSFUL REMOTE SCHOOLING

BY V. DARLEEN OPFER



**W**hen schools closed down because of COVID-19, educators scrambled to provide remote instruction. The uneven quality of educational provision during this period led to concerns that the achievement gap between low- and upper-income students would widen significantly. Those concerns were not unfounded. In April 2020, we [surveyed](#) participants in [RAND's American Teacher Panel \(ATP\)](#), a nationally representative panel

of teachers, about what teachers were providing during remote instruction. Overall, only 12% reported that they covered all or nearly all the curriculum content they would typically have.

Teachers in high-poverty schools (with at least 75% low-income students) were more likely to devote the majority of their time to review rather than to teaching new content. They were also less likely to provide feedback or grades for their students' work.

News coverage and [other reports](#) during this period affirmed that it didn't need to be this way. Some schools, even those serving large populations of low-income students, were able to provide high-quality instruction. These schools tended to have four generally co-occurring characteristics that supported their success. Here they are.

## **Coherent Instructional Systems**

Before the pandemic, teachers in more successful schools used a common curriculum made coherent through teachers' guides, pacing guides, lesson plans, assessments, and online student learning software. Any supplemental materials aligned with the core curriculum and reinforced instructional goals. Teachers in these schools used common instructional strategies and practices. That is, in these schools, key elements related to teaching and learning are [consistent](#) with each other and provide the same messages to teachers about what instruction should look like.

## **Collaboration**

Our ATP data suggests that many teachers struggled to provide high-quality remote instruction. The culture of teaching that expects teachers to close their classroom door, or in this case, go online and get on with it alone, causes unnecessary strife. Schools that were successful during this period had preexisting high levels of [collaboration](#) that they relied on for remote learning. Teachers in successful schools often shared lesson planning and instruction. At the elementary level, for example, one teacher in a grade would plan and present the math lessons, another literacy, another science, and so on. Collaborative teaching allowed these schools to provide almost a full day of learning and cover most of the content they usually would have. As one teacher was presenting, others would be [working with small groups of students](#) who may be behind or struggling to master what was being taught. Notably, teachers in these schools were able to easily share because they also had a coherent instructional system in place.

## Continuous Improvement

Schools that were less successful at remote instruction tended to [develop a plan and stick to it](#). More successful schools worked continuously to improve what they offered. As an example, Success Academies in NYC developed [an initial plan](#) that they responsively [shifted](#) a few weeks later. Teachers used benchmarks assessments as well as activities to [assess](#) student learning and understanding. These gave them access to timely, classroom-level data, which helped them to identify students in need of extra support or to inform instructional strategies or pacing. The data was actionable at both the classroom- and school-level. Actionable classroom-level data can be rare as it is a result of having a coherent instructional system.

## Communication

During the COVID-19 school closures, parents often reported that they did not receive clear communication from schools about [expectations](#) and how they should be [supporting their child](#). In short, they did not receive sufficient support to be effective co-teachers. Schools that were more successful in the transition to remote instruction had clear and regular [internal](#) and [external](#) communication. These schools provided clear guidance to parents about their roles, the time children should be spending on schoolwork, attendance expectations, and other critical issues. Excellent internal communication often coincided with a culture of collaboration and the existence of shared expectations.

Building a coherent instructional system, improving collaboration, implementing continuous improvement, and enhancing communication can not be done overnight. But as school leaders work to design the “new normal”, prioritizing the development of these characteristics in schools is important for schools to be more resilient in the future.

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**About the author:** V. Darleen Opfer is vice president and director of RAND Education and Labor and holds the Distinguished Chair in Education Policy at the RAND Corporation.



# REIMAGINING EDUCATION AND BUILDING THE FUTURE OF SCHOOLING POST-COVID-19

BY STANEALA MAIDIE BECKLEY



**S**ierra Leone lost no time in organizing lessons by radio for school children at the outbreak of the Ebola crisis. The then Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) had secured a newly built education radio station with support from UNICEF. This investment was later to prove vital in future emergencies requiring a lockdown of schools. Facilitators were drawn from qualified and experienced retired teachers and serving teachers, some of whom were examiners

and chief examiners of public examinations. The programme was assessed as having wide coverage through other local stations, with 81 percent listenership.

Schools returned to full session nearing the end of the Ebola crisis. The radio lessons continued, although they were not as regular as before due to declining funds. The station survived almost exclusively on repeat broadcast of previous lessons.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education and the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) immediately began preparations for a radio education programme in anticipation of school closures. Schools closed as originally planned for the second term on March 31. A few days later the government declared a national lockdown due to COVID-19. Before then, armed with past knowledge and experience of the education response to the Ebola epidemic, teams of subject teachers had been quickly mobilized, and infrastructural requirements assessed for potential wide coverage and for a more functional education radio station.

Previous experience of several teachers who had served during the Ebola was brought to bear on programme planning decisions. A 2-day workshop on the choice of curriculum subjects for the radio lessons was based on student performance and where students had the greatest difficulty. Core subjects were automatically added to the timetable. Old notes used during the Ebola programme response were dusted and updated, with emphasis on child-friendly and interactive methodologies. Scripts were drafted, sample lessons delivered at the workshop and critical feedback provided by peers. Teaching by radio was a key aspect of the orientation. Modalities were put in place, timetabling for recording and broadcasts agreed. The radio programme for students started eight days after schools closed. To date, thirteen community radio stations around the country broadcast the lessons.

