Leading Education Through COVID-19

Upholding the Right to Education

Fernando M. Reimers

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Difficult leadership. Sustaining the Right to Education during a Pandemic

Fernando M. Reimers

As the COVID-19 Pandemic ravages the planet changes big and small are changing human lives and our future prospects. Among those changes, few other than the discovery and effective distribution of a vaccine will be as consequential as the changes taking place in our schools. The discovery of a vaccine will save lives, which is crucial given the Pandemic has already taken the lives of 985,823 people, as of September 26, 2020, and that a vaccine, widely available to the public is at least a year away. The disruption to our schools could cause the biggest education setback in history, gravely impacting the lives of students, their future prospects, their communities and widening inequality in unprecedented ways. This is a crucible moment for education, one that will test our resolve and collective commitment to the idea that education is indeed a universal human right.

The measures adopted to mitigate the spread of the virus have disrupted schools and universities, in most cases limiting in person instruction. Even as some schools are beginning to reopen, the prospects of a second wave of infections make a return to in person instruction uncertain. A number of alternative arrangements have been created to mitigate the impact of such disruptions to education in the learning opportunities of students. We know little to date about the effectiveness of those alternative arrangements, and about the extent to which they will leave students less prepared than they would have otherwise been, less interested in continuing their studies, or about how these effects differ for different groups of students. What we do know so far is not very encouraging.

To shed some light on the impact of the Pandemic on education, I invited current students and graduates of the International Education Policy Program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, to reflect on six questions describing how the Pandemic had impacted their work and the students they serve, how they had adjusted to those changes, and to reflect on the likely educational consequences of the Pandemic. These were the questions I posed to them:

> 1. What educational leadership challenges has this Pandemic represented? Could you give some examples of the kind of challenges you have faced?
> 2. How are these challenges different from the challenges of leading in education under normal conditions?
> 3. How have you faced these challenges? What forms of leadership have you used that are different from what you would have used to lead under ordinary conditions?
> 4. What has helped you lead in your sphere of influence during this period of the Pandemic?
> 5. What has been most difficult about leading during this period of the Pandemic?
> 6. In your opinion, what will be the educational consequences of the Pandemic in the next five years?

The forty-two essays included in this book illuminate how the Pandemic has impacted students around the world and transformed a variety of roles in the education eco-system. They illustrate the multidimensional educational impacts of this plague, how various institutions in this ecosystem interact and complement one another in attempts to sustain educational opportunity. They provide a complex view of this impact and the responses to it, one drawn from various vantage points in the educational enterprise, of the educational consequences of the Pandemic and of its possible aftermath.

The authors of these essays are no ordinary group of educators. They are graduates of an elite university, and of a program designed to attract people committed to advancing educational change around the world, in order to contribute to a world that is more inclusive and more sustainable. I count them as leaders of the Global Education Movement, a construct I created to describe the collective leadership efforts, across the world, to advance the right to education included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted at the General Assembly of the United Nations in December of 1948. This movement includes institutions such as schools, universities, governments, international organizations, foundations, non-governmental organizations, among others. It includes individuals in roles such as teachers, school principals, teacher educators, professors, education administrators, ministers of education, education specialists in a variety of organizations, education entrepreneurs and funders. The Global Education Movement is the concrete expression of the African proverb 'it takes a village to raise a child'. The Global Education Movement is that village, a global village, that encompasses efforts of multiple actors, at many different levels, across the borders of nations and states, for the shared enterprise of advancing the promise contained in these six words which open article 26 of the Universal Declaration: *Everyone has the right to education.*

The inclusion of those words in the declaration transformed humanity through what I have elsewhere described as the most remarkable silent revolution in human history[1]. At the time those words and the declaration were adopted at the United Nations, a time when 2.5 billion people lived together on this planet, less than half of them had ever set foot in a school. Today, as 7.8 billion people populate this earth, close to 90% have done so. That achievement, the institutionalization of the common school, is nothing short of

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[1] Reimers, F. 2020. Audacious Education Purposes. Springer.

remarkable. The success of that achievement clearly expressed in the shared concern, across the world, for what is happening to educational opportunity as schools have been disrupted because of a Pandemic.

That achievement represented in the institutionalization of the expectation that each child has a right to be educated is the result of the hard work of millions of people across the world who, day in and day out, labor so that the next generation is more educated than the one that came before. It is to that community of laborers for a more educated world that the graduates of the International Education Policy Program belong. To some extent, they are representatives of that community. These graduates lead the Global Education Movement because, along with others, they devote their work and lives to lift other people through education, to help them become better versions of themselves, to gain the voice and agency to become authors of their own destinies and architects of their communities. It is in this collective global effort to educate all and to lift others that they lead. Their reflections in this book are a window onto how the Global Education Movement, represented in the small number of voices included in this book, faced the most serious education crisis since humanity agreed in 1948 that we should give each member of our species the right to be educated. Their words in these essays capture the present moment in a bottle so that, at the other side of what now looks like an eternity, it becomes possible to understand how this Pandemic was experienced by those leading education institutions across the world.

But their words may, perhaps, also be helpful to others in the Global Education Movement even while we traverse our current predicament, this voyage in the darkness, uncertain about its full blown impact, about its end and about the state in which it will leave the world. The insights in these essays make clear why it is so crucial that more of us engage with this Global Education Movement, how

this Pandemic is bringing an education crisis on top of a pre-existing learning crisis, how it is affecting learners as well as teachers, how it is augmenting social divides in who can learn well, how it may be undoing equal learning opportunities for girls, for the poor, for indigenous children and racial minorities, and especially for those who suffer multiple disadvantages concurrently, such as indigenous girls in rural areas, or poor ethnic minority children with special learning needs, or children living in marginalized regions who speak a subdominant language or refugees whose parents have low levels of education. These risks, that the universal right to education might be more elusive at this time and after the Pandemic than it has ever been in our lifetime, are also the reason why the collective efforts of those who lead Global Education Movement are so crucial, so very necessary at this difficult time in history.

In the everyday actions with which these leaders face the current moment described in the forty two essays included in this book, we sense the commitment, the courage, the love, to persevere in spite all the difficulties, not to give up in the effort to educate, to continue to push for the universal right to education, no matter how challenging this is to do at this time. And the everyday nature of the actions of these inhabitants of the much larger community of the Global Education Movement, can perhaps give us all the same courage and strength to carry on, in hope that we will help to sustain the opportunity for all children to learn, and in so doing build more hope. Hope that at the end of this Pandemic, of this long night of suffering and pain, the sun will rise again, and the world will still be one where everyone belongs, where we can live in peace with one another, where we can relate to this earth in ways that allow the many species now living on the planet, including ours, the chance to live much longer.

Perhaps also these pages might invite those who have not yet seen themselves as part of the Global Education Movement to join its

ranks. It is a large and inclusive global village this movement. Better appreciation of what's at stake, and of what is needed, may help grow the support for the cause to educate all well, and to prevent the undoing of what the silent revolution to educate all well has achieved to date, as more join in.

To set the context for the rest of the book, in these introductory pages I explain how I became concerned about the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on education, I say a few words about the role universities could play in sustaining the Global Education Movement as I describe how my own institution has done so over the years, and conclude underscoring the risks that the pandemic presents to education.

Learning during a Pandemic

In February of 2020 I was planning to visit Mexico during the spring break in the academic calendar at Harvard, scheduled for the week of March 16-20, to give a series of talks about the latest research findings of the Global Education Innovation Initiative, a research practice consortium I lead with the purpose of advancing understanding of how to support education reforms that help students gain the capacities they need to thrive in the 21st century. We had three new books scheduled for publication in March and I was hoping to launch them in Mexico, one of the countries which has been a focus of the Initiative and where colleagues in the partnership have successfully integrated our work with the research, policy and practice communities.

Discussing these plans with a colleague at the Harvard School of Public Health he mentioned that I should reconsider them, given the news suggesting that COVID-19 was rapidly spreading to various countries. He explained how airplanes and airports are easy places in which to contract a respiratory infection and further suggested that,

if the spread of the epidemic continued, we might all have to rethink our travel plans for some time. Based on that advice, I focused more carefully on news about how COVID-19 was spreading, cancelled my spring break travel plans and called colleagues in several international development organizations to discuss the likely implication that, if the epidemic continued, schools around the world would be following the same path which they had followed in some of the countries which had closed schools to curb the spread of the Pandemic. If this were to happen, this could have disorienting consequences for education systems, as there was no playbook for how to continue to educate during the Pandemic. As a result of those conversations, in early March, I began a collaboration with Andreas Schleicher, the director of education and skills of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development to systematically gather and analyze information that could be useful to education leaders in sustaining education during the Pandemic, anticipating that more countries would be closing schools down to contain the spread of the virus. Our idea was simple, to think of the world of a large laboratory, in which different countries would be trying different approaches to educate during the Pandemic. If we could do rapid research to capture these varied practices, and could distribute that information rapidly, we would be providing useful knowledge to those who had to invent a path to sustain education in a situation most of them had never seen before.

On March 11th the Director of the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a Pandemic. A few days later, Andreas Schleicher and I administered a survey to education leaders around the world, to ascertain what education needs had been created or were anticipated by the Pandemic, what plans were in place to address those needs, and what were the areas where these educators anticipated challenges. The results of the survey, which we administered to respondents in 99 countries, were concerning. Most respondents indicated that, by the end of March, schools had closed

down and that they had no plans for educational continuity during the period of school closure. A variety of areas of need where identified in the survey, as well as areas where implementation challenges were anticipated, including how to sustain academic learning, how to prevent widening of social divides in opportunity, how to support the emotional needs of students and teachers, how to continue school feeding programs, and how to establish a technology based delivery system. Our report 'A framework to guide an education response to the COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020'[2] explained how the loss of learning time would reduce opportunities for students to gain knowledge and skills and that protracted disengagement with school learning, might lead students to drop out and not return to school. The report highlighted how different social conditions among students would cause the most marginalized to be impacted more severely as learning opportunities were now more directly mediated by home environments and support. We urged sustained attention to the educational needs of children and youth throughout the Pandemic and proposed that every education system and institution developed a strategy for educational continuity during the Pandemic, offering a framework to develop such strategy.

The report generated significant interest, in part because it was one of the few empirical comparative studies of the educational impact of the Pandemic, so we were invited to share it in multiple virtual convenings with international groups, as well as with stakeholders in particular nations or regions. Those online discussions made evident that there were some silver linings of this global educational tragedy. The first that many people were concerned about it, the second that it was possible to use technology to facilitate conversations among people who all had access to different aspects of the educational enterprise.

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[2] Reimers, F. and A. Schleicher. 2020. A framework to guide an education response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Paris: OECD.

The need for these conversations across large and diverse groups of education stakeholders to shape more adaptive education policies had been the theme a book I had published years ago, in which, with my co-author Noel McGinn, we had explained how education policies were unique in the complexity of the organization they governed, the multiple interests they affected, the multiple goals education was expected to serve, the long term nature of its results, and the changing nature of the social context in which schools operated. Given that singularity, we argued in the book Informed Dialogue, processes of policy reform would benefit from processes of social dialogue sustained by research-based knowledge[3].

Over the month of April, I participated in many informed dialogues based on that first comparative global study of the educational impact of the Pandemic, involving close to 20,000 people. In these virtual town halls, I witnessed ministers of education learn from insights shared by parents or teachers in remote schools, about the impact that the directives of the Ministry were having on their children or families, and I saw leaders in the public and private sectors develop a better appreciation of their opportunities to collaborate in addressing the crisis. These conversations, it seemed to me, were a helpful way to foster empathy and solidarity, and both seemed very much needed at the time.

But these meetings also concerned me because, the more we talked about the findings of the survey, the more aware I, and perhaps others, became of the looming education crisis. There was a risk that just talking about this crisis might reinforce a sense of inevitability about it, and act as a self-fulfilling prophecy. At that point I concluded that it was necessary to expand the focus of our research in the direction of generating more usable results and to begin to

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[3] Reimers, F. and N. McGinn. 1996. Informed Dialogue. Using research to shape education policy around the world. New York: Praeguer.

study efforts that showed that sustaining educational opportunity was possible.

To achieve the goal of producing usable resources that could support continuation of education during the Pandemic, Andreas and I invited colleagues at the World Bank and at the non-profit organization Hundred, to join us in documenting, through short case studies, global examples of efforts to sustain educational opportunity during the Pandemic. We knew it was too early, and that we did not have the time to evaluate the impact of these efforts, given our goal of conducting rapid research that could be useful in the very real time in which education leaders had to make decisions, but thought it would be valuable to document what was being done, and how, so that it would expand the range of options available to those education leaders considering what to do during an education crisis for which there was no playbook. I reached out to graduates of the International Education Policy program to identify innovative practices in educational continuity throughout the world, and to work with me studying them. Many of them responded to this call, with generosity, reaffirming my knowledge that this is a community for which advancing the right to education is not a job, but a life's call and mission. It was very satisfying to collaborate with former students in writing these cases, between the months of May and August, and with our colleagues in the OECD, the World Bank and Hundred, we produced over thirty case studies[4].

As we held various discussion of these cases in virtual fora, I realized they were serving the intended purpose of inspiring education decision makers, and of creating a new sense of accountability, of responsibility to do something, however modest, to sustain educational opportunity. Knowing that in very vulnerable contexts,

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The case studies are available here https://oecdedutoday.com/coronavirus/#Continuity-stories

with limited resources and infrastructure, there were heroic efforts to continue to educate children, inspired others in similar contexts, as well as in settings with more resources and infrastructure. The case studies documented, unsurprisingly since we selected them on that criterion, that innovation was possible through this crisis, that in a relatively short period of time local, state and national governments, as well as organizations of civil society, had created novel ways to continue to engage students, and to teach them. Many of these innovations seemed to have emerged as a result of collaborations, in contexts where leadership had invited and supported such collaborations.

In addition, since one of the needs identified in the first survey was for quality online education resources that could support instruction, I invited a number of graduates of the International Education Policy Program to work with me developing a curated catalogue of online resources, identifying which type of competencies and skills each of those resources could help develop. Our first survey had asked respondents to list the online resources they were using, and our team analyzed all of them using a taxonomy of 21st century skills which we had used to guide other studies of the Global Education Innovation Initiative. The publication reporting that study was an annotated resource that was immediately useful, and an example of how to support teachers, schools and systems, by helping to organize and curate the many existing resources to support online instruction[5].

In May of 2020 Andreas and I conducted another survey, this time to examine how educational opportunity had been sustained during the preceding months, and what plans had been made for the

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[5] Reimers, F., A. Schleicher, J. Saavedra and S. Tuominen. 2020. Supporting the continuation of teaching and learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic Annotated resources for online learning. Paris. OECD.

months ahead. We were surprised to find how much had been done in a relatively short period, and to realize also important differences across countries in how they had succeeded in maintaining educational opportunity. The main theme of our report[6] 'Schooling Disrupted, Schooling Rethought. How the COVID-19 Pandemic is Changing Education' was about how the Pandemic had unleashed unprecedented collaboration and innovation involving teachers, school administrators, organizations in civil society and governments. The survey also showed that, in the views of teachers as well as administrators, the arrangements which had been made had not succeeded in reaching all students and that they had only partially succeeded in teaching the intended curriculum. They also highlighted how little was known about what children were learning. These findings underscored the potential looming education crisis that was developing, in spite of all efforts, especially with respect to growing disparities in learning and engagement with school among children from different social backgrounds, and among countries.

In June of 2020, with my colleagues in UNESCO's Commission on the Futures of Education, we produced a policy framework to mobilize governments and international development organizations to avert this crisis and to begin to work in earnest to build back better. We also underscored the need for global and national solidarity to prevent the widening of education gaps among nations and within nations[7].

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[6] Reimers, F. and A. Schleicher. 2020. Schooling disrupted Schooling rethought. How the COVID-19 Pandemic is changing education. Paris: OECD.

[7] UNESCO. 2020. Nine ideas for public action. International Commission on the Futures of Education. Paris. Unesco. https://en.unesco.org/futuresofeducation/news/nine-ideas-for-public-action

Over the summer, I participated in many conversations with government officials, specialists in international development institutions, and educators, and realized that leadership was a critical ingredient to navigate this crisis. This was most evident with respect to the health impact of the Pandemic, as vast differences in mortality per capita across jurisdictions seemed to reflect variations in institutional capacity and in leadership. Increasingly, the US became an outlier relative to other OECD nations in the very high levels of mortality caused by infections, which could hardly be explained by a deficient health infrastructure. The disregard of the President for the evidence and scientific advice of the top infectious disease specialists, and the politization of simple measures to prevent infections such as wearing masks resulted in a number of fatalities greater than the number of Americans who have died in all wars since the Korean war in the early 1950s. To date 200,000 Americans have died, 20% of the total number of COVID-19 deaths, even though the US accounts for only 4.25% of the world population. Figure 1 shows the number of COVID-19 deaths per 100,000 people

Figure 1. Deaths per 100,000 population as of September 25, 2020.
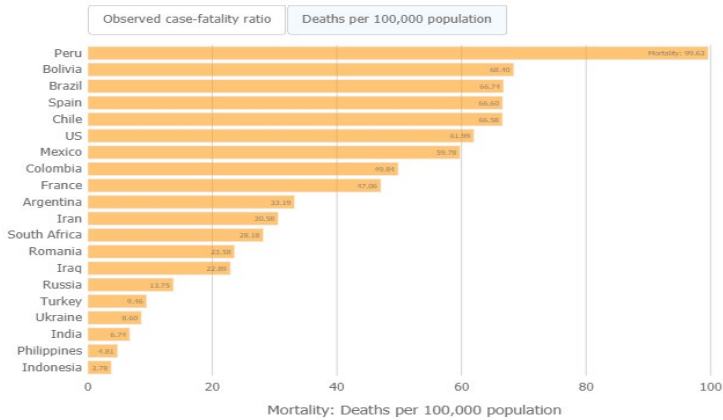
Source: Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center. September 25, 2020.
https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality

In conducting the case studies of educational innovation I had noticed that all of them had happened as a result of good leadership, of individuals and groups committed to finding ways to sustain educational opportunity, against the odds, and who had succeeded in creating enabling environments which had invited collaboration and participation, generating significant innovation and creativity. To spotlight the importance of leadership, and to foster a better understanding of the challenges leaders faced in addressing the Pandemic, I invited several ministers of education in Latin America to write essays discussing the challenges they were facing. These essays were published in a book on system level leadership during the Pandemic[8] and I convened a global forum to discuss the role of education leadership during the Pandemic at which several of these ministers discussed the topic.

As the summer of 2020 ended, and I prepared to start teaching my education policy course online, I realized how much of my own life

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[8] Reimers, F. 2020. Liderando sistemas educativos durante la Pandemica de COVID-19. Kindle Direct Publishing.

had been impacted by the Pandemic. I was now doing most of my work confined at home. Public authorities in the State of Massachusetts had issued guidance that had limited how institutions could function and Harvard had shifted all instruction online, making the unprecedented decision of authorizing various professional schools to conduct all instruction for degree programs online, an option the Harvard Graduate School of Education pursued. The course on comparative education policy I am teaching this fall includes a strong focus on the impact of COVID-19 on education, and at least half of the students in the course are engaged in research projects, working with governments around the world studying the impacts of the Pandemic on education, and examining options to mitigate such impact.

Some of the changed induced by the Pandemic were positive. I had not traveled in six months, something I had not done since completing my doctorate in 1988, but I had participated in more international conversations during those months, and in more countries, than in the preceding six years. In addition, the time unspent on travel was now entirely focused on research and writing, on a topic of obvious importance, so even though I was working very long hours seven days a week, and did not have any break during the summer, I was able to focus on how to sustain educational opportunity during COVID-19. I redirected all efforts and resources of the Global Education Innovation Initiative to that subject. With my research partners, we embarked on a cross-national study of how universities around the world had undertaken efforts to sustain educational opportunities at the primary and secondary levels, our two forthcoming books, one on education system change and one

on education and climate change, finished during this period, explicitly address the urgency to 'build back better'[9].

A year ago, I had planned a reunion of graduates of the program to coincide with the culmination of the celebration of the centennial of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Realizing that an in-person reunion would not be possible, we adjusted our plans to make it a virtual reunion. The conference program reflects our current moment, it is entirely about how the Pandemic is impacting educational opportunity, the leadership of our graduates, how they are adjusting and their forecasts for the future. The idea of this book was also born out of these various plans. Some years ago, I had surveyed graduates of the International Education Policy Program about the work they were doing and the leadership lessons they had learned. I presented the results of that study, along with essays from a number of those graduates, in a book which both inspired me and gave me great pleasure[10]. I thought it fitting to do the same in the current moment and, as was the case a few years ago, I was again inspired by my former students, from learning about how they are facing this moment. Their courage, determination and resiliency are the reason I have hope that we will build back better, and weather this very serious educational crisis.

I am also hopeful that Harvard, and other universities, at this critical time for the idea that all children have the right to be educated, will continue to take responsibility for the advancement of the Global Education Movement, through the education of those who lead it

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[9] Reimers, F. (Ed.) In Press. Implementing Deeper Learning and 21st Education Reforms: Building an Education Renaissance After a Global Pandemic. Springer; and Reimers, F. (Ed.) In Press. Education and Climate Change. The Role of Universities. Springer.

[10] Reimers, F. 2018. One Student at a Time. Leading the Global Education Movement. Kindle Direct Publishing.

and through the research and engagement of their faculty. The research project I am currently working on examines the efforts of 25 universities in this regard. Preliminary findings suggest that many universities understand that this is indeed a central aspect of being socially embedded institutions. There are 28,000 institutions of higher education around the world, and if they all took responsibility to prevent what could be the greatest educational setback in the history of humanity, the Global Education Movement to educate all children well would be well served. Universities are certainly a very important partner in this global movement, and they have at multiple times in history played a critical role partnering with schools and high schools, to advance global educational opportunity. In the next section, I illustrate this point with a few thoughts on the global educational engagements of my own institution, the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

The Harvard Graduate School of Education and the Global Education Movement[11]

The Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE) is celebrating its centennial this year. The first faculty appointment in the field of education at Harvard was made by President Charles William Eliot, a remarkable leader who turned Harvard into a major research university. President Eliot had spent two years of his life studying educational systems in Europe, and in particular how those systems contributed to social and economic development. From this study, Eliot developed a vision of how education advanced society, which he laid out in an article he published in the magazine The Atlantic in

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[11] I am indebted to Patricia Graham, Howard Gardner, Noel McGinn, Jerome Murphy, Dwight Perkins, Henry Rosovsky and Catherine Snow, who I interviewed to augment my knowledge of the history of the school as I wrote this chapter, and to Arthur Powell who provided feedback to a draft. The responsibility for the views or omissions on this part of the history of HGSE is mine.

February of 1869[12]. This article, arguably, brought him to the attention of the committee that appointed him President of Harvard University. His vision of the university as an engine of economic and social development is an extension of the ideas he laid in that paper.

In appointing Paul Henry Hanus in 1891 as an education professor in Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Eliot was especially interested in how Harvard could contribute to preparing teachers for American high schools so that students would be well prepared to continue post-secondary studies. Hanus, who had immigrated from Prussia, shared Eliot's broad view of education as socially embedded in the larger society and economy. Hanus, as chair of the department of education, worked tirelessly to create the intellectual and institutional infrastructure to make Education a distinct field of studies at Harvard. And so, the school of education was formally established in 1920, with one of Hanus' students, Henry Wyman Holmes, serving as the first dean.

It is possible that one could find examples of international engagement of the school since the early years in the 1920s, but, since the Global Education Movement begins with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at the UN General Assembly in December of 1948, it is from this period that I will draw examples of global engagement at HGSE.

HGSE has engaged with the Global Education Movement as a forum to debate ideas that have been of significance in advancing the universal right to education, educating students, and through the research and work of the faculty.

One of the ways in which HGSE has engaged with the Global Education Movement has been as a forum for discussions of

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12 Eliot, C.W. 1869. The New Education. The Atlantic. February Issue.

relevance to those efforts. In March of 1947, the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and the International Activities Committee of the Harvard Student Council, invited Bernard Drzewieski, head of UNESCO's Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Section to speak to students and faculty about Reconstruction efforts. The meeting focused on ways in which American colleges could assist UNESCO through Food Relief Drives and promoting student and faculty exchanges[13]. Twenty-five years later, in November 1973, HGSE hosted, in partnership with the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, a conference to discuss the policy implications of the IEA studies, the first cross-national study. The timing of the conference was important, the Coleman Report, published a few years later, had made evident how limited the influence of American schools was, relative to the socio-economic background of students, in predicting educational achievement. Coleman, who participated in the conference, wrote a paper using results from the IEA six subject and 19 country study which showed greater effects of schools as children proceeded to higher grades and in subjects such as science than in language[14]. These findings made

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[13] The Harvard Crimson. Drzewieski to Tell UNESCO Plans Tonight. March 20, 1947. https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1947/3/20/drzewieski-to-tell-unesco-plans-tonight/ This meeting took place even before the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted at the UN. UNESCO, which would become the institution tasked with advancing the right to education, had been established three years earlier, in November of 1945, two months after the end of World War II, to support the reconstruction of education systems in the countries most impacted by the War.

[14] Coleman, James. Effects of School on Learning. The IEA Findings. Paper presented at the Conference on Educational Achievement. Harvard University. November 1973. This paper was eventually published as Methods and Results in the IEA Studies of Effects of School on Learning. Coleman, James S. *Review of Educational Research*, 45, 3, 355-86, Sum 75

visible that the world could indeed be studied as a global laboratory of educational practice.

In addition to serving as a forum to discuss ideas relevant to the Global Education Movement, HGSE's contributions to the movement involved three principal interrelated channels: a) educating students who would go on to play leadership roles in the Global Education Movement, b) internationalizing the curriculum as a way to educate students on the challenges and opportunities to advance the Global Education Movement, and c) the participation of HGSE faculty with the Global Education Movement, sometimes directly, as faculty engaged in a practice that directly connected to advancing the right to education globally, or indirectly, as faculty research had global influence helping advance the right to education. Faculty research in turn included those faculty whose research had a principal comparative or international focus and those faculty whose research, while based primarily in the United States, also had global influence.

I will begin this discussion examining examples of direct involvement of HGSE faculty in efforts to advance the Global Education Movement as they created immersive and transformative opportunities to internationalize the curriculum, to educate students who would go on play roles of considerable influence in advancing the Global Education Movement and to conceptualize and theorize such practice in a way that advanced academic knowledge relevant to the Global Education Movement.

The first ambitious initiatives involving HGSE faculty directly in the Global Education Movement were supported by the newly created United Agency for International Development under the administration of President John F. Kennedy in November 1961. In April of 1962, the Harvard Corporation approved a contract between the University and USAID to fund the creation of a model

comprehensive high school in Aiyetoro, Nigeria, as a partnership between the government of Nigeria (which had achieved independence from Britain in 1960), the Harvard Graduate School of Education and the Newton school. The pilot project, which was headed by Judson T. Shaplin Associate Dean at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, integrated education principles from the US, Britain and Sweden in offering students a general education without an entrance examination. Harvard College Dean John Monro, a champion at Harvard in efforts to enroll low income and minority students, gave the project his full support as an initiative that would bolster democratic ideals in the newly independent nation, dismantling the elite nature of an early tracking system[15].

The same year, HGSE Dean Francis Keppel established the Center for Studies in Education and Development. As first director he appointed Adam Curle. Curle had earned a PhD in anthropology at Oxford and taught social psychology there, quickly developing an interest in education. While a Professor of education at the University of Exeter he began to consult for the United Nations in the early 1950s. In 1956 he joined Harvard's Development Advisory Services project to establish the Pakistan Planning Commission and spent three years in that country heading their education work. From Pakistan, Curle moved to South Africa to help establish colleges to educate black South Africans in Swaziland and Basutoland. The establishment of the Center and Curle's arrival to Harvard, augmented HGSE's involvement in international development work. This work was strengthen by a grant from the Ford Foundation to Harvard in 1965, a 12.5 million dollar gift to support international studies, which funded the construction of a building and endowed nine professorships, one of which, the Ford

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[15] Trobe, J. Harvard to Found School in Nigeria. The Harvard Crimson. April 21, 1962.
https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1962/4/21/harvard-to-found-school-in-nigeria/

Foundation Professorship in International Education went to Adam Curle. The gift, which at the time was the largest single gift received by Harvard, had a considerable influence supporting the University's international work.

With funding from USAID and from foundations, the Center for Studies in Education and Development appointed research associates to work on its many projects advising governments around the world. These development professionals held also instructional appointments at HGSE, in this way establishing an academic program in international education with strong connections with practice, often involving participating in planning entire education systems. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Center undertook projects advising governments and international development agencies in Afghanistan, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, India, Kenya, Panama, Lesotho, Malaysia, Mauritania, Mexico, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Singapore, Thailand, Venezuela and Yemen.

Through these projects, the Center supported also research and training of numerous doctoral students, who would go on to pursue careers in government and international development agencies. The Center also hosted a number of visitors who were influential in advancing the Global Education Movement. The active involvement of the Center's affiliated HGSE faculty members on international education was also the basis of research and of numerous academic publications. For instance, based on his work as an education advisor Curle wrote the book 'Planning for Education in Pakistan. A Personal Case Study' an insightful analysis of the role of the international development advisor during this period in history in

which the Global Education Movement produced extraordinary advances in access to schooling in the developing world[16].

The Center also organized convenings that engaged the HGSE community with broader efforts in the Global Education Movement, hosting a weekly seminar which often involved leaders of thought or practice from outside Harvard with HGSE students and faculty. In 1963, for instance, Philip Coombs, Director of UNESCO's Institute for International Education, was invited to deliver the Burton lecture. In his speech, Coombs criticized American educational assistance to developing nations for their 'lack of strategy or coherent body of principles'[17].

Among the faculty brought by the Center to Harvard were Russell G. Davis, Noel D. Burleson, H. Merrill Jackson, Manuel Zymelman, Noel McGinn and Donald P. Warwick. Russell Davis, who had obtained a doctorate in HGSE in 1955, and who had gone on to work as an education advisor in Ethiopia and in Latin America, was brought back to HGSE in 1960 to work in the Center and as a lecturer in the HGSE faculty. He would subsequently become associate director, and then Director of the Center and in 1967, when Curle left the University, the Ford Foundation Professor of International Education.

Noel McGinn joined the Center in 1964 to lead the development of the entire education system of a planned city in the South of Venezuela, living in that country between 1964 and 1965 to assist the government in planning this city. That work was the subject of his

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[16] Curle, A. 1966. Planning for Education in Pakistan. A Personal Case Study. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

[17] Coombs, Philip H. Burton Lectures 1964. Education and Foreign Aid. Ways to Improve United States Foreign Educational Aid; Problems and Prospects of Education in Africa. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

book w Davis 'Build a Mill, Build a City, Build a School'[18]. In 1966 he became a lecturer at HGSE. In 1970 McGinn moved to Chile for two years, to help found the first educational research center in the country, at the Catholic University. In 1974 he joined the newly established Harvard Institute for International Development and in 1979, he moved to Mexico to work for a center of educational planning. Upon return to Harvard, in 1982, he was appointed as a Professor at HGSE, becoming also the Director of the Office of International Education, tasked with helping to internationalize the curriculum of the school.

The report of one of the Center's projects conveyed much of its culture and ethos, that Universities should be socially embedded and directly contribute to societal advancement. The project, funded by USAID, was a study of higher education in Vietnam containing a number of recommendations to strengthen universities[19]. The project report reflects in this comment a view of the university as a socially embedded institution:

> "A lack of clarity in the purposes of the various institutions [of higher education] deprives the country of the high regard that a people should have for the education and training of their leaders and experts… University programs must serve both the needs of nations and of individuals. In Vietnam they can only do so by becoming immediately responsive to the country's problems.

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[18] McGinn, N. and R. G. Davis. 1967. Build a Mill, Build a Mill, Build a City, Build a School Industrialization, Urbanization, and Education in Ciudad Guayana. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

[19] A tragedy would bring wide notoriety to the project at Harvard, when Vincent Conroy, a beloved HGSE faculty who was also the director of field studies at the school, died on a plane crash in Vietnam while working on the study.

It is hard to know and perhaps irrelevant to consider the extent to which the wide gap between the economic needs of Vietnam and its programs in the universities is due to the nation's preoccupation with war, the shortage of resources, the relative newness of its institutions, or to the academic customs that have been inherited by the country."[20]

The Center made also valuable contributions providing a conducive environment for notable figures to write influential books, a point I will illustrate with the books two visitors with appointments at the Center wrote there: Clarence Beeby and Paulo Freire. Clarence Edward Beeby was a significant figure in the Global Education Movement by the time he came as a visitor to the Center. A psychologist who left the academy to become Director of Education in New Zealand, he had led an education reform to advance educational opportunity for disadvantaged youth in the 1940s and 1950s. Beeby had been actively involved in the educational programs of UNESCO since 1946 and, at the end of his term as Director of Education, in 1960, he was appointed as New Zealand Ambassador to France, and chair of UNESCO's executive board between 1960-1963. He helped establish the International Institute for Educational Planning, a center to train educational planners from developing countries as those where at the height of educational expansion. Beeby was invited by Davis to spend the year of 1966 at Harvard, where he wrote the book 'The quality of education in developing countries', an influential theory of how strategies to develop education systems had to be aligned with the state of institutional development of each education system[21]. Beeby referred to his

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[20] The Harvard Crimson. Survey of South Vietnamese Universities Describes Severe Problems, Shortcomings. August 1967.
https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1967/8/22/survey-of-south-vietnamese-universities-describes/

[21] Beeby, C.E. 1966. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

period at Harvard as one where he wrote his most important book and requested that HGSE former Dean Patricia Graham spoke at his Eulogy. Dean Graham travelled to New Zealand to honor Beeby's request.

Years after she stepped down as Dean, Patricia Graham would become heavily involved in global education efforts herself serving on the board of the Central European University, as a director of the higher education group within the Open Society Foundation, and as director on the board of Smolny College of St. Petersburg State University. This form of engagement with other organizations is another avenue through which HGSE faculty engage with the Global Education Movement. For example, after stepping down as Associate Dean and before becoming Dean of HGSE in 1992, Jerome Murphy spent a six-month sabbatical in South Africa, helping to establish a program to prepare math and science teachers at the University of the Western Cape, which Harvard funded.