Enthusiasm was high. Many spent a greater part of their day listening to the lessons, calling others to tune in. Before then, the public was prepared for the start of the radio programme through announcements on radio, in local newspapers and via social media. Each lesson lasted for forty-five minutes with fifteen minutes for interaction with the audience. In the course of the programme, we realized the need for data on radio listenership and other parameters like access to radios, the reach and receptivity of radio broadcasts, family habits pertaining to possession and use of household devices, students' access to and

use of these devices; teachers' access to electronic devices, among others.

Experience of two life-threatening health emergencies necessitating school closures has offered us insights into how we should function in future pandemics. Firstly, health and healthy living and healthy lifestyles must be more fully ingrained into the school curriculum. Environmental degradation is a global phenomenon. This calls for greater awareness of school children of environmental issues and the causes and control of diseases. Practical sessions on the use of masks, hand gels, safety and security in and around the school, in the social and home environment are important aspects to consider.

The COVID-19 pandemic is opening avenues for innovation. On-line and digital teaching and learning programmes are emerging, led by local entrepreneurs. They are likely to accelerate as more students and teachers become familiar with their use.

The concept of teaching and learning materials will change. Electronic devices in schools will become part of the 'new normal'. Continuous assessment, the bane of teachers with large classes, will get a new lease of life as technology enables faster testing and grading of assignments.

Preparing teachers to deliver online lessons will be part of the 'new normal' in these institutions. Technology will define the way trainers train and students learn in these institutions, as technology-based infrastructural needs, equipment and HR support become more apparent.

Resources to assess listenership must be provided. The needs of children and teachers in remote areas and children with disabilities are top priority for future emergency plans as online distance learning modalities tend to benefit urban populations with access to devices and better receptivity, and so create further inequalities. Similarly, resources for hearing and visually impaired learners must be developed and more training organized for teachers on the use of technology as well as delivering online classes.

Future plans will explore online teaching and learning modalities, extending the reach of the radio programmes, addressing the needs of children with disabilities, developing lessons for teachers, feedback mechanisms and tools to assess listenership.

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**About the author:** Dr. Staneala Beckley is the Chairperson of the Sierra Leone Teaching Service Commission.

# MEANINGFUL MATTERS COME TO THE SURFACE DURING EMERGENCY CONDITIONS

BY OLLI-PEKKA HEINONEN



**W**hat does the education system have to do with the virus-based influenza that developed in Wuhan in China? This would have been a difficult question to answer four months ago, but today the answer is obvious. The SARS-CoV-2 virus is a medical challenge, but the virus refuses to remain within its own realm. Instead, it has affected all areas of life, including the reality of schools and learning.

Now that we are getting used to the state of emergency, it is time to look further to understand what we can learn from this experi-

ence. Coronavirus has been a crash course on learning for all of us, forcing us to take action. When people's lives are at stake, everyone has a strong motivation to find functioning solutions.

Teaching and practical schoolwork were reorganized with an extremely rapid timetable in Finland, as well. In international comparisons, we have managed to safeguard the continuity of education fairly well, although the ways of implementing the teaching and learning had to be changed.

Emergency conditions bring to light the fundamental, often subconscious assumptions that govern our daily activities. The recent public debate proves that we do not have a shared view of many of the basic questions. What is the task of schools? What does compulsory education include? Who is responsible for the well-being of children and young people? How does the education system function as a system and how are the roles in decision-making determined?

One of the principles in the management of comprehensive security is that operation is based on the same powers and roles both in exceptional and in normal situations. The reason for this is simple: knowledge and operating models are best mastered by the parties that use them daily in normal conditions.

However, some things are highlighted in a crisis situation. Communication becomes central. Communication in one's own unit, in relation to the supervisors and the stakeholders. Management in emergency conditions is largely communication.

It is necessary to be aware of our own role and responsibilities as part of the wider system. What am I responsible for and what responsibilities fall on other parties? A clear division of responsibilities is based on interaction built on trust that has been tested in normal conditions. The extensive autonomy given to teachers, schools and education providers does not mean they are entirely independent of other levels of actors or other actors. On the contrary, it is necessary for them to be linked with the wider network.

If people do not know each other in normal conditions, the pressure of the crisis may cause the lacking trust to collapse. Strengthening the trust between the parents and the school and working together for the best interest of the child is important in normal conditions as well. We strived to reach all pupils during the emergency conditions and it is now meaningful to strive for reaching the parents of all pupils in normal conditions. We know that there is a link between parents' interest in the child's school

attendance and the child's learning outcomes. We do not need a new crisis to ensure cooperation between homes and schools.

School must make an even stronger transition from solving individual problems to strengthening the resilience and the ability of the school community and the community in which children grow up to control tensions. This can be done by building strong interaction with the parties working in schools: the school, youth services, social and health professionals, organizations and, of course, homes. It means sharing power and leadership more widely in the entire network required to bring up and educate the child. At the same time, different parties commit to working together.

In this work, taking care of the occupational wellbeing of teachers and all school staff is essential. Teachers' mutual collegial support, pedagogical leadership in the school and feedback from peers as part of the school community's operating culture need to be further strengthened. We must strive for learning communities that implement competence sharing.

As unfortunate as it seems, we need to prepare ourselves for the fact there will also be further crises and emergency conditions one day. When everything is well, we should invest in putting into order matters that we will no longer have time or opportunities to focus on when something happens. The most important thing is to build strong interaction between the key actors in the community in which the child grows up and the different authorities.

No evidence of how the distance teaching phase has affected the learning outcomes of children and young people is available as yet. A lot more is needed than just research and evaluation data on the impacts and lessons learned from the coronavirus crisis. Many research units have already taken action and FINEEC is also planning a project on the assessment of equality and equity in education to support decision-making.

Now is a good time to assess the needs, deficiencies and strengths of the content-related, pedagogical and technical implementation of distance teaching and digital teaching. What is needed, what works and what doesn't.

A managerial position entails the responsibility to anticipate what is behind the corner. At the beginning of the summer, the situation in the autumn seems partly shrouded in mystery. We have to be prepared for different situations depending on what is required to safeguard health. Enhanced maintenance of hygiene,

keeping a distance to others and minimizing contact are not a brief and passing phenomenon, but a more permanent situation. This is why the last two weeks of the spring term were important from the point of view of practicing these operating methods.

We have had to learn to live in uncertainty, acknowledge our lack of competence and our ignorance, find creative solutions, use interaction and cooperation skills in the digital reality, and manage everyday life in the middle of the changed routines. These sound like the key elements of transversal competence in basic education. In other words, we have been learning and teaching the basic skills required in life. In exceptional circumstances, fundamental matters and values are highlighted and become crystal clear.

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# USING DISRUPTION TO INNOVATE: THE NEW NORMAL OF PRIMARY EDUCATION

BY ASIF SALEH



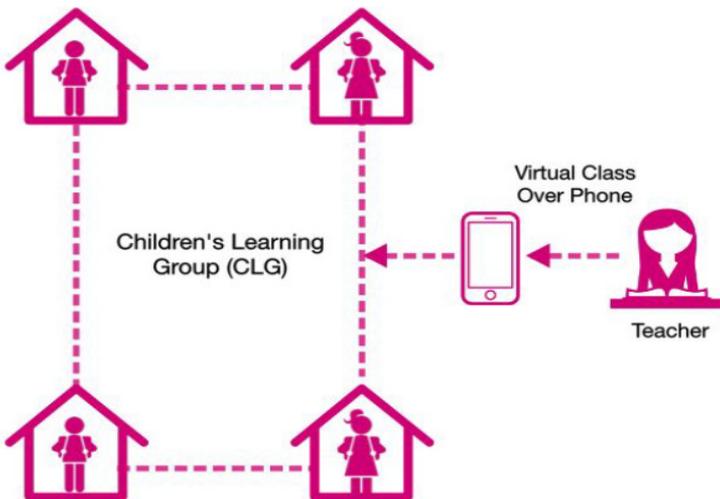
**E**ducation in Bangladesh has, for the most part, stopped. The loss of momentum is not because of a lack of effort—the Government of Bangladesh is broadcasting primary and secondary classes on a state-run television channel and is establishing a national call centre which will connect over 450,000 teachers with students. These are significant initiatives, and BRAC, among other organizations, has contributed to developing lesson plans and the content, and provided resource trainers to conduct classes and groom teachers.

While television schooling and a hotline will allow some students to access some learning, these initiatives will not help children in low-income and marginalized communities—who are the group at the most risk of dropping out. Less than 57% of the households, which BRAC students live in (who are typically from these communities), have access to a television, and less than 40% have access to the internet.

A customized, appropriate, and accessible solution is needed for students in low-income and marginalized communities.

Ninety five percent of BRAC’s students’ families have access to a feature mobile phone (a basic phone with button-based input and a small display screen). This phone is likely to be primarily kept in the pocket of the father in the family. Fathers can be persuaded to be present at home, with the phone, for a specific period, if notified beforehand.

Using this platform, BRAC started piloting a home school model in March 2020, after schools closed. Feature mobile phones are used to connect teachers and students, and self-learning is a focus, both individually and in groups, through children learning groups (CLGs) established with the members who live in close proximity, with limited supervision from teachers. The idea is simple. In absence of classes, learning is moving into a self-learning model with support from peer groups and their parents. The teacher’s role is limited to guiding and checking up on the phone and doing the assessment.



We have piloted 50 BRAC home schools, for Grade 5 students, catering to 20-25 students each. In a BRAC Home School, a teacher connects with a CLG, which consists of four students and their parents, through a twice-weekly group call. Calls last for 15-20 minutes, during which students' performance is assessed.

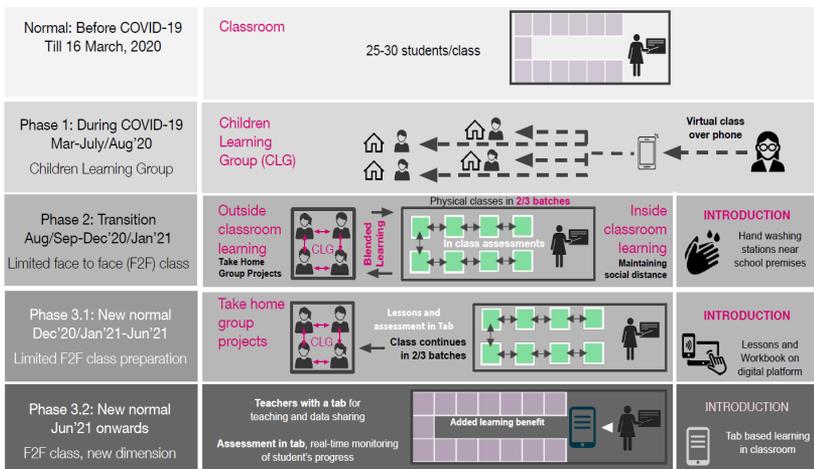
These virtual classes, conducted twice a week, are currently reaching more than 180,000 students of 6,890 BRAC home schools (as of August 20, 2020).