Upon meeting him as part of the Center's work in Chile in 1968, where he was in exile from the military dictatorship in his home country in Brazil, Noel McGinn invited Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, to join the Center. In his office in 65 Kirkland Street, where the Center was located, Freire finished reviewing the final manuscript of his book 'The Pedagogy of the Oppressed'. Freire also offered a seminar on his teaching approach, which was well attended by students. Freire left an impression in a number of the students at HGSE at the time. One of them was Margaret H. Marshall, a student from South Africa who had decided to transfer a scholarship to pursue a PhD in art history at Harvard to study at HGSE because the ethos of the school resonated with the excitement of the civil rights movement. Marshall would go on to become the first woman to become Chief Justice in the Massachusetts Supreme judicial court and an activist in the US-based anti-apartheid movement. She wrote

the groundbreaking decision that made Massachusetts the first State in the USA to recognize gay marriage.

Just as it did for faculty and visitors, the Center for Studies in Educational Development provided an intellectual home that nourished the cosmopolitanism of many students at HGSE. Some of them would go on to pursue careers that advanced the Global Education Movement in important ways. One of them, Peggy Dulany, who completed her doctorate at HGSE in 1973, went on to establish Synergos, a nonprofit organization that supports leaders and social enterprises in the developing world working on education and social development. Another student at the time, David Harman, played an important role advancing Adult Literacy, consulting for various governments in the developing world, he would go on to become a Professor at the Hebrew University in Israel, where he played very influential roles as Director of the Joint Authority for Jewish Education, Advisor on Educational Planning at the Ministry of Education and deputy director of secondary education and of adult literacy.

In 1974, Harvard President Derek Bok established the Harvard Institute for International Development. By then, the Development Advisory Services, an outgrowth of the Economics Department which involved faculty and graduate students in international development work, had a very established program. Most of that program involved helping to create national planning units in developing countries, and most of the work involved macro-economic planning. It was in one of those projects that Adam Curle first began to collaborate with Harvard faculty. Bok concluded that if that form of engagement with the wider world was good for faculty and students in economics, it would also be good for anthropologists, for faculty in public health and for faculty in education, so HIID was designed to foster interdisciplinary collaborations among the various faculties, in work that contributed

to reduce poverty, promote economic and social development, improve public health and education. Curle had already left Harvard to become fully involved on peace studies, and Davis was the last director of the Center for Studies in Education and Development, which he closed down, the result of a combination of a decline in funding and decline in support from the Dean of the School of Education at the time. HIID would go on to play, for many parts of the university, the role the Center had played for HGSE, mobilizing the university to advance development, supporting research that would then advance knowledge, and supporting the education of graduate students. As had been the case with the Center, the instructional program in international education at HGSE engaged faculty who also held appointments at HIID, where they worked on projects that bridged scholarship and practice.

The most significant of those projects, led by Noel McGinn, was the BRIDGES project, funded by a ten-million-dollar grant from USAID to support Basic Research in Education and Development between 1985 and 1992. This project funded many studies on the quality of education in the developing world, supported doctoral student research, and was a critical part of the education of many graduate students, including me.

In addition to the work of faculty who had active engagements in an international education practice, other faculty research at HGSE advanced knowledge that contributed to the intellectual underpinnings of the Global Education Movement. That work included work of faculty whose research was comparative or primarily focused outside the United States, as well as faculty whose research focused primarily in the United States, but whose influence extended elsewhere, often via the students they taught. Among the former, are anthropologist Beatrice Whiting, one of the first women to be tenured at Harvard, who worked at HGSE between 1952, first as a research associate becoming a professor in 1973, with her

husband John Whiting, also a Harvard professor. Together they conducted comparative studies of child development and socialization in three continents in the developing world. Robert Levine, a doctoral student of John Whiting, became one of the few HGSE professors whose cross-cultural studies of child development, parenting and the effects of maternal literacy were primarily outside the United States. He discovered the mechanism through which maternal education influenced fertility, as it changed the parenting practices of mothers. Catherine Snow arrived to HGSE already having done research on language acquisition and literacy in other contexts, continuing that international focus in her work throughout her career. Gerry Lesser, whose earlier work developing educational television for children (Sesame Street) was primarily in the United States, extended that work internationally significantly in the later part of his career. Merry (Corky) White, William Cummings and Bruce Fuller taught international and comparative education at HGSE in the 1980s and 1990s.

A number of other HGSE faculty, whose work was primarily focused on the United States, also impacted efforts to advance the Global Education Movement through their ideas, including for example Jeanne Chall's theory of reading acquisition as a developmental process, Larry Kohlberg's theory of moral development, Courtney Cazden's work on language development, Carol Dweck's theory of mindset, Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, Carol Weiss's approaches to the evaluation of programs and policies, Robert Selman's theory on perspective taking, Kurt Fischer's work on cognitive development, Richard Elmore's theorizing of the instructional core and of approaches to policy reform to transform it, Richard Murnane's work on the declining economic returns of low order cognitive skills in a knowledge economy, and Paul Harris' work on early child development, among others.

Founded in 1967, Project Zero, an institution within the Harvard Graduate School of Education, has been a significant avenue of global engagement for the school, particularly since 1980, when Howard Gardner, then director of Project Zero, visited four universities in China as part of a delegation led by Dean Paul Ylvisaker, which included also Gerry Lesser and Richard Light. That visit had the effect of sparking Gardner's global interests and, along with it, of his colleagues on PZ. Also, during the deanship of Paul Ylvisaker, the Bernard Van Leer Foundation, provided significant support to Comparative and International research at HGSE.

In addition to the work of the faculty, the Harvard Graduate School of Education has contributed to the Global Education Movement through the education of our students, of which I have provided a couple of examples already. In 1961, for example, Ruth Wong Hie-King received her Ed.M. from HGSE, and her Doctorate in 1962. Dr. Hie-King was a teacher from Singapore, upon graduation from HGSE, she taught at the University of Malaya in Singapore, established the faculty of education at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, was the director of research at Singapore's Ministry of Education, and was the first woman to direct the National Institute of Education, Singapore's lead institution in preparing teachers and school administrators. Many other graduates of the school went on to play leadership roles in universities, school systems and international development institutions, and to make significant contributions to the advancement of the universal right of education, such as Ernesto Schiefelbein, who would become Minister of Education of Chile and Director of UNESCO's regional office for Latin America, or Gwang Jo Kim, who became deputy minister of education of South Korea and director of UNESCO's Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau.

In sum, HGSE has engaged, in ways big and small, with the Global Education Movement to educate all children since the right to

education was adopted in the Universal Declaration. Sometimes more intentionally and directly, others in more roundabout ways. Through the work of our faculty and students, as a result of the interactions with colleagues in the larger Harvard, in many respects a much more international university than the school of education, our work has been shaped and has contributed to this larger global project, much bigger than ourselves.

In the long history of global engagement of HGSE, the International Education Policy Program, established under the Deanship of Jerome Murphy in the year 2000, is just a small episode. The program was created when Dean Murphy brought three faculty members to HGSE to revamp an international program which had seen better days. With Suzanne Grant Lewis and Emily Hannum, and with the support of Richard Murnane who was then chair of the Department of Administration, Planning and Social Policy, we designed the IEP program and persuaded the senior faculty to authorize it. Over the years, a number of colleagues joined the HGSE faculty in teaching the amazing students the program attracted: Thomas Cassidy and Haiyan Hua, who worked for HIID and moved to HGSE when the Institute was disbanded, Matthew Jukes, Felipe Barrera Osorio, Sarah Dryden-Peterson and Emmerich Davies. Their presence at HGSE, given their own global interests and expertise, helped to internationalize HGSE's curriculum and to reinforce the school's involvement in the Global Education Movement. Internally, a number of faculty supported the education of students in the program and, I hope, cultivated their own global curiosity as a result of working with them. Over the years it has existed, the program benefited from a program coordinator who has played a pivotal role supporting the academic experience of our students, and in this way also helped internationalize the school. I am certain various cohorts of graduates keep fond memories of our splendid coordinators: Mitra Shavarini, Barbara Perlo, Omolola Irele and Andy Hall.

Small as the IEP is, the pleasure of educating over one thousand graduates of this program over the last two decades has been a high privilege. To see so many of them go on to take leadership positions in schools, school systems, non-governmental organizations, foundations, governments and international development agencies has fulfilled every expectation we had when the program was created. Given the many questions I had to answer at the senior faculty where the program was approved, I could not have predicted that the program would meet such success and last that long. The first cohort included only 15 students, but interest in the program grew quickly as others in leadership positions in the Global Education Movement encountered our graduates. The last cohort of graduates of the program has just begun their studies, as the school launches five new master's programs, that will replace all current master's programs. The graduates of the IEP over the last two decades will continue to do good work advancing the Global Education Movement, they will continue to be HGSE's graduates and it is my hope that they will remain as engaged with each other and with the school as they have been over the years.

As was the case before this program existed, HGSE will find ways to continue to play a role in the important task of contributing to the education of all of the world's children[22], just as we began to do when we took the bold step to partner with others to establish the first comprehensive high school in Nigeria, and just as we have done in many and varied ways since. For as long as Harvard remains committed to being a socially embedded university, one interested in contributing to solve important challenges affecting humanity, being relevant to advancing global education will remain close to our mission, and as HGSE begins its second century, this Harvard school will in all likelihood be the principal avenue to be of service

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[22] We are planning a concentration in international education that will be open to students in the five programs.

to that goal. As the COVID-19 Pandemic disrupts educational institutions worldwide, there is no better time to examine how we are doing on that front, and to try to be of greater service to sustaining global educational opportunity intentionally and effectively.

COVID-19 and the risks to the Global Education Movement

Emerging evidence suggests that the Pandemic is creating the most serious educational crisis of our lifetime. It could result in the collapse of education for poor children globally, but especially in the developing world, where nine out of ten students in the world live. Aggravating pre-existing challenges in low levels of learning for 1.6 billion learners in over 190 countries around the world, and in vast disparities in the learning outcomes achieved by children born to different social circumstances, the disruptions the Pandemic has caused to schools have made what in many places was already a challenging situation, a whole lot worse. School closures have affected 94% of students, and 99% in the case of low and lower-middle income countries[23].

The effects of the Pandemic on education include the direct effects, resulting from the interruption of schools, and from the reduction of fiscal space governments face as they must meet the health and economic demands created by the Pandemic, as well as the indirect effects, resulting from the diminished support to continue with their studies and from growing hunger and insecurity that the most vulnerable children face as a result of the economic impact of the Pandemic on their families. The direct effects resulting from the interruption of schooling include discontinuities in instruction, plus

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[23] United Nations. 2020. Education during COVID-19 and beyond. https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_covid-19_and_education_august_2020.pdf

other services offered in school, including food and various forms of health services. For many children schools are one of the safest spaces in their lives, providing them support and stability. The indirect effects are also multipronged, including the impact of loss of income in the family causing food and livelihood insecurity, health impacts in the family, stress at home resulting from prolonged anxiety and from the uncertainty created by the Pandemic, and for some children violence and other toxic stress at home or in their communities. As these economic impacts are likely to get much worse in the coming years, because of the slow recovery, they will exacerbate many of the indirect effects.

A recent synthesis of the global economic impact of the Pandemic summarizes it in this way:

> "multiple financial crises across the world, sovereign debt defaults in the developing world, a contraction in economic activity, decline in global trade, increased unemployment, a disproportionate impact on lower income households, an additional 60 million people pushed into extreme poverty, and an increase in hunger. Furthermore, the economic recovery will be slow"[24]

This financial crisis will exacerbate the preexisting deficit in education financing, necessary to achieve the education goal agreed upon at the 2015 general assembly of the United Nations, when the Sustainable Development Goals were adopted. This includes Goal 4, Education, aimed for universal secondary education globally, and improvement in the quality of education. Prior to the Pandemic, the financing gap to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 had been

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[24] Reinhart, C. and V. Reinhart. The Pandemic Depression. The Global Economy Will Never Be the Same. Foreign Affairs. September/October 2020.

estimated for low income countries and lower-middle-income countries at $148 billion per year[25].

This challenge to the capacity to fund and improve education is significant because education is not just one of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals, it is a cornerstone of all other goals, essential to achieve poverty reduction, gender equality, improvements in health, mitigation of climate change, etc.

The economic crisis will impact the poor disproportionately and create food and livelihood insecurity for many. The World Bank has estimated that the number of people in extreme poverty will increase from 580 million people to between 679 and 719 million[26].

These financing challenges will be compounded by the likely consequences of the educational loss caused by the Pandemic. Because children will not learn as much as they were able to, before their schools were disrupted by the Pandemic, and due to the lack of engagement with learning during this period, this will cause some of children to drop out. School dropout will diminish the knowledge and skills of many of the current generation of students, diminishing their future productivity, employment prospects, and in turn their ability to contribute to development in their economies. The World Bank has estimated, in the most conservative case, that such education loss would result in an economic loss of ten trillion dollars over the lifetime of the current generation of learners[27].

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[25] United Nations. 2020. Education during COVID-19 and beyond. https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_covid-19_and_education_august_2020.pdf
[26] World Bank. 2020. Global Economic Prospects. Pandemic, Recession: The Global Economy in Crisis. https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/global-economic-prospects
[27] World Bank. 2020. Simulating the potential impact of COVID-19. A set of global estimates.

It is because of these and other effects of the Pandemic, that the Secretary General of the United Nations, has characterized the severity of this crisis as follows:

> "The pandemic is more than a health crisis; it is an economic crisis, a humanitarian crisis, a security crisis, and a human rights crisis. It has affected us as individuals, as families and as societies. The crisis has highlighted fragilities within and among nations. It is no exaggeration to suggest that our response will involve remaking and reimagining the very structures of societies and the ways in which countries cooperate for the common good. Coming out of this crisis will require a whole-of-society, whole-of-government and whole-of-the-world approach driven by compassion and solidarity."[28]

Central to the inability to continue to educate students during the Pandemic are low levels of skills of their teachers to do so remotely, and a considerable digital divide that excludes many poor children from connectivity and devices to access online education. In 2018, the OECD conducted a survey of representative samples of teachers across the world in which they were asked various questions about their preparation, capabilities and teaching conditions. The results show significant need for teacher preparation in using information and communication technologies for teaching, as shown in table 1.

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https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/publication/simulating-potential-impacts-of-covid-19-school-closures-learning-outcomes-a-set-of-global-estimates

[28] UN Response to COVID 19.
https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/UN-response

Table 1. Teacher preparation to use Information and communication technologies in teaching.

	Countries/economies where the indicator is **above** the OECD average
	Countries/economies where the indicator is **not statistically different** from the OECD average
	Countries/economies where the indicator is **below** the OECD average

	Percentage of teachers for whom the "use of ICT for teaching" has been included in their formal education or training **(1)**	Percentage of teachers who felt "well prepared" or "very well prepared" for the use of ICT for teaching **(2)**	Percentage of teachers for whom "use of ICT for teaching" has been included in their recent professional development activities **(3)**	Percentage of teachers reporting a high level of need for professional development in ICT skills for teaching **(4)**	Percentage of teachers who "frequently" or "always" let students use ICT for projects or class work **(5)**	Percentage of principals reporting shortage or inadequacy of digital technology for instruction **(6)**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Alberta (Canada)	71	42	56	8	66	12
Australia*	65	39	67	11	78	12
Austria	40	20	46	15	33	18
Belgium	51	28	40	18	29	29
- *Flemish Comm. (Belgium)*	56	34	45	9	38	16
Brazil	64	64	52	27	42	59
Bulgaria	58	50	63	23	44	26
CABA (Argentina)	53	50	61	20	64	39
Chile	77	67	51	17	63	13
Colombia	75	59	78	34	71	64
Croatia	47	36	73	26	46	25
Czech Republic	45	28	41	13	35	24
Denmark	47	40	47	11	90	13
England (UK)	75	51	40	5	41	15
Estonia	54	30	74	19	46	12
Finland	56	21	74	19	51	20
France	51	29	50	23	36	30
Georgia	45	47	67	33	53	29
Hungary	51	66	69	20	48	36
Iceland	46	26	63	21	54	5
Israel	58	47	69	29	52	40
Italy	52	36	68	17	47	31
Japan	60	28	53	39	18	34
Kazakhstan	75	69	90	30	66	45
Korea	59	48	61	21	30	24
Latvia	55	48	77	23	48	41
Lithuania	45	57	69	24	62	30
Malta	70	49	48	14	48	6
Mexico	77	80	64	16	69	44
Netherlands	49	29	61	16	51	16
New Zealand	59	34	73	14	80	18
Norway	46	36	58	22	m	11

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Portugal	47	40	47	12	57	55
Romania	70	70	52	21	56	50
Russian Federation	69	72	75	15	69	32
Saudi Arabia	73	72	76	28	49	61
Shanghai (China)	79	63	77	30	24	10
Singapore	88	60	75	14	43	2
Slovak Republic	62	45	60	17	47	25
Slovenia	53	67	59	8	37	4
South Africa	62	54	53	32	38	65
Spain	38	36	68	15	51	21
Sweden	37	37	67	22	63	10
Turkey	74	71	61	7	67	22
United Arab Emirates	86	86	85	10	77	31
United States	63	45	60	10	60	19
Viet Nam	97	80	93	55	43	82
OECD average-31	56	43	60	18	53	25

Source: OECD, TALIS 2018 Database, Table I.4.13, Table I.4.13, Table I.5.18, Table I.5.21, Table I.2.1 and Table I.3.63.

*   Participation rate of principals is too low to ensure comparability for principals' reports and country estimates are not included in the OECD average.

Beyond financial resources, connectivity and teacher capacity, leadership is critical to achieve the essential system transformation that will be involved in recovering the learning loss caused by the Pandemic, and in producing the essential transformation of education systems in order to build back better. Leadership is at the heart of how this Pandemic has impacted health and lives, and it will be at the heart of the collateral damage that it will cause.

Good leadership, collective leadership, can help us avert the worst of this crisis and, in some cases, perhaps even build back better as we address pre-existing challenges. We will need sound education strategies to sustain education during the pandemic, and to recover learning loss. They should be based on the best evidence and have clear implementation plans. They should include effective communication strategies, which reach and engage students, parents and teachers. They should be based on clear priority setting and provide adequate support for teachers and parents to develop the necessary skills to support learners as necessary.

Defining clear priorities will be complex. It will involve finding a balance between health and safety, wellbeing, ongoing engagement in school, learning, inclusion of all students and equity, participation of all relevant stakeholders, encouraging and sustaining innovation in classrooms and schools and rapid learning. Identifying actions aligned with each of these priorities requires careful design. For instance, inclusion and equity requires thinking about the language of instruction for students and for parents so that those who speak subdominant languages are also included, it requires thinking about delivery systems that can truly reach all children, it requires preparing teachers so they can support students with special learning needs. We should be especially attentive to the gendered impacts of this Pandemic. A rapid assessment conducted by the UN suggests violence against women has increased during the Pandemic[29].
More than ever coordination across organizations, within education and beyond, will be necessary. The most obvious need is for

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[29] UN Women 2020. Impact of COVID-19 on violence against women and girls and service provision: UN Women rapid assessment and findings. https://www.unwomen.org/-/MEDIA/HEADQUARTERS/ATTACHMENTS/SECTIONS/LIBRARY/PUBLICATIONS/2020/IMPACT-OF-COVID-19-ON-VIOLENCE-AGAINST-WOMEN-AND-GIRLS-AND-SERVICE-PROVISION-EN.PDF?LA=EN&VS=0

coordination with public health authorities, but other forms of inter-sectoral collaboration are essential. One of the priorities should be to extend internet connectivity as broadly as possible to leverage the power of online based learning.

Clear priorities will allow the development of good strategies, based on sound implementation and program theories. This needs to take into account the local context where they will be implemented and provide room for the necessary adaptation. Contextualizing responses in this way will also enable building on existing assets and strengths of local actors and institutions.

Such clarity about priorities and strategy will in turn permit clear communication to all stakeholders, and the development of monitoring of the implementation process to permit rapid course correction and organizational learning. We should be attentive that leading through this crisis should move organizations forward, towards organizational forms that invoke greater professionalism and pluralism, and not towards authoritarian forms of governance. This is what will make it possible for organizations to learn, and for all to collaborate and communicate in ways that enable such learning. Learning from other systems should also be cultivated. If the lessons that allowed Estonia, Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Vietnam or some districts in China, to reopen schools so rapidly had been rapidly shared across the world, and assimilated, this might have prevented much of the considerable learning loss that has already taken place.

Handling all that complexity will require skilled leaders. Creating effective responses to this crisis is what will allow them, and us, to have hope. Perhaps even hope that in facing the bare deficiencies of the education system that was built by the most significant silent revolution in history, that which provided most children in the world a place in a school, we will make that system better, more equitable, more effective and more relevant.

Amidst the challenges created by the Pandemic, there have also been some silver linings. Greater mutual recognition, appreciation and collaboration, between parents and teachers. Greater appreciation of the value of schools and of teachers. Greater solidarity, collaboration and innovation. Paradoxically, the Pandemic has foregrounded issues which predated it and which now may receive more attention: the role of poverty in shaping the lives of children, the significance of parental engagement, the enormous disparities in access to technology, considerable equity divides in which children have the competencies for independent learning, the interdependence of socio-economic development and cognitive development, the need to attend to children's well-being. The Pandemic has also increased the demand for comparative knowledge and highlighted the value of learning from the world as an education laboratory. The essential leadership we need will face this crisis capitalizing on this dividend of the Pandemic, with a mindset of possibility, and will build an education Renaissance out of the ashes left by this plague.

The goals of the International Education Policy Program have been, since it was established two decades ago, to cultivate that essential leadership. In this crucible moment, that tests our resolve and commitment to educate all children, to give those words in the Universal Declaration *'Everyone has the right to education'* full meaning and make them a reality, we need good leaders for whom these words are not a slogan or a job, but a life's mission. In the following pages we hear, in their own voices, how several leaders of the Global Education Movement are making sense of this moment.

Rising-On-Air

By Somaia Abdulrazzak, Felicity Burgess, Natasha Japanwala and Keya Lamba

Rising Academy Network is a school network in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Ghana with the mission to create schools that open doors and change lives. Rising was born in the context of an epidemic. Back in 2014, Rising first provided emergency education to children kept out of school by Ebola. We opened our first school in Sierra Leone in April 2015 and now serve over 50,000 students in more than 160 schools.

As 2020 IEP graduates, we have had the privilege of joining Rising to support the leadership team with remote student learning and remote teacher professional development. Rising responded to the closure of schools in March 2020 by adapting our core curriculum content to create a radio program meant to strengthen and build students' foundational skills even when they are out of school. Rising On Air is a 20-week program of free, ready-to-air, radio scripts and SMS content made available to partner organizations around the world. At the time of writing, Rising On Air lessons have reached over 12 million children in 25 countries across Africa and Asia.

We want to use this essay to tell the leadership stories from across the organization. At Rising, we don't pretend to have all the answers and we know we can always improve — for example, to make audio lessons more accessible to a wider audience, we launched a podcast to reach more people in a more customizable way. This culture of constant iteration and experimentation is a form of constant acknowledgement that striving to create equitable solutions is an infinite process. We hope in writing this, others can learn from our experience through COVID-19: not just the way we created and scaled a low-tech distance learning solution, but also the way we built

a global network in its wake, one that gave us the insights and partnerships we needed to keep innovating. First, we will focus on how individuals at every level of Rising stepped up to lead the initial response. Then we will explore what we learned through our experience producing and scaling Rising on Air. Finally, we will share our reflections on launching Collaborators on Air, a digital community that brings together members from all over the world, through workshops and more informally on Slack, to share ideas, strategies, and support to ensure all learners are reached globally.

Rapid-Response: Confusion, Courage, and Care in the Face of Crisis

Our Operations and Finance Manager, Leroy Kanmoh, reflects on the initial challenges we faced; "In Liberia, when the pandemic started, everyone was confused. Not knowing what to do to prevent the virus. Apart from being confused, everyone was scared, especially with the way the virus was killing people in developed nations that have the best health systems in the world. The first challenge was to give school leaders and students the confidence and take the needed steps to stay alive."

Across the organization, leaders stepped up to steer others forward, even while experiencing challenges themselves. Krubo Solomon, a School Performance Manager, had just joined Rising when the pandemic hit. She was unable to get to know teachers and school leaders in person or to provide coaching and instructional support. Krubo shares her initial difficulties: "Facing [these] challenges was hard, however, I found a way around them. I had to redesign my strategies from field visits to remote working. I did regular phone calls with teachers and school leaders about the virus, transmission and prevention."

We have always had a bias to action at Rising, seeking out solutions and testing them immediately, and we exemplified this practice in the immediate wake of the pandemic, even though coordination and communication were more challenging. "The team had to adapt to new working conditions, as well as a faster working pace with many decisions taken too quickly and lots of changes in the direction," says Francisco Carballo Santiago, our Data and Analytics Manager. "Being understanding and ensuring the team is heard and supported at all times was key for success."

He continues: "There is a lack of information and sometimes misinformation. That, together with fear and worry about going through another epidemic like Ebola, creates a more complex environment to work in. Particular to Sierra Leone and West Africa, that is aggravated by the limited access to the internet and other communication challenges that required teams to go the extra mile to coordinate and move programs forward."

Scaling Radio Lessons: The Challenges of Launching Rising-On-Air

"The second challenge was to redirect our resources to fighting the virus while at the same time coming up with ways in which we could continue to support the education of our students," explains Leroy Kanmoh. School Performance Manager, Peter Konmen, also reflects on the decision to take curriculum onto the radio: "Because there is a lack of technology and internet in areas where our schools are located, online learning was just impossible." Thus, Rising On Air was born. Because the Ministries of Education in both Sierra Leone and Liberia had been through school closures once before during the Ebola epidemic, they were both able to get the radio school infrastructure up and running quickly. Rising had written and recorded the first radio lesson script within one week of schools

closing and aired it on national radio within two weeks of school closure.

Keya Lamba (IEP '20) had already been working with Rising while completing her Ed.M. at Harvard Graduate School of Education. She was able to add immediate leadership capacity to develop the Early Childhood Education radio scripts, leading a team of writers to produce 20 weeks' worth of literacy and numeracy content. "Managing a team of writers across several countries remotely - many of whom I had never met - was a new experience for me. We had to move at an extremely quick pace to get the lessons written so a level of trust was established quickly." Keya adds, "During a time of crisis, leaders need to make the best decisions they can with the information they have at the time and move quickly to implement solutions. The phrase 'do not let perfect be the enemy of good' definitely applied. I learned that it was important to be flexible and adapt quickly to the changing situation while trying to give my team as much clarity as possible to do their work."

Elsiemae Buckle, our Curriculum Associate, tells us how the birth of Rising on Air impacted her work: "One day I'm in the office working on curriculum, the next day I'm in a studio recording and then the other day I'm on a live broadcast. The change was quick which made it quite challenging to adjust and adapt. The first few times were quite a struggle, but things got better along the way." This is a testament to the learning culture at Rising. We know that quality does not happen by chance: it requires a constant focus, in everything that we do, on being better today than we were yesterday." School Performance Manager Aaron Ballah's daily routine was also uprooted: "I stepped up to a radio presenter on the Rising On Air radio program. I co-presented audio lessons that were shared with local radio stations to be aired. This process helped to fill some of the learning gaps of students while schools were closed."

Learning for teachers was also made a priority. Under normal conditions, Rising places a strong emphasis on coaching and teacher professional development so it was logical to think about how Rising On Air could best serve teachers who were forced out of school due to the pandemic. Felicity Burgess (IEP '20) joined Rising in early May to develop radio content with a focus on teacher professional development. "We had three goals in mind when we were developing PD scripts. First, we wanted to affirm teachers' professional identity and sense of community while schools are closed. This meant that we began every script with a segment on why teachers are so important in society. As a teacher myself, this part felt critical. Every teacher around the world was being displaced and so we wanted to acknowledge the huge worth of our profession.

Second, we wanted to facilitate continuous professional development by providing pedagogical knowledge, practice, and reflection. Finally, we finished with a segment that promoted teacher wellbeing. The mindfulness segments in the primary content had been so effective, we wanted to bring this to teachers too."

In the field of education, there should be no such thing as someone else's problem. When we have some knowledge that others might need, it is our duty and responsibility to share it. Embracing this mindset, we made all our content available to partner organizations around the world. With this goal in mind, Somaia Abdulrazzak (IEP '20) joined Rising late in July to lead the Arabic program for Rising on Air. She is currently working with a team of writers to develop and disseminate radio content for the communities that were affected by Covid-19 in Arab countries. "I joined Rising closer to the end of the Summer break with a mission to develop lesson scripts that can be utilized upon the start of this academic year - namely, in a matter of a few weeks." On working for Arabic-speaking communities, she says, "Producing educational content for children in [these] communities amid all the uncertainties that are in place at

the moment is very valuable. To me, we are providing scripts not just for those who were impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic only, but also for the refugees, the internally displaced, and those who have been out of school for several years." Somaia adds, "Coping with the stress involved in working under these circumstances is not easy. I always remind myself that I am too impacted by this pandemic, and that taking care of myself will enable me to take care of my team. We are all in this together."

Creating a Global Network:
The Inception of Collaborators on Air

After our audio lessons and professional development sessions broadcast via radio in Liberia and Sierra Leone, we wanted to continue scaling our impact. We are now focused on how Rising On Air can reach even more students, especially during a time when every educator is facing similar challenges with distance learning, albeit within different contexts. We launched Collaborators on Air to bring together digital citizens from countries including Botswana, Uganda, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Pakistan, India, Cambodia, the UK, the US, and beyond. Using a Slack workspace, Collaborators share educational content, implementation strategies, and motivational support to ensure that all learners are reached and supported globally. Through Collaborators on Air, we hosted three public workshops. Our inaugural session featured the Hon. George K. Werner, Liberia's former Minister of Education. Our second and third workshops were themed around caregiver engagement and behavior change and non-internet-based tech solutions to learning respectively and featured a total of 10 guest speakers who are global leaders in educational innovation and transformational change.

Collaborators On Air is a community of 104 like-minded educators, funders, non-profit organizations, and researchers all working on distance learning solutions during COVID-19. The power of

collaboration among leaders has never been stronger. Keya reflects, "One of the unexpected and incredibly positive outcomes of this uncertain and challenging time has been the community that we built with our partner organizations. The group has been extremely generous with their time and resources, as well as sharing ideas and challenges so we can all work faster towards the common goal of keeping our children educated during this crisis."

At the time of writing, we are now reflecting on how we can communicate the success of Rising on Air to a wider audience so that more students and teachers can benefit from the remote curriculum, audio lessons, and philosophy of partnership that drives Collaborators on Air. To help share Rising On Air's story, Natasha Japanwala (IEP '20) joined the organization in August as a Communications Consultant. "I've been struck and inspired by Rising's eagerness to share their curriculum while supporting their global partners to adapt it and share it in culturally relevant and effective ways. The Rising On Air story is a triumphant model of distance learning in developing contexts and their dedication to open source collaboration is a mark of true leadership. During a time of profound seismic shifts in education worldwide, it is important to capture our processes, learnings, and reflections to serve as both case studies for our contemporaries looking to do similar work as well as historical archives for those who will come after us."

Conclusion

As September approaches, we are now preparing to welcome our teachers and students back into Rising classrooms. School Performance Managers, who have been based in the capital while recording Rising on Air, are busy returning to their local school communities to support school leaders with a safe reopening. To conclude, here are their reflections on the enduring impact of Covid-19.

Cheyon Wesseh explains, "The pandemic will have a higher negative impact on students from remote settings, who, unlike urban communities, find it harder to evolve." In addition, Cheyon explains, "Being out of school has also put children, especially girls, at increased risk of sexual abuse, teenage pregnancy or dropping out." These are all challenges our Rising leaders will have to confront. Peter Konmen adds, "Already the population of students that I work with fall far way behind in literacy, numeracy, and is mainly over-aged due to poverty and effects of civil unrest. This pandemic is going to widen the gap." In Sierra Leone, Elsiemae Buckle has similar concerns, "We will have mastered new ways of learning but those who may not have had access may struggle to keep up. Those in the rural and unreachable areas will suffer the most. The disparity between the wealthy and the less privileged will be alarming." School leaders globally will have to respond to this alarm.

At Rising, we do what's right even when it's difficult or daunting. We have a saying, "where others step back, we step up." There is no doubt that individuals at every level of the organization will continue to step up in the months ahead to best serve our students and communities. For us, as recent IEP graduates, it has been a pleasure to serve alongside you during this time.

Somaia Abdulrazzak is an international development research and consulting professional. She is passionate about educating children in emergencies and conflict zones. She has worked in education management with a focus on teacher development and empowerment.

Felicity Burgess is a school leader committed to transforming the way we think about teaching and learning in the 21st century. She has designed and led professional development resources and trainings in Rwanda, Burkina Faso, Nepal, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.

Natasha Japanwala is a writer and teacher who is passionate about scaling equity-focused innovation in education systems worldwide. She has worked with schools, networks, and districts across three continents to bring quality learning to all students;

Keya Lamba is an early childhood education specialist who is passionate about play-based learning opportunities for our youngest children globally. She has taught in early childhood classrooms, designed teacher training and created play-based curricula for low-resource settings.

Drinking Tea in a Pandemic: Four Lessons in Leadership
By Akanksha Bapna

As I walked across Harvard Square on a snowy day in January 2011 to take the supposedly mawkish leadership course at the Kennedy School of Government, one of my classmates remarked that we should instead be heading to classes that taught well defined skills – evaluation, econometrics, policy analysis, statistics – instead of mushy leadership stuff. I decided to experiment anyway, given that Harvard allows one take as many credits as one can physically manage. Moreover, I had heard so much about this leadership guru from strangers well before I started graduate school and I was curious. I finished the course thoroughly dazed and confused. And to add to the confusion, the professor concluded it with the declaration that we would probably only understand what he was trying to teach us, some years later.

I returned to India in 2011 immediately after graduation to work with an international research organization and was immediately seconded to the Department of Education (DoE) of a state government, to set up their research team. The opportunity presented an excellent chance to work closely with senior policymakers, institutionalize evidence-based policymaking, impact over 2 million children, and put into practice the brand-new skills learnt in graduate school. Little did I know, this opportunity would also present a series of leadership challenges that looked impossible to crack. From upward management of several senior policymakers, to handling a mutiny of field researchers not receiving government entitlements on time, to working with a team of distrusting DoE colleagues, the challenges seemed endless. In those first six months, the adaptive leadership principles taught in that fancy Harvard classroom failed to make sense. Setting up a research team for the

DoE was, simply put, really exhausting. I thought had made the biggest mistake of my life returning to India.

Fast forward a few years, those lessons turned out to be some of the most valuable learnings I took away from Harvard – lessons I have been applying every single day whether I was establishing my own research organization, managing large scale research projects, or setting up multilateral international collaborations. The professor was right – what he was trying to teach us was only grasped much later! Fortunately, those lessons continue to hold true even in times of a global crisis – perhaps with a few pandemic-specific tweaks. I discuss four of those lessons in this essay.