A curriculum suitable for home-schooling has been developed, and teachers have been trained virtually.

The first three days of classes focus specifically on psychosocial counselling and well-being. The third and fourth-day focus on revisioning lessons from before their schools closed. After the first week, lessons continue as per their curriculum. Every sixth day of classes consists of a special class, with customized timings decided by the teacher, for students living with disabilities, especially those who are hearing impaired, those who are weaker students or have missed classes.

As the model continues to show potential, we are building on it to create a blended primary education model to make education relevant in the new normal.

We are shifting away from a completely teacher-centered approach towards an approach, where students have more responsibility for their learning, supported by their family, peers, and



the community. Learning outcomes will be monitored through remote technology, instead of hands-on monitoring.

As we transition into the new normal, we will gradually bring in the technology, train our teachers and make changes in the physical classroom set-up to be able to roll out this approach effectively across the country.

### **A few key insights so far from Bangladesh**

There are three key points that I would like to highlight, from our experience in Bangladesh:

- This is an opportunity to bring in technology into classrooms and education administration, but the steps have to be gradual. Technology literacy and access have a long way to go before they can be useful in low-resource settings.
- School dropouts are expected to increase in low-income countries for economic reasons after the pandemic. Adaptability and flexibility to the changing scenario in any model will be essential to reduce this.
- Building back better will be possible with balanced investments in capacity, technology literacy and infrastructure, better assessment methods and more autonomy in learning for students.

Our experience in providing education for over 45 years has shown us that children are vital ambassadors to their families and the wider community by advocating their learnings outside classrooms. So, we see children not only as crucially needing to be supported but also as an invaluable resource in tackling the pandemic.

COVID-19 might be the disruption that the education sector needed to rethink the effectiveness of the current education system. We can collectively drive innovation to flip this disruption as an opportunity to bring in more autonomy and self-learning, better assessment of learning outcomes and more equity in bringing technology to the classroom.

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# BEYOND COVID-19: RE-IMAGINING THE FUTURE OF FORMAL EDUCATION

BY SARA RUTO AND RAJARSHI SINGH



**T**he COVID-19 pandemic will perhaps have multi-faceted and entrenched impacts on modern human society. School closures across the globe is one such significant consequence of this public health catastrophe. At one point, schools were closed across 194 countries. These closures have affected [90%](#) of the world's student population. If schools are temples of light, 1.57+ billion learners have been pushed to sudden darkness world-wide. This is perhaps why many yearn for a "return to normal." The moot question would be what this new "normal" would be, for a child who despite spending three years in school, cannot read a Grade 2 level text.

How can this moment be used to reclaim back the right of this excluded child to an education of good quality? Although the road to normalcy and re-opening schools is still unclear as many countries are still debating on the issue, we take three lessons to heart while reimagining the future of education that is inclusive of all in Kenya, through:

- 1) Development of a digital learning ecosystem that nurtures creativity, innovation and equity of opportunity
- 2) Creation of an enthused cadre of locally recruited instructors to energise learning, and lastly
- 3) Reclaiming the centrality of parents in formal education provision.

Let us elaborate on each of the above points here.

### **A digital learning ecosystem**

Physical distancing policies have forced many schooling systems to adopt online platforms. Some education systems [such as South Korea](#) have systematically adapted and adopted online teaching-learning and education management. Kenya's shift to remote learning has been far less uniform: it has heavily depended on access to existing ICT infrastructure and household affordability, as a result the 'Haves have it and the Have nots don't'. Although schools and families that are hooked to high-speed internet have scrambled together to create a 'quick fix' online schooling regiment, some parents are [fighting an uphill task](#) of 'supporting' their children's learning, given their need to work from home and manage an extremely tumultuous economic situation. Typically, many parents are not well-prepared or cannot afford to support their children's remote education needs. Additionally, bandwidth issues have cropped up due to unprecedented simultaneous access. That being said, there is a clear and absolute need to promote blended learning even beyond the COVID-19 timeline. Development of a robust blended learning ecosystem will first depend on improving digital access. In a re-imagined future, this would be supported with a government-led distribution of digital devices to all learners, partially paid for by the government, the people, private sector and with discount from service providers. It would be a future where children with special needs are included and needy households are boosted with adequate social safety nets as a first priority before addressing the education needs. A reimagined future will need to be a humane one as well.

A second area of concern is digital content. In Kenya, the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) has the official mandate to develop digital content for learners in all levels below the

University. This content should be of high impact, child friendly and ought to be mapped to the developmental learning stages. It needs to be of high quality, interactive and attractive to the young audience that is increasingly stimulated by 'edutainment'. New partnerships will therefore be needed in the digital ecosystem if one is to nurture content to meet an increasingly choosy audience. The curriculum developer would need to retain leadership, but also be willing to invite a more diverse skill set (content creators, designers, game developers, children and local communities) to enable the creation of engaging and educative content suited for learners; content that not only promotes critical thinking, and foundational learning, but also creativity. Furthermore, contextualized packaging of content would also improve children's level of engagement. For example, simply using the voice of Kenyan children to dub a story might increase acceptance of that story for all other children, while also providing a benchmark. While it is absolutely necessary for a large portion of the content to originate from Kenya, there is also a significant opportunity to leverage internationally developed content from across the globe.