The first lesson was to keep the 'work' at the center. When we were in that leadership course, the constant question from the class of 110 students was, what on earth is the work! The professor of course, did not deign to tell us – we were supposed to discover it for ourselves. Many years later, as I dove deeper into education on the ground, clarity emerged. While it is still difficult to articulate, keeping the work at the center has allowed me to manage complex teams, have difficult conversations, and take hard decisions.

The work is key. All else is secondary. *In times of the pandemic, focusing on the work has enabled me to re-imagine new working ways that are more likely to get the job done. If this has meant not having a team working in the same place at the same time, or making timelines more flexible to accommodate for ground realities, or innovating new ways of data collection, the focus on the work at the center has made acceptance of the changes much easier for the organization as a whole.*

The second lesson was to drink lots of tea! Well, not just because tea is the most popular drink for India's population of well over a billion, but what he meant was, to spend time with people in an effort to

genuinely understand them. A large study conducted by Google[30] evaluated what made good teams function well. What they found was that it was not highly creative, or super smart, or Ivy League educated teams that were the best, but teams that managed to create a psychologically safe space for each member were most effective.

When I was setting up the research team for the state DoE, I favored efficiency over efficacy. My need to get the work done, was not getting the job done. Not sitting down with the colleagues in the DoE for a cup of tea turned out to be one of the reasons for the distrust that was brewing, and the significance of something seemingly trivial became apparent as a leadership strategy. *The pandemic, has heightened the potential for this pitfall given the inability to have face-to face conversations and has underscored the need to have more (virtual) teas with colleagues. Taking the time to understand people and checking-in to see how they are coping with the dramatic change from normal, has become crucial to the functioning of an effective team.*

The third lesson, communication, is an obvious leadership trait, but one of the hardest to implement. At the DoE, we were brought in to. Do a job, and we set about doing it. Communicating to the other colleagues why we were there, especially ones not involved in the project, never occurred to me and led to the building up of an unfriendly working environment. Over time, and with much practice, I have honed my ability to communicate. Transparent, timely, direct and dispassionate conversations have become central to my ability to lead. *The pandemic has challenged communication like never before. Despite the availability of technology, a Zoom call does not compare to an in-person conversation. As a result, extra care is needed in how emails are worded, and documents prepared. There is the need to involve all stakeholders at more stages in the development of projects, so that it is easier for them to see the*

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[30] https://rework.withgoogle.com/blog/five-keys-to-a-successful-google-team/

evolution of thought processes and ideas. An example has been our current work on designing the evaluation system for one of the state governments in India. Calls and meetings have been scheduled at a much higher frequency, even at the risk of over communication, documents have been shared in the creation phase itself, and draft versions have been emphasized. As a result, all parties involved are much more engaged with the project and communication failures are less likely.

The fourth lesson was – find your allies. Collaboration and partnerships are the hallmark of any organization that chooses to stay current and grow. Collaboration has become even more important in times of the pandemic, and creative partnerships can lead to unexpected results. *As s recent example, we undertook a research study to hear the voices of the real stakeholders in the education system – parents, students, teachers and experts – to understand their problems and find solutions that could meet teaching and learning needs in the COVID-19 pandemic. The possibility of collecting data in person was out of the question, and our network was limited to education experts. A collaboration with a public relations firm that runs a student admissions magazine was an unlikely prospect till we saw the value of access to their network and expertise in outreach. The result was a large sample size that provided in-depth insights into the needs of learners through the pandemic and the report reached a large audience that could benefit from the results.*

A keen focus on the work, connecting with people, communication and collaboration are central to leading. The pandemic has accentuated the need for us to lead, but with even more empathy and flexibility.

The consequences of the pandemic on education are going to be immense and long-term. Learning losses are likely to lead to significant losses in lifetime earnings and socioeconomic inequalities are likely to be exacerbated. At a fundamental level, schooling may not even remain synonymous to learning and at this inflection point in the history of education, learning can finally take the centerstage.

Akanksha Bapna *is the Founder and CEO of Evaldesign, an education research firm based in New Delhi, India. Akanksha has worked internationally in K-12 Education, bridging the gap between practice, policy and research. She holds a Ph.D. in Biochemistry from Cambridge University, and graduated from the IEP program in 2011.*

Education in a Crisis: Bridging the Gap of Inequity in Times of Uncertainty
By Said Bilani

Goals and Work

Inspired by the conviction that education holds the key to Lebanon's future stability and prosperity, *The Institute for Middle East Peace & Progress* seeks to empower youth and the next generation of leaders in Lebanon through education by harnessing Lebanon's attributes of tolerance and cross-cultural understanding, by ensuring the country and region remain a bastion of progress and prosperity, thereby propelling the prospects of peace in the Middle East.

Under the auspices of American leadership, *The Institute for Middle East Peace & Progress* strives to inspire the next generation of leaders in Lebanon. As the President of the Board of Directors of this non-profit, non-partisan, and non-sectarian organization, I work to implement and execute educational, cultural, developmental, and humanitarian programs that play a critical role in Lebanon's recovery and development by creating educational, sponsorship, and vis-à-vis exchange opportunities to help improve the quality of life of Lebanon's youth, including its underprivileged and underrepresented communities, comprising Syrian and Palestinian refugee youth.

The mission includes equipping young Lebanese youth with the necessary requisites to build and sustain a peaceful, progressive, and prosperous homeland, all the while, contributing to the viability of the national and global development processes, throughout the Middle East, and under the auspices of the United States. In addition to serving a critical humanitarian need in the Middle East, this initiative serves a major United States and global national security

interest by promoting and strengthening democratic institutions in the region, which thereby weaken malign stateless actors, throughout the Middle East and its peripheries.

Challenges

Over the past few months, a record number of people have become displaced, joining in the ranks of refugees worldwide in dire need of water, food, shelter, education, and now protection from and treatment for COVID-19. From the humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen, where the war-torn country is on the brinks of a cholera outbreak to Syria, still reeling from its post-civil war identity to Gaza continually under siege, to the recent explosion in Beirut, now regarded as the third largest explosion in human history, this year has lent many challenges to the Middle East region. Already burdened with a multitude of challenges, including a series of long-running conflicts, sectarian tensions, economic crises, and widespread political unrest, the global pandemic has served as just the latest regional confrontation. The region's current lack of legitimate political leadership and capable institutional structures needed to deal and thwart the danger posed by the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic only further cripples an already challenging situation. This current social and political calculus coupled with a lack of functioning healthcare systems, especially for the millions displaced that inhabit congested and insanitary refugee camps, forbode a particular concern regarding the welfare of the region's youth and how they seek to navigate the education landscape amid crises. Working in an international context is challenging as it is, much less steering through the health risks on the ground with those most disadvantaged, makes a humanitarian endeavor all the more complicated.

Some examples of how this Pandemic has hindered my leadership is how it has made maintaining my visibility and influence in the

organization much more complicated with limited interaction opportunities; with members of the board of directors, with partners, and with those whom the organization serves. Another challenge posed by this Global Pandemic is how it has led me to change my leadership style, and the orientation of the organization itself in keeping my team engaged while operating remotely, and while adjusting to the logistical challenges of meeting the organization's goals in the midst of a highly-contagious disease plaguing the many communities we serve. The constant loss of life, as well as the virus's capacity to transmit rapidly, has led to a global health emergency mired by an unprecedented need for an overhaul in the way inequity is addressed; locally, nationally, and in international contexts, as well as the way the education community functions, teaches, and distributes necessary services to those in the most calamitous conditions. This has been my institution's greatest cause for concern. Meeting the mission of my organization has been most hindered by the guidelines instituted at the federal level for flattening the pandemic's curve, and this approach being drastically different on the ground where my organization operates in the Middle East, where guidance is often different. Thus, the approach to managing the pandemic while following the protocol both in the U.S. and in the Middle East, has seen very little overlap since no clear answers exist and because approaches to tackling the pandemic seem to constantly be in flux, at the municipal level, at the state level, at the federal level, as well as internationally.

Generally, leadership challenges with respect to executing my organization's mission are posed by the instability of the Middle East, and in particular, the state of collapse in Lebanon where my organization focuses primarily in its pursuit to spread access to education to all members of this civil society. Over the past year, the Lebanese Revolution of 2019 and the void that was created with the collapse of the government created a challenge in pursuing my organization's mission when public-private partnerships couldn't be

met due to the political vacancies and social, economic, and political unrest on the ground. In this way, this pandemic has only made a complex and convoluted reality all the more challenging.

I have faced these new challenges by working with larger regional humanitarian organizations that hold a larger on-the-ground presence and collaborating with them, along with the aid and assistance of the U.S. Embassies in these Middle East countries to administer in the redevelopment and reconstruction of these nations' education systems. Whereas before my leadership was more hand-on and on-the-ground, it now brings together the aid and value of partner organizations and serves our mission through collaboration with external public and private partners. In addition, whereas before my leadership solely focused on education re-development, the aftermath of the "Port of Beirut" explosion; where a third of Lebanon's capital was ravaged by the blast, caused me to change my focus and that of my organization, which has since taken on the additional responsibility of rehabilitating the country's infrastructure, as well as the identity of the youth burdened by a constant state of disaster and disfunction, both at home and around the region.

A committed team that is dedicated to the mission at heart has helped me lead throughout the Pandemic. Though the pandemic, the uprisings in Lebanon; its economic collapse, and its recent port explosion in its capital of Beirut have made my leadership disoriented in more ways than one, it has nevertheless reminded me and my team that the work we are doing is needed now more than ever, and this ingrained commitment continues to fuel our passion to lead despite-or-in spite of these current circumstances.

The most difficult aspects of leading during this period of the Pandemic include traveling, and the logistics of operating on the ground. Due to travel restrictions, mandatory quarantines when arriving from high-risk countries, such as the United States, and

having to remain in lockdown for a mandated amount of time has really slowed down my leadership and that of my organization, where before it would've been relatively easy to fly in and out of the countries we serve. Now, the pandemic has made the logistical aspects of executing our mission very complex and requires much more preparation and hands-on leadership in the region.

Furthermore, empowering youth to drive social change in uncertain times like these, where much Lebanese youth have lost hope due to the trajectory of their country; where a nation with a once proud and prosperous history of trade, commerce, and tourism is starting to crumble into endemic poverty, has been the most disheartening challenge to face.

As the Pandemic we are in continues to evolve in the weeks and months ahead, we are going to have to learn new ways, unbeknownst to us before, to engage in virtual learning environments and to meet the mission of driving equity, inclusion, and access in all developing contexts worldwide, through education. This is especially important in light of what could result in what I believe would be a "lost generation," a consequence ultimately setting our country and world back for many years to come if not tackled head-on for the sake of our youth.

During this period of uncertainty, my desire to transform disenfranchised communities reflects education as an engine for sustainable development. It emphasizes education as a means of training leaders to transform societies in the United States and around the globe by examining the most critical challenges facing society, whether it is the achievement gap, education inequity, or inaccessibility; it nurtures students as scholar-practitioners and propels them to push the frontiers of education thereby improving human rights, strengthening equality, protecting the environment, and changing the world. In meeting the challenges of the present

while forging a movement for the future, I will continue to reflect on education as a liberatory tool of empowerment, with an emphasis on working through rapidly evolving real-world challenges and developing innovative solutions that aid in addressing the developing educational and social issues facing our global world. It will be committed to multilateralism; to taking big ideas, allowing those ideas to breathe through social discourse, and then moving from ideas to action, to practical impact – "impact" that can make a difference in our communities and our world by providing a viable means for talented yet disadvantaged students to receive an education, despite any inhibiting barriers. Driven by my desire and passion to champion education on the international stage, I am committed to indivisibly democratizing and universalizing education as a core human right for all, as the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights once set out. These values and desires are at the core of my mission and are at the center of my identity; an mission and identity that binds community and scholarship with diverse faith, backgrounds, circumstances, cultures, and traditions, and which works in service to others, to engender opportunity for all, especially the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of our global community, in times of uncertainty like these.

Said Bilani *serves as the Chief Founder of The Bilani Foundation; a private non-profit conglomerate launched to globally promote peace, reduce poverty, eliminate disease, advocate for equity in all levels of education, and expand educational opportunities for all. A Global Goodwill Ambassador: his humanitarian initiatives and advocacy span the globe, from the continental United States to the Middle East, and all corners of the world. As a Gates Millennium Scholar, Said completed his Bachelor of Arts degree at Georgetown University, concentrating in International Affairs, and is pursuing his Master of Education degree at Harvard University in International Policy.*

Pink-nailed and People-focused
By Sarah Braden

I never get my nails done, but I scheduled a nail appointment for a Sunday afternoon at the end of July, 2019; I paid $30 for the buffing, filing and painting because two days later I would meet for the first time a team of seven recent college graduates who I would supervise over the next ten months. The young professionals that made up my team had signed up for an AmeriCorps term of service as a CollegePoint Coach with the organization College Possible. I wanted to look sharp and put together. I chose pink to present as feminine and approachable but wore a black dress to feel business-like. I thought being a leader meant being nice but intimidating, demanding in a good way. I imagined myself as a supervisor with a no-nonsense mindset, focused on outcomes, and keeping things in order and people on track. I believed that pink nails and a black dress would help me look more like a leader.

College Possible is a U.S.-based non-profit that provides free college advising to low-income high school students. One program implemented by College Possible is called CollegePoint, which assists high-achieving, low- and moderate-income high school students in enrolling in high-graduation rate institutions (colleges or universities that consistently graduate over 70% of students within six years). The coaches I supervise provide advising directly to students via virtual platforms such as text, phone, video chat, email and social media; the virtual aspect of programming allows students from all over the country access to free advising. CollegePoint is one of the first programs to try virtual college advising at scale, before the COVID-19 pandemic demanded the world go virtual. CollegePoint became a leader in its own right, sharing best practices to large swaths of college advising programs that implemented in-person programming and suddenly had to switch to virtual. We

proved that strong advising relationships could be developed over the phone, and students could reach desired outcomes through programming delivered by coaches from miles away. CollegePoint serves between ten and fifteen thousand students each program year, spread across four organizations: ScholarMatch, College Advising Corps, Matriculate, and College Possible.

During the first few months in my role, my goal was to ensure that my team had the necessary skills to do their jobs well. I was driven by quantitative results and was lacking a focus on my team as individuals who lived in a broader context than just the College Possible office in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Although my managerial style took into account various coaching styles and student contexts, it lacked empathy; the student outcomes that aligned directly with CollegePoint's program goals were placed at highest importance.

From August 2019 through February 2020, we all worked in an office building; each coach had their own cube, along with ample community spaces for collaboration. Coaches were expected in the office five days per week, eight hours per day. They were allotted five personal days over ten months and two days per month could be taken as work-from-home days. During the pandemic, we discovered that this rigidity was not necessary for our programming: coaches worked with students virtually and many meetings took place over Zoom in collaboration with College Possible's Oregon site. I thought that a "high trust, high accountability" leadership style meant giving coaches two days per month to work from home; letting them develop their own organizational system; and allowing flexibility in how and when they sent outreach to students. I trusted them to do their jobs well, but I also paid close attention to their work. The "high accountability" part took precedent: we had weekly numbers reviews on Fridays and further discussed progress towards benchmarks in individual check-ins. I wasn't micromanaging, but I also wasn't embodying the type of leader I strived to be.

In early March all staff and Corps members received an email notifying us that starting the following Monday, the office would be closed, and everyone would be working fully remotely due to the spread of COVID-19. The email said this policy would remain in place for at least two weeks; looking back, it was silly to think that we would return to the office that soon. The nearness to my coaches in the office allowed me to see how they spent their days. Once the full-remote policy took action, I was left feeling disconnected and uncertain. I quickly learned that what I thought was a "high trust, high accountability" supervisory approach actually lacked trust. I found myself questioning whether coaches were spending their time appropriately while out of direct view of the leadership team. I told coaches and colleagues that I trusted that coaches would continue to meet expectations in this new virtual world, but I had my doubts. I was worried that coaches would take advantage of the freedom and fall behind on their work. I questioned how much, if any, additional guidance they needed and whether I would be able to do that from behind the screen of my computer. We asked all coaches to update their Outlook calendars to demonstrate how they spent their days so that all hours were accounted for, including desk time, calls, follow-up email writing and even lunch. Upon reflection, these requests demonstrated that I was not as trusting as I originally thought.

Something about the way I was trying to manage my team felt off; it was almost like I was ignoring the reason we were all remote in the first place. This approach was problematic because humans in the midst of a pandemic cannot- and should not- be asked to perform as if the circumstances hadn't drastically and suddenly changed.

I asked myself, *what do I need from my supervisor right now*? My answer: autonomy, flexibility, and context awareness. Based on my own three needs, I modified my supervisory approach to stand solidly on three pillars: Coaches need to continue to support students, to log enough weekly hours to meet the 1,700 required by the AmeriCorps

contract; and to take care of themselves. To my team, I summed it up as: Students, Hours, Self. I knew that different working styles and home environments would result in each coach taking a different approach to meet these expectations. Response to a pandemic is not one-size-fits-all. This new framework allowed me to provide my coaches with the three things I felt we all needed most: the autonomy to do our work in the way that makes the most sense; the flexibility to choose when and how to best serve students; and that self-care is critical in maintaining quality of life and work. What did this look like in practice? I gave them permission to: step away early if it had been a tough day; keep their cameras off if they were experiencing Zoom fatigue and center calls around students' personal lives, rather than college, if that's what the student needed that day. Permission for breaks and delayed response times. Permission to not be completely put together during a global pandemic.

What I noticed was that even though coaches were working less consistent hours, student outcomes didn't dip. Pieces of outreach were being sent and responded at similar rates; students were getting ample support in reviewing financial aid packages; coaches were spending hours per week on the phone with students; and ultimately, students were committing to high-graduation-rate schools. As a supervisor, I couldn't see when a coach arrived at work or when they left; I couldn't hear conversations through the thin cubicle walls; and I couldn't walk down the middle aisle of the workspace to monitor productivity.

But I learned that I didn't need to. I remembered that these coaches signed up for a 10-month term of service living on a below-poverty stipend in order to serve students from low-income backgrounds and build their professional skills. They were motivated by student success before COVID-19, and they continued to be motivated by it even when the global pandemic knocked their routines out of whack and caused them to question their sense of safety. I was

impressed by their resilience, their ability to stay focused and to shift their coaching practices to meet the ever-changing needs of students in this unchartered territory. They found answers to brand new questions, kept track of changing or re-opened application deadlines, and connected students with resources outside of their typical scope. We all lessened the emphasis on program goals in order to focus more intentionally on the needs of students. Because of this, trust between me and my coaches, and coaches and students, was strengthened. Coaches empathized with cancelled proms and Zoom-based graduation ceremonies; they gently listened to stories of families with abrupt income loss and severely sick grandparents; they logged in our database hundreds of mind-changes about whether or not a student would leave home for school in the fall, and if so, where they would enroll. I saw their skills in working with students align closely with mine as their supervisor. In looking back, it's hard to know if they adapted their skills from interacting with me, or if I adapted mine from them. Ultimately, I really think it was a mutual teaching and learning moment for us all.

The ways in which my leadership has changed in response to COVID-19 aligns directly with how education, and specifically college admissions, is changing. Universities are giving students more choices than they've previously had: expanded options for deferring acceptance; distance versus in-person learning; more opportunities for financial support; and innovative ways for students to get to know college campuses without leaving their bedrooms. Additionally, now more than ever students are empowered to assess the schools to which they are admitted as much as their applications are scrutinized by admissions officers. What may have felt like a unilateral decision to students (as in, if the school says yes, the students will go) is becoming more bilateral. Students have more information to sort through before making their decisions-specifically, how schools are responding to COVID-19. If a student's former Dream School doesn't demonstrate that student safety is top

priority, that school may not be considered as positively by that student. If a school decides to maintain tuition costs despite switching to fully remote learning, it may lose favor. The lack of communication about decisions could be an additional reason for a demotion on the list of favorites. The circumstance created by COVID-19 has given students more autonomy in choosing if, when, how and where to pursue their tertiary education.

This year, college admissions will be forced to be more flexible and consider each student's broader context. Many schools have gone test-optional, which will require them to rely more heavily on grade point average, personal essays and activity lists in admissions decisions. Because college standardized testing has proven racially and socioeconomically discriminatory, this is a step in the direction of a more equitable admissions process. Without the SAT/ACT, more qualitative data will be used to assess a student's fit potential with a campus, by a more intentional consideration of how a student spends her time, which classes she chooses to take, and how she presents herself in the personal essays. Just as I saw coaching efficacy improve when coaches broadened the lens through which they knew the students on their caseloads, and how I improved as a supervisor by acknowledging that humans confronted with a pandemic need a more flexible and empathetic leader, I believe that the college admissions process will make strides toward equity as a result of the changes brought on by the Coronavirus pandemic.

COVID-19 has presented unique challenges to individual leaders and the education sector as a whole and has also uncovered opportunities for positive change. We now have clear potential paths towards a more equitable college admissions process for students from all backgrounds. As an organization, it has forced us to implement policies that wouldn't have been explored under normal circumstances, but that will have hugely positive impacts on the AmeriCorps experience at College Possible. The pandemic has

allowed me to improve my leadership by more successfully practicing the "high trust, high accountability" intention for which I aim.

Sarah Braden is a graduate of the International Education Policy Program.

Leading with a Broken Heart
By Yeeva Cheng

COVID taught me that leadership in times of true crisis means going beyond self-preservation and finding connection with people—even when it feels as though our life experiences, histories and identities are entirely too different and fractured to inhabit the same space.

Work and Existing Challenges

I left to work as a teacher in China for many good reasons, such as wanting to work directly with students. However, one reason always felt very selfish: Simply put, I was burnt out from my job working with a non-profit in Charlotte, North Carolina—a city home to a school system that has been notoriously deemed re-segregated. I was the only Asian American woman in an educational organization of over 100 employees, and the racial dynamics post-2016 had left me with a lot of questions about being a woman, being entangled in a bipolar racial spectrum, being from an immigrant family—being a person never quite belonging in the place I spent nearly all my life, but at the same time, knowing that I was responsible for helping others belong so long as I worked in education.

When I landed a teaching job at Jiaying University in China, I felt relief in knowing that I could go to a place where my presence and appearance felt unchallenged. As it turned out, there were other foreign teachers teaching English, and nearly all were White and from western countries. On my first day, one commented that my English was good for a Chinese person, then asked where the new American teacher was (it was me). Another day, a teacher burst into my classroom to yell at my students (with me still in the room) for being too loud, and when later confronted about the unprofessional behavior, responded that he hadn't noticed me because I "blended

in with the students." I often avoided my co-workers because such micro- and macro-aggressions always reminded me of the previous encounter I had allowed to pass by, not fully addressed. In those moments, I felt as though suddenly brought back to the US.

I worked in my own silo for a while, which was the norm for foreign teachers at Jiaying. I credit my students for keeping me connected and thoughtful. My first year, I was tasked to teach approximately 1,200 first-year students' skills in oral English, which equipped me to intimately understand endurance. By my second year, I was teaching English-major sophomores' oral skills and writing, which allowed more time to delve into complex topics in American culture, including race in the United States. I used the pilot episode of "Fresh Off the Boat", a TV show that tells the story of a Taiwanese-American family that moves to Orlando, Florida and whose son Eddie faces bullying on his first day of school, later ending up in a fight. I used this TV show to get students to engage with open-ended questions, which they learned to articulate and discuss: What does "White culture" mean? What has been the historical relationship between Black and Asian communities, and why did the respective characters struggle to see each other as allies in the fight? How does one come to belong, and what is the value of community?

The Pandemic's Impact

This answer to that last question has never been more apparent and *a propos* than during these times. In December 2019, there was mention of a bad case of pneumonia going around in the north. Nestled in Meizhou, a city in the far south of China, we thought we were safe from it. But by Lunar New Year in January 2020, it was announced that we were facing an epidemic. No one really understood the nature of COVID—how deadly it was, its symptoms and effects, and how the government was going to have us respond to it in our daily lives. With city lockdowns in 24 hours, people were

scrambling, not for toilet paper or hand sanitizer, but for vegetables, oil and rice. Roads were blocked between cities, meaning our access to supplies, mainly coming from the big cities, would be limited. Mask laws and curfews were enforced by police and security guards. With the city's supply of masks bought up within hours, many people were not allowed to leave their homes and communities, and I saw people facing punishment for venturing out unmasked. Families were carefully calculating meals and unsure of how they would continue to work if they ran out of masks.

As the number of cases continued to escalate, it was announced that schools across the country would not be reopening, and teachers would need to teach remotely. Beyond the announcement from our department and a request for a rough 8-week lesson plan, there was no instruction as to what technologies and platforms to use, how to schedule courses, or what to do about students who had limited or no technology and access.

In many ways, a centralized response to shut down schools while leaving instruction methods open-ended and in the hands of educators was the right move. Generally, the lockdowns did keep people from unnecessary travel and exposure to those potentially infected. The flexibility to choose how we shared materials, scheduled and facilitated synchronous lessons, evaluated students' performance was a double-edged sword though. Many teachers were unsure of the applications and platforms that could be used. Some were unsure of how to reform their lesson plans, especially with standardized testing still looming. Some teachers made their courses entirely asynchronous. Others were engaged with their students far into the evening.

As the "ground zero" country for the pandemic, no matter how we chose to individually problem-solve, the takeaways were profound as we found ourselves needing to be in conversation with each other.

Lessons Learned

When things get personal, keep sight of the bigger picture.

Managing a crisis when already struggling with internal politics and frictions poses a perpetual threat to community and our humanity. There were many moments in which I or any other teacher could have chosen not to translate from Chinese to English, share contacts or resources, or mention important news—solely because we didn't *have* to do so, given that we had no appointed centralized leadership within our team. It had been such a part of the foreign teachers' work culture to live and work independently of each other. This of course had to change. For example, at the very beginning of the pandemic, when masks were nearly impossible to acquire and it seemed that the virus was more deadly than it was treatable, we had to consider our communal living conditions and potential health threats, leading us to offer and share supplies if someone was in need.

Start at the logistics—they are the least personal.

Trying to tackle logistics naturally brought me in direct, depersonalized conversation with co-workers. For example, closer in age and cultural background, my students felt at ease sharing tips and recommendations with me about communications applications. With higher proficiency in reading Chinese characters, I could navigate and share the resources my students recommended and translate functions for my co-workers. Likewise, my co-workers also began to share important updates or observations, such as regulations requiring foreigners to show specific QR codes to enter the hospital and other facilities. Such communications were meaningful enough to convey community and care yet did not require large amounts of emotional labor.

Relationships give our identities a stake in others' lives

Sharing information and tools of course brought some foreign teachers closer but getting closer to people also creates opportunity for conflict, vulnerability and the uglier parts we were avoiding from the very beginning. Unsurprisingly, I saw problematic and racist language about Chinese people and culture within our group, including one that described locals as "backwards," "uneducated" and even "dirty village people." This particularly hit home because Meizhou *is* my ancestral home, and furthermore, to know that a teacher would see the local community, and by extension her students, as such, felt like a betrayal on many levels. During such moments, I berated myself for feeling accountable to people who failed to see others' humanity.

The hardest thing about leading with your heart is that it's bound to be broken multiple times. Having built stronger familiarity followed by relationships with my co-workers encouraged me to confront again—not from a place of despair as I had done while working in Charlotte, but from great hope for better teachers for our students. I'm not such a Pollyanna to think that the conversations I've had with co-workers about identity, race, power and privilege sunk in for all. But I did leave as a teacher less afraid of difficult relationships, because I have seen for myself that we need them to survive. Where there is an existing relationship, the possibility to heal hearts still steadily beats.

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An American Soldier's Perspective
By Staff Sergeant John H. Davis

As an American soldier in Afghanistan, I was part of the American influence overseas. On one hand, I was an invader in a foreign land with a gun in my hand and on the other attempting to build schools and overcome long embedded gender discrimination in education. The war against Covid is clearer but no less problematic, both pandemics and wars wreak havoc on the poor and minorities.

Martin Luther King viewed war as an enemy of the poor[31]. He had observed that in America, the disadvantaged were asked to suffer the horrors of wars, serving on the front lines only to be later discarded. Sadly, this outbreak is disproportionally affecting disadvantaged communities much like armed conflict. Dr. King wanted the energy and resources America spent in Vietnam to be redirected towards civil rights, education and healthcare in a GI Bill of Rights. Instead, money was spent on military action, where often countries in conflict will spend 10x as much on an individual soldier than education for a child. The current environment presents an opportunity to flip that spending and unleash a global movement to educate all children.

Conflict and Covid

War and Covid both damage institutions and our social fabric while increasing unemployment. They both contribute to forced displacement and misery. It can be a vicious cycle, poverty creating conflict and conflict increasing poverty and Covid has the same effects. War and poverty are just as interconnected as pandemic and poverty. In pandemics and in war, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Corporations have grown exponentially in this pandemic,

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[31] Martin Luther King, "A Time to Break Silence" (1967)

just like in wartime, while simultaneously disadvantaged children across the world have only been thrust deeper into the clutches of poverty. Bill Gates noted that epidemics and war are similarly costly of blood and treasure, but that only war is taken seriously by politicians[32]. As educators we are uniquely situated to be a force for good through any calamity, providing reason and the light of truth to the world. I believe as stated in the UN development goals that education enables upward socioeconomic mobility and is a key to escaping poverty[33]. History is the long story of privileged groups refusing to give up their resources. In the coming months and years, the pandemic presents an opportunity to restructure our world in the aftermath. As Americans, we should seek to transform our role on the world stage to one of prioritizing educational and healthcare aid.

The Weapon That Can Change the World

Covid-19 has hindered education in settings across the world, from Harvard to sub-Saharan one-room schoolhouses. We are aware of resource disparities between institutions of learning, but this new threat thrusts those inequalities into the public eye. Educators should use this spotlight to challenge the status quo and break the cycle of disparities in education. Nelson Mandela viewed education as the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world[34] and my combat experiences put me in a unique position to come to the same conclusion. I am striving to contribute to the demilitarization of American aid abroad because I knew firsthand that war creates only destruction and bitterness, not reconciliation. I have seen children in warzones still aspire for educational opportunities, despite numerous obstacles and a lack of opportunities. Seeing the disadvantaged youth of the world fall even further from the path of

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[32] Bill Gates in The Economist
[33] https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/
[34] Nelson Mandela, usaid.gov

progress is a tragic reality evident in this pandemic and conflict worldwide. My challenge moving forward is to restructure the American foreign policy stance towards a path with peace as our new objective. One of the hardest tasks we can undertake as an American collective is to look honestly in the mirror and to realize that we can and must do better. Veterans are strong voices for peace because we are the ones who bear the true cost of conflict and know firsthand that violence only engenders violence in response.

When the pandemic began, I was in Laos, investigating to understand how this small South East Asian country became the most bombed per capita nation in the world. Like conflict, the pandemic affects everything it touches and every institution it meets, including education. My passion is education in conflict zones which stems from my years in Afghanistan witnessing the resiliency of the children of that country to strive for educational betterment, despite numerous obstacles. My passion has not changed, although now I am interested in areas hit hard by Covid and conflict as the results can be comparable. The pandemic creates additional learning obstacles for children learning in Afghanistan and other fragile states and turns education into even more of a challenge. It is another roadblock for educators to break through.

The pandemic has shown the urgency of agile leadership in education, the necessity of quick-thinking leaders implementing rapid on the ground improvements. In the military I learned essential problem-solving skills that are transferable to education through a global pandemic. To be resilient enough to prevail over any hardship and composed through any adversity to make sound, ethical decisions. It is a different kind of mission we are facing, a collective mission, and it is more important than any I have undertaken. I am strengthened by the courage and tenacity of my peers and professors at HGSE and in the knowledge we don't need to transform the world overnight, just one classroom at a time.

I have been moved by the global education communities momentous efforts and the words of Dr. Reimers of HGSE, "Our shared future, in this fragile planet, is entirely contingent on whether we succeed or fail in educating all of our children well."[35]   At no point has that been truer than now and in the immediate future our success or failure will shape the coming world. Education can link the present to the future and link the past to a more promising tomorrow. In the soul of education is love. Skilled educational leaders possess the fortitude to teach students to build a better world for themselves and all of us in the aftermath of Covid.

Inspiring Confidence Through Adversity

Challenge can bring solidarity. This pandemic has the potential to create a global togetherness to carry us forward into a brighter tomorrow with effective educational leadership. The leadership challenges moving forward are not that different from battles that I have fought in and the stakes are just as high. Educators are on the front lines in the classroom, battling for children's mental and physical health as well as their futures. Teachers are warriors for the future and no other profession has the broad impact on the world that teachers do. War is a historical reality and it can inspire actions of sacrifice and togetherness. In the military, we train to build each other up to work to become the best collective unit that we can, our lives can depend on it. The pandemic is correlative and as the leading educational institution in the world, future lives and the children in the world will depend on HGSE. We cannot let them down and it is an honor to join the team learning to change the world. America was born of fighting and unfortunately, we have not yet discovered how to stop. I have seen the violent transformative power of war and its

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[35] Professor Fernando Reimers, https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/16/05/thank-you-teaching-us-what-it-means-learn-change-world

effects and now I embrace the nonviolent transformative power of education. I have been inspired by the inscription on the Dexter Gates at Harvard reading "Enter to grow in wisdom, depart to better serve thy country and thy kind." As a nation, it is time to self-reflect and step away from what is familiar and uncover insights into new ways of thinking that are grounded in education, healthcare and peace.

The Strength to Love

It is time for America to rise above short-term selfish concerns and instead to the broader matters of all humanity. I have come to the Harvard Graduate School of Education to enlist in a new Army, a nonviolent Army of educators that have goals that can be articulated, making the world a better place through education. I have come to be armed not with bullets and death but education and life. I view the International Education Policy program as the best mechanism to give me the tools to steer America's foreign policy mindset towards education, healthcare and equality and away from bloodshed. There is no more potent a weapon than educators armed with knowledge to enlighten youth. I say to my fellow warrior teachers, "You must never, ever give up. You must never, ever give in. You must never, ever give out. We must keep the faith because we are one people. We are brothers and sisters." [36]As someone who has seen enough misery, I have a newfound clarity of purpose through the arm of the International Education Policy Program. I am hopeful that we can seize this opportunity together. To be vanguards of the future, rethink America's orientation towards foreign policy and rebuild educational infrastructure stronger than ever before. Everyone has the right to an education[37]. Let's get to work.

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[36] John Lewis
[37] Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26

John Davis is a current International Education Policy student at HGSE where he strives to better understand education through conflict to make a future impact. He is a combat veteran who served in Afghanistan with the American Army and author of the book Combat To College. John worked previously as a student veteran advisor, is active in the military community and has previously taught incarcerated education. John holds a BA in History from St. Joseph's College in New York.

Leading with Authenticity in Uncertainty
By Drew Edwards

Seat belts unbuckled in unison and passengers stood up as our plane arrived at the gate. I pulled out my phone to check my email as I deboarded the plane and walked through Chicago O'Hare International Airport. I was *en route* to our quarterly board meeting. In the days leading up to the meeting, my inbox was inundated with last minute details and updates to documents.

Interspersed in the airwaves were notes of an unfamiliar acronym for a far-off virus: COVID-19. Like many organizations, we took this threat seriously. We had already ratified an organization safety plan, procured work from home equipment for our staff, and we even went as far as asking high risk members of the board to telecommute to the board meeting I was flying in for. Still, I did not think much of it.

I was zoned into my phone, flipping through emails when a news alert flashed across the screen, "President to speak to the nation in an emergency address". In the statement that followed, a shutdown of the largest economy in the world stopped my walking and made me wonder if the framing preparation was too small. Indeed, it was.

Since the arrival of COVID-19, the virus has altered nearly every institution and community around the world. Businesses shifted to working virtually from home while others closed. As children were sent home, schools shifted to learning virtually or paused learning altogether. Families rushed to find supplies to sustain and protect their families from a rapidly spreading, unknown, and little understood threat. As our streets emptied and the world came to a quiet pause, we all waited and searched for answers.

As I write this, six months after the moment in March 2020 that stopped me and the rest of the world on our tracks, COVID-19 has forced nine out of ten children around the world back into their homes and out of school. When classrooms locked up, some reopened their doors online. However, for most of the world, distance learning is still not an option. 43% of homes in the world and 82% on the African continent do not have a computer or access to an internet connection. For many children, learning stopped completely as a direct result of the pandemic. The World Bank has projected that the current impact will set educational progress back 10 years and cost $10 trillion dollars of life cycle earnings.

We are facing an historical moment, regardless of geography or sector. I say this to reflect the immensity of the challenge, but not necessarily the commonality of it. While we are in the same storm, we are not experiencing it equally. Challenges that existed prior to the pandemic do not disappear because of it; they are exacerbated. For those of us in education and those that we are serving, this is the most significant disruption our institutions have faced in a century.

This disruption affected our work immediately. Most of our programs have been designed with community and in-person relationships at the center of our methodology. As a result, these are facilitated directly in the classroom and in the home. Within a week of the announcement, 2/3 of our programs were paused and they have remained so since. Our teacher training program was put on hold as schools closed and in-person training and in-class coaching became unsafe and lacked priority in the immediate moment. Our mobile libraries had their brakes put on as transmission across surfaces, including books, was unknown.

Our remaining program, our publishing arm, along with our admin were transitioned to work from home for the first time in our organization's history. This alone has been no small adjustment. At

first, I was concerned not only for our team's safety and wellbeing, but how and if we would adjust to continue our work in order to serve those we are in business to serve in their greatest moment of need. Not only did we immediately adjust to the moment, we blossomed in it.

As I have grown in my role as a leader, I have subscribed to Marshall Ganz' definition of leadership as "Accepting responsibility for enabling others to achieve purpose under conditions of uncertainty". Every leader knows that even under pre-pandemic circumstances, we are always facing a degree of uncertainty in our lives and in our work. But in these moments of extreme uncertainty, where the facts are convoluted and the playbooks aren't yet written, real leaders step forward while others stand back.

The mission and vision of our organizations have been put to the fire, testing our institutions and our leaders authenticity. The principles we operate under either become guiding lights in this moment of uncertainty or reveal themselves as banal platitudes for increasing productivity.

We are a small organization, but we have revealed ourselves as a strong one as our principles and values have come to bear. If I have done anything right in my role, it has been to be sincere with our leadership, with our staff, with our customers, with our community partners, and with our supporters about what we do and do not know as we decide and act. We have not pretended to know when this will end, we have not pretended to know what to do, and we have been quick to reframe our focus as the shifting needs have arisen.

Our publishing team found purpose in this moment and has responded. Not only were we able to continue working, but we recognized an opportunity for our role to serve the world in this

moment with what we do best: publishing. We developed a children's book to provide a narrative for families to navigate the uncertainty of the moment in an unprecedented 16-day period. We released it in mediums that we have never worked in before in order to meet students where they were at. We released the titles digitally for the first time, we released audiobook and radio versions, and we did so in languages and in partnership models that we have never worked in before. Our team and an army of volunteers worked around the clock, many doing tasks and navigating challenges they have never before faced, because they found purpose in the work we were doing.

In doing so, we reached more children in a month than we ever have in a decade of our work combined. Our book was read on national television by the Vice President of Liberia, shared by the Mayor of Chicago, it was featured in news outlets and by large organizations around the world, and was utilized by school networks and families in over 50 countries. As the pandemic has continued and new issues have arisen, we again shifted to develop an entire series to meet students where they are at.

Not everything was a success though. We also attempted to shift our halted teacher training programs online and still reach our established strategic goals for the year. Although we tried, we struggled to adapt in form and ultimately the attempts failed. Our immediate responses do not have to be correct, but we do have to listen and respond until we get them right. There is no other approach than an iterative approach at this moment.

This pandemic has been challenging for every child around the world and for every institution serving them. When I have laid down in my bed each night since this began, I do not do so with the clam certitude of knowing when this will be over and if we are taking the right steps. When I lay down in my bed I do so with mountains of

doubts, ideas, and the concern that what we do must matter now. However, I detach from it for a moment as well. I am not my work. I am a person with finite time, energy, and skills. I have to pause and check in with myself and with my team as people as an end in itself. When we are not our full selves within, we cannot show up as our full selves for others.

Every challenge we face is a moving target right now. We must not be stubborn and continue on or ignore it and wait it out, but instead step fully into it. I firmly believe in this moment of great challenge that this is also a moment of great opportunity, if we have the eyes to see it. The world was facing a global learning crisis prior to the pandemic. The unprecedented innovation happening at every level combined with the sobering realities has challenged our conventions in a way that has shaken up education.

I hope that a positive externality of this pandemic will be that true progress may in fact be more urgent and possible as collaboration, limitations and hesitations to innovate, and obsessions with silver bullet solutions are sobered by the contextual realities of learners. My fear is that this moment will widen the gap for an entire generation and their children will be worse off than their parents. While progress in the world of education has made steadily and slowly to date, it has been quickly lost. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the vulnerabilities and inequities of one of the largest institutions in our society: education. This pandemic is a call to action to build resilience not only in our institutions but in the society upon which they stand.

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New definitions
By Armando Estrada

It only took a few months to completely dismantle the concept of school in the way the world had framed it for centuries.

As it probably had never happened in the past, the pandemic forced the different actors of the school community to work closer; to understand each other's roles and challenges; to become really aware of what it takes for a children to learn something; and to recognize the importance of the practical outcomes that a good education brings, such as counting with emphatic citizens who act responsibly and with solidarity to mitigate the effects of a global pandemic wearing a protective mask.

From a systems thinking perspective, the leverage of this huge disruption moved within days what would have taken decades to consolidate through conventional education reform: The different actors of school community found their complementarity and recognized the need for complementarity.

No individual part of the system is sufficient on itself, not even the parts as a whole are as important as the connection between each part of the system. The interdependence of every piece of the system has become clear and explicit.

Common questions such as what makes a school successful? what makes a child learn? what kind of learning is valuable to face social, economic and ecological challenges? have now more possible answers. We now know the responses will have to include an intricate system that involves the participation of different actors, where each part is fundamental, but it is the connections and interactions between these parts what makes the system really work.

Today we know for sure how important it is to have well prepared teachers who have high expectations of their students, but we know that high expectations are not enough if they are not shared with the parents of the students. During the pandemic we know parents are stepping in more actively as educators and we know they are simultaneously handling so many different tasks.

Unless our economic and political structures change it would be hard for parents to engage more fully in the education of their children, not just during the pandemic; and we know it takes educated citizens to choose better politicians and true reformers. Everything is connected one way or the other.

How different are these challenges from the ones we used to deal with?

I think what we used to call "normality" made us see broken systems as the only reality available. As the German philosopher Markus Gabriel said in a recent interview "the world order was already lethal before the pandemic".

One can see that only a few months back, our approach on the needs of the education system was taken by all sorts of ordinary problems, a public education agenda mired in politics, terrible reform implementation, lack of local autonomy to design what could work better, and a long etcetera; it was a bit like the dog that wants to bite its tail.

No one could expect the way things changed, the enormous challenges we now face in terms of access and quality of education, the huge lack of innovation demonstrated by teachers and schools giving the same content and lectures over screens to only few students that have access to internet and electronic devices.

One thing is clear, education wasn't working in the first place.

The systems were broken and not producing changes at the speed they should, generations of boys and girls are suffering the consequences of previous decisions. If for generations the education was producing disparities and inequalities in every major indicator both in local communities as well as in the globe, that only means that the way we used to do education was not working.

A quantum leap in leadership is necessary, and this crisis is perhaps the opportunity of our generation to translate the many weaknesses of the education system into opportunities for innovation and change.

What kind of leadership is required? Here are some ideas.

Asking "why" was without a doubt the main question that I learned the importance of asking from my classes and peer discussions at GSE.

It is an important question. It helps build the inquiry with curiosity and deepen our understanding of things. With a firm conviction, it also helps to denunciate what is not working and elevate our voice in search for greater social justice.

Personally, this question has led me to commit myself entirely to the education of children. To passionately look for ideas and opportunities of better education, especially for the most marginalized. It has encouraged me to stand up and don't take any response for an answer, but to try harder in bringing new tools, methods, practices, processes and reforms to education; from the understanding of the very interaction of a student and a teacher, to the design of the national reforms and curriculum.

As Jean Jacques Rousseau said in the XVIII century: We are born weak, we need strength; helpless, we need aid; foolish, we need reason. All that we lack at birth, all that we need when we come to man's (and woman's) estate, is the gift of education.

A health emergency, followed by an economic crisis and the subsequent educational emergency has put many children out of school, so now it is important to ask: why we do what we do? and why it is so difficult to change it, even though it is not working?

As education leaders and innovators of this generation, we have to be prepared to answer that question too. One of the things that over the years I keep learning from Fernando and my fellow IEP colleagues is to respond to challenges with great commitment, always speaking from the most fundamental values.

This contingency has certainly made us rethink the educational models we have. How big should the innovation we must undertake be? What skills do we need to put in service of changing paradigms and structures in education?

In terms of innovation I am not only referring to digital technologies but to the refinement of all the processes and relationships that are needed for a good education. I am also referring to the appropriate supply of necessary preconditions for learning such as food, rest, content, space, teaching methodologies, relationships, care, etc. so the students can approach learning with curiosity and appreciation; can learn meaningful and useful things and make good use of them; can reach their highest human potential and advance in the social and economic ladder; and are able to participate and live together as full, global citizens, defending their rights, the rights of others, and the rights of the planet and all its creatures.

In terms of skills and capabilities I wonder if this disruption would be enough to move us in that direction and fulfill the purpose of education more effectively.

And I think that depends on the role that every part of the system commits to play during the pandemic, but especially once the emergency is over.

The families will have to reorganize themselves and do the best they can to ensure that young students do not lose their appetite for learning, they would have to make sure that their children can express themselves and ask questions and that they feel accompanied and loved.

By being closer to their children, they will be able to teach them things that are not part of the curriculum but are important values for the family to transcend. They must be patient and prevent their homes from becoming toxic and abusive spaces caused by the inadequate management of emotions.

Teachers and educational authorities will have a huge opportunity to reinvent themselves. Thousands of teachers have turned to technology to train and connect with experiences from other places and the good news is they have enjoyed it very much!

The vocation of the teacher is not lost but is strengthened by adversity. The authorities must see it and must open spaces for innovation as it has not been seen before through avant-garde policies and programs. For the higher authorities in education, there is no place for hermetic behaviors; it is important to attract and value the help of all.

This shift will also require a new kind of philanthropy and social responsibility from foundations and corporations, so with boldness

and commitment they can contribute to make the most out of the opportunity that this challenge is giving us all. They must be prepared to learn and become experts in social change; transit more rapidly from charity to philanthropy, to social investment, to become fully knowledgeable allies of governments and NGOs to produce longer term, disruptive and change driven education initiatives.

It will take us a few decades to achieve this, but there is no better excuse to start right away.

Throughout the process, well-tuned methodologies for facilitation and community nurturing will be necessary so the momentum keeps building in every step of the way. True knowledgeable and committed leaders from every sector and from every level will have the opportunity to make history.

The next five years would have to clearly show the impact of our decisions today. Our leadership and our capacity for collective impact is going to be tested in the next few years and it is truly my hope, that the efforts of my colleagues from IEP will bring new definitions on important concepts around education and they will be strong and lasting and they will continue inspiring others as I am always inspired by them.

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Supporting Rural Schools during a Pandemic
By Mine Ekinci

We established KODA (Rural Schools Transformation Network) in December 2016 as a non-profit organization to bring a new approach to rural education in Turkey to empower the rural communities that starting from children and young people. As an organization that is founded by a group of volunteers and teachers and me, a 26-years-old leader (at the time we started KODA) without any major, permanent financial and organizational support nor any real experience in management and fundraising, we learned and continue learning many things on the way.

Flexibility, agility, constant learning, closely following the needs of our target group, valuing teamwork are the working principles that are strongly suggested by experts to the corporate and non-profit world to cope with the constantly changing world of the 21ˢᵗ century.

As the experience of COVID-19 pandemic showed us, for us embodying these principles has never been a choice but a must from the very beginning and became a part of our organization's DNA. It was these principles that allowed us to survive and grow in the first place since as a start-up organization change and ambiguity was the reality of our daily lives in the organization. Before the Pandemic, me and my team were already like very alert sailor(wo)men who knew that their boat was not the safest and quick to respond to the mishaps that happen along the way. The Pandemic was a big mishap for sure that deepened the cracks in our boat. Nonetheless, I believe we were quick to adapt ourselves to "the new normal" because our world before the Pandemic was already a world of a series of big or small crises that demanded constant agility, creative problem-solving and solidarity. The deeper cracks maybe required for some new methods, but this was relatively easy to do as we already had all the working

principles, values and approaches that enabled us to continue sailing the boat even in these circumstances. What we needed to do was to be even quicker to respond to the changing conditions, to listen to our beneficiaries with even more attention to support and to trust each other and the organization we built more than ever. Eventually, our work was relatively easier compared to many other more established organizations as doing something that you are already used to do more frequently or more forcefully is indeed easier than gaining a brand new skill or adopting a completely new principle or value.

The challenges that we faced during the Pandemic were of three kinds: First, the challenges directly related to our fieldwork, second, the challenges with funding, third, how the Pandemic impacted our community as individuals and team members. First one is clearly the most obvious one. As KODA, our work primarily consisted of face-to-face gatherings and trainings with rural schoolteachers and teacher candidates to increase their motivation and their opportunities for personal and professional development.

We believed that the motivated and prepared rural schoolteachers were key to quality rural education among many factors that are responsible of rural-urban education gap. We had teacher communities in six different districts of Turkey where volunteer rural schoolteachers gathered monthly, received trainings, exchanged problems and solutions on various topics according to their local needs. We also worked with four different education faculties where we ran a one-semester-long program that enabled rural school teachers to share their experiences with the young teacher candidates and teacher candidates to gain first-hand experience of working in the villages by running 6 different children workshops in multi-grade rural schools. Alongside, we had an ongoing collaboration with the Ministry of Education, where we were training the trainers for delivering local in-service trainings to the multi-grade rural

schoolteachers after publishing two teacher guidebooks for the same target group. We saw face-to-face trainings and building up local teacher communities as the best methods to empower rural schoolteachers. For sure, we were aware that some digital options existed for delivering trainings and connecting teachers or teacher candidates but always opted for face-to-face options weighing their advantages and disadvantages.

In this context, one can easily imagine how the Pandemic turned our whole work plan upside down. Closing of schools meant no teachers staying in the villages as the overwhelming majority of teachers do not live in the villages anymore in Turkey but commute from the nearest town or city center. For our team, this meant losing our access to the villages to a great extent, since in many rural parts of Turkey there is still no access to high-speed fiber Internet. Internet was accessible only through mobile data in many villages we worked with. Even this 4G Internet was sometimes not reliable, disrupted, or non-existent, and no matter how the quality of mobile Internet is, it is expensive and thus being rarely used for purposes beyond messaging over WhatsApp. Moreover, only a small minority of families we worked with had computers or tablets at home, even though smart phones became very prevalent among the adults. Given the situation, you can imagine how frightening it is for our organization to lose suddenly the main channels that connected us to the children in the villages. On top of that, the quarantine measures meant that literally everything we planned to the in the coming months had to be cancelled as it was impossible to organize any face-to-face events in the coming months. It did not take us a long time to understand and accept that we were left with all our planned work cancelled and our connection with the villages heavily disrupted.

Given the situation, like many other organizations also for us it was clear we had no chance but to go for solutions that involved distant

communication. Video conferences and production of videos seemed to be the most straightforward way of replacing face-to-face meetings and trainings. However, we knew that in our situation that this was only partially possible as it meant accepting not reaching many teachers and even a larger number of children and families in rural areas-those who needed the biggest support at that moment. Seeing the dilemma, our first instinctive reaction to the situation was wanting to assess what is going on from the eyes of the teachers and rural communities. Without losing much time, a few days after the announcement of closing of schools and other quarantine measures, we planned meetings with our teacher groups and volunteer educators within our team. We also released a survey to the teachers and asked them all to what extent they can reach the communities and via which tools and what are the most pressing needs of children and families in the villages. In addition, we made phone calls to some villages and learned directly from heads of the villages and young people what was their own experience and assessment of the situation.

Eventually we came up with an action plan that involved:

1- Establishing a Solution Desk with the help of some of our educators, volunteers and teachers what will closely monitor education in the villages throughout the Pandemic,
2- Producing digital educational content according to the diagnosed needs of teachers and families we reached since many teachers had told us they needed some guidance and materials in the distance education period,
3- Producing also digital content directly for children as we saw that many teachers solely sent texts or math problems to their students and there was a real need for content that could really get the attention of the children and support them not only academically but also psychologically, socially and emotionally through the extraordinary times of

quarantine. As Internet connection and electronic devices were limited, we created sound-recorded series of 26 stories that could be sent through WhatsApp as voice messages.

4- While doing all that, we also decided to continue gathering teachers and teacher candidates online. We knew that this meant some of the beneficiaries that normally regularly attended our events would be left out, nevertheless, it was also an opportunity to reach rural schoolteachers that normally we could never reach. We also realized now all teachers being at home, they were quick and more interested than ever to start learning the digital tools such as Zoom, Slack. From this perspective, we knew if we wanted to organize digital meetings with teachers at a normal time it would be very difficult to bring teachers in front of computers but like every crisis the Pandemic was changing our habits and created new opportunities.

5- For the teachers who did not have access to high-speed Internet, we communicated, released tips, online distant education activities, announcements form other NGOs in our teacher WhatsApp groups.

6- Another big opportunity we saw in Pandemic was the opportunity of more easily bringing together the members of our community who normally could not easily came together with face-to-face gatherings. Besides the meetings that gathered teachers and teacher candidates together, we also organized online events that are open to our volunteers, educators, donors and started airing one-to-one interviews with our community members a few times a week over Instagram TV.

7- Towards the summer, we realized some of our teachers came up with very inspiring good practices during the times of distance education. We organized a Conference to share these good practices with a larger group of teachers and public. The Conference was also followed by a smaller online round-table discussion where the teachers talked about how

to be prepared for the time when we go back to their schools or what was to be done if the distance education continued.

8- Lastly, our frustration of losing our access to villages, made us understand better that we needed to start working with volunteers and families from the villages while continuing our work with teachers. This learning motivated us for coming up with new project ideas to build local volunteer communities and to create a WhatsApp Information Sharing Network for families in rural areas.

No need to say that many additional things to do while our resources remaining the same we needed to work almost twice as much during the Pandemic, that was possible only with our team's high motivation and the support of the volunteers and teachers. Furthermore, as I mentioned above, in parallel, we had to deal with problems of funding and adopting to work from our homes. Our organization still heavily depended on grants given by foundations; only recently we were able to gain one more potential foundation to support one of our ongoing projects and two more individual donors. Luckily, there was no change in our agreements with our existing funders, however, the new foundation who was interested in supporting us cancelled its funding together with one of the individual donors and the other one postponed sending the donation to an unknown future. Apparently, with the Pandemic there was a lot to do but much less opportunities for raising funds.

Our first reaction was to share the situation as it is with our current funders. In general, they were flexible in the sense that we could change our activity plans and transfer funds that we saved from cancelled travels and events to administrative and personnel costs. As the Pandemic made fundraising from individuals and companies even more difficult than usual, even though we wanted to bring variety to our funding resources (gaining big and small individual donors, corporate social responsibility funds etc.), we understood that at least for some time we did not have any chance but to bring

in more funding through making even more grant applications. We used our new COVID-19-related project ideas to prepare these applications and finally managed to secure two grants, at the time I am writing we still expect results of five more applications we prepared. These project applications could be made only through the employment of a new team member. Employment of a new person in the midst of such a crisis and while we were not even able to have a face-to-face interviews with our candidates? Yes, that was exactly what happened, actually we did not employ only one person but even two. In fact, after sharing our situation and action plans with our funders, two of them were convinced to give us extra funding for employing one person for making grant applications as well as one for employing a volunteer coordinator since our plans demanded a lot of human resource that could not only be matched with employees.

The challenges we experienced with our field activities and funding were difficult and what made them more difficult was they occurred while as individuals we were also going through a time that our personal lives also went upside down. We wanted children, teachers and families to feel well and go through this period with the least damage while our team also felt insecure and anxious. The possibilities of getting sick, losing our loved ones, getting unemployed hang in the air around us like haunting ghosts. Moreover, as a small team who are used to support each other, we were also apart from each other now, connecting only through computer screens, having no travels or meals together as we were used to. Me personally had a very dramatic change in my daily life. When the quarantine measures were taken I was in Berlin, Germany visiting my husband who was there for work and as the borders closed I stayed there for 5.5 months living in his office, not knowing when I will be able to go back and if I ever went back I did not know if I would be able to see my husband afterwards. So, besides accepting the challenges that came up with the work and their

emotional residues -especially the frustration of having to accept all the project writing, talking with donors, planning, organizing, preparing we did in last months were in vain and everything we were working on now could have just the same destiny as the future was completely ambiguous- we had a lot to cope with in our private lives. It is not the easiest thing to do to provide support for others, to welcome the ambiguity and to make difficult decisions while you are having your own emotional ups and downs.

How we dealt with this last set of problems were even more instinctive rather than being rationally planned. Of course, the most obvious measure we took was to organize frequent online video conferences with each other. We also became a little bit less strict in how we ran our online meetings, leaving more time for starting and closing circles, sometimes remaining after the meeting only for chatting about our day, thoughts and feelings. We managed to make each other feel that we are there for each other even though we were not physically together. In fact, working towards a mission helped us to go through the days of isolation and anxiety about the future. Now looking retrospectively I can even tell that I feel an even stronger bond with my team, the bond built through struggling together, seeing that sharing my own negative feelings with the team is okay and this deep trust of knowing that we are there for each other no matter what the circumstances are. Also, practically speaking, like in our work with teachers, frequent online trainings and live Instagram TV shows with our community members allowed us to connect with many volunteers and teachers that maybe normally we could never have a chance to connect. Prior to the Pandemic, I don't think everybody was that much aware of from whom our community consists of nor the immense social, cultural and geographic richness of it.

The Pandemic conditions still continue, even though our lives are a little bit "normalized", almost all the problems I mentioned still

continues to some extent. Nevertheless, almost spending half a year learning to live with the COVID-19 and all what it changes in our lives and organizations, I think it is a good time to step back to harvest deep insights and learnings that these six months taught us. When I asked myself what really allowed us to sail on our boat even more stronger and crowded than usual in the time of a big global crisis, I see five different but connected factors: First, our cause is a right and strong cause. During a time that people strived for hope, it attracted even a higher number of followers and volunteers during the Pandemic while our existing employees, volunteers and teachers were ready to spend more time on the work we do. Second, our community deeply believed in this higher cause, even though our project aims changed a lot, we were quick to found out what should be the new aims in the changing conditions and had no difficulties to find the same motivation to work towards them. Third, close, sincere relations we built prior to the Pandemic within our team but also with the volunteers and the teachers as well as our funders helped us to go through the wavy times. Fourth, working as a small team, our readiness to embrace the change, our prior experience with making decisions in the midst of ambiguity, made us make moves easily and almost comfortably throughout the most difficult times. Fifth and last, our ability of seeing and seizing the opportunities even when everything seems to be dark helped us. We raised the amount of our total funds, employed new team members found new ways to connect with new beneficiaries, built new strategies to reach our mission. In fact, clearly, what made KODA survive and thrive in the earlier phases also saved us and even helped us to grow during the Pandemic.

I was 9 years old when the Marmara Earthquake happened on 17th of August 1999, causing death of about 20.000 people. Yalova, the city we lived was one of the most impacted. Luckily I did not lose anybody from my close family, however our lives changed suddenly and irreversibly. Our home at the city center was heavily damaged so

we had to move to a house in my grandmother's village. I had to change my school as my old school was demolished. I went to my new school for two months. As there was no teacher for these two months, then I had to rechange it towards the end of first semester. The city had a completely different look, half of the buildings were completely destroyed and many of those that were not destructed had huge cracks on their walls and no windows. It looked like a scene from the apocalyptic movies, but that scene became the usual background for our daily lives that was difficult to get used to.

I remember it was short after the earthquake that while driving from our village to the city, I asked my father: "When will everything go back to normal?" He said that it is not easy, probably it will take about two years. He was right and wrong. Many things changed in two years: New roads and apartments were constructed, shops were reopened, my old school was rebuilt. We continued staying at our home in the village but discovered that it was in fact wonderful to have a house with a garden -only a bit too cold as we tried to heat up a big house with a stove. On the other hand, *everything* did not go back to normal. My teachers and relatives who died in the earthquake never came back, buildings that were destroyed were never rebuilt and the experience of going through such a destructive earthquake changed us from very within forever.

Now, knowing it from this experience of the Earthquake, I know once the COVID-19 pandemic is over some things will go back to the normal -as it is already happening now- while some will never do. Lives that are lost with the COVID-19 or the lost time in learning in the classrooms will never come back. Similarly, the speedy digitalization in education is here to stay in the global education scene. Digitalization gives a lot of hope for closing the education quality gap between poor and rich, rural and urban. Especially for higher levels of education, it is immensely valuable to have access to the best teachers and educational resources produced around the

world. On the other hand, if digitalization in education is faster than the speed of building the digital infrastructure for the poor and rural to be able to make use of it, the digital gap will turn into an even more widened educational gap that will turn into an even more accumulated social injustice. It was a big endeavor and difficult achievement to bring children to schools especially in rural areas in many places around the world. If we continue giving distance education to those who are easier to reach while leaving the others with a bad quality education or de facto with no education at all, I think we are even risking to lose the current schooling rates in rural areas. In parallel, it is important to remember schools don't mean only education for many children around the world but also healthy nutrition, a warm and safe place to play and regular check of their health and development. Distance education might be relatively better in filling the educational purposes of education, but we have to think what will happen with the other functions of schools that cannot be replaced. In the meantime, if distance education mimics didactic teaching that was prevalent for most of the 20th century aiming transfer of knowledge instead of supporting learners to gain skills including cognitive, social and emotional skills, we risk of going backwards in our journey of empowering students to learn and become citizens ready for the 21st century.

For avoiding all these risks while making the best use of the opportunities the digitalization and distance education bring us, we need to remember that "education for all" has to remain as the utmost priority of global education. In addition, education world should not be only reactive to what is happening socially and politically but should be pro-active in the sense that it should make it possible and easier to create a more just and more sustainable world which could prevent many similar catastrophes such as the COVID-19 Pandemic in the future. We should not forget what the education and even before that what the humanity means, so we never fall into the trap of viewing education as transmission of some

information. Lastly, in order to be able to do all that I believe we need leaders, teachers and volunteers in the education field who work passionately for improving the education systems while never stopping working on their very selves, relations, schools and organizations: "Being the change we want to see in the world".

Mine Ekinci founded KODA, a network to support rural schools in Turkey. Born in a village in Turkey and having studied herself in a village school, Mine graduated from college and from Harvard's International Education Policy program. She founded KODA with a vision to improve the professional and personal development of young teachers not only for their wellbeing but to also contribute to rural communities in a positive and supportive way.

It must be hard to start a new leadership position in such difficult times…

By Ana Florez

Former colleagues, friends, clients, and relatives have been asking this question over the last nine months and I had no time to reflect on the actual answer. This essay aims to share my journey through the COVID-19 pandemic and my brief reflections about leadership and the long-term consequences of the pandemic in the education sector.

To provide some background, I accepted a new leadership position right before the pandemic. After fifteen years working in global education at FHI 360, I left my leadership position, my team and my colleagues, to embark in a new adventure. In January 2020, I started a new role as Head of the Americas at Teach For All. At awe at the visionary CEO, Wendy Kopp, I began my mandate to support 10 network partner organizations in the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region. Our goals, to develop collective leadership to ensure all children have the opportunity to fulfil their potential and grow our network of 56 partners around the world, opened a new window for me to learn about the education sector from a different perspective fueled by entrepreneurship.

Reflecting on these nine months, it has been challenging to lead the Americas region at Teach For All under one of the worst pandemics in history. In addition to onboarding in a new position - embracing the mission, setting the vision and strategies for the region, getting to know my team, developing a relationship with our partners and donors-, there were uncertain challenges both at the professional and personal level. The moral of my story is that I could have frozen to the point of inaction but instead I found strength in the unknowns

to build trust, understand the issues, and offer a safe environment for everyone to connect emotionally and deal with change together.

Teach For All's LAC regional strategy for 2020 was full of amazing opportunities to get to know the partner organizations and learn first-hand how they are developing leadership in classrooms and with communities. I was preparing to do a yearlong listening tour that was going to take me to Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, Chile and Peru. This last trip was especially exciting because I was going to travel with Wendy Kopp to Anscash, Peru, where Enseña Peru (led by another IEP graduate Franco Mosso) has one of the strongest cases for community impact in the region.

In a matter of weeks, COVID-19 became a pandemic. Our partners in the Asia Pacific region and Europe were closing their offices. In March, we felt the full impact of the pandemic in the region. From Brazil and Ecuador to the rest of our eight partners. My first action was to foster and open spaces for our teams to connect emotionally with each other. Empathy and compassion were my priorities. I wanted all of us to be aware of each other's situation and acknowledge our vulnerability as human beings. My second action was to support partners assessing their programmatic and financial status. As a result, we intensified our fundraising efforts to support them. At the beginning of the year, I wanted a break from writing proposals but suddenly I ended up writing as intensively as the prior year. Fortunately, we are securing resources that will help partners overcome the financial difficulties caused by the pandemic.

Very quickly, partners adapted their programing. I have witnessed some incredible examples of how our network partner organizations, teachers, and alumni are leaning into this time of uncertainty to meet the needs of students, families, and communities they work with. I am seeing proactive approaches with the return of TV and radio to support learning and the increase use of mobile platforms such as

WhatsApp and the creation of podcasts to reach out to our students. A growing number of partners are innovating and collaborating with governments, private sector, and local leaders to train teachers on digital skills and to create and broadcast high quality educational content to continue teaching students during the lockdown, especially considering the region's uneven access to the internet. I am truly inspired by the resilience, sense of possibility, and great commitment to our mission our network continues to show through this challenging time.

With my colleagues at the Inter-American Dialogue, we wrote a blog with our first interpretation of the crisis and its impact in Latin America. We noted the uncertainty in reopening schools, the challenges teachers were facing, and the risk of stopping vital services like school feeding programs. In two decades of work in education, I felt comfortable confronting obstacles while implementing solutions around the world. I have dealt with very complex situations but nothing I had faced previously felt this big and uncertain.

The pandemic is leaving us with many challenges. The most urgent challenge is enabling student learning despite school closures due to COVID-19. However, my biggest concern is the risk of erasing decades of increased access and retention in education in Latin America and around the world, especially at the secondary education level. In Bridging the Skills Gap in Latin America and the Caribbean, my co-author and I focused on secondary education and the connection with employment as a pressing necessity, citing the importance to develop socio-emotional skills and to invest in pathways to connect school, tertiary education, and employment. If one out of every five youth -20 million people- was neither working nor in school already, the number would only increase after the pandemic. Students from the most marginalized contexts that were in school may never return.

In times of an unprecedented education emergency, we need to invest more resources to ensure out of school children and youth acquire foundational and socioemotional skills through high-quality distance learning platforms (online, TV, radio). Likewise, governments and donors should prioritize holistic investments in education to ensure that when students return to school, they find plenty of opportunities to catch-up academically and socioemotionally while having access to protection services.

Ana Florez *is the Head of the Americas region at Teach For All. Mrs. Florez has more than 20 years of experience in international development focusing on education. She graduated from the International Education Program at Harvard in 2004.*

Promoting Quality Interactions for Young Children During the Pandemic
By Angela Hernandez

Moments like the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, bring to light the stark inequalities in society and particularly in the care and education of children. At the same time, moments of crisis often serve as catalysts for innovation and opportunity, propelling society to find new solutions to address problems and inequalities in ways that were not thought of before.

I decided to focus on quality interactions for children ages 0 to 6 because I believe that numerous challenges faced in education can be solved by improving early childhood education. Moreover, there is a direct financial benefit to society. Research shows that every dollar invested in high-quality, comprehensive early childhood programs can deliver a 13% return on investment per year to society[38].

Challenges of the pandemic

I moved to Brazil in 2019 after graduating from the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE) and joined Avenues: The World School in the Sao Paulo campus. At the same time, I co-founded Carinos, an education organization focused on early childhood education, alongside Elisa Mansur, an MIT/Harvard Kennedy School Graduate. We met during our time in Cambridge and share a passion for improving access to quality care for children in the earliest years.

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[38] García, J. L., Heckman, J. J., Leaf, D. E., & Prados, M. J. (2016). The life-cycle benefits of an influential early childhood program (No. w22993). National Bureau of Economic Research.

As Director of Education, I began working with early childhood educators, caregivers, providing professional development through workshops, mentoring cycles, and visiting their centers. Things were picking up and our organization was building momentum. Then, in March 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic hit Brazil. Everything changed from night to day. Schools were shut by government order and children were stuck at home. As an educator at Avenues, an independent private school, I saw how quickly private schools were able to shift to an effective and world-class distance learning model with synchronous and asynchronous activities for all students. However, as Director of Education at Carinos, this was not what I saw happening with families in at-risk and low-income neighborhoods. These were two opposite realities.