This repository of educational learning materials made freely available to all children in Kenya would serve to bridge the divide between children who have access to quality education versus those who do not. Presently, this chasm is not only in terms of teaching and schooling infrastructure quality, but it also affects access to teaching-learning materials. Imagine what children could do with open access to Maasai stories, videos of experiments aboard the International Space Station, and indigenously inspired games from other Global South geographies. It is hoped that this repository of child friendly TLM would catalyse learning through play and the inclusion of activity-based learning as well.

The third issue lies in retooling teachers to facilitate ICT-based pedagogies and management of heterogeneous classrooms. Empowering teachers will help them reach, connect and facilitate learning. The e-alternatives are so vast, and if teachers, especially the 'digital immigrants' are not well supported, they might sink. In a re-imagined future, the teacher will operate in a decentralised decision-making milieu and will be confident to make decisions that work within their local contexts, and which are in the best interest of their learners. They shall understand, rather than feel intimidated or incapacitated by the e-learning system that comprises many platforms such as radio, satellite television, SMS, secure and monitored YouTube channels and WhatsApp groups (secure monitored). This teacher will support real-time interactive online/offline classes, use pre-recorded content and practice based online instruction sessions. The younger genera-

tion has chosen these mediums for communication and interaction. Rather than fight them, they need to be embraced as the new mode of semi-structured learning.

The fourth issue is that irrespective of the learning platform, whether digital or face to face, basic principles that allow children to learn effectively and efficiently must be put in place. Educators need to embrace evidence-based teaching and learning. An example used by several members of the People's Action for Learning network starts with children first being assessed to understand their level of competency. The assessment data is used to group children of similar competencies together so that they can learn together. Thereafter, a combination environment is created where they can learn through level-appropriate pedagogy. Evidence based teaching-learning is not only more effective than curriculum driven approaches, it is also child friendly and prone to high course-completion rates.

There are several strategies associated with evidence-based teaching-learning activities. First, the teachers need to have clear lesson goals for each learner, and grouping the learners by their competencies can be a good strategy of managing large classes. One needs to quickly and easily state what the teacher wants the students to know and be able to do at the end of a given lesson. Secondly, it is best to depend on a 'Learning by doing' strategy, wherein children observe and learn by experimenting or replicating the activities demonstrated by instructors. Thirdly, encouraging questioning and argumentation are very important. It is seen that teachers typically devote a large amount of teaching time asking questions but very few of them use questions that emerge from within a lesson. Fourthly, use of graphic outlines such as mind maps, flow-charts and Venn diagrams in the new and on-line teaching mode could be of great use. A key methodology of teaching-learning, where rapid evidence is collected to gauge what's working and what's not, is popularly used in discovery-based science teaching with locally available objects and indigenous games. Lastly, evidence is also useful in creating tracks for children to navigate and learn at their own pace. Group work lessons and opportunities have been shown to be very successful as well. The steps outlined here are already in use for some children. They need to be extended to all children.

### **Each one, Teach one**

In her article for UNESCO, Stefania Giannini [noted](#) that "the longer the school interruption, the larger the learning loss." School closures have also interrupted the support schools provide for children's social protection, nutrition, health and well-being. Al-

though reopening of schools is a complex question, in the short term it will be driven by public-health concerns. Given physical distancing norms, for the time being, young learners can connect with ‘teachers’ locally. This proposed model of “Each one, Teach one” has two variants:

(1) Advanced learners connecting with less-advanced learners at the household level to give regular teaching-learning instructions. This is often seen in communities, where older siblings help younger ones learn.

(2) It is also seen in connecting learners with the army of young people with at least 12 years of schooling.

Considering the increasing unemployment rates, this connection would help interested youth leaders to champion the cause of discovery-based learning throughout Kenya. These new graduates can be recruited and trained to serve as facilitators who connect learners to the variety of structured and semi-structured teaching-learning material available remotely via radio, television and the Kenya Education Cloud. This young-group would help in creating a pedagogic routine and supporting children to access discoverable content. To ensure protection of the children, these young people will need to be registered, say with social services. They can energize learning in ways not imagined before.

We may recall that even before COVID-19 the global learning landscape was grim; UNESCO estimated that 670 million children worldwide did not have minimum proficiency in foundational skills. [The Uwezo survey](#) in Kenya showed that on average only 30 percent of Class 3 pupils could do Class 2 work. This learning crisis could potentially deepen significantly with school closures leading to unprecedented learning loss. The “Each one, Teach one” strategy is a mechanism to combat this learning loss while also improving youth productivity, skilling, and expanding productive engagement in a manner geared at creating community solutions. Empowering university graduates to be community resource persons would also improve what children learn—with music graduates teaching music and design or architecture graduates teaching the basics of design in addition to foundational reading and math.