A month into the pandemic, I was invited to give an online workshop to more than 100 trainees working in public education departments around the country. The goal was to help them think of ways to support education in their cities and states. In the middle of the workshop, one of the participants broke down in tears and explained she was a mother of a two-year-old and she had no idea what to do with her young child. Many others in the group who were also parents shared her frustration and said the families their department served were just as desperate as they were. The more I listened to parents and families, the more I realized children were being impacted in multiple ways. The pandemic not only brought physical health risks but was also impacting their learning and care. I knew this was a time to provide young children and babies even more attention and care because early experiences affect a child's brain development by establishing either a sturdy or a fragile

foundation for learning[39]. The pandemic made evident the deep inequalities in access to education in Brazil.

Facing the challenges

Although there were many public and private organizations mobilizing to create online solutions to ensure continuity of student learning, few of those solutions were focused on early childhood education and most required high-quality internet connection, which made it challenging for families to access. A recent survey on internet use by children in Brazil conducted by Nucleo de Informacao e Coordenacao (NIC) showed that 17% of children and adolescents in Brazil live in homes without internet access[40]. Having access to an internet connection during the school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic became essential in order to guarantee children's learning continuity, interactions with peers during social isolation, and have access to reliable information. According to UNICEF representative in Brazil, Florence Bauer, "children who do not have access to the internet at home are the ones who will suffer the social impacts of the pandemic."[41]

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[39] Center on the Developing Child (2007). The Science of Early Childhood Development (InBrief). Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu.

[40] Brazilian Network Information Center. (2019). *ICT Kids Online Brazil: Survey on Internet Use by Children in Brazil.* Brazilian Internet Steering Committee. https://cetic.br/media/docs/publicacoes/216370220191105/tic_kids_online_2018_livro_eletronico.pdf

[41] UNICEF Brasil. (2020, May 12). UNICEF alerta: garantir acesso livre à internet para famílias e crianças vulneráveis é essencial na resposta à Covid-19 [post]. Retrieved from: https://www.unicef.org/brazil/comunicados-de-imprensa/unicef-alerta-essencial-garantir-acesso-livre-a-internet-para-familias-e-criancas-vulneraveis

As an organization focused on early childhood education, we knew we had to do something to support these families who desperately wanted to provide continuity to their children's development during school closures but whose hands were tied due to their lack of connectivity. But how? We had to think of a way to reach these families that would not depend on internet connection and would not cost the family anything in financial terms. In February 2020, an independent survey found that 99% of all cellphones in Brazil had Whatsapp installed[42]. Moreover, many wireless network operators in Brazil do not charge data while using Whatsapp. It became clear that the solution was to use Whatsapp as the communication channel to deliver the content families needed.

Taking on this project was not a small feat. It meant listening to parents and understanding what the needs were. It meant thinking of news ways to reach families with accessible tools they could use to support their children's development during school closures. It meant finding partners to sponsor this initiative. It meant planning a strategy to get the project done in a very short amount of time because these young children needed help immediately.

We set off to find the funding for the project, put together a team to create the educational content that families would receive and get the technology that would enable us to reach families at scale. As Director of Education, my main focus was to lead the creation process of the pedagogical materials to be sent to parents. Knowing that this was not something I could do on my own, I selected a team of highly qualified and experienced public preschool teachers who knew what young children these ages need to continue their development at home. The team worked tirelessly for two weeks to

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[42] Mobile Time. (2020). *Panorama Mobile Time/Opinion Box: Mensageria no Brasil.* Retrieved from: https://panoramamobiletime.com.br/pesquisa-mensageria-no-brasil-fevereiro-de-2020/

create the materials that would be equivalent to four months of schooling. The contents were designed in alignment with Brazil's version of the Common Core (in Portuguese, Base Nacional Comum Curricular or BNCC, which translated to English would be National Curricular Common Base) and organized by age. The pedagogical sequence is play-based and takes into account what babies and young children are able to do at each age and how to best provide them quality interactions that will holistically support their development. Additionally, each activity is carefully created using everyday objects families already have at home, making it easy for families with limited resources to do the learning activities with their children.

The materials are delivered to families through a chatbot via Whatsapp. This enables families to receive the materials at no cost. The idea is to use Whatsapp as a communication channel to reach low-income families while using technology to "enhance, rather than substitute adult-child interactions in everyday life and promote high-quality learning contexts".[43] Since the service is delivered digitally, there is no geographic constraint for families who want to receive these materials to support their children during the pandemic. We launched our Whatsapp chatbot called "ZapCarinos", and in less than a week over 700 families enrolled and started receiving tips and activities to do at home with their young children. Every day, the number of families enrolling from all over the country increases.

Something that has helped me lead during this period of the pandemic is listening generously to all stakeholders. I would not have been able to understand what the educational challenge was, if I hadn't taken the time to listen to the parents who had their children at home and did not know how to support their learning. Another

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[43] Piedra and Reimers (2020), Brazil: Educação Infantil no Maranhão (Early Learning in Maranhão), Education continuity stories series, OECD Publishing, Paris.

important takeaway from this period of the pandemic is to take action. In a moment of crisis, patience needs to be balanced with a sense of urgency to find solutions. Moreover, these solutions need to be rooted in a strong sense of purpose.

Creating educational solutions that will be equitable for all and more than just quick fixes has probably been one of the most difficult parts of leading during this period of the pandemic. It is challenging to think of education programs that will both address the pressing needs of the crisis and be sustainable after the crisis. When you are under the pressure of an educational crisis with children's development being impacted it is easy to focus on the here and now. However, we should not lose sight of how what is happening now might have long lasting effects on education as a whole.

It is hard to imagine what the consequences of the pandemic might be in the next five years. At times, I worry about the impact of social distancing on babies and young children who will spend many months of their development in a small space without social interactions with other children. In my opinion, young children from low-income families will be the most impacted. In Brazil, for example, many low-income families have continued to work throughout the pandemic, leaving young children unattended or under the care of siblings because of school closures.

I am confident that solutions like the one we created are examples of new ways of addressing educational challenges by providing programs that are accessible to all and scalable, both now and beyond the pandemic. The need for parents to provide young children high-quality interactions, especially among low-income families has become more evident, relevant, and urgent due to the COVID-19 pandemic and social isolation. However, parental engagement is important for children at every age at all times. The moment we are currently living is serving as a stage to highlight its

importance and it is my hope that this engagement will continue once schools open again.

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Transforming M&E to enhance remote learning for all in Peru amidst the pandemic
By Kristen Hinckley and Luciana Velarde

We worked together at Peru's Ministry of Education Monitoring and Evaluation Unit. As the head of the M&E Unit. Luciana lead a multidisciplinary team dedicated to generating and promoting evidence to inform policymaking, as well as monitoring the implementation of main education strategies and interventions nationwide. As part of this Unit, Kristen was a member of the Unit's Education Policy Studies Team that specializes in gathering evidence on teaching and learning, school climate, and school management by visiting schools throughout the country.

Our reflection begins with how we had to transform our learning strategies, as the pandemic hit right as the school year was starting. Since our monitoring instruments were designed for in-person learning, we will share our experience of rethinking how to monitor remote education and how we executed this adaptation process. First, we needed to know if the remote education strategy was reaching all Peruvian students. Second, we needed to know if this strategy was successfully providing quality learning opportunities.

How remote education was created from scratch over the course of two weeks

In March 2020, without any warning or foresight, on the eve of the beginning of the school year, Peru went into strict lockdown. The challenge was unprecedented. How were over 8 million students going to learn at home in a country where several areas lack not only internet connection but even telephone signal? The Ministry of Education (MoE) was quick in its response and, by enlisting the support of national and international partners, multilateral

organizations, the private sector and, of course, teachers, principals, and educational authorities nationwide, Aprendo en Casa (Learn at Home) went live on April 6th. By leveraging curated resources such as Sesame Street shows and complementing them with national resources developed and adapted by the MoE's Basic Education team, Aprendo en Casa broadcasts shows for students in pre-primary, primary, and secondary education via television, web and even the radio. After a couple of weeks, the content was translated into over 12 native indigenous languages in order to ensure remote education for all. This was an extraordinary effort, but two questions remained. How many students were taking part in Aprendo en Casa? How much were these resources supporting students' learning?

Transforming M&E to shed light on how children are experiencing remote learning

The MoE's Monitoring and Evaluation Unit was officially created in 2015 to promote evidence-based policy making in education. As education transformed into remote education amidst the pandemic, monitoring and evaluation efforts were bound to transit the same path.

Immediately after the M&E Unit undertook this task, questions and challenges started to arise. First, monitoring was usually done through field visits to schools where enumerators could monitor principals', teachers', and students' attendance, as well as verify first-hand whether all learning inputs were in place. How could we "verify" these in a remote education setting? We used a strategy that had never been done before at a large scale for monitoring purposes: conducting phone surveys. This led us to another key decision. Before, our monitoring efforts were focused on how teachers and principals were providing the educational services, but now, we had the unique opportunity to also listen directly to families regarding their children's educational experiences. Although these was

unchartered territory and questions kept arising each step of the way, we embraced the opportunity to learn by doing.

Just two weeks after the launch of Aprendo en Casa, we had our first results: around 95% of Peruvian families surveyed were taking part in the remote education strategy, over 90% of the teachers and principals surveyed communicated with their students' families at least once a week, and over 80% of the families surveyed were satisfied with how remote learning was being provided.[44]

Lessons on remote M&E (amidst a pandemic) for the world and the future

Days away from our 5th month of monitoring the provision of remote education, we are ready to share our main lessons learned and takeaways:

1. Be clear about why you're embarking on this: collecting data to directly inform decision-making. Work in collaboration with the policy-implementing offices to identify what are the questions they need answered to take action (and make sure actions are taken).

2. Identify what are the big questions you want to answer (and just focus on those), i.e. which are your highest priority indicators.

3. Be thoughtful about the population you are serving. As willing as your survey respondents are to share their experience with you, they are juggling new challenges with health, work, and family obligations and don't have extra time to answer a survey that is over 20 minutes long.

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[44] Results of MINEDU´s Aprendo en Casa Monitoring Surveys (http://escale.minedu.gob.pe/).

4. If phone surveys are the only way you can collect data, move heaven and earth in order to obtain phone numbers of the majority of the informants to ensure that your sample is representative of the population.

5. Oversample (even more than you think you should) in order to account for high non-response rates; in Peru we found it ranged from 20% in cities to 80% in rural areas.[45]

6. Plan ahead for connectivity challenges; e.g. reserving one day at the end of the week to reach out to participants who could not respond to calls earlier in the week due to lack of phone coverage in some areas (some families are likely to be in areas with less or more connectivity depending on the day of the week).

7. Pilot and re-pilot (and re-pilot) before you officially begin your planned fieldwork. Make sure you are correctly communicating the questions you are asking, because it is different asking someone a question in person, than on the phone.

8. Be clear (and make sure everyone is clear) about how representative your sample is of the population that you are serving. In the case of Peru, the sampling frame can only include those for whom we can access their DNI (national identity document) and telephone information, which only represents 43% of the students in the public education system.[46] Without having information about the rest of the students, it is difficult to know how different all the students are from those that are included in the sampling frame.

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[45] Results of MINEDU´s Aprendo en Casa Monitoring Surveys (http://escale.minedu.gob.pe/).
[46] Results of MINEDU´s Aprendo en Casa Monitoring Surveys (http://escale.minedu.gob.pe/).

9. And last but not least: invite critiques and feedback. This is a situation in which everything is transforming and there are always limitations. All criticism and feedback are opportunities to continually improve.

Now that we know who we are reaching with remote learning, how do we know if this is supporting their learning?

Since the probabilities of returning to in-person classes in 2020 are (now) almost nonexistent, whether Aprendo en Casa is providing opportunities for students to learn has become a question of the utmost importance. But, how do we measure this? In a regular year we would conduct a "Monitoring of School Practices" study by visiting schools and carrying out classroom observations and interviews with school leaders, teachers and students about teaching and learning, school management, and school climate. However, in order to gather information on what occurs between learning inputs and learning results in a remote setting, we had to create an instrument specifically for this context where the house is now the school and the teacher is not there.

Therefore, our team was responsible for adapting our monitoring mechanisms to the new remote learning modality. The urgency of this task challenged us to produce high quality work in a short period of time. We began by researching best practices, speaking with education leaders, and systematizing the research. Our team then diligently adapted our current instruments to the new reality, deciding which parts of the instrument we could adapt to the new reality and which new aspects we should include that are important for remote learning. The proposed instruments were then validated with each of the Ministry's implementing teams (including the Vice Minister) to ensure that the proposed questions and the depth of the instrument would answer the questions they were expecting, in order to motivate improvements in the strategy.

Having anticipated the need for a remote school practices monitoring study and having begun the adaptation process in April, we are now prepared to roll-out our "Monitoring of Remote School Practices," which aims to assess the quality of student-teacher interactions in the remote learning setting. This data collection during the pandemic will be vital not only to our knowledge base about how remote learning works, especially in times of emergency, but will also be fundamental to our improvement now of remote learning in Peru.

Lessons learned for education leadership

Work in education always has a sense of urgency because as education leaders we want to provide the best possible experience for our students, teachers, and families. However, COVID-19 has redefined our conceptions of urgency and uncertainty. Leaders are challenged with how to create policies for school openings/closures, strategies for alternative learning, and measurement efforts, all dependent on ever-changing health circumstances. This has led to a reprioritization of what is most important for our students to learn and what are the most important aspects that we want to measure with respect to these new teaching and learning strategies.

1. Learn from the experiences of others and share your own.

Examine the strategies and interventions that other countries have used and adapt their lessons learned to your own context. Don't just focus on countries that are most similar to yours, because you can also learn from contexts that are very different than your own. Collaborate with other education leaders to develop best practices together during these challenging times. The international education community has come together through various webinars where education leaders across the globe have shared experiences and learned from one another.

2. Documenting your intervention is just as important as implementing it.

It is vital to document your intervention so that you know what works, what doesn't work, and how you can use this information to improve your intervention. Conducting studies and research now will provide us with vital information for decision-making and improving strategies for education in times of uncertainty, now and in the following years. Effective leaders need this evidence, especially when making urgent decisions as circumstances change and new priorities arise.

3. Be adaptable.

While planning is important, it is just as important to be flexible with changing circumstances. When 2020 started, no one thought we would be in this situation. Having an open mind to propose and welcome new ways of teaching, learning, monitoring, etc., has created new possibilities outside of our traditional methods, opening up new opportunities for educators, students and families, that we would not have anticipated or planned for before.

4. The same solution will not work for everyone. Empower others to innovate for their own context.

It is important to not only understand different contexts and needs that people have, but also to find individualized solutions to address those needs. For example, in some communities, remote education may work well through radio. In other areas, teachers may reach their students more effectively through Whatsapp. As leaders, we must acknowledge we will not have the solutions for everything and everyone. But rather, true leadership relies on motivating and empowering others to find solutions that work for them, and to then support them in their efforts so that they can flourish.

5. Create sustainable solutions.

The creation of Aprendo en Casa and the remote monitoring strategies is not only important in the current moment, but is also now an asset that will be able to be leveraged in the future. By producing these sustainable solutions during the pandemic, MoE will be able to continue to offer these services as a way to complement the regular education once we return to school in person. Aprendo en Casa was created originally as the only way to provide education during the pandemic, but it could soon become one of the strongest mechanisms to close inequality gaps in learning by providing extra support for the students who need it.

6. Be kind to the process and everyone taking part in it.

Remember that we are in a pandemic and the challenges are complex. What you and your team are (very successfully) pushing forward is already something that no one would have imagined possible. Maybe you will need a couple more days to reach all your informants, maybe some of your enumerators will fall sick, maybe your data analysis will take a bit longer than you expected – that is OK. Stick to your non-negotiables to guarantee data quality, but realize that other aspects can be adjusted and you will still make a positive impact.

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__Luciana Velarde__ is the Head of the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit at the Peruvian Ministry of Education. She has an undergraduate and a master's degree in economics from Universidad del Pacífico in Lima, Peru and graduated from the International Education Policy Program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in 2018. Previously she worked as a consultant for the World Bank Group Education Global Practice in Peru, Nicaragua, Uruguay, and El Salvador, and was the Evaluation Coordinator for AtentaMente Consultores, a Mexican non-profit dedicated to providing SEL programs to students, teachers and principals.

Learning for Leadership: How COVID-19 Prompted a Conversation About Equity at the Latin American Leadership Academy
By Idia F. Irele

For many educators, pressing needs in the early months of COVID-19 included understanding the ins-and-outs of virtual platforms, like Zoom, and learning to actively engage large groups of students through computer screens. At the Latin American Leadership Academy (LALA), we faced those issues and more. As virtual learning thrust us into students' homes and closer to their realities, we faced head-on, what is arguably one of the region's most consistently overarching issues: its stark inequality.

Early March 2020 marked the peak of my journey as an educator, thus far. As I strolled through Medellin's colorful Manila neighborhood, listening to three of my 19-year-old students discuss the importance of political participation from their respective experiences in Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil, I beamed proudly at what my small, Colombia-based, organization had accomplished. With extremely sparse resources and a 12-person team composed of mostly very young professionals, we had managed to create the ideal educational environment for young people to not only make their voices heard, but to also actualize their wildest aspirations when it comes to engaging their communities towards positive change.

By that moment, we were just one month into the pilot of our Academy program, a 3-month residential program in Medellin for teenage leaders from all over Latin America. During this short period, I witnessed firsthand, what young people can produce when they are given the intellectual, social, and emotional space to address the issues closest to them. As an organization that seeks to inspire

positive social impact across Latin America, we had never been strangers to the region's ever-present structural inequities, however the residential nature of our two core programs had always allowed us to provide an equalizer of sorts, ensuring all students a secure environment to explore their development, regardless of their social or economic background.

At the Academy, we had built a safe, resource-rich, community in the picturesque Valley of Aburrá, where just short of 25 students learned to live together, learn together, cook together, reflect together, and communicate across cultural differences. The city was our classroom, and students leapt at every opportunity to deeply engage in their learning. In the mornings, our students could be found nose-deep in Spanish-Portuguese dictionaries or novels, desperately working towards increasing their ability to communicate to their peers in the region's other most widely spoken language. In the afternoons, they could be heard engaging in intense debates on the Colombian Conflict and the meaning of peace. In the evenings, they could be seen taking lessons from local Colombian cooks on how to prepare the tastiest *sancocho* for their classmates. It was education in its most beautifully holistic form, and I could not wait to see what these young people would build during our time together. Little did I know, soon thereafter, I, like most educators on the planet, would encounter a nearly unprecedented global pandemic that would require my team and I to re-shift the way we thought about our programming.

Not long ago, the OECD produced a report that shed light on the varying levels of social inequality throughout its member countries. In places like the Canada or Spain, an individual might take up to 4 generations to move from the lowest socioeconomic bracket to the country's average, the study concluded. In Colombia, our organization's home-country, the number of generations jumps to eleven. Latin America is home to perhaps some of the most socially,

economically, and racially unequal societies, and our students stand at the heart of many of the day-to-day challenges these inequities yield. As an institution that holds 21ˢᵗ Century skills at the core of our programming, we've always been well-equipped to respond to students' social-emotional needs, however the series of events that have unfolded since the global outbreak of COVID-19 have clearly illustrated that without a lens of equity and inclusion, sometimes social-emotional support only goes so far. The past few months have urged us to reconcile with our program's role in responsibly navigating issues of inequity as we support our students in driving social change.

First, like most academic institutions, we deliberated over the leading question on every educator's mind: do we go virtual or not? While some residential programs—such as our South African predecessor, the African Leadership Academy—concluded that the best option was to keep students close, we quickly realized that we simply did not have the infrastructure to maintain the level of safety and security required to continue to house students, especially as borders closed and uncertainty loomed everywhere. Our decision to send students home was met with the anticipated tears and disappointment. However, some students communicated more profound concerns. One student, a notoriously thoughtful and headstrong activist from a *favela* in Rio, approached me sobbing. "*I can't go home*," she said, "*You don't understand, this month has been the first time in a long time when I knew I'd have three meals every day. It's been the first time in a while when I haven't been woken up by gunshots outside my window. Please, let me stay.*" Although this student's reality had always been an essential part in her narrative as a leader, for the first time ever, I stood before her feeling powerless. Unable to offer a hug due to the newly introduced norms around social distancing, I knew that the lack of an embrace was the least of her worries; a hug would not undue the structural inequity that threatened her overall wellness and safety once she returned home.

Other concerns students presented raised issues experienced at a national level. One Paraguayan student, whose professional goals center on urban planning in 'developing' nations, spoke to the staff of significant infrastructure barriers. "*It would be much safer for me to stay here in Medellin,*" she told us, "*In Paraguay, we face a high frequency of water shortages during these months.*" How could she meet the World Health Organization's recommended hand-washing standards if running water was not always guaranteed? Like many nations in the Global South, Paraguay faces nationwide structural shortcomings, at times rendering people—regardless of their socioeconomic standing—for days without basic modern-day necessities like running water and stable internet. Our staff, which comprises members from around Latin America, as well as various Global South countries, are intimately familiar with these kinds of challenges. However, sending students to their homes during a potentially deadly pandemic, prodded us to confront the urgency of solving them.

Over the months, my team and I gradually learned to adjust to the new normal of leading an education movement during a pandemic. We sent students home with copious amounts of hand-sanitizer and a medical mask for everyone and strategized with several students about how to maintain physical and economic stability during this time. We even reached out to our extended network of social impact professionals for resources and advice where necessary. We started to find a rhythm to remote teaching and remote work and created task forces around extending increased community care during this universally scary and uncertain time. Nevertheless, just as we had begun to feel like things were starting to seem manageable, we were confronted with another one of the region's ugliest inequities: systemic racism.

In May, viral footage of the brutal murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota spurred an international reconciling with race and racism. Figures coming out of Brazil—the country that the

vast majority of our students call home—show that similarly to the United States, life expectancy for Black and indigenous individuals is much lower than their white counterparts. With the backdrop of the Coronavirus, this disparity has intensified; a discrepancy, our students remind us, that is not a result of mere coincidence, but rather the direct consequence of intentional, systematic marginalization. Not long after the public murder of George Floyd, millions of Brazilians publicly grieved the death of Miguel da Silva, the 5-year-old son of an Afro-Brazilian domestic worker in Recife, who died while in the care of his mother's white boss. "*During the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, around 10 million enslaved people were captured and brought from the coasts of Africa to Latin America,*" one *Piauiense* alum shared with me in Portuguese over a *Whatsapp* audio message, "*these populations continue to be enslaved, living in the region's most impoverished and abandoned regions. As an organization that promises to lead necessary social change in Latin America, we have to make space to address this issue.*" Soon after, another student, an afro-Brazilian racial justice educator from the Black-majority state of Bahia, convened our majority-nonblack staff in a meeting. "We have to discuss racial inclusion at LALA," he calmly appealed. He proceeded to lay out an incredibly cogent argument in which he reminded us that he, and the few other alums like him, cannot feel psychologically safe in a community that, at its core, does not understand their realities as young people whose daily struggles are marked by deep-seated racial oppression. As a staff, we leaned forward and listened. The student was right.

While LALA has always sought to engage students and community members in critical conversations around the region's most pressing issues, the pandemic has thrust us into the depths of these issues like never before, and we've been tasked with adapting our priorities to meet these urgent needs. While we could recoil with fear in the face of all of these challenges, we see the trials not as setbacks, but as opportunities. As a community that unanimously promotes mental

models like growth mindset and capacity building, we have chosen to rise to the challenge.

To start, we have started a series of open and honest conversations, bringing together both staff members and alumni, about how we can better prioritize equity and inclusion as a community. One unique benefit of the current global shutdown is the capacity to build community across distances due to the world's collective transition to virtual gatherings. The fact that much of the world is now online has given us access to people and resources that were not as readily available pre-pandemic. We have empowered students to invite social impact experts, academics, spiritual leaders, and many more role models from all different walks of life to provide diverse perspectives at our events. Our students and alumni have used this time as an opportunity to launch international social impact campaigns, garnering support from potential allies from all over the world. The deep-thinking student from Piauí who so bravely shared the need for a more sophisticated racial analysis in our programs recently held an *Instagram Live* event on racial justice in Latin America. Over 1,500 viewers participated. The surge in energy around these issues of inequity welcomes an overwhelming sense of reassurance, we are on the right track.

As I reflect on my organization's journey since March, I am both blown away by our resilience and grateful for the lessons we have learned as we have encountered each hurdle. The backs of our T-shirts read the words "*Lead the Change*," and the past few months have shown us that leading requires first learning. The lasting effects of COVID-19 have the potential to cripple some societies more than others, especially in many communities in Latin America, where inequity has stifled the advancement of historically marginalized populations. The shock of the pandemic has forced us all to pay closer attention to where society hurts most, and our education systems must respond to the multifaceted issues uncovered by this

momentous point in history. At LALA, we have chosen to embrace this trying time as an opportunity to better understand the communities we serve. Yes, let us lead the change we wish to see in the world, but first, let us learn.

Idia F. Irele is the Director of Curriculum & Strategic Relations Manager at the Latin American Leadership Academy

One Step Forward and Ten Steps Back: A Time for Reorientation
By Ryleigh Jacobs

"Be a Leader!" my parents would call out after me as I left for school each morning. In my head, I rolled my eyes at my parents, something I wouldn't dare do in reality. I distinctly remember not feeling like being domineering that day which is what I imagined any good leader would do. This vision of leadership exhausted me — I could never determine how I fit into it. Many years later, I am slowly being transformed in my view of leadership recognizing that it is not about rising *above* a community but *rather,* it is about being rooted *within* a community. Opportunities to lead teachers in Belize have empowered me to hone my leadership skills by drawing strength from my community, building a culture of collaboration and reorienting ourselves as educators with a clear purpose for our work: our students.

Goals and Work

My journey with Belizean teachers started with EduDeo in 2018. I am currently working on a two-year cycle with teachers in Belize on a holistic approach to the gift of assessment, honoring it as an integral part of the learning process. On our journey together, we analyze and implement the multiple facets of assessment ("of", "for", "as"), each of which have the potential to endow students' agency, grit and self-reflectiveness.

During our first year together, we spent most of our time deconstructing our understanding of assessment in order to assemble something more life-giving. We discussed cultural hurdles and what authentic assessment might look like. With a solid

foundation and evident eagerness catapulting us into this year, we were going to move mountains.

Cue the COVID-19 Pandemic

The proverbial wrench was placed in the works: I would no longer be able to walk alongside my beloved Belizean teachers — at least not in the intended capacity. One step forward, ten steps back (or so it felt).

Pandemic Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic presented educators with a variety of challenges, many of which were novel, and others that, while not new, were unfortunately magnified.

Two major issues identified by teachers in Belize were the lack of resources and technology for high-risk, vulnerable and low-income students as well as the lack of accountability for and supervision of younger students. These teachers started to notice the discrepancy between low-risk and high-risk students in terms of output, a gap which grew wider as a result of poor support and infrastructure.

Thankfully in Belize, UNICEF had a large presence and doubled their efforts in supporting children by collaborating with the Belize Ministry of Education. Through this partnership, the necessary infrastructure and access to relevant tools was provided to most students.

However, another challenge lay in equipping students and teachers alike to use technology both resourcefully and responsibly. For some teachers, this was an exciting adventure. But for others, with little previous experience, it was something akin to a nightmare.

As a result, the pandemic presented issues regarding teacher self-care. In addition to the steep learning curve associated with technology, teachers found it challenging to deliver course materials in a hybrid model while also juggling the exacerbated social-emotional needs of their students. Together we had to find ways to support them and provide resources for them, but somehow not overwhelm them while doing so.

Now more than ever, teachers needed to pursue authentic and ongoing assessment in order to best understand where students were and where they needed to go. The budding enthusiasm of teachers for the subtleties of assessment was snagged by the pandemic. As a result, teachers in my class asked variations of the fundamental question: "how can we assess students in a just way when we are learning remotely?"

Leading Through Change

First, the pandemic demanded that I become more flexible. As a "Type A" person, I enjoyed the structure and meticulous planning that my workshops had to offer. Somehow, I had to let go of my pride and plans as I realized that plowing forward would cause more harm than good. I had to revert to the planning stages of this year's intended learning goals and adapt to the needs of the teachers I was leading.

I also learned that as a leader, we can only support teachers' needs when we truly listen to their experiences. Recognizing the gravity of the current circumstances, I chose to do what I would typically do with my students after an impactful event: I asked them to reflect.

After a gentle prompt to share, teachers began pouring out their frustrations and laments:

"I can't finish teaching this unit."
"I do not have enough grades in the gradebook."
"But what about the standardized test?"
"This student has done no work since the pandemic started!"

Teachers were overwhelmed; their energy reserves drained. Still, however, I attempted to push them further with this fundamental question: "How does the pandemic threaten the purpose of and our calling to education?"

In order to analyze this, we had to first reflect on what we believed the purpose of education was. Was there a motive, goal, or truth vital enough to enable us to push through this mess we found ourselves in? In some ways, it is lamentable that it takes a world crisis to come to identify what we value and prioritize in our teaching practice. Still, when we overcame this hurdle, we were ready to not only survive this pandemic but find ways to thrive through it. Our students needed us to.

Intentional time was given to reconnect to their vision and to brainstorm responses to the pandemic. Typically, leaders and teachers feel the pressure of the time crunch to get things done and confine ourselves to our siloed classrooms and very little effort and time is given to collaboration.

However, in this workshop, I did not have the answers and I could not pretend I did; courage and vulnerability were the qualities I needed to lead with. As others came to recognize my humanity, they, in turn, were enabled to share their own nature and become a support network for each other. I needed my teachers to feel connected to one another and to have confidence in the brilliant community of educators around them.

As a result, I acted as a guide, facilitating groups and discussions, instead of the typical lectures. Our time together had become a collaborative effort of co-constructed learning about assessment and teaching. Teachers met in small groups, with grade level teachers, their schools and subject-areas. Due to the course being online, I was also able to use synchronous meeting times to mobilize conversations globally. From here, teachers began to have meaningful conversations about how to support students and one another in a variety of areas, including technology, reaching vulnerable students, social-emotional wellbeing, character formation, assessment, classroom management, and instructional strategies.

Through the focus on collaboration and the subsequent support network that was established, teachers felt empowered to address the issues they were originally burdened by. They felt that the work-home balance was improved as collaboration yielded shared workloads, ideas, and responsibilities.

Despite having taken a giant leap forward and ten steps back, we had the opportunity to reorient our paths and ourselves with what was most important in education: our students.

Educational Consequences of the Pandemic

The gap amongst low and high-risk students, which was alarming before the pandemic, has grown disproportionately since. This will likely continue to grow in the next five years, especially with the limited availability of resources, resulting in only more dropouts through educational systems worldwide. Due to this disparity, more support and interventions will be required for a diverse student body to succeed which will be taxing on many systems.

If an increase in funding and time to support teachers through professional development cannot be provided, the repercussions of the pandemic will become a stronger, perpetual cycle that will continue to marginalize minorities and vulnerable students. Since education is a foundation for improving the standard of living and global citizenship, the consequences of the pandemic on education will undoubtedly create ripple effects that impact society and the wellbeing of communities for the foreseeable future.

Furthermore, the social-emotional and mental well-being of our students and teachers is at stake. Not only have students been exposed to the stresses of the pandemic, but they have also been coerced into environments not conducive to learning. Our inability to foster a collaborative ethos that prioritizes well-being during this pandemic may make it difficult for particular students to reintegrate into classrooms and further isolate them from the learning process.

Teachers on the other hand, are at risk of burning out. I believe that in the next five years we will see the highest turnover of teachers in education. We must ensure that we are supporting them thoroughly as they continue to give their best at this time, often beyond capacity.

Additionally, we need to be cautious of the primacy given to technology in education as a result of remote learning. While technology is an indispensable tool that enables our students to become 21st-century learners, we need to be prepared to deal with its shadow side. In addition to the lack of availability, technology usage in education should be called into question in the next five years. The quick shift to remote learning seems to come at the cost of digital citizenship. We needed immediacy, and technology provided us with that. In my own classroom, as well as anecdotes from parents and colleagues, I have heard of issues surrounding the increase of technology, including the inability to tell fact from fiction, the temptation of plagiarism, and of course, an increased exposure

to inappropriate links. This in turn has led to poorer outcomes and will continue to undermine learning and character development in education.

I will say, however, that I remain cautiously optimistic during this COVID-19 pandemic as my experience with the Belizean teachers leads me to believe that the education of the next generation is in good hands.

One promising impact of the pandemic is the shift of teachers' approach to educating students and their eagerness to engage with professional development. The global community of teachers has become interconnected and I choose to believe this will continue in the next five years. Together, I have seen teachers reimagine education through unrelenting creativity. They have provided choice and opportunities for families to learn together about their communities – powerful! They have considered unique ways to reach out to vulnerable students through local tutoring connections, as well as online remediation and accommodation tools.

Perhaps being forced to reprioritize our students in this time will catalyze a change to our education systems in the upcoming years. Given the pandemic, we can no longer view school as an entity separate from home with a rigid structure. We will need to adopt a new model and vision for schools. My deep hope is that this vision includes the empowerment of students to see themselves in their learning as well as the ability to think critically and develop resilience to pursue social justice.

Hope, when properly harnessed, spurs us into action. There is still, undoubtedly, work required of us in order to bring about restoration of our education systems. Collectively, we will need to foster collaboration between invested agents for change. Many of the initiatives at work in the world of education today share the same

passion for education and, by necessity, the next five years will see these stakeholders merge their efforts in service of a more holistic education experience for all.

In many ways, this moment is like any other, in which a simple truth must prevail: we, as participants in the field of education, must continue to put students' success at the forefront of all that we do.

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The Absence of Government Leadership: The Role of the Education Entrepreneur in a Global Pandemic
By Kevin Kalra

Financial, Operational, and Political Challenges in the Business of Education

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented several financial, operational, and political challenges for leaders in the business of education: How do you sustain a school, a small enterprise, when operations are 100% tuition-based? How do you justify the use of public tax dollars when public schools are closed? How do you sustain teacher motivation with digitally based student relationships? What is the role of community actors - especially the business community - in supporting public education? How do you find common-sense solutions for the safety of teachers and students in a highly politicized environment where there is disagreement on basic facts?

I live in Cypress, Texas, a small, conservative, middle class suburb in northwest Houston. We are home to the third-largest school district in Texas with a little over $1 billion public education budget. Since the mid-2010's, our community has seen the growth of master-planned communities, the emergence of charter schools and expansion of school choice, and a predominantly privately-owned early education sector with little to no public support, even though it is accepted that early education plays a critical role in shaping a local workforce and supporting child development.

Despite successfully navigating Hurricane Harvey and natural disasters, we witnessed an uncoordinated and haphazard response to safeguard the education sector and our community from the impact of the pandemic. Local teacher groups resisted the reopening of

schools; certain community members questioned the value of wearing face masks; there was significant political tension - in an election year - between the youngest, first-ever Latina, and Democratic-elected County Judge; a Republican governor; and a Lieutenant Governor who publicly promoted that the State should accept casualties amongst the elderly in order to protect economic growth.

Within this politicized context, the pandemic raised several operational and financial challenges for the education sector, from early education to higher education. In the public sector, serving ages 6 years to 18 years, we faced challenges transitioning to online learning, including developing relevant curriculum content as well as delivering computers and internet access points for marginalized students. Parents were hardly able to help their children with schoolwork during synchronous, live learning online. Parents had to navigate between working at home and a sea of learning platform acronyms to help their children complete assignments on time. Teacher schedules were out of sync with parent work schedules, and families did not have enough technology devices for each of their children to support online learning. Also, many schools - funded with property tax dollars - are ill-designed for a public health crisis. They lack proper ventilation, utilize recycled air, and lack space to practice social distancing in a classroom.

In the private sector, local schools - funded entirely by tuition dollars - were ordered to close without notice and were left without any revenue in mid-April resulting in massive teacher layoffs. They also had limited access to quality information about the pandemic. For example, early education schools were not informed about the potential life-threatening effects in children of Kawasaki disease, a potential outcome from COVID-19. The State of Texas permitted centers that had cases of COVID-19 on their premises to continue operating with limited to no quarantine procedures or PPE (Personal

Protection Equipment) supplies. Nationwide shortages of gloves, masks, and sanitation supplies affected safe operations. Private schools had to wait in line with the general public to get supplies for their operations. The State of Texas tried to supplement existing supplies for schools, but these were hardly enough. For example, one center was provided 1 box of 100 gloves and 1 8 oz bottle of hand sanitizer, to serve over 100 students, including infants. Instead of addressing national logistics and supply chains, political efforts were redirected to supplement existing supplies with limited support for financially strapped centers. Many schools permanently closed their doors. Local and state governments have also not issued liability protections for schools, leaving many school leaders and teachers vulnerable to unnecessary lawsuits. Even local insurance agents could not confirm if an employee would be covered under workman's compensation if they fell sick on the job due to COVID-19.

Navigating the Pandemic: An Example from American Early Education

Despite numerous challenges, many schools have responded nimbly and strategically to the pandemic. I lead a system of local Montessori schools serving children ages 6 weeks to 6 years.

As a Houstonian, my team and I looked to lessons from Hurricanes Katrina, Ike, and Harvey to determine how to respond safely to the pandemic. We immediately took personal ownership of our response using the latest data from Johns Hopkins University, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and our local county public health office. National data advised to begin stocking early for the emergency, and we stockpiled gloves and disinfectant in order to sustain our operations.

In April 2020, we made the difficult decision to close all of our schools, so children and teachers could safely stay at home although a few early education centers stayed open and faced sudden outbreaks of COVID-19 with a loss of revenue. In May 2020, we opened only one of our campuses, and we only served essential workers. We kept our remaining campuses in reserve in the event we need to close operations due to contamination. To engage and support teachers who chose not to attend in person operations, we started a series of small infrastructure improvement projects to provide them an income.

We also modified our buildings to ensure safe operations, including social distancing measures in the classrooms, separate AC units in each classroom to avoid room-to-room air circulation, and completing drop off/pick up procedures limited to the lobby area. Certain CDC guidelines were of help.

Despite all these precautions, COVID-19 spread through community contact was still an issue. Before reopening our schools in May 2020, our teachers met to share their fears, review protocols (and what was considered impractical), and collectively decide on our safety procedures. Management needed to acknowledge any concerns of our teachers. Management also needed to affirm that facing the pandemic requires a collective response, and it requires buy-in from all parties. We created a special fund to support specialized personal protective equipment (PPE) for teachers and also agreed to supplement their pay with a COVID-19 bonus.

As education leaders, we curated a parent community that felt a collective responsibility to fight the pandemic, and as a result, more easily accept challenging public health policies despite their conservative leanings. When public leaders were still debating the science of the pandemic and the effectiveness of wearing masks, we campaigned for our parents to follow public health officials, and they

supported a school-wide mask mandate before it became county policy. Our parents committed to a set of voluntary community principles to avoid social gatherings and quarantine voluntarily with their children after trips out of town. We communicated often and substituted face-to-face learning with Zoom classes so that children could continue to see their teachers and friends.[47] This helped address concerns about socialization and mental health for young children. Our Zoom program also highlighted early education techniques for parents to try at home with their children.

We also learned the importance of piloting new processes. We tried small changes and scaled them accordingly. We admitted failure openly and maintained transparent communication. We created a 24/7 parent concierge system to respond to parent inquiries and concerns about the pandemic. Parents utilized our concierge system to confirm protocols, share feedback on protocols from external institutions, and inform the schools on any public health concerns in their own families. The school always acknowledged parents who spoke up, creating a culture that openly encouraged parents to share information.

Fortunately, our efforts resulted in zero incidents. We scaled our efforts in August 2020 when we opened all our campuses. We were later recognized by the Texas Private School Association, praised by the local Chamber of Commerce, and featured in the Houston Chronicle.[48]

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[47] McShane, M. (2020). How Montessori Preschool is Responding to COVID-19. *Engage by EdChoice*. Retrieved from: https://www.edchoice.org/engage/private-school-profiles-how-montessori-preschool-is-responding-to-covid-19/

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What's Next: Future Trends in our Education System

I expect the education system to be nimbler, quickly adapting to changing circumstances. The education system is often experienced as a physical space and a series of brick-and-mortar structures; however, the pandemic has shown that knowledge transfer from teacher to student does not always require a physical space. Education can occur online, at home, in existing community buildings, or outdoors. I anticipate that public education systems will shift away from a physically built indoor environment to a series of principles and common curriculum that can be adapted to different locations and diverse styles of learning alongside improved school choices and better accountability across different modes of schooling. It would help to shift some public funding towards education research and pedagogical support versus capital spending on buildings.

I anticipate that education systems will receive decreased public funding. As schools transition to different models of learning, many public officials will shift public resources away from schools to other public efforts. Schools will be required to do more with less as they manage complex pedagogical models with online and in-person instruction.

Parents will be better informed about education models and the science of learning. After being at home with their children for over 6 months, parents have become more knowledgeable about educational services and products - and the research behind their creation. The general marketplace for educational products and services will expand to allow for a more personalized experience with transparent communication on a child's progress for parents. New digital platforms may emerge to facilitate communication between parent and teacher.

We will see a change in where people work and increased participation by mothers in the workforce, transforming the role of schools as supplemental caretakers. During the pandemic, many local companies experimented with work-from-home policies, allowing many parents - including mothers - to continue working. Greater flexibility in the work environment may affect school operating hours, school holiday schedules, and the necessity for widespread private early education. In the early education sector, especially, there will be a greater demand for higher quality early education (and less babysitting) and shorter operating hours.

The pandemic also raises questions about the need for centralized governance in an education system and an over emphasis on scalability. We will need a more decentralized system with greater local control that allows individual communities to respond quickly to local schooling needs. We will also need to invest in learning solutions that are scalable within a smaller geographic context.

In the United States, we will need to learn from global actors, who have successfully continued providing education to children who are victims of war and natural disasters.

The Need for the Education Entrepreneur

To support their children during the pandemic, parents looked to both public and private education leaders rather than local, state and federal authorities. We need to train and equip education leaders to think like entrepreneurs in order to do more with less, so that all children can continue learning. The involvement of local school leaders in statewide and local education decisions is also critical to create plans that are practical, feasible, and cost-effective. Most importantly, we must find ways to safeguard school systems from

politicization and ensure the well-being and continued learning of our community's children and teachers.

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Silver Linings and Gray Skies
By Maw Maw Khaing

The Challenge

Some say education is recession proof which in a way implies that education can attest to the most difficult of times but as we are realizing now –it is not Pandemic proof. In fact, the education sector, particularly early years and elementary education sectors that I am in, have been hit the hardest during the Pandemic. As an education leader who leads preschools and K-12 schools, I faced external and internal challenges.

1) <u>External challenges</u> are related to the parents and the children. I worried for the social and emotional wellbeing of our children. Furthermore, as the early years are so important for children and any lost time in these crucial years can have an impact on their learning and development, I knew as a school leader it was something I had to address quickly and work together with officials at the education ministry to advocate for the best opportunities for children in our district.

2) <u>Internally</u>, as an affordable and accessible school, we allowed parents to pay tuition monthly. Then, when the Pandemic hit, I knew there would be reduced or no income for next few months. I had to worry about how to pay our teachers as well as rent for the school.   Then, as we harped on the beginning of a new school year, the government wavered on the reopening of early years and primary schools which made it hard for us to make any promises to parents and teachers on the reopening of our schools.

The one silver lining in all this is that as Myanmar only got the first COVID-19 case in late March after other countries had gone through a similar fate. Thus, I was able to do comparative studies on other countries to come up with a plan on how to face these challenges while keeping our mission to provide high quality affordable education to children in Myanmar.

Facing the Challenges in the time of the Pandemic

1) Deciding on School Reopening Plan

I decided early on that our school will go online should our schools have to close. I also prepared to open the school in hybrid mode for both parents who were reluctant to send children to school when the Pandemic is not over. For children who would come to school, we arranged the schools to meet all the social distancing and hygiene procedure in practice when the schools could open. We quickly submitted our reopening strategy with the Ministry of Education, and we prepared all the equipment necessary to ensure health and safety of our children, teachers, and parents. We also worked closely with district education leaders to show them our schools and how we were going to execute this education year to make a positive learning year for our school.   In this manner, the challenges I had to face during this Pandemic were different to the challenges I face under normal circumstances. In my role as a school leader for the past three years most of the decision only affected students, teachers, and parents of the school. In this case, every decision I made, I had to collaborate with our district education leaders and personnel from the Ministry of Health. We all wanted the best for our children to continue their learning and for parents to be able to work but at the same time we all knew health and safety was the most important factor.

2) <u>Administrative Side First</u>

In facing these challenges, we addressed the administrative side of schools first. I believed that learning could not thrive in an environment of uncertainty given this one. So, we decided to refund half the month's tuition fee of all the children when schools closed mid-March. Then we gave a free month on our online program so that parents and children could adjust to the new way of learning. All the while we maintained our payroll giving 85% of their salary to all teachers. When parents signed up for our online classes, we made sure the time was adjusted for parents' working hours and since we had such young children we asked children for 30 minutes of screen time with us four days a week. We also reduced our tuition to one third our normal fees.

3) <u>Community Building First and Teaching Second</u>

Then on the academic side of things, we focused on building a new community for children. We could not directly take what happened in classrooms directly to the Zoom classes. Children, teachers, and parents had to feel comfortable with teaching, learning with everyone's homes being so transparent. We crafted many teaching and learning videos for different age groups that we made available for all children on our social media page. Our school was one of the first schools to go online and our efforts were quickly recognized because other school operators were calling us to congratulate on our ability to adapt. We tried to lead everyone with the knowledge that fun and engaging learning can happen online even for children as young as three years old. In every step of our decision making we accounted for all parties, when we took our classes fully online and we also offered offline options for parents who could not do online synchronous learning.

Transforming my leadership and my role as a leader

In the past three years, I have led my team as a teachers' trainer, an academic director, an operations manager, and a school founder to grow from one preschool to five schools. I have invested my time and effort to grow the school and raise awareness about modern education methods. I have been leading by example with my commitment and service to the school and my team.

1) Service Leadership to Transformational Leadership

Even before the Pandemic hit, I was starting to realize my leadership roles had to expand. We needed more leaders within the organization who could take it to the next level. Then, when the Pandemic hit, we had that opportunity. Our teachers started to take ownership of our mission to make continuous learning happen in their own way in their specialty subjects. I supported and assured the teachers that our methods and commitment to education would allow us to thrive. I motivated and congratulated them on being heroes who committed to educating young children which was not an easy feat during normal times but to do it online they were heroes on their own rights. While we had some adjustments to teachers' salaries, we equipped them with data plans and other materials that would make online teaching possible. We arranged transportation for teachers when more than 10 people could gather, and offices were able to reopen.

Silver Linings and Grey Skies: What factors were helpful and What were the challenges?

1) Grey Skies: Our enrollment dropped. We were not able to enroll new students for our K-12 schools one of which was set to start this academic year. We reduced school fees to 30% of the actual amount we usually charge to make online learning more accessible for all since not all schools were going online like us.

At the same time, we wanted to keep our payroll at 85% of their salary and not have to do any job cuts. I thought given our country's cell phone penetration at 64%, I assumed connectivity issues and digital literacy would only be a slight issue. But I quickly discovered that we must give all options online and offline methods if we were really going to bring accessible education for all.

2) Silver Linings: Since all children could not take up online learning because some are not just that learner type or they did not have the right connectivity, we made kits "Preschool-in-a-Bag", "Kg-in-a-Bag" types of kits for those who could not do online learning. This gave as a new revenue channels for our school that we could use even when we are back to normal schooling. With a mix of creativity and dedication, now five months since our schools had to close, our teacher salaries are back to 100% and we are making the same revenue as pre-Pandemic times. We receive less tuition per child but are getting more enrollments after reaching students from all over Myanmar. My team and my commitment to education for the good of many children, the belief that basic education should be accessible to anyone, really keep driving our team forward. Of course, it goes without saying that we saw bumps and roadblocks here and there but our teachers, parents and officials from our education district worked together to bring continuous learning to as many children as we could.

We had plans for two more schools opening this year. We had to cancel one of the plans, but we still went ahead with opening our dual curriculum school this year. The Pandemic hit us just as we started to market our new dual curriculum school, but we have learned to promote our methods and communicate the difference we bring to children in Myanmar in a unique way. We made our teaching methods transparent, our programs, and our mission with

everyone. We shared phonics, math videos and even gave English conversation classes free of charge. In doing so, unexpectedly we gained students from all over Myanmar who wanted their children to learn with us. A parent told us that she has sent her 6-year-old girl to school since the girl was 3 and never knew what her daughter did at school. But now she can see what her daughter is learning and when she applies her learnings from school at home, she is even more confident in our teaching methods.

Overall, my role as a school leader or day to day work of overseeing the smooth running of programs, teachers' and children's engagement did not change due to the Pandemic but I also became a moral leader uplifting the social and emotional welfare of our students, parents and teachers.   Since I knew that lost time in early childhood years could have an impact on their cognitive and non-cognitive development, my team and I worked as hard as I could to bring solutions for our children. Upon reflecting, it is time for the education paradigm to change because parents recreating schools inside their homes or Pandemic pods are not the most efficient way of solving systemic issues of education. We need to start building a world where children anywhere can learn at any time. We need to build schools that goes beyond the school walls so that education is recession proof, Pandemic proof.

Educational Consequences of the Pandemic for the next five years

1) Role of Teachers will change: Teachers learned to teach beyond classrooms with a mix of synchronous, asynchronous learning. They use real life scenarios form their daily lives to allow children to wonder and explore into different topics as the educational aids, science lab nor art room was available. This made learning even more authentic

for children and they were always eager to learn – some even asking for weekend classes!

2) Role of Schools will change: During the Pandemic, we witnessed new teaching options with education technology. Even if we can all go back to school, we would all know that learning can always happen outside of school. We will see that there are many ways to learn literacy, math, and science apart from just learning at school. But the concept of school remains important to receive a global education that encompasses civic education, social and emotional learning, and a place for like-minded young children to come together to grow, develop and find their purpose.

Maw Maw Khaing is a founder of a portfolio of high-quality affordable preschool and K-12 schools in Myanmar. She is interested in using inquiry-based learning, education technology and fostering for policies that will further equitable education access for children in Myanmar.

Reshaping Views on K-12 Educators
By Somang (Hope) Kim

There are stereotypes about people who work in schools. School jobs are considered to be mundane. Most people do not expect the smartest people to end up working for K-12 schools. After all of my experiences especially during the Pandemic, I wish that the stereotypes of school jobs as easy-going and stress-free were true. I write this piece hoping that the other K-12 school administrators out there feel validated and know that they are not alone. Yes, teachers go through a lot without a doubt. They have been and will always be the essential workers of our society. However, a lot of school administrator's experiences are underrepresented even within the field of education. I hope that this piece can shed a light.

When I'm asked why I chose education as my career path, I have two versions of the answer. The shorter version is that my parents are passionate educators and that they've inspired me. The longer and more complicated version goes back to my childhood. I'm from South Korea but grew up in Bangkok, Thailand. I went to an international school from first grade to senior year of high school. "International school" can be misleading. My twelve years of experience at an "international" school as a student told me that "international" is whitewashed especially when you are in a non-Western part of the world. I became an educator myself wanting to redefine "international" in the space I grew up in. Today, I am an administrator at an international school in Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand.

Thailand has been free of local cases for more than a month. Unlike many other parts of the world, schools here reopened from July. As schools reopened, K-12 educators did not have to choose between their lives and work. Although wearing a mask is still mandatory in

public places, life is slowly going back to normal. This makes my experience as an educator during the Pandemic unique. I have seen what education looks like during the peak of the Pandemic and the possible "post" COVID-19.

Back in March, COVID-19 cases in Thailand rose exponentially and all schools had to close. Within a week of notice from the Ministry of Education, we were expected to somehow switch everything online. As if the technical complications weren't challenging enough, private schools had to deal with questions about school fees. Because my role at our school is an administrator, any concerns or complaints regarding this matter came straight to me. In Thailand as well as most parts of the world, international schools are not the most affordable schooling options. However, as a young school with less than a hundred students, we have yet to become financially stable. Nevertheless, the school announced that it would provide a tuition reduction for the upcoming academic year. A few parents still demanded cash refunds. I wish a cash refund would have been a viable option for us, but it would have been a direct threat to the daily operations of the school. When the school couldn't keep everyone happy, things got ugly. Those who demanded cash refunds started talking about suing the school. The worst part of this fiasco for me was receiving a threat call from one of those parents. He said that he hasn't been happy with multiple things about our school and that if he doesn't see them change, I would not like what we would do as a consequence. Just a month before our school had to close down, this same parent had a meeting with another staff at our school expressing how much he has seen his child grow at our school. He promised us his continued support and trust. This parent and other parents at our school had to deal with the aftermath of the Pandemic in their own ways. They were struggling with their businesses, and they wanted the school to give cash refunds. During a month of complaints and threat calls, it was as if many of the

parents were considering the school as an outlet to express the frustrations and fear caused by COVID-19.

When we all began to realize that the world is going through a Pandemic, "unprecedented" was probably one of the most used words. We all justified our shortcomings and lack of preparation because no one has ever experienced this, but it was as if schools were an exception. Schools had to keep going. I had to keep it going knowing that what I do can at least give our students the minimum normalcy in their lives.

I have to be honest and say that I actually didn't think online classes would work especially for our school, where until last semester, we had Pre-K (age 2) to G5 (age 10) classes. Our Kindergarten classes were designed as 5-10 min of a video created by the teacher and activity, they would be able to do with their parents or guardians at home. Materials for these activities were either uploaded online or mailed to students' homes in order to minimize the burden on parents and guardians. The teacher would then follow up every day through conference calls doing a review together. Elementary School had longer videos. Some teachers preferred to have a conference call for the entire 20-30 min class. Bigger classes were divided into a few groups to make the classes more engaging. I single-handedly checked every video the teachers made before uploading the final versions. I had to give feedback to teachers and let them know if any of them had to be edited for quality and appropriateness of the content. I also followed up with teachers about their conference calls. I made sure that the students who weren't participating in classes were contacted by the teachers and the school office to remind them. We all got better at it week after week. We got better not only because we were becoming used to it, but because we were communicating. In the last week of every month, we asked students and parents for their feedback. We asked them about every class, teachers' methods, and

their suggestions on how we can provide a better online learning experience for the students.

During a regular school year, asking for feedback from students and parents is not the top priority of most K-12 educators. Our excuse is that there are plenty of other things on our schedule that require our time and attention. However, my experience during the lockdown says that maybe we should. If we want our education systems to improve, we have to listen to the most important stakeholders - our students.

Another thing that education during the Pandemic has uncovered is that the combination of education and technology is not so bad after all. I've realized that technology complements education and classroom experiences in ways I have not thought about. There are two most memorable comments we received from our Elementary School students - Student A and Student B. Student A doesn't consider academics to be his biggest interest. In addition, his learning disorder does not make studying any easier for him. However, Student A expressed that during the lockdown, he really enjoyed learning because he could create his own school schedule. He wasn't restricted to a schedule that didn't work for him. He finished his assignments on time and actively participated. Since the new school year started for us in August, all of his teachers have been impressed with his academic growth. For Student B, Mandarin used to be her least favorite subject, but she was so engaged during online learning because her teacher did a great job in creating the videos. Student B watched the videos for Mandarin class multiple times, giving her plenty of time to understand and review.

Since schools reopened in July, a few schools in Nakhon Ratchasima announced a new form of school. They are now providing a "hybrid program" that allows students to complete a grade level without going to school every day. Students are required to come to school

only a few times during the entire academic year to take tests. These tests will prove that they are ready to move on to the next grade level. Some students, depending on their personal circumstances, might benefit from such a system. Nevertheless, as educators, we should be cautious about this change. Education is a holistic journey. Education is not only about giving and earning grades. At schools, students do not only grow academically but also socially and emotionally. Interaction with peers and teachers is essential. Across all socioeconomic classes, there are students who find schools to be their own safe havens. I fear that supporting a rapid change that permanently takes away students' physical presence in schools may threaten both the growth and safety of students.

I hope the Pandemic can be a call to action for K-12 educators around the world, including myself. We have to ask ourselves if we have been listening enough; if we have been innovative enough, if our resistance to change has been feeding the stereotypes about K-12 educators. Applying the lessons learned during the Pandemic will challenge the primitive definition of K-12 educators.

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"Be Water": Leading with Empathy and Agility
By Carrie Ho Yi Lau

Goals and Work

When two million Hong Kongers took to the streets and peacefully protested against the arbitrary Hong Kong Extradition Bill in June 2019, Hong Kong's Water Revolution not only made headlines worldwide, but also led to territory-wide student-led class boycotts across secondary and tertiary institutions. Eventually the Bill was withdrawn with bloodsheds and over more than 3000 counts of student arrests alone, including 24 students of my very own.

Back then, all teachers in Hong Kong were given very short notice to switch all teaching online by the Hong Kong Education Bureau without much guidance and support. Therefore, Hong Kong got a head start over many countries with the use of synchronous eLearning. While I was busy looking for my missing students at various police stations and trying to bail them out during the months-long protests, I was also leading a team of 68 full-time and part-time lecturers in English and serving as the curriculum leader of the Associate of Arts (Legal Studies) program.

Then the COVID-19 pandemic followed, protests for freedoms persisted regardless. Student absence became a norm, and many suffered from depression which made assignment submissions impossible. Some overseas students failed to return to Hong Kong after the Christmas break due to travel restrictions. Financial hardship also strained their studies because not every family could afford costly digital gadgets; also, students simply could not pay for their own daily expenses when most of them lost their part-time jobs to the pandemic.

Teachers were found to be overwhelmed by the shift in pedagogical paradigm that changed overnight. Besides, my team members had a hard time motivating low achievers and responding to massive number of emails from high achievers. Given the existing achievement gaps before the pandemic set in, polarization of performances made effective teaching more difficult than ever.

In response, my College came up with a holistic plan to support all stakeholders with a bottom-up approach. A few signature measures include tailor-made mental wellness workshops led by the Student Development and Counselling Services Unit, special financial subsidies for students to upgrade their broadband plans, revisions of all assessment schemes to cater for adjusted learning contents, trainings on synchronous teaching platforms for all teachers as well as new credit-bearing supervised projects for students to make up for their missing credits in summer so that they could graduate as originally scheduled.

Within the master plan, I was named as a key member of the brand new Task Group on Strategic Development of Online Learning and assisted with (i) deriving best practices in eLearning from my coworkers; (ii) producing suggested guidelines and lesson exemplars on effective curriculum planning and delivery; and (iii) serving as an intermediary between the teaching staff and training unit in identifying the necessary trainings for effective online synchronous teaching. My juxtaposed roles of front-line instructor, curriculum leader, administrator and an in-house researcher have given me thorough insights from multiple angles.

Impact

The changes in delivery, curriculum and assessments impacted around 6800 actively enrolled sub-degree students at my College. According to last academic year's records, on average, around 78%

of my college's graduates would articulate into government-funded undergraduate programs across disciplines after completing their two-year sub-degree studies. Without proper handling of students' academic transitions, physical safety and mental well-being, their chances of gaining admissions to universities would be much slimmer than before, owing to multiple reasons like dropouts, unsatisfactory academic performance or failure to meet entrance credit requirement for senior year admissions.

Challenges

In a recent College-wide research study on new eLearning pedagogies, some divisions (arts and humanities, social sciences) received better student ratings in the Learner Experience Surveys than others (mathematics and science, engineering etc.), which could be partially explained by the fact that face-to-face learning could never be substituted entirely by 100% synchronous learning, especially for programs involving clinical practicums, work placements and hands-on lab sessions. Hence the first challenge was to identify the limitations in delivering such courses and improve effectiveness. Evidently, the pandemic did not only affect the learning experiences, but also expectations upon teaching quality. Having the University of Hong Kong as the overseeing body, any revision made to program structures and assessment schemes needs to fulfil the statutory requirements of the qualification framework. The paradox lies within the fact that existing competency benchmarks may not fully reflect or be compatible with the new skill sets that students are expected to pick up during the pandemic, let alone evaluating new results with a pre-pandemic lens.

From my perspective as a curriculum leader, online learning as a necessary by-product of this pandemic has greatly discounted students' achievement in form of "performance penalty" (Carr, 2020; Hart et al. 2018), implying higher dropout rate and failure rate

in assessment, plus lower completion rate of programs due to lower learning motivation (Maltby & Whittle, 2000). Reichert et al. (2020) established that students' digital competency level might not enable them to reach complex academic goals, for instance, engaging in effective online research with proper digital etiquette. Without doubt, the achievement gap is further widened by the lack of digital equity and curriculum adjustments.

Above all additional academic preparations, teachers are overloaded with responsibilities given their new multiple roles as instructor, counsellor, learning support assistant, facilitator and life skills promotor (Ní Shé et al., 2019; Cacciamani et al., 2012). It is not uncommon to experience all sorts of online security issues, cases of cyberbullying (Zalaznick, 2020, April 20), ghost writing and cheating in online summative assessments. My team members, who have never been trained in counselling, have to carry students through their emotional distress induced by the pandemic, financial difficulties and social movements. During hardships, students can definitely count on teachers as pillars of support, unfortunately, who will be out there to watch over the needs of teachers? As a leader, what kind of support should I rally for my team members?

Lessons Learned

The animated movie "Inside Out" alerts me of how people tend to conceal their sadness and overemphasize positive thinking in crisis. It is fine to stress out. It is fine to feel uneasy with all these new tools in eLearning. As an educational leader, I should lead with my heart and listen to the worries and concerns, such that my coworkers would be willing to move forward together. We have to accept the fact that the past "normalcy" is long gone; for me, I have to be empathetic towards those who do not feel comfortable with embracing changes, instead of requesting my coworkers to take everything in with a smile. As a Hong Kong idiom goes, "Our ten

fingers come in different lengths", meaning different individuals bear various abilities and shortcomings, myself included. With that said, the mentality of independent learning should be planted within the minds of not only students, but also teachers.

The Hong Kong Education Bureau has always put an emphasis on "assessment for learning" instead of "assessment of learning". True, though it appears me that "assessment for survival" also applies now during and after the pandemic. Teachers ought to redesign their curricula and assessment components to enhance relevance (which leads to subsequent change in lifestyles) in pragmatic ways. For example, I designed and delivered two courses, namely, "Introduction to Hong Kong's Legal System" and "English for Healthcare Professionals". In the former course I have to cover novel topics like how to exercise one's legitimate personal freedoms without infringing the new National Security Law (and unintentionally antagonizing the Chinese Communist Party), how to collect COVID-19 patient screening data without compromising legal rights to data privacy or lead a debate on whether public health justifies wide-scale surveillance; whereas in the latter course, nursing students need to be taught a new set of terminologies that facilitates communications with patients within the pandemic setting, new protocols on hygienic practices for patient education etc. My students were found to react positively to these curriculum changes and the corresponding "assessments for survival" during the pandemic, as I shape them.

"Empty your mind, be formless, shapeless, like water.
Put water into a cup. Becomes the cup.
Put water into a teapot. Becomes the teapot.
Water can flow or creep or drip or crash. Be water my friend."

Bruce Lee in the American TV series 《Longstreet》 (1971)

To survive this pandemic with excellence, educators should be agile and "be water" in order to stay afloat. Be adaptive to changes and embrace them with creative solutions. Do not fight against changes. Take challenges as mental trainings, but not obstacles to learning and teaching. When academic freedom is under threat or should teaching quality be undermined in any sense, educators should express their ideas courageously without self-censorship in spite of the new National Security Law in place.

Actions speak louder than words, thus I have to lead by doing. A curriculum leader is expected to channel an effective communication loop to promote best practices among his teaching team. I did share my curriculum review experiences above with my team members and in return, surprises were found along the way – interestingly, it was the younger (and mostly junior) staff members who coached the experienced ones on digital technology in pedagogy. Somehow equality is just nominal ideal in a traditional, hierarchical school setting, yet now respect for the abilities of all ages is being realized.

Being agile and responsive with good curriculum planning and school-wide support could minimize the damages of the pandemic to the minimum. However, bearing in mind that there are always gaps in the support network due to resource constraints or cases where students fail to adjust and adapt to the new learning mode still. In that case, relationship building is found to be a mutually beneficial means to strengthen emotional bonding and improve attendance during the pandemic. One of my team members recalled that his students were the most engaged when his cat "intruded" into his teaching interface, which then led to warm conversations over pet grooming and self-care during post-lesson chit-chats. My students also enjoyed themselves a lot when sharing their "strategies" of toilet paper shopping, laughing over their cooking-for-the-very-first-time chaos, sending 30-plus "happy birthday" chat-box messages to a

fellow classmate online, among many other happy moments we had together.

I once read an Oxford study of occupations that are the least likely to be replaced by computerization and Artificial Intelligence in the 22nd century and "teachers" rank top of the list (Frey & Osborne, 2013). In my humble opinion, that is because compassion is the cornerstone of education. During this pandemic, empathy in leadership is manifested to its fullest, which is crucial for navigating students and fellow educators through the troubled waters and working towards a brighter future ahead.

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The opinion expressed in this article is the author's own and should not be taken as the views of HKU, HKU SPACE and its affiliates.

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Why Not: The Power of Possibility
By Janhvi Maheshwari-Kanoria

Assuming the responsibility for educating our future generations often cripples schools and education organizations with fear of delivering something that is less than perfect. We also grapple with scientific notions of developing proven evidence based and error-free models in what is an inherently irrational field dependent on human connections.

With the COVID19-imposed challenges of school-lockdowns, we have collectively come to the sobering realization that none of our carefully crafted models is working. We have no evidence-based pedagogical models for the majority of learners. Our crammed curriculums and textbooks remain in closed school buildings and our scripted teaching lessons only work in didactic in-person learning models.

While the majority of privileged learners have shifted to online-schooling, even as teachers worked hard to harness the power of technology-based learning and parents stepped into the roles of educators, an overwhelming majority of global homes are not connected to the internet. The student populations targeted by our organization face crippling compounded challenges, including the lack of internet and digital connectivity, low-literacy or unavailability of parental support, and the absence of educational resources at home. We are also acutely aware that in the absence of alternatives for continued learning, these vulnerable students will fall even further behind and be on the cusp of dropping out of the educational system completely. While the pandemic has freed us of the necessity of catering to all learners with a standardized model of schooling, we now have to not only challenge ourselves to truly innovate but do it really fast.

After some research, we discovered that the world had gravitated to a few educational responses, but none of them are truly proving to be effective: i) Online or hybrid learning require internet and technology, ii) TV and Radio instruction relies on access to hardware and is usually not personalized or interactive, iii) SMS based and/or activity based learning is effective in bite-sizes and often results in productive fun, but not meaningful learning. Intuitively, I thought of project-based learning as a proven and universally accepted pedagogical method of learning by engaging in diverse real-world tasks. My instinct as a parent and experience as a teacher made me realize that learning can happen everywhere and through every experience – the question was: how to unlock the potential of everyday experiences to promote learning? We decided on designing a bank of projects: each project being internet-free, student led and requiring minimal resources.

In normal course, the hypothesized and proposed solution would undergo a lengthy process involving need assessments, research and expert consultations, in addition to an iterative process, to finalize the concept. In the face of the crisis, however, I had to lead from the front – not relying on syndication but on quick decision-making. The reality is that there are no experts or experience to rely on and nobody really knows how the crisis will play out.

I also understood that while organizations like ideas, they like results more. Ideas and strategy can be debated and challenged, but impact is non-negotiable. Our goal, therefore, was to develop something low-cost in-house and quickly prove its effectiveness on the ground. My small team was prepared for the challenge, and with a clear understanding of the gravitas of the mission and constraints of the potential beneficiaries, in less than 2 weeks we had some initial projects to show our management. Being able to see a set of tangible projects allowed everybody to understand how engaging and simple the design was. I was fortunate to be trusted by the management and

given that this was a completely cost-free and therefore a low risk undertaking, we got all the approvals in place to start. We scored an early win when we successfully published curated list of cost-free and vetted e-learning resources in multiple languages and that is the genesis of much of my innate confidence and cemented the organizational backing. The list was very well received and resulted in our discovering the hunger for learning resources and approaches. While the development of the projects was definitely challenging, navigating the uncertainties of the pandemic-related school closures, however, was proving to be even more difficult.

We cast the net wide to find implementation partners and spoke to everyone who worked with children that fit the profile we were trying to serve. Multiple conversations resulted in a frustrating dead-end, but a few fortuitously gave us useful insights and even translated into pilots. We realized that many of the larger education organizations, much like my own, were bogged down by the fear of using an "untested" approach that had so much teacher and student voice and flexibility. The smaller organizations were prioritizing the immediate needs of food supply and healthcare over education. This resulted in many of our initial pilots starting and stopping abruptly as they shifted their focus to providing sanitation and food rations. We discovered that mid-size organizations that worked directly with learners were the right partners given their urgent need for resources and their capacity to train their teachers and customize the resources.