### **Strengthening Neighborhood Schools through Invigorated Citizen Engagement**

An African adage claims ‘it takes a village to educate a child’. It seems apt that a reimagined future needs to reclaim the sense of collective action and community responsibility in nurturing

children, and that values need to be emphasized as much as academics are. Anecdotal observations confirm that a significant proportion of people are alarmed at the weak home and community influence on learners. Colonial education in Kenya bequeathed the concept of boarding schools, which allow children to be away from their homes for nine months every year. The unfortunate result of this is that there is an increasing social distance from parents, while schools become total institutions that define a child's character. Practices like boarding schools seem to have allowed communities to cede 'parenting' to schools. Indeed, schools are governed with policies that have enabled them to become safer havens for children. When schooling is disrupted, as has happened during COVID-19, cracks appear that posit the home as an unsafe space for the child. A visible threat already being reported is increased teenage pregnancies and drug abuse, all happening while the child is at home.

Parents need to take charge of nurturing their children, and while the school remains an essential social unit, it ought not to be the central unit. The concept of a neighborhood school needs to be seeded. This will be a school that attracts children from a specific locality; a school where the citizens in that locality play a critical role as teachers, and where collectively, an ethos is created governing that community. With neighborhood schools, boarding schools will lose their centrality, and children and parents will be in close proximity, with each playing their role in ensuring broad competence and value acquisition. A grounded education needs to tap on community knowledge, and this can happen with increasing agency to parents and citizens.

In conclusion, we do not know yet when, how and in what manner schools will reopen in Kenya. But the COVID-19 situation provides us with an opportunity to reimagine the education system, making it more accessible and child friendly and endearing to the parents of these anxious children. This moment gives us an opportunity to imbibe values, and create a new normal that includes all children in a meaningful learning journey.

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**About the authors:** Sara Ruto is the CEO of the PAL Network. Rajarshi Singh is the Director of Programs at the PAL Network.

# CONCLUSION

## WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION?

BY JENNIFER ADAMS, JOANNE MCEACHEN,  
LOUKA PARRY, AND DOMINIC REGESTER



**T**he authors of the essays in this book come from all around our world. They represent UN agencies, international and national NGOs, ministries of education and universities. They are discussing the extent to which education has been disrupted in their countries or across broader regions and offer radical new ideas for how education needs to change. A lot of the essays respond, directly or indirectly, to what UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has described as both ‘a defining moment for the world’s children and young people’ and ‘a generational opportunity to reimagine education’.

There are consistent threads that weave through many of the essays: a set of through lines that connect a lot of these distinct 'reimaginings' of education, irrespective of where the authors are writing or the context they consider. These are ideas about a more positive, inclusive, compassionate and relevant lived educational experience for young people, and how that experience has changed and is changing. Although not always called out explicitly in the essays, these ideas are often categorised as social and emotional learning or life skills.

Social and emotional skills are teachable key human capabilities that allow individuals to manage their emotions, work with others, solve problems and achieve individual and collective goals. They are crucial for the wellbeing and success of every child and adult, and for the future of our societies and economies. The skills, competencies and behaviours that social and emotional learning (SEL) programs and practices help young people develop are a crucial part of the solution to a great many of the macro-challenges that different societies and economies around the world were facing before the pandemic struck.

They are even more relevant now.

These skills, competencies and behaviours like conscientiousness, empathy, self-management, kindness, social awareness, openness, creativity and responsible decision making, are not just additional aspects to educational process, they must become its core fabric.

Many organizations from around the world have identified these as being essential for the diverse array of challenges societies, governments and systems face. These include equipping the workforce of tomorrow to do the jobs that won't be automated, addressing the mental health epidemic affecting young people around the world, building kinder more inclusive and empathetic societies, helping young people develop their own sense of identity and find their place in a complex changing world, and improving education outcomes for all students, especially the most disadvantaged. Back in 2013 Barack Obama said that the empathy deficit was a more pressing problem for America than the Federal deficit and identified this deficit as a key factor in the escalating number mass shootings in different American communities. This empathy deficit still exists, addressing it has never been more critical.

Evidence shows many long-term benefits from embedding Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) opportunities in education in both formal and non-formal contexts. SEL can contribute to more inclusive, dynamic, and productive schools, communities and workplaces, and is central to enabling the creation of innovative solu-

tions that require collaboration across sectors, governments, and cultures. If the evidence is so compelling, why then has the progress been so slow across education systems?

Self-understanding, knowledge, competency, connection—when people around the world embody these skills, the world is a much better place for its people. In the past these kinds of skills have often been described as ‘soft’ skills, frequently with some sort of implied pejorative underlying meaning, contrasting them unfavourably with ‘hard’ skills like literacy or numeracy. We would argue that “essential” skills is a more accurate description. These are skills which increasingly define us as human, the skills that are needed to do the kinds of tasks that can’t be outsourced to algorithms or artificial intelligence. These are skills which underpin fundamental ideas about wellbeing and identity around the world. There is also a robust body of evidence that shows how social and emotional learning skills have a really significant impact in addressing inequalities around learning outcomes (why children growing up in different kinds of disadvantage tend to do less well at school). These are skills that are essential for meeting the Sustainable Development Goals. These are all skills that are highly visible in many visions of a better education that can grow out of the current crisis.