Once we found the early adopters, we discovered the numerous challenges of the low-resource contexts in which we were to operate – for example, one of our early partner schools began using SMS and phone calls to convey details of the projects. The lack of visual media made it challenging to teach new and unfamiliar concepts. We had to be creative to circumvent these issues and constantly innovate and adapt. Gradually, we began to see teachers gain confidence in their ability to execute the program after going through several cycles of

the process of adapting and building on projects as they worked with their students remotely. Students also began to enjoy the lack of prescribed learning and explore the multi-disciplinary and creative aspects of the projects. Over time, all our stakeholders were overwhelmed with the academic and non-academic learning that a project-based learning approach brought.

The process, however, was not seamless and we experienced multiple issues – for some participating teachers and students, it was unclear what academic learning would be gained since the project tasks were more fun, engaging and based in everyday work. Additionally, teachers and students who were used to a didactic and structured model of learning were forced to be more creative. Many struggled to appreciate how, through designing a pop-up restaurant, we could gain literacy concepts by writing recipes and lists of ingredients and gain numeracy concepts by creating a budget and pricing plan etc. We had to make the expected academic learning explicit and support parents and teachers in assessing them. Assessing students without any in-person interaction necessitated the establishment of an academic code of trust, empowering teachers to evaluate students' learning based on conversations in instances where students could not take pictures of their completed work and encouraging student self-reflection.

Another big initial challenge was overcoming the widespread belief that online-learning was the optimal choice and that students in our pilots were given a cheaper, less effective, learning alternative.

Unfortunately, in the absence of robust data collection mechanisms, it is hard to understand or prove the effectiveness of the PBL approach for distance learning. We began using proxy early indicators, including self-reported stakeholder measures of learning and engagement, in addition to qualitative and narrative data and testimonials as evidence of preliminary success. It was, however, an

uphill battle that can only be won when participants experience the approach. On darker days, it was the anecdotes that students were for the first time understanding the facts associated with the pandemic as they made their own newspaper project or teachers feeling privileged to be empowered with what they always believed was "elite" project based learning skill that fueled our motivation to tackle the next set of challenges.

As the Director of Innovation, I always have to operate on informed belief in order to convince early adopters and my own organization to work in more "risky" territory. What made COVID19 more challenging was the complete uncertainty in which we operated combined with the urgency of the crisis. Simultaneously, we were developing our strategic plans and projects, working on operational models while running live pilots, and developing research frameworks while collecting feedback. We worked ourselves to the point of complete exhaustion, sustained only by stories of students craving more projects and teachers inspired to continue the use of a more inclusive project-based learning approach even after the crisis.

The uncertainty of it all is a much more difficult terrain to navigate – we had and still have no idea if and when schools will open and how long this interruption to education will last. We have no idea when we will be able to meet the students face to face or even deliver educational resources and materials to them. Are we developing a long-term solution that is meant for a lock-down situation or one that is meant for blended learning during partial opening of schools? Will the teacher be able to deliver part of the rich conceptual learning in-person, or will we have to rely on prior knowledge gained through the projects? I still do not have an answer to this question except that, in the absence of a clear strategy, we have the flexibility to evolve and mold our resources and model to all contexts.

It has been 4 months and we are reaching hundreds of thousands of the hardest-to-reach learners across multiple countries who have no other real alternatives. I believe that identifying a clear and pressing challenge and really understanding the constraints of our beneficiaries has helped us design an effective solution. We are also comfortable with accepting that the solution is far from perfect and continues to be open to adaptation and constantly iterated by our team as we learn more from the field.

Leading a team and an organization in these times has required tremendous clarity of vision and even more importantly self-confidence. I have to make terrifyingly significant decisions very regularly and have given myself many moments of quiet reflection or soliciting perspectives but left no more space for doubt or self-questioning.

Unfortunately, the advent of COVID 19 has meant that much of the progress that we have made over the last decade will be lost as many of the most vulnerable will drop out of education and be pushed into child labor, early marriages, teenage pregnancies and other consequences of extreme poverty. While some learners have had individualized and personalized attention and grown in leaps – many have missed precious learning opportunities and will see an irreversible slide.

As education innovators, however, the uncertainty of COVID19 has given us an incredible opportunity to build better models and create real alternatives to the singular system of schooling thereby ensuring that we improve its resilience to future shocks. This might be our chance to create integrated learning systems and also bring the student's community into learning and hence bridge the differences in family environments. I believe that our innovations will serve us not just for this pandemic, but the frequent times when education is interrupted due to conflict, migration, natural disasters and other

unforeseen issues. Finally, I also believe that this system can help us reach the millions who were never served by schools due to their rigid schedules and inflexible age requirements.

The experiences of some of our students kindle a ray of hope for the future. Take the case of Rita, a girl trapped in a cycle of domestic violence as the crisis deepens the poverty in her home, but also a person who has realized the power of education as a means to escape this cycle. She can continue learning at home using some chalk, her tiled floor and a phone. Or the case of Kamal who lives in a conflict zone and routinely faces 5 or more months of school closures a year – for the first time he has not been automatically promoted to a grade where he is unable to understand instructions at school and has actually found a way to keep learning during school closures. As he designs his own country for a project, he has the autonomy to decide the rules that will curb violence and promote peace. I also think of Fatima, living in a very remote geography where for the first time she is designing her own alphabet book where the letter A stands for an arrow and not an apple that she had never seen.

Maybe COVID 19 is the crisis, which will be the catalyst to bring us the longed-for opportunity to keep all these children learning and on the path to an improved future?

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Building a Movement and Decentralizing Leadership During the Pandemic

By Jonathan Mendonca

My foray into education began on a construction site in Mumbai, India. I found that skilling migrant labourers in geometry led to a significant amount of material saving. It was only when I encountered the children of these migrant labourers that I experienced the intergenerational effects of education, or rather, the lack of it. Their children did not have the attention span to sit through classes, the fine motor skills to hold a pencil, nor the cognitive ability to navigate formal learning in the early grades. Such impactful experiences continuously shape my understanding of educational leadership and roles that I undertake as co-founder and *Director of Strategy at Barefoot Edu Foundation.* Reflecting through the pandemic, I have experienced my role as a leader evolve from empowering individuals to orchestrating the conditions for autonomy to thrive within communities.

Goal and Work

Three years ago, I experienced the strength in a community of change-makers and witnessed the beauty of my initiative evolving into a movement. The exclusion of Early Childhood Education from the Indian Right to Education Act resulted in untrained teachers and a nationwide unregulated pre-schooling system. Anganwadis-government child development centers - are the largest preschool chain in the world servicing 84 million children[49] but were primarily viewed as nutritional centers. For this to change, the government had to be motivated to take action with the palpability of immediate

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[49] Aayog, N. I. T. I. (2015). A Quick Evaluation Study of Anganwadis under ICDS. NITI Aayog, Government of India, June.

results and the lure of scalability. My co-founder and I explored Haryana, scouting for and uniting a number of NGOs under an umbrella vision, and mobilized them to voluntarily improve the quality of education in these Anganwadis. The importance of organization and leadership emerged when the collective that I formed was able to invigorate a stagnant system. Together, we were able to build the capacity of 1,400 'Anganwadi Teachers' in the domain of early education, and successfully motivated the State Government of Haryana to invest in regular training of Anganwadi Teachers across the state.

Founded on the core principles of collaboration and sensitivity, under my leadership, Barefoot Edu Foundation now works with government and low-fee school systems (K-10) across three states in India. We work at the grassroots with school leaders, teachers, and community leaders in order to co-create interventions for early education and whole-school transformation. My goal is to create a global movement that empowers leaders and organizations to democratically contribute to educational reform; and create the conditions for collective advocacy to inform data-driven policy. With this intention, I am now enrolled at the *Harvard Graduate School of Education* for a Master's specializing in *International Education Policy*.

Challenges

Complexity: Having established proof of concept across our early education and school transformation projects, Barefoot Edu was ready to scale its operations in all three geographies. This was, however, in the Pre-COVID world. Since *education* is entangled with other challenges such as food shortages, housing, income, and social discrimination, it was disrupted when the pandemic brought a wave of challenges that devastated the under-resourced communities with whom we work. A majority of parents, being daily wage labourers, lost their livelihood when the nation-wide lockdown was instituted.

Without financial buffers, accessing two meals a day seemed like a distant dream for their families and continuing to pay school fees was out of the question. Not only would students be under-nourished but also be subjected to toxic stress and an aggressive environment. The low-fee schools that catered to these under-served urban communities did not have financial buffers either. Without the minimal fees, schools would not have the income to support their children digitally or even sustain as an institution for more than a few months. How does one begin to prioritize action when morale, services, and systems break down simultaneously?

Difficult Decisions Behind the Scenes: An NGO is usually viewed as an entity that runs interventions, often forgetting that the organization is a group of people who are very human. They feel, emote, and persevere, bringing sensitivity to interventions. In fact, we chose the name 'Barefoot' because of the feeling of empathy that it evokes while reminding us to be sensitive to the ground we tread on. The situation on-ground was changing so rapidly due to the pandemic that it quickly became overwhelming to plan sensitively across so many interdependent scenarios that evolved every few days. It requires a certain kind of strength or faith for compassionate individuals to empathize with those in distress and not be weighed down by it. This made it imperative that we paused to check in on the wellbeing of our team. Especially at this time, leadership meant actively asking difficult ethical questions and making demanding decisions. Do we provide immediate relief in the form of food rations to those in immediate need, or do we pause to reflect and address the challenges that this paradigm shift would bring to the education sector? With the funds available, should minimal food rations be provided to many families that our schools serve or more significant nutrition to fewer families, and for how long? For the given bandwidth of my organization, do I help schools cater to children who have access to smartphones or help fewer schools reach even the children who do not have any digital access? And

most importantly should we even be making these decisions on behalf of the community?

Learnings and impact

Building a community: The events of the pandemic made me realize that leadership is inextricably linked to community building. In the past, I have worked with and driven people who were demotivated, angry, sad, and disinterested but this was the first time that I was working with people who were scared. They did not need motivation but required reassurance. Earlier, my strategies focused on helping people build their capacity in order to achieve their intended outcomes. Through the pandemic, however, I focused on building a community that placed less attention on 'self' but instead encouraged stakeholders to experience empowerment through their interdependence with the larger community. Since entire systems were dismantled, teachers would only be able to teach students with considerable assistance from parents who were physically with their children and from other community members who lent their smartphones for these students to learn digitally. Teachers who had been struggling to increase parent involvement in education now had engaged parents ready to participate in their children's learning. This paradox of autonomy emerged where community dependence could create new opportunities that create the space for individuals (such as the teachers) to act autonomously.

I recall the instance where my co-founders and I let go of sector specific fundamentalism and took the decision to extend the scope of our support beyond education and actively focus on the nutritional needs of the community. We included the distribution of rations to families of our students who lost their livelihood due to COVID as part of our intervention. With the male member of the household unemployed and homebound, we expected a rise in domestic and child abuse cases in our community. In order to

decentralize leadership and strengthen the community of mothers, we encouraged the women to form a collective and placed them in charge of the food rations that we had procured for them. The rations were to be used at their discretion and the intervention would be planned with them. These mothers now became the sole providers of food in their household. They took charge and the intervention unfolded organically with our schools playing the role of buffer zones. Women stored their supplies in a school and took what they needed at their discretion, using the rations as leverage to keep in check any abuse at home. Further, with this autonomy, they orchestrated a redistribution of rations from fixed kit sizes to a need-based system for families who were affected more adversely than others. We were able to service more than 600 families in this manner.

Decentralizing Leadership: The cross-sectorial nature and scale of the challenges faced by schools meant that they could not be addressed by one single individual or organization. The rapidly changing nature of the unprecedented situation also meant that decisions needed to be made quickly, by people who had adequate context and capabilities. Moreover, these decisions would affect our communities so personally that the decisions had to be made by them. For instance, it is not for someone external to a community to decide whether the children of that community should continue or discontinue their education during the crises because of the profound long term effects that it would have on that community. My team and I therefore, started to create communities at multiple levels- our team, teachers, principals, community leaders, parents, etc. and began to empower them by building their leadership and decision-making capacity.

One such example of creating decentralized leadership is the incubator that we launched during the pandemic in order to support school principals that were serving students located in the slums of

Mumbai. The incubator is called Rehnuma- which means 'the one who unfolds the path' in Urdu- and builds the capacity of school leaders in entrepreneurship and school management, and enables them to manage their school as a community based organization. I saw a steep rise in the motivation of these school leaders after providing them with the autonomy to steer their school and the support needed to implement their ideas. A number of school improvement solutions began to emerge, but what is striking to note is that these solutions are sustainable because they are generated from the grassroots by the people who were going to implement them. Our schools now gather food rations for their community and act as distribution centers to ensure that their students receive essential nutrition regardless of their family's economic condition.

One school has attracted 45 volunteers to create an open-source platform for lesson plans that guide educators to teach remotely using freely available online content. Another school is in the process of starting an early childhood caregivers training program to alleviate the effects of toxic stress on children. As a result of this decentralized leadership, 300 community leaders are being skilled in early education and caregiving, over 2000 students are learning digitally and receiving socio-emotional support, and 10 schools function as support centers for their community.

People often think that complex challenges require complex solutions. But one must look to a murmuration— a phenomena which occurs when a large flock of starlings fly together in rapidly changing, intricate patterns. While it was assumed that complex communication would be required to create these spontaneous formations, Pearce and co-authors theorized that this group behavior was not really complex but in-fact, governed by just a few

simple rules[50]. Drawing a philosophy from Pearce's explanation 1] the starlings are sensitive to their neighbors, 2] each bird tries to acquire a certain kind of collective density, thereby maintaining a community, and 3] there is beauty in making mistakes, in fact it may redefine the expression of the system. When the formation starts to fail, the individual birds in the flock autonomously rearrange themselves into a new formation. To me leadership requires being a facilitator that binds communities of people together with a shared vision and a few enabling rules so that with unbridled autonomy, they may collectively create a murmuration.

Jonathan Mendonca *is the co-founder and Director of Strategy at Barefoot Edu Foundation, a non-profit organization focused on school improvement. He is a Young India Fellow and is currently pursuing the International Education Policy program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.*

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[50] Pearce, D. J., Miller, A. M., Rowlands, G., & Turner, M. S. (2014). Role of projection in the control of bird flocks. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 111(29), 10422-10426

Camino21: An Organization Born to Match the Educators' Needs in Higher Education during the Covid-19 Crisis
By Paul Moch Islas

It was an eerily quiet Sunday in March at the Harvard Innovation Lab. Normally, getting a hold of one of the private cubicles to work with your team means planning weeks in advance as the place is blooming with aspiring entrepreneurs and students, but not this time. We decided just a few days before that we were going to conduct our Ideation session for our product there, not knowing that it would be one of the last in-person meetings that Camino21 was going to have for a very long time.

By that moment, we had been working for several months on identifying the pain points and needs in Latin America's Higher Education sector. We began a very detailed Design Thinking process and were on the last stages of it when the Pandemic stroke. After reviewing the existing literature and conducting in-depth interviews with experts, instructors, program directors, deans and presidents from public and private universities in Mexico, we had identified that students graduating from these institutions did not have the necessary 21st Century Skills and Competencies (21CCs) to succeed in their professional paths, nor to become fully realized individuals.

We knew of amazing initiatives that helped some of the recent graduates bridge their gaps in knowledge and skills, and that were collaborating closely with companies to ensure they met the requirements to be hired. However, we went one step beyond and searched for the root cause, to tackle this huge challenge in a way that would create a systemic change in Latam's higher education system. We settled on working alongside instructors to provide them

with new pedagogical strategies and tools that would allow them to innovate in their courses and, in doing so, help students develop 21CCs during the time they pursued their degrees.

We were still debating the nuances of our approach when COVID-19 transformed our realities. This prompted us to pivot (slightly) from our original idea to a subset we had not contemplated as our first iteration shifting from teacher professional development in higher education to helping higher ed institutions to adapt to online learning. As many people experienced, we had to be quick to adapt our plans to accelerate the launch of our operations months in advance. The crisis had highlighted the need for instructors to receive help to reimagine their courses for the online world. We had to be assertive to take this unique opportunity and work with institutions that would have otherwise been reluctant to hear about a new product. In doing so, it was fundamental that our clients understood teaching and learning virtually not from a space of deficiency, but as a new realm of possibilities to engage with students and the material on a different level.

Also, starting a company at the midst of a Pandemic was a challenge in itself. Selling a product when enrollment is down, while helping institutions understand the value of investing in improving the quality of teaching, has not been easy. It was essential for us to push for change and explain the impact that good teaching has in this new normal, how it is fundamentally different from the in-person experience and what are the strategies that can catalyze a fruitful learning community. Higher education institutions are slow to adapt to change, but during these turbulent times change becomes a constant. So, our nascent organization needed to be nimble, agile and very efficient to present innovative, economically sustainable and technically feasible solutions.

We also had to be seen as a trustworthy service, and the only way to achieve it was to be even more strict with meeting deadlines, providing deliverables, and demonstrating knowledge and quick wins with a big impact with each client. Under normal circumstances, there is an opportunity to build rapport and slowly meet the stakeholders involved in the decision making processes, but living on the online world, the way for an organization to establish presence turns into a flow of documents and communications that have to be perfect.

Surprisingly, in many ways, the fact that we were forced to work remotely was a strength for us. It allowed us to continue working with the intensity we had before, even though we were all forced to move in large part because of the pandemic, so the fact that half of the team was based outside of Mexico (where our clients were) did not become a weakness, but rather a selling point and a demonstration of our mastery of the remote learning, teaching and working space. Additionally, this allowed us to expand our reach and team well beyond national borders, with our advisers and collaborators living abroad.

The pandemic has also promoted a new understanding of everyone as a life-long learner. We all had to adapt to the online world and re-learn to interact with each other, work collaboratively, and be humble enough to admit that we did not have the answers to face the uncertainty of the moment. Camino21 is betting that this experience will translate into a cultural shift, and we are envisioning becoming a key player in that new arena. Educators in colleges, universities and vocational schools have been confronted with rapid changes without the necessary tools nor accompaniment, and we believe we can provide them with it in a personalized but efficient way.

The future of higher education is here today, and it is blended learning. Technology has been introduced in the classroom and will only keep increasing its role in the learning and teaching experiences. We are betting for Camino21 to consolidate the reflections around the educators' own teaching practice and help foster conversations among peers by ensuring a common set of metrics, and in doing so, also transform the way that Latin American higher education institutions think about teacher professional development.

Camino21 was born during this crisis and it was allowed to compete and participate in the Higher Education sector, a space that normally is tightly closed and reserved for actors with a long trajectory. We presented an option of teacher professional development and support to adapt to the online world that solved a need that had always been there, but that surfaced with more urgency because of the health contingency. The pandemic will force all of us to completely reassess the goals of education and transition to a new world of possibilities of how we teach and learn, moving to a system where the learners have an increased responsibility and agency over their learning. Technology in education is no longer a luxury but has become a tool intertwined with it. But as so often happens, it will prove useless unless it is accompanied with the know-how to elevate its potential. Good pedagogy and instructional design cannot be substituted by technology but will be enhanced by it. If they have deficiencies, they will be unmasked in this new light; if they have strengths, then they must be leveraged to live up to the expectations and ensure quality, engaging and liberating education.

Today, as I finish writing this document, the world is still struggling to keep the virus under control. The pandemic meant that the team that started working together in the rooms of HGSE, HBS and the Smith Center at Cambridge, now shifts between virtual zoom-rooms and has learned to write with 6 hands at the same time. Yes, we are

far away from each other, but we are way closer than when we began with this ambitious endeavor.

Paul Moch Islas *graduated in 2019 from the International Education Policy Program. Together with Ana Tere del Toro Mijares and Humberto Ceballos Ángeles he co-founded Camino21.*

Building Community Through Quarantines at the East-West Center

By Robert Moore

The Pacific Ocean is wondrous in its distances. Islands of people and culture and wisdom are separated over thousands of miles covering half the world – shining lights of personal connections among the vast expanse. And now the pandemic requires even more distance of us.

I write from the island of Oʻahu, The Gathering Place (where it is now dangerous to gather), the home of the East-West Center. Our mission is to build a thriving international community of students, scholars, and leaders that reaches across the U.S., Asia, and Pacific regions. We do this with scholarships for international graduate students to study at the University of Hawaiʻi, with housing facilities to bring students into daily social interaction, and with leadership programs to prepare students to help address the pressing issues of the region.

Our biggest pandemic-era leadership challenge in the Center's education program is this: how do we foster a rich, multi-cultural, place-based community of learning while maintaining safety through physical distancing and quarantines?

Early safety adjustments to our student programs were easy to make, and when we put them in place during the initial outbreak, in March 2020, they were easy to justify. We canceled all in-person gatherings, and we moved our formal events online. The disruption was minimal – our student community had already been building for eight months. Students were already oriented, they had friends, they knew their neighbors in the residence halls, and they had experienced nearly a year's worth of seminars, conferences, potlucks, and game

nights. Finishing the academic year online did not pose much of a threat to our mission.

Some of the adjustments, even in the beginning, were a bit more complicated, the trade-offs a bit higher. All students at the East-West Center are typically required to live on-site in dedicated residence halls. When the outbreak began, we encouraged as many to leave as reasonably could, and we put a strict new regimen of safety protocols in place for those who stayed. Complete closure was not an option, as many of our students have no other homes within reach. This too was easily justified, but now, for the first time, our active community was widely dispersed, separated from the core of our programs.

It was after this emergency-response phase that the deeper challenges of pandemic-era community-building emerged.   As leaders, we quickly recognized the need to shift our framing from "What do we do for now?" to "What do we do for now on?". The pandemic would be staying with us, and we would need to re-define what it means to be part of the East-West Center for new arrivals in the coming the years.

This new planning phase forced us to re-consider assumptions that had become deeply entwined in our core philosophy for how community is built. We were confident in our community when we knew that the students lived close to one another, cooked in shared kitchens, walked together to attend weekly seminars, and talked about the seminars together on the walk back. Student groups coalesced around hiking, music, cooking, and cricket. That milieu of casual, unplanned interactions is what elevated the East-West Center experience, made it different from the experience of merely being classmates.

How much of that is lost when students must stay distanced from each other? Is there a difference in experience between those who stay on-site and distanced versus those who are off-site? Is there a difference in the nature of the community? The answers to these questions matter. If it is impossible to deliver the East-West Center experience under a requirement of physical distancing, then the scholarships and affiliation programs should be canceled or deferred – the mission cannot be fulfilled, donor expectations cannot be honored. If, on the other hand, the experience can be delivered in full no matter where students are physically located, then the on-site requirement should be dropped permanently – housing resources should be diverted to activities closer to the mission.

The truth, we decided, is somewhere in the middle. We can build a rich community experience, pursuant to the Center's mission, despite distancing requirements, and it is still important that students be present on campus for it. Our top-line strategy was set: we would continue offering scholarships and affiliations for the 2020 academic year, and we would continue requiring that students live on campus (with exceptions, of course, for health). Now we had to figure out how.

Our first task was to make a system for students to arrive and move in safely. We started planning for this in June, but we were frustrated by a constantly shifting policy environment on questions of quarantines and visas. Quarantines were mandated by the State of Hawai'i for all new arrivals beginning in March, but nobody knew if they would still be in place in August. Over a two-week period in July it was announced that the requirement would be lifted, then that it would stay in effect, then that it might be modified. International students had their visas denied, re-instated, and denied again as embassies adjusted to conflicting federal guidance, and others were delayed indefinitely, their embassies closed. We had little influence

over student visas, but we realized early that we would need to plan for our own strict quarantine for newly arriving students.

Our challenge, then, was defined and framed. We would have to lock all of our new students away in physical isolation for two weeks, beginning the moment they set foot on the island. Amid this isolation, we would need to welcome them into the East-West Center, orient them to the institution, keep them alive, and somehow start the process of connecting them to each other to build the foundations for their new pandemic community.

One of the big leadership insights that guided us during this time was that we could design our approach to supporting the basic needs of our students in quarantine in ways that simultaneously built community ties. Quarantine was new ground for us, a stark motivation for new projects and new ways for stakeholders to get involved. Our job as leaders was to create the overlap- to bring our new students and our existing community together (at a distance) to address these new challenges.

We set up a cross-departmental team to coordinate our quarantine program, and employees and students from across the center volunteered their time and local contacts. We focused on four areas of support: food, welcome kits, daily social interactions (at a distance), and virtual activities. The team was called SQuaSH – the Student Quarantine Steering and Helping team.

Food was most urgent – students were not permitted to go shopping before they arrived. We arranged a pantry for donations and partnered with local farm distributors for deliveries of excess produce. SQuaSH members volunteered their personal connections with local restauranteurs to work out a twice-daily hot meal delivery program, available to quarantine students at a big discount. Staff and current students (non-quarantine) volunteered to stock the rooms

with food donations in anticipation of new arrivals, and they kept volunteering to make deliveries from the pantries to the quarantine rooms after students arrived (leaving the food outside the closed doors, knocking, and leaving). Food for quarantine became a rallying point for strengthening our work with external partners, activating our donor networks, and interacting with new arrivals in a way that showed the aloha spirit of the larger community they would be joining.

Our next area of support targeted students' initial arrival and first day in quarantine – a time of huge adjustment, coming directly after many hours of disorienting travel. We put together welcome kits containing a mix of easy-to-prepare foods, essential supplies, and Hawaiian treats like macadamia nuts. Items were donated by allied organizations (the Friends of the East-West Center, the staff and employee union, and the Center for Pacific Island Studies), and the kits came with a message of welcome by which these organizations could introduce themselves and contribute to a positive first impression.

Social support came next – each new arrival in quarantine was paired with a current student to be their buddy. Buddies volunteered for this program and received training in the role. Their task was to be a friendly and accessible resource for those in quarantine, available to chat, answer questions about life at the Center, and run small errands – things like delivering food from the on-campus pantry and shopping for lost supplies (toothbrushes, shaving kits). Many of our new arrivals had no connections on the island (aside from their scholarship coordinators), and we feared that this double isolation – physical and social – would stress their health and well-being. Our buddy volunteers stepped up and became those connections, checking in daily with their quarantine students and making themselves available to help. Buddies were vital for our new arrivals,

who had no agency to do anything outside of their rooms, and in their work, they built the foundations for new relationships.

Our final project was to arrange a calendar of virtual activities – exercise, book discussions, crafts, and others – to target the intense monotony inherent in the quarantine experience. Sessions were available to everyone (students and staff), and anyone could volunteer to lead. Quarantiners could lead activities as well, giving them a rare forum where they could have some agency and control. These sessions became new social nodes for our budding community, and similar activities are poised to continue as quarantines are replaced with normal day-to-day physical distancing. Our most popular activity so far has been a recurring yoga class; participants often stay late afterward to "talk story."

The drive to help can be a powerful force, and we found many who were eager to step up. We had groups contribute even outside of our official programs. An alumni group, for example, performed regular ukulele concerts on the lawn outside of the quarantine building, and students opened their windows and sang along. The buddy system and the activity calendar were our clearest examples of building community through projects of quarantine support, connecting students to each other directly, and we hope that these programs will prime our students for making lasting connections with each other, at a distance, throughout the academic year.

We have come a long way since March. Like all educational organizations, we have had to think deeply about our mission and create new ways to pursue it safely. Our quarantine programs are presented in highlights here, but they also had their trade-offs – they required big organizational shifts at the Center, were expensive in resources and time, and posed new sets of risks for staff and students. We were almost entirely derailed by a hurricane in early August.

There are a few qualities of leadership, I think, that helped facilitate these deep changes and allowed our programs to take shape so quickly. The first was an early shift from a mindset of emergency response to one of deliberate medium-term planning, considering the mission and giving decisions the weight of lasting precedents. The second was the vision to use the new constraints themselves to structure novel ways to achieve our community-building mission – to build connections by way of quarantine response. The third was the invitation across the Center for staff and allies to contribute to these new programs, to be creative and enlist new channels of outside support.

I write this at the end of August 2020. The semester has just begun, and most of our students have completed their quarantines (the few who are left were delayed by visa troubles). We are entering a new phase in our community-building mission, to support our students to keep sharing and learning from each other amid persistent physical distancing requirements. I do not know exactly how it will go, but I am confident that it has started, and that the start was not a disaster. We proved to ourselves that it can be done. There will be an East-West Center experience this year, and I am excited to see how it unfolds.

Robert Moore serves on the Education Program leadership team at the East-West Center, where he currently leads the Center's quarantine response efforts. He has been involved in higher education leadership since graduating from the International Education Policy Program in 2012, with positions at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani, and the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia. He recently earned a Ph.D. in International Management from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, and he has been at the East-West Center since 2018.

Deconstructing and Mobilizing Privileges from the Academy

By Luz María Stella Moreno Medrano

Without a doubt, these are times of great challenges around the globe. This "new reality", in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, has confronted us to see the breakup of social, economic and educational structures, among many others. On the one hand, I mourn what I have left behind; sadness and frustration flood me at not being able to go out on the street and reach out to others to feel stronger and closer. On the other hand, I am hopeful that this process is opening opportunities for us to create something new, a new way of living.

The pandemic has exposed our vulnerabilities as human beings, and it also revealed to us that those vulnerabilities were not sufficiently addressed in the same way for all. The virus can infect anyone, but without a doubt, the pandemic affects differently to those populations who have been forgotten, racialized and marginalized.

How to create a community of care in all contexts in which we inhabit? How to do it from a physical distance? How to transcend virtual reality to reach populations that do not have connectivity? From my position as a Mexican middle-age woman, mother, an academic and a researcher, it is clear to me that mutual care within our closest communities should be the priority in the middle of such difficult times. How to identify the communities we inhabit? How can we simultaneously transcend our class privileges and link with other communities that do not have the same opportunities that we do?

How to prioritize the well-being of our communities, their health, their hopes, amid the constant demands of the economic system?

How can we maintain hope in the middle of such uncertain times? How do we keep up with work and jobs demands when our energies are depleted? How, as a woman and mother, balance, and model to my daughter what it is important within this pandemic? All the structures as we knew them have collapsed: the school model, the market, health care systems, among many others. Clearly, those who are most vulnerable are those populations whose rights have been systematically denied.

As a coordinator of an undergraduate program at Mexico City, I have been prioritizing the security and wellbeing of my community: students and teachers. The needs that we are facing are diverse: some students live in remote areas where there is no access to the internet, others have problems with their old-dated computers, some others have lost a loved one, and others are dropping out of university because of economic issues. My academic colleagues, on the other hand, are also going through difficult times: most of them feel exhausted after many zoom meetings, they feel overwhelmed by having to deal with household chores, children's homework, and their own work, in one single day. It is often mentioned that the line between private and work life has been totally erased.

Being an academic is a privilege; it implies a leadership role, it is to live a life of service, within teaching, management, and research (when done with the heart placed at the right side). A pedagogical leadership seeks to create communities of mutual care, trust, and dialogue. I question myself how to promote that, as academic communities, to look beyond our own realities. How do we put our privileges at the service of neglected communities?

Among the biggest challenges that we have faced as a University, has been the possibility of providing quality education, in an environment where each student and teacher feels cared for, and considered in their individual and family needs. Being part of an

academic community like the Universidad Iberoamericana has been a huge support in the pandemic. We, as academics are privileged to receive our salaries intact, have job security and above all, follow humanist guidelines of conduct and a great social call for equity and justice, as part of the University mission. I am very grateful for the leadership of Chancellor David Fernandez and Vice Chancellor Sylvia Schmelkes because they have managed to keep us hopeful for the return, despite all the fatalistic predictions.

The mission of building community in proximity, in face-to-face dialogue, in deep encounters continues to unite us. This has also been supported by many funding opportunities to carry out research and advocacy projects in favor of communities, who have been most affected by the pandemic.

In this sense, I have had the opportunity to explore and support what diverse groups in rural areas are doing to face the pandemic. In the state of Oaxaca, for example, many Zapoteco communities are organizing autonomously. They have strengthened traditional medicine, planting for self-consumption, using community radio to keep themselves informed, among many other efforts. It is admirable to see how these initiatives take place beyond the government efforts that tend to homogenize care and education, in a single formula.

In Guerrero, Puebla, Veracruz, and many other states with large rural populations, many teachers have remained in contact with their students from remote communities to offer classes in the trunks of their trucks. Some other teachers leave educational activities in the stationeries near the school or maintain communication with families with posters placed on the doors of the school. Part of the challenge of my work is how to help make visible and strengthen these autonomous efforts within my academic community. How can I stop my desire to put together centralist and homogeneous educational responses in a country with so much diversity and with so much

initiative to respond in a pertinent way? I have realized that our work as educators cannot be detached from specific social initiatives. We must be part of them. We are not the ones who have the answers. Only by listening carefully and empathetically we will be able to keep our feet on the ground: in direct communication with the actors of the changes, teachers, families, and students.

Mexican educational authorities have dedicated great efforts and resources to provide generalized educational responses to try to reach the majority of students; however, they have forgotten the strength of teachers to organize and conduct relevant projects based on a deep knowledge of their own realities. Confidence and autonomy in teaching is something that I genuinely value in the institution where I work. Shouldn't it be the same for all teachers in the Mexican public system: clarity, trust, continuous training and above all, autonomy? Will that be more expensive than millionaire agreements with Google and with the country's television stations to deliver a single national curriculum for all children? Are the means more important than the ends? Is the transmission of knowledge more important than the process of learning to think, and to solve problems that really matters to each community in a different way?

Throughout the pandemic, the organization of diverse groups within academia has been strengthened: there is a great variety of analysis seminars, webinars, trainings, workshops, meetings. The technologies even allowed us to experience the gift of ubiquity and have two screens opened at the same time, so we do not to miss anything that is happening in the world, in real time. This favored the creation of networks of specialists (eg. MUxED[51]) and the

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[51] Mujeres Unidas por la Educación (MUxED). https://www.muxed.mx/

possibility of listening to alternative proposals, that had not been sufficiently heard (eg. other voices in education)[52].

This opens up a new challenge for those of us who step on the safe grounds of the academy: how can we get out of the comfort of the acquaintance and wisely mobilize our academic contacts to find other ways of responding to the world's needs? How to open other possible ways to build a new way of educating ourselves from below? How to put at the service of the bases all the privileges we have in terms of academic, social, economic, linguistic capital? How to construct learning communities of mutual care?

As educators, more than never, we have a critical role in society. Let us take pedagogy to the streets, to the families, to the community centers, to share with all people that we are all teachers and students, as Paulo Freire said. We are constantly learning in dialogue with our closest realities, we are learning to read to our "new realities" with a different glance. If we recover our agencies, as educators and students, we will be able to construct together a new model for educating us all in a different way.