Existing structures, the overpoliticisation of education policy, slow moving bureaucracy, command and control mindsets, narrow metrics seen as success—these are the large obstacles that we need to overcome to enable true transformative change. Young people today have no patience for a learning system that doesn’t work for them and it’s looking less and less likely that education-as-usual will be the future scenario. As leaders, researchers, educators and policy makers, we need the courage to realise that we are the people we have been waiting for, and we must not simply throw off aspects of education that do not serve us, we must first reimagine a new learning system and then remake it. As the late Sir Ken Robinson noted, “The fact is that given the challenges we face, education doesn’t need to be reformed—it needs to be transformed. The key to this transformation is not to standardize education, but to personalize it, to build achievement on discovering the individual talents of each child, to put students in an environment where they want to learn and where they can naturally discover their true passions.”

The nineteenth century French novelist Gustave Aimard wrote “there is something more powerful than the brute force of bayonets: it is the idea whose time has come and hour struck.” Reading these essays, looking at the diversity of the authors’ backgrounds and reflecting on many of the sessions from the conferences that lead to this book, it feels very much as if SEL is the idea whose time has come.

**About the authors:** Dr. Jennifer Adams is the founder and CEO of Educating Leaders. Joanne McEachen is the CEO and Founder of The Learner First. Louka Parry is the CEO and Founder of The Learning Future. Dominic Regester is a program director at Salzburg Global Seminar. The authors are Executive Committee members of Karanga: The Global Alliance for Social Emotional Learning and Life Skills.

# CONCLUSION

## EDUCATION REIMAGINED AND THE NEW ROLE OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

BY ASMAA AL-FADALA



**T**he COVID-19 pandemic caused an international disruption affecting economies across the world, from the largest to the smallest. Other than the economy, the regular running of businesses, day-to-day events, and the education sector, including schools and universities, were stopped abruptly following a global lockdown in March and April. Schools and systems have come up with different approaches of ensuring that children engage in continuous learning despite being out of physical classrooms. The world is currently grappling with the question of how to grow systems that will withstand such challenges by developing high-level resilience. School leadership will play a critical role in re-defining the education system to suit the current and future needs of the children. This article will narrow down the discussion to the school systems and leadership that will withstand events that cause constant uncertainty.

In April and June 2020, WISE and Salzburg Global Seminar held two convenings under the theme and title of “Education Disrupted, Education Reimagined.” Practitioners, researchers, and policy makers were invited from around the world to share their perspectives on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education systems. What emerged from these two events, in addition to the incredible experiences shared, was captured in this publication as a Special Edition E-Book entitled “Education Disrupted, Education Reimagined: Thoughts and Responses from Education’s Frontline During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond.” This article serves as a concluding section for the book.

According to UNESCO, more than 1.5 billion learners were affected by the global pandemic following an indefinite closure of schools as of April 2020. Governments have focused most of their resources on the health sector to fight the pandemic. This leaves the education sector with fewer resources and causes the departmental heads to think harder to overcome such future calamities ([Simpson, 2020](#)).

The education sector has suffered an irredeemable loss, even in the most advanced economies. It is indicated that K-12 students in the United States have suffered a loss of four months, which is equivalent to over \$33,464 as future earnings—an enormous effect on the economy estimated at over \$2.5 trillion (Simpson, 2020).

Also, the closure of schools poses challenges for school leadership, Allan Walker states in [his article](#) that this crisis has generated conditions that have twisted understandings and challenged established leadership norms, even those bred during previous disruptions. Leaders have few roadmaps to guide their actions—there are few ready-made answers as things change almost day-to-day.

UNESCO released a report sounding a warning to the developing nations that the school's prolonged closure could supersede the benefits they were expected to achieve. The effect is likely to be more than economical as there will be an impact on the social protection and safety of children ([Kirby, 2020](#)).

The pandemic has led to the birth of various innovations and utilization of designs that were yet to be implemented into the education sector. Some of the innovations include digital learning, relying on technology to communicate with stakeholders, and incorporating counseling and psychological assistance to the affected parties. With the pandemic hitting hard in most parts of the world, coronavirus changed the mode of delivery and how students are educated worldwide. The virus has spread rapidly in Europe, Asia, the United States, and the Middle East causing decisive actions to mitigate its effects in central sectors such as education. Schools have adopted online learning utilizing various platforms to relay information to learners studying from home. With the 5G connectivity in countries such as the U.S., Japan, and China, learners from these countries can receive real-time information from teachers. Learners have been forced to study more digital skills since they are vital during the pandemic. Most technology companies have helped the transition by ensuring that connection is up and issuing out digital tools such as computers and tablets to be utilized by both teachers and learners ([Tam and El-Azar, 2020](#)).

Social distance is one of the most critical protocols and guideline measures that schools must follow as they readmit children back to school. It is imperative to make clear, that classroom designs and models are expected to change permanently. Technology is being used across various countries, for example, in Morocco, Mohamed El Idrissi, Founder and CEO at Teach for Morocco, states in [his article](#) that they launched a communication system to correspond directly with the stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and school heads. This tool empowered school heads to communicate effectively and push their content through WhatsApp, voice notes, and SMS. The instant communication is efficient in establishing the learners' well-being and for the school head to plan strategically. In Kenya and other developing countries, Deborah Kimathi, Executive Director, Dignitas Project, argues in her article that education leaders must determine how to strike a balance between learners that were privileged enough to afford online learning and those from marginalized communities who did not access any form of education throughout the pandemic. The school leaders face a tough challenge since systems are fragile, and most have collapsed with the pandemic.

Since humans are resilient and school systems are not, leaders are forced to spearhead new developments and innovation that will increase the sector's resilience.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the world has been left in ruins, with most of the systems being overwhelmed while the rest are unable to remodel according to the demands presented. According to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, this pandemic has caused one of the most extensive disruptions in education's history. The vulnerable, including those from marginalized regions, and the disabled have been affected the most. The refugees and children seeking asylum have also suffered a devastating change. On top of the most common pandemics, the world is undergoing a convergent crisis, a climate crisis, and a newly registered one. The COVID-19 pandemic has made the mental health crisis more difficult for all industries ([Simpson, 2020](#)). The UN Secretary-General argues that education should be reimagined since an opportunity has presented itself to make it more futuristic. School leaders need to develop a structure that will empower individuals to ensure they are ready to combat various challenges, including convergent crises ([Greenhalgh et al., 2020](#)). The curriculum should be aligned with the needs arising in sustainable economies because this marks the future. While responding urgently to the COVID-19 crisis, school leaders have had an opportunity to look into the education system's future and consider the generational opportunity presented in the 21st Century. ([Onyema et al., 2020](#)).

Now more than ever, education leaders need to adapt to the rapid transformations happening in our systems and schools. There is general consensus now, particularly in the wake of COVID-19, about what 21st century learning looks like, but we also must apply that same criteria to our educators and school leaders. If 21st century learning embodies an approach to education that marries academic skill with behavioral competencies—such as collaboration, problem-solving, creativity, and life-long learning—learners can survive and thrive in this uncertain world. The same skills and competencies should be required for educators and school leaders so that they can support and influence this learning. We need to shift school leadership development approaches that prioritize many of the same skills and competencies for future-ready learners. This will necessitate widespread access to leadership development programs that are both informed by 21st century learning paradigms and draw from the existing knowledge and research of what robust and future-ready leadership learning design looks like. Azad Oommen and Baidurya Sen wrote in [their article](#) that the content of these development programs should be relevant to school leaders' needs but also point

them in new directions when required. During the initial phases of COVID-19 shutdowns, a survey conducted by [Global School leaders](#) found that school leaders knew that they needed to engage learners but did not know how to go about it. Hence, school leaders need to be supported to create a pathway for them to move from checking on students' well-being to learning.

The COVID-19 pandemic has proven that not all systems are progressive; some are rigid, hence affected most by the crisis, education being among them. The future of schooling post-COVID-19 is perceived as one that will address the 21st century needs and requirements as Julia Kirby states in [her article](#) in part two of this book. Countries that have been thinking progressively have not experienced a difficult time adjusting upon the virus's setting that affected the usual way of studying. For instance, in Sierra Leone, with the help of UNICEF, an education radio station was set up during the outbreak of Ebola to facilitate learning, ([Tam and El-Azar 2020](#)). As COVID-19 set into the country, it was easy for the department to adjust to the radio lessons without affecting the academic year. Stakeholders in the education sector should reconsider some of the changes highlighted as weak points by the glaring COVID-19 pandemic and create a more resilient system. Even as the health crisis passes, teachers and learners will not get rid of the new technology-based learning materials and tools.

Due to COVID-19, it is evident that electronic devices will feature permanently in the education culture. This is significant given its late adoption in schools, despite the increased reliance of technology in the 21st century. The future emergency plans have identified some of the most vulnerable students, including the disabled, and those living in low-income regions such as refugees and asylum-seeking children. Some of the impaired students have been affected by the sudden change in the study mode since they cannot see or hear what the teacher is delivering through the online platform. Other than innovations geared towards favoring the education system, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought technology closer to students, sparking their interest further. As learners continue to explore they will also develop innovations and solve some of the 21st century challenges both present and in the future. Education is mature for remodeling to design it to address the 21st century challenges. School leaders have been tasked indirectly by the COVID-19 crisis to change teaching and learning and make it more helpful to the current economy.

The contributors in this book all agree on what kind of changes need to be made, what type of leader schools need, and now we need to focus on the "how" of building back better. I want to conclude with

the following suggestions to answer the question of how to transform and implement systemic change to reimagine education during and after COVID-19. These are some suggestions:

1. The current world requires every individual to have a deeper connection to their innermost human traits, such as creativity and empathy. Despite the pandemic disrupting the education system, it is a great opportunity to reimagine or renew the system.

2. The education system must move towards enhancing equity and co-creation between the teachers and students. This will create a conducive learning environment for enriching the whole student. This will require more autonomy for schools and teachers and fewer top-down demands.

3. COVID-19 has widened social inequalities, especially in distance education. The pandemic is an opportunity to recreate public policies without discrimination. We need, now more than ever, to bridge the equity divide in our global learning systems.

4. Reimagining the school system could involve eliminating examinations for a year, training teachers on social and emotional learning to ensure that they are trauma-responsive, and realigning the school calendar to prepare the children for an uncertain future.

To conclude, the world is facing a time when it can go through great ruin or experience great renewal. The education sector is the most adversely affected. Education needs to be a priority in the coming months and years, we cannot let it get lost in budget cuts and aid. Education is often the first service to be disrupted and the last to be restored in crisis situations. School leaders have no clear answers or pathways that can help them resolve the constant challenges of COVID-19, however their role is critical towards the survival of the education system during and after the pandemic.

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