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[52] Otras Voces en Educación. http://otrasvoceseneducacion.org/

A Journey of Collective Leadership
By Franco Mosso

Sometimes it is difficult to turn back and remember a challenging experience; a mountain looks different from the bottom, from the middle, and from the top. Some rocks along the way might seem less threatening once we have surpassed them, perhaps especially so for an optimistic person. But when I think of what it means to lead during this time of crisis, there is something that looks the same in my story, over and over again: that in the midst of the battle with my incompleteness, with my weaknesses and strengths, the potential of diverse people can create a force that I call collective leadership, and that force can scale impact, care, and sense of purpose beyond our wildest dreams. And because I am part of collective leadership, the internal conversation I will portray here will be half as a participant and half a witness of the impact of others.

Principles of the self

The night of March the 11ᵗʰ in 2020, after a debate with my wife about the possible scenarios of COVID19, I ended up sending a message to my senior leadership team saying "I think we need to meet tomorrow urgently to discuss how will we react." I had been following the development of the virus in other parts of the world, through colleagues in Asia and Europe, and it had become crucial to anticipate, given that on that weekend we were scheduled to have in-person events in 5 regions of the country, for our leadership programs. The following morning we decided that we would cancel the events, that we would hold meetings with all of our participants during the weekend, and that we would start meeting daily for 30 minutes to maintain our capacity to react nimbly to unforeseen situations.

I believe that by inheritance, I wake up before dawn every day. I use that early time to reflect on important issues of the work and of myself, without the distractions of the networks, emails, and WhatsApp messages. The morning of the 12th I asked myself what would be most helpful for our very diverse group in these uncertain times. I had to keep in mind that we have over 250 participants in our leadership programs in 10 regions, and 46 committed staff members. I knew people were going to adapt, transform our work, and I trusted in our diligence and in our sense of purpose. I remembered our 2014 crisis, the most difficult episode of my professional career in which we almost shut down the organization, and I read a story about leadership during crisis, the story were Ernest Shackleton and the crew of the Endurance survived the harrowing experience of being stranded in the middle of Antarctica, without knowing how or when they would return. Personally, I felt stronger and more prepared for this crisis than for the past one.

I decided that having a strong tactical plan wouldn't work unless we had principles about how to treat each other respectfully, how to carry ourselves in each meeting, each space, through each difficulty. So, I decided to co-create and synthesize a set of 5 principles, of ways of being with each other. They were the following:

- We acknowledge that everyone will process the crisis differently, and they will do so without feeling judged
- People should feel valued, accompanied, and part of the effort to overcome the crisis
- Technology will enable us to connect personally, co-create, and learn from each other
- We believe that sharing our most pressing challenges will allow us to become stronger
- We will be mindful with our personal privileges in comparison to others: having a job, being able to do that job

remotely, being close to our loved ones, being healthy, having internet

We went on to communicate these principles in every meeting we had with our participants, our staff and our alumni, and followed with emails that tried to convey a sense of hope while acknowledging the difficulties and tragedies faced by members if our leadership movement. When it was my turn to write to the movement, I hoped to convey integrity, care, authenticity, closeness, conviction. Our team also hosted meetings just to listen to each other, to see how we were doing in the art of balancing the personal and the work dimensions. I was glad to see people feeling heard, appreciated, and taken care of. People can give the best of themselves to our students if they are at their best possible selves, physically, spiritually, emotionally. Through this point, I felt this was a good starting place to face challenges together, but of course the principles only matter as long as they worthwhile to hundreds of people in their day to day actions.

Making space for leadership and innovation

With these principles taken care of, I then wondered about our peoples' capacity to implement. Perhaps I do not express it as often as I should, it but I am deeply proud of all of our staff, participants, alumni, and partners that joined our efforts to uphold our mission of building a movement of leadership for a transcendent education for children in Peru. Normally, we live our mission through three leadership programs where we recruit several diverse leaders from different roles (teachers, principals, professionals from various backgrounds, student leader) and our participants, through teaching it through projects, impact the lives of over 13 000 students and grow their leadership skills. However, during this time I have seen the birth of other ways to build a leadership movement for education, fueled by a mindset of collective leadership and the circumstances of

the crisis, whereby Ensena Peru deliberately placed itself at the service of national emergency goals, and worked hand in hand with other organizations to find, develop, and connect diverse educational leaders. During this time our team co-created different innovations to our leadership initiatives:

- Partnered with the Ministry of Education to build the curriculum for several grades that would reach 1.5 million students through tv and radio.
- Partnered with districts to launch a virtual learning module about how to implement 21st century competencies education, reaching over 1 000 of the 3 000 district leaders
- Partnered with other NGOs and the Ministry to gather data and give voice to over 8 000 families about their experience with distance education
- Co-create an unprecedented teacher professional development virtual conference, which reached over 40 000 teachers nationwide
- Partnered with a group of alumni, researchers, and districts to survey over 30 000 on their opinion about distance education and how to go back to school.

From my point of view, what I saw here was an incredible capacity to react, a hunger to innovate, to live collective leadership. And once I saw the team gaining momentum, I knew that I had to be less directive and give a fair amount of space for creativity, knowing that each team member has a clear sense if our mission. For me it is imperative to believe in the leadership if others, and to be consistent with that believe one must learn to make space for people to innovate, but at the same time ask mobilizing questions: why are we doing this? How could it fit with our mission? Do you personally believe it is the right place for our efforts? Will this liberate the potential if more leaders for education? He would you imagine this initiative a year from now?

I reflected upon a phrase that my esteemed colleague Tomas Recart from Chile said during a call on late March: this cannot be only about survival; this has to be about transformation. I feel grateful that with a combination of principles, partnerships, creativity, and purpose, we are still in a position to persevere in that balance, coping with the immense difficulty of the crisis, while striving to transform how a child learns in Peru.

A future with purpose and dynamism

I think of the future with mixed feelings, to be quite honest. I am incredibly hopeful because, like never before, I have seen examples across the country of students growing into their potential, developing competencies. I look at the kinds of enhanced collaboration we have developed as a country and it is clear to me that our capacity for collective leadership has expanded. Of course, nothing is perfect, and we need to learn from this period to understand which if the initiatives we have out in place are the most effective and more connected to changing for the better the students' education. On my skeptical side, I wonder how we are thinking about transforming education when we go back to schools. It still amazes me that we operate in a system with so many characteristics that date from more than 200 years ago, where learning mostly does not recognize the diversity of learning in students, and where there were engrained issues if trust between leaders in education at different levels. If in 9 or 12 months we will go back to schools, are things going to be different? What can we collectively do in the midst of so many urgencies to take the opportunity to change the rules of the game of how children learn? If I had to open a debate, I would propose a few images that I call "a future of ecosystems":

- o A country becomes a national village of amazing and transcendent learning, a dynamic ecosystem of learning where children (provided we can connect the country in the

next 10 years) can learn on a regular basis from students if different backgrounds. I sessions, they explore each other stories of life, recognize the ways in which they are similar and complementary, and this fuels a national sense of empathy.

o   A student in the Amazon, during class, watches tutorials of key concepts created by teachers in Cuzco, a teacher in La Libertad selects a project created by students in Tacna. All materials and projects are freely used and adapted to build extraordinary curriculums fueled by national creativity.

o   Teachers no longer learn in Peru only from their region or from their district, they know they belong to a wider ecosystem of great learning, where from initial to in service training they choose the best way to learn and have an extraordinary competency based system.

o   Students have high power no their decisions of learning and evaluation, and all experiences have substantial student input in the design and execution. Students of the same age can certify their competence at different points in time, and work in them as much as they need to grow how they want.

I dream of a more fluid and open ecosystem of learning, where students chose and feel great when they are learning, where they have a life changing experience because they profoundly connected with their fellow human beings, and explored the richness of getting to know a person, being part of a collective, and find out that there is something about yourself that can be of value, not just to you.

I leave this essay grateful for the opportunity to write some reflections from the last months. In the end, it's about the people. Trust them, give space for others to be great, be a partner in another person's journey of service. Thinking of oneself not as an individual in search to "be the best", but as a member of a community with a

great challenge, the challenge that one day all students will enjoy life because they enjoyed their education.

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Educating the Next Generation of Innovators (Virtually) Lessons learned from launching a new social impact venture during the pandemic

By Mary Nagel and Margaret Wang

Introduction

On March 12, 2020, we walked into what we did not know would be our last in-person class at Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE)-- Professor Fernando Reimer's Education Innovation course. Throughout the spring semester, we had been working on creating a social impact venture called Innovate for Africa (IFA), a 12-month fellowship program that inspires aspiring African innovators (**Fellows**) to become entrepreneurs through a 1-month Innovation Readiness training and an 11-month placement opportunity with one of our IFA partnered organizations (**Partners)**. After two months of growing from problem statement to a business plan, we were selected as 1 of 12 teams across all Harvard Schools as a semi-finalist for the social impact business competition thanks to our **dedicated team of educators, consultants, and entrepreneurs from HGSE and MIT united in our mission to create the next generation of innovators.**

As the spring semester's end quickly approached, we found ourselves cornered on the third floor of Gutman scribing proposal after proposal for summer funding opportunities as we prepared to go from ideation (our business plan) to implementation (launching our pilot program). We would then head to Lagos, Nigeria in August to finalize our university student recruitment and sign agreements with our IFA partnered organizations. As we parted ways for spring break, we had no idea that this would be our team's last in-person coffee at Gutman or walk along the Charles river. **The world would**

**change forever, and the question was whether or not we were
ready to change with it.**

As we completed our virtual semester at Harvard, we found
ourselves in constant awe of professors as they managed, many for
the first time, a virtual learning experience. Through tools such as
breakout rooms on Zoom or the chat function, we found ourselves
connected, in a different way, but engaged, nonetheless. This proved
to be extremely insightful for the IFA team, as we faced the reality
that an in-person launch of Innovate for Africa would be impossible
in a worsening COVID-19 pandemic in both the United States and
Nigeria. Because of our transition to virtual learning at HGSE,
however, we found ourselves reimagining the IFA experience in the
virtual world; the question then became, was it possible to create
value for our fellows and partner organizations remotely?

COVID-19 forced our IFA team to re-think the status quo-- what if
there were a better way to train aspiring entrepreneurs? But even
more so, COVID-19 forced us to re-think many aspects in our own
lives as educators-- what if there were a better way to affect change?
A better way to educate? A better way to inspire? We quickly adapted
our program to meet the needs of our Fellows and Partners alike
while shaping a new perspective of what it meant to be an
educational leader in a world during and after COVID-19.

Lessons Learned throughout COVID-19

*This section provides an overview of IFA's topline takeaways from the launch of
our May 2020 pilot Innovation Readiness Training in response to the COVID-
19 pandemic. These can be applied to any leader in education seeking to launch
or adapt learning workshops to the virtual reality of today.*

1. **Internet should be a human right**. Article 26 of the
   Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everybody has

the right to education.[53] As stay-at-home orders were enacted due to COVID-19, access to the internet is being uncovered as a basic human right upon which many other rights are dependent -- from the right to basic education to the right to work. Access to the internet and the ability to receive education are no longer separate rights. While many educators firmly believe it is the access to technology that served as the greatest challenge to virtual learning and working in response to COVID-19 pandemic, we believe it was access to reliable WIFI to access the internet. Young people around the world-- despite not having computers-- have access to a mobile device. In fact, the World Bank estimates that eight out of every ten individuals have access to a mobile device.[54] We, as human beings, crave connection but if we cannot access the platforms required to learn and work, we remain in isolation throughout the pandemic and into the future of learning and work. As such, we propose an amendment to the UN Declaration of Human Rights which includes the right to reliable, stable internet access to every human being as required to learn and work.

Specifically, for IFA, in order to accommodate our fellows' access to the internet and limited ability to leave their places of residence due to quarantine, we recorded all of our sessions and offered an asynchronous option filmed on Youtube Live. This was particularly challenging for group work and required us to spend more upfront time on 1-1 check-ins and deliverable-based learning to give students time offline to reflect, prepare, and upload. We also were not able to use video cameras in order to reduce bandwidth. We would recommend incorporating the cost of reliable internet

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[53] The United Nations. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.
[54] World Bank (2016). *Digital Dividends*.

into any future learning opportunity particularly in the developing world-- specifically, a minimum of 40GB/month for full-time virtual learning.

2. **Communities can be created virtually through various technological platforms**. While we could no longer physically be in the same space with our students or startups, we had to re-design the learning experience to create a strong sense of community:

    a. *Live Synchronous Classes* - We reduced the amount of time of our live classes on Zoom and increased the amount of interactions using Breakout Rooms for discussions and Google Slides and Docs for activities and simulations.
    b. *Group Work* - Using Google Classrooms, we posted videos, readings, and assignments for fellows to work on before our classes. It was imperative to set up communication channels such as Slack and introduce Google Suites so that our fellows could easily work in groups.
    c. *1-on-1 Personalized Coaching* - After each class, we had 1-on-1 coaching appointments to build personal connections with our fellows.
    d. *Informal and Formal Touchpoints* - Lastly, we used various channels on Slack to engage our fellows. On one channel, we discussed class assignments and on the other channel, we celebrated fellow birthdays to continue to foster community and keep everyone engaged.

    The biggest mistake would have been to design the virtual space exactly like the physical space-- for example, to simulate a 6-hour bootcamp as a 6-hour virtual

video session. Instead, we used a variety of tools to create a community. More importantly, we set the culture by establishing group norms together and creating a shared identity: using PollEverywhere, all our fellows' voices were heard to create the team name of the Pioneering Pacesetters.

3. **Teamwork makes the (virtual) dream work.** The purpose of a shared work environment is to create a culture, the opportunity of serendipitous encounters, and an easier way to collaborate and communicate. Every leader during the pandemic has to re-imagine how a digital environment can fulfill the purpose of a shared work environment and perhaps, even enhance it. As entrepreneurs, we are now planning on how to permanently manage a team remotely. Some experiments include:
   a. Creating "open office hours" for our team to drop in and work with each other online.
   b. Using communication tools such as Slack to open communication channels.
   c. Allowing each team member to share their "work hours" instead of assuming that everybody will be working 9-5PM on any one specific time zone (note: IFA team members are based in California, Massachusetts, Texas, Nigeria, and Indonesia).

4. **Building relationships and trust is even more essential in the virtual world.** With IFA moved entirely to the virtual space, it is easier than ever for our IFA fellows or our IFA partnership organizations simply to opt-out of the IFA experience. Without the physical presence to be able to have candid conversations with our customers, the value delivered to both our fellows and partnered organizations has to be felt so that, despite the pandemic, our customers see the

benefit that IFA brings to their personal and professional lives.

   a. **Fellows -** We are helping them prepare for the future of work. The pandemic is only the beginning of increased demand for virtual workers. Many of our fellows had never used Zoom or Trello-- some of the tools we operate on for IFA-- and now are able to integrate these into future organizations.

   b. **Partners -** Organizations around the world are financially hurting and overwhelmed by the task of moving to virtual operations. They need human capital who can help them pivot and continue operations in this new virtual world. If we are able to communicate this value, we are helping organizations navigate through this pandemic.

5. **Geographic boundaries are no longer important.** Lastly, as part of our program, our fellows would be placed at a Nigerian start-up to couple what they learn with practical experience. COVID-19 disrupted businesses all over the world as many start-ups experienced hiring freezes and were more risk-averse. We struggled to find placements until we realized that there was another opportunity: many start-ups were pivoting into completely remote teams. As such, we could reimagine the geographical boundaries we originally created-- why confine our fellows' learning opportunities to just Nigerian start-ups? The biggest change to our programming was opening our fellows' opportunities to be placed in start-ups abroad such as the U.S. Technology had always provided a platform for cross-regional collaboration, but COVID-19 pushed companies to be more comfortable with the thought of having a remote team.

The Future for Education and Leaders

When the pandemic ends, schools and offices will never be the same. We, as leaders, will never be the same. While we may be able to physically see each other, we have been exposed to the various inefficiencies and norms that we had never questioned. However, this pandemic made us re-imagine the physical work environment and the boundaries that could be eliminated through technology, opening the possibilities of how we, as leaders, can contribute to education.

The right to reliable, accessible internet is no longer optional as we look forward to the post-COVID-19 pandemic realities. The future of work and education is here and the present demands each of us, as leaders, to ensure that our students have access - in the same way they previously needed access to books - which requires our collective action, as educators, to ensure our students are prepared for the classrooms and workplaces of today.

For anyone looking to start a new educational venture during the pandemic -- don't be deterred. Your students need you. The world needs you and it is up to all of us as educational learners to provide opportunities (light) when we are faced with a global challenge like the pandemic (darkness).

Learn more about our mission to create the next generation of innovators at *innovate4africa.org*

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Mary Nagel is an educator, entrepreneur, and public servant missioned to reimagine development through education innovation. Prior to HGSE, Mary worked at the U.S. Department of State as a digital advisor for the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. She also served as an English Teaching Assistant in the Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo and Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais in Brazil. Mary is a 2021 graduate of the International Education Policy program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

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Leadership Through Teaching During COVID-19: Public to Private Schools in India
By Prachi Narang

Quite recently, I happened to read an article in a leading newspaper in India which categorized professions by their 'necessity' in the midst of a global pandemic. Of the top ten professions listed, 'teacher', unsurprisingly enough, featured towards the bottom of the list. However, in a curious turn of events, it featured at the top in response to a question on people's choice of professions to avoid in the current situation. A job people need but fear to take on is telling of the impact it has for generations to come and in the creation of all other jobs in the near future. In a context as unprecedented and dire as the one we are facing today; leadership takes on many forms. For me, teaching, in such a scenario, becomes one of the many panaceas trying to maintain- and improve- the quality of life at a time when all feels lost. It is an unforgiving, exceedingly demanding profession, and requires vision and humility, all at once. It is with this knowledge that I transitioned from the role of a teaching fellow at a severely underfunded school in a corner of Pune, India, into a private school in Delhi NCR with an aim to initiate mindset shifts in schoolchildren to encourage the bridging of social, economic, and cultural divides among the masses in the country.

As a teacher in two vastly contrasting contexts, I struggled to comprehend the impact of the pandemic. The families of students in Pune had one mobile phone for an average of five members, and would often result in limited to no access to remote learning for students who found refuge from their abusive domestic contexts in their classroom spaces. In Delhi, my students had access to reliable and high-speed internet, largely supportive home environments, and access to multiple devices for engagement with the online learning material. Both situations presented their own set of relatively new

problems, and my helplessness and anger in the first few months of lockdown were palpable to all around me. I had failed my students, and I had failed my promise to ensure access to quality education for all. I saw the access and opportunity gap existing between my two sets of students increase, and I was complicit.

I often analyzed my situation at the time with a "what if" lens: what if the pandemic hadn't hit?

My students in Pune would have had some time off between their highly competitive board exams and their eventual preparation for junior college. We would have been hosting financial literacy sessions for their parents in order to prepare them for college expenditure. Advisory sessions would have been organized, and students would have been visiting colleges, soaking in the campus, making new friends, and finding new avenues worth exploring to widen the limited scope that their immediate context usually bound them in. I would have been facilitating career guidance sessions and shown the available opportunities and the ways to access them to parents who had invested in their children's education in the hopes of escaping the drudgery of poverty.

Back in Delhi NCR, I would have been leading capacity-building sessions for teachers for technology integration within the classroom. Designing interactive activities, resources, and classroom spaces was a high priority, for I wanted my students to develop critical skills to thrive in today's world. I wanted them to advocate for the less fortunate. To build empathy and drive, I would have been organizing the second phase of the letter-exchange program I had initiated between my two schools.

Being able to mull over the "what-ifs" is a privilege not many are afforded. Such a perspective is often romantic and hardly feasible. I believe that in a country where the access and opportunity gap

increase every minute, time-sensitive action is necessary. Hence, after the initial few weeks of grappling with the elements of known life thrown into disarray, I embarked on a new journey: trial and error of new ways to battle new challenges. Until that point, I used to employ technology to enhance the quality of lessons delivered within the classroom. Now, I was forced to dig deeper to find ways to increase *access* to education. WhatsApp, a texting platform popular with all my students in Pune, became our classroom. I would send text questions, voice notes, self-created and crowdsourced content, and YouTube links for the students to continue learning asynchronously. Deadlines and rules ceased to exist, for the sole focus of all our efforts was continued exposure and access to academic achievement for our students. Not everyone had access to phones at all times and holding classes via video conferencing platforms was not viable with interrupted access to reliable internet.

It is often said that it takes a village to raise a child. I have often wondered about the implications of this statement in many situations. However, I saw it truly come alive during this testing time as *every* Teach for India fellow I had the privilege of knowing, current and past, was invested in the purpose of maintaining access to education for all. The idea of leadership became tangible in the sleepless nights, brainstorming sessions, and constant digging for new technology which could be used to further our purpose. For our children, school offered a sanctuary away from abusive households, work responsibilities, and a lack of attention. They found solace in their friends and teachers who looked out for their interests and believed in their individual capabilities. In this context, uninterrupted access and communication became the main focus of all our efforts. I relied on this network of dedicated changemakers when it got rough, and they relied on me right back.

On the other hand, my students in Delhi had a whole different struggle to face lockdown fatigue. Constant exposure to screens,

already a significant problem, multiplied manifold as everything, right from academic classes to ballet studios, shifted online. Violin classes were being conducted online, and inter-school debates were now being organized via 'breakout rooms' on a vast array of video conferencing software. Not wanting to miss out a single second of whatever was happening, students began to experience migraines, backaches, and general fatigue and listlessness. Many of my students had special needs and trying to find ways to maintain engagement went hand-in-hand with ensuring wellness all around. Organizing unstructured circle time, exploring new applications, and incorporating kinesthetic elements into existing lesson plans became my priority as I conducted capacity-building sessions for other teachers around the same. For these students, academic achievement was secondary to their mental and emotional well-being, for most of them were at their grade level. The months away from school were crucial for developing their value systems and social and interpersonal skills and I, as an equity advocate, would often try to find ways of bringing those skills alive in our time together. The children's support, their parents' approval, and reliable internet helped us move school online and enabled me to create safe spaces for students.

Having been exposed to and worked with two vastly opposing contexts of the economic spectrum, I have often felt uncomfortable with the existence of such contexts with little to no dealing with each other. Both school systems have had students who leave to matriculate in institutions within their social and economic 'bubbles'. Coordinating a pen-pal project between the two schools was one of my few undertakings which attempted to open windows between the student groups- enough for them to see that they are all, in fact, children: with dreams to change the world, with aspirations to improve their communities. The pandemic forced me to reevaluate this romantic notion as it closed off the one reliable unit of change: the school. Staying at home and learning for some was tiresome and

annoying, but for some it was their only chance at becoming capable of breaking the cycle of poverty they were born into.

In the COVID-19 world of remote learning, much is to be learnt. Not everyone has access to reliable devices and the internet, and assuming it to be the reality has left a lot of children behind. The impact of the decision to continue remote learning with no viable alternatives may not be immediately evident but will present itself in the years to come. School closures due to the pandemic have resulted in children staying at home, fighting for space, food, and attention. I believe that five years down the line, children, who were attending school against so many odds, will find it increasingly difficult to return to a space where the returns on investment are high but delayed. For a hand-to-mouth community, the need of the hour, adequate access to resources and continuation of their livelihoods, cannot be guaranteed by education anytime soon- especially not in a situation where the well-to-do continue to learn and dream about the future and the poor have resigned themselves to the abject reality of the cycle of poverty.

Prachi Narang is a current student of the International Education Policy (Ed.M.) program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She is a former Teach for India fellow (2017-19) and has experience working in low-income public and high-income private schools across India in the capacity of a teacher and a teacher trainer.

Driving Away From Bhara Kahu
By Arooj Naveed Haq

On the outskirts of Pakistan's capital city, there is a small but densely populated area called Bhara Kahu, that tourists drive by on their way to one of the country's most scenic hill stations: Murree.

My father's side of the family is from Murree, and over the years, they have done well for themselves. In a family of six, the parents became doctors after graduating from the country's most competitive medical school at the time. These two had four children, three who also became doctors, and my father, who became an engineer. Education was a driving force for our family, and has played a central role in creating the lives of privilege my generation has gotten to live in.

Two years ago, however, I became conscious of the other side to this story.

Murree, the same beautiful hill station, is also an ancestral home to many of the residents in the polluted and dangerous streets of Bhara Kahu—the transit area on the road to greener pastures up north. People here have migrated from their villages to seek better employment for their family's wellbeing, and education for their children. Unfortunately, the public schools that they have entrusted to fulfill the ambitions they hold for their families are far from the steppingstones my father's family had access to.

On a normal day, before COVID-19, the school I taught at was a place of authoritarianism and violence. Daily wage teachers who had not been paid for months complained about the work expected of them–managing classes of over fifty kids at a time, and the lack of any job security. Some permanent members of staff, on the other

hand, seldom attended classes on time, mostly sat down on a seat throughout lectures, asking children to copy down materials from the board or textbook, verbatim. There was very little teaching going on here, but worse, at the slightest infraction or failure to reproduce fact from memory, children were repeatedly humiliated and beaten using sticks. This was not a school of transformational change. This was not a steppingstone to any dream of social mobility.

Before the pandemic started in March, I had played my part in building a community of learners and teachers that could strive for something different. My students and I participated in long hours of deliberative discussion forums to recognize the forms of violence we were subjected to, and to articulate our rights as citizens. Through a class-wide campaign, we engaged with other members of staff, and brought the issues we faced to light outside of the confines of our school. With time, things improved. My students jumped multiple grade levels and became excited to learn and to come to school. By March, attendance had reached a record high, parents were involved in school discussions like never before, and then…. the pandemic hit.

More than ever, these past few months, I have become aware of the vast gaps in resources available to kids in lower income communities versus those who live in better economic circumstances, and the immense role played by the physical presence of a teacher who was emotionally available to do better. While private schools in the country have had their own struggles in optimizing online work and creating suitable learning platforms, the situation at government schools has been grim: there has been no order by the Pakistani government to as much as ask teachers to contact children individually, to ask them how they are, or to even bother to determine what resources are available in individual households to continue learning.

During this time, I struggled to make sense of this new reality, both as a teacher, and as a person experiencing all of this change in her own day-to-day life. Fighting off feelings of hopelessness seemed difficult at first but supported by my Teach For Pakistan community of peers and staff, I was able to draw upon a shared pool of hope and resilience. Step by step, I worked to identify the immediate needs my students had and take action to fulfill the gaps I saw as best as I could, even if resources were scarce.

Over the course of a week, I called students' families and conducted an assessment of the resources available to them. Collected data made it clear that Whatsapp was the most workable platform for disseminating class materials. While all children did not have an account, enough did to get us started.

Thus, began our "Whatsapp Classroom". For the next few weeks, before the end of term, my students and I communicated at a set daily time to go over the equivalent of an in-person lesson plan; through voice notes breaking down the day's agenda and explaining activities, to videos that were reduced in file size to allow for easy downloading, and worksheets that I would write by hand and photograph for further discussion. My students would then complete each of their assignments, and through our Whatsapp class, we would discuss feedback in detail on a number of pieces of our work. Surprisingly, I learned that this medium of instruction offered a great opportunity for expansion post-pandemic, to create spaces for remedial support that our children at low-income schools in Pakistan are normally believed to simply not have access to. The expansion of Whatsapp services for school children could be a key low-cost solution to many of our woes, both during and after COVID.

As the year went on and classes reached their end, things began to make a little more sense. The gaps that had existed since long before

the pandemic had even started appeared to come together not just in terms of highlighting the negative impact of this global event on kids across Pakistan, worsening already existing inequities, but also in terms of showcasing opportunities and needs that now made their way to public discourse in an unprecedented way. For instance, Gilgit-Baltistan, an administrative territory of Pakistan, has long been cut off from the rest of the country for its lack of access to the internet. Now, with classes shifting online for the more better-off universities, citizens across the country have raised their voices to demand equitable internet access for places like GB, as have other people from provinces that have been taken for granted over the years. During this time, I have gotten to better articulate my thoughts and voice as a citizen who can demand specific reform by voicing specific actionable ideas to key policymakers who are not all that difficult to access; at the current moment, organizations and governments are working overtime to find novel solutions, and Twitter has been a great way to get conversations started.

In many ways, this time of reflection that my peers and I have gotten, has allowed us to witness something very strange happen: the veneer has started to fall off. For too long, Pakistanis have known that public schools are hubs for rote learning, however, the average citizen has not felt real empathy for the state of affairs at schools that they do not attend until the world has dramatically changed to alter the lives of those who are more fortunate also. Most of all, I have found that initiatives by the State to attempt to create uniform technological interventions like educational television programs (meant to substitute for actual schooling) have raised a host of other important concerns that do, ultimately, raise the basic question of equitable access for all: If the government, with so much international funding at its disposal, is still struggling to create a quality television show to meet a single learning outcome, what exactly are they, and have they, been doing at our schools all this time?

Arooj Naveed Haq is currently an International Education Policy student at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Previously, she worked as a Teach For Pakistan Fellow at a low-income school in Bhara Kahu, Pakistan, where she taught English and Mathematics.

Enhancing Local Impact Through Regional Collaboration

By Nicole Paulet Piedra

2019 was an unusual year for *Laboratório de Educação*, the non-profit organization I lead along with Beatriz Cardoso and Andrea Guida. In the five years since I joined this inter-generational team, aligned around a common sense of purpose and a determination to transform knowledge into action, we have confronted technical, financial, and ethical challenges that threatened the very existence of our young initiative.

It is rather uncommon for an NGO of our size to produce research-based content and strategies that inform professional development opportunities available to educators. Yet, in Brazil, as in many other Latin American countries, few schools of education have taken it upon themselves to not only organize relevant pre-service training curricula, but also intentionally explore and devise effective methodologies to equip teachers with the necessary knowledge and tools to make professional judgments and decisions in the ever-changing contexts of public schools. *Laboratório de Educação* was founded to fill this gap, through program development, implementation, and research. However, realizing that mission did not fit clearly within the available funding boxes for social organizations. Effective communication, flexibility, and persistence were some of the ingredients that enabled us to diversify our pool of resources and establish the building blocks for a "proof of concept".

In 2015, we piloted an in-service training program to help teachers, pedagogical supervisors, principals, and technical staff in municipal departments of education support early language acquisition through their unique professional roles, while maintaining a systemic perspective. Midway through the initial implementation cycles, we

embarked on a design and piloting process aimed at creating materials and strategies for these same actors to engage parents and guardians of young children in recognizing themselves as educators and strengthening the much-needed school-family relationship.

After working with 1,714 educators, responsible for 26,097 children enrolled in public nurseries and pre-schools in three heavily urban municipalities bordering São Paulo city, a unique opportunity emerged to adapt this methodology to the predominantly rural northeastern state of Maranhão, in partnership with an energy company interested in giving back to the communities in which it operates.

The year 2019 gifted us with the time, funding, and technical autonomy to immerse ourselves in the challenges facing early childhood education in five municipalities: Santo Antônio dos Lopes, Lima Campos, Pedreiras, Capinzal do Norte, and Trizidela do Vale. Our team interviewed a variety of stakeholders, from teachers all the way up to district administrators, ran focus groups with future participants, and conducted school visits and classroom observations. When Andrea, Beatriz and I sat down for dinner after our last on-site meeting in November, we knew the next two years would not be easy: the socioeconomic inequalities between rural and urban schools were rampant, and seemed to have been normalized in response to structural barriers that made even small gains seemingly impossible to achieve.

In light of these circumstances, we understood that our research efforts had to adopt a formative perspective, and so we began a collaborative process aimed at compiling data that would help us develop a more accurate picture of the educational reality of these locations. The lack of information surrounding multi-year classes in rural schools made a potential opportunity visible to the parties involved – we could design our program in a way that would target

schools whose needs had always taken a back seat. We would, of course, not be able to circumvent all of these problems, but after the first month of training in 2020 we felt confident in the path we had chosen to make our support "present" even in spite of the limited amount of professional development time afforded to teachers and school leaders.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit Brazilian soil, two of the five municipalities had suffered from heavy flooding and an outburst of H1N1, where schools had been converted into temporary shelters for displaced families, with no end in sight. City governments decided to break early for midyear vacation and, just like that, our partners were in the middle of a humanitarian crisis.

Painfully aware of the limited resources at the municipalities' disposal, we sought to communicate openly with local administrators so as to make ourselves available without creating additional burdens to institutions already stretched beyond their means.

Before the public health crisis, we had designed a professional development process that intended to carefully and gradually unpack some of the myths that tend to drive schools and families apart. In these vulnerable communities, we had witnessed how prejudice affects not only the way teachers and principals relate to families, but also influences their beliefs and expectations about children's potential. We were cognizant that these attitudes would not change overnight and, to that end, we had prepared a series of collaborative experiences that would invite families into schools in order to hear what they had to say about their children. Our theory of change was that by modeling and "scaffolding" these kinds of experiences, teachers and principals would begin to establish closer ties with students' families, while incorporating new strategies into their professional toolbox.

Whereas in regular times we would put action into educators' own hands, under these new circumstances, our in-person mediation was out of the question. In addition, with most teachers officially on vacation, it would take a while for districts to come up strategies of their own.

Our efforts to move quickly were motivated by our desire to ensure that no children would be left behind, as well as by a sense of institutional responsibility towards our team and funders. Prior experience with arbitrarily suspended contractual payments reinforced the importance of being proactive and developing plausible scenarios that addressed the concerns of our partners in both the public and private sectors. We had to navigate uncertainty with rigorous planning that considered everything from a scenario in which we had the means to keep helping the five municipalities, to one in which our sponsors diverted their financial support to immediate local public health needs. All options were on the table.

In this context, we had to be creative and flexible in imagining different courses of action, allowing ourselves to temporarily let go of our "business-as-usual" premise that we would not "do things for" but "with" educators. In other words, we would have to speak directly to families, despite knowing from our earlier pilots that even basic forms of mediation around our content was key to its impact on day-to-day practices.

Given the years that we had invested in our research and development model, we had a structured methodology to lean on, including a book and an app with concrete suggestions for parents and caregivers to encourage child learning by interacting with them during daily routines and household tasks. This approach provided alternatives to continue to educate young children without leaving one's home or requiring special resources. We could leverage existing

tools to respond as quickly as the situation warranted, as long as we identified the right channels.

Months of relationship-building enabled us to approach the Maranhão State Secretariat of Education with a genuine desire to identify points of convergence. We discovered that our five municipalities were not the only ones that had been caught off guard by the present challenge, and that lacked the operational, technical, and financial resources to confront them right away.

In this unique moment, we chose to strengthen local responses by developing a regional strategy. As a result, in under three weeks, we adapted our family engagement strategies to the Secretariat's technical requirements for multimedia content delivery through social media, public radio, and television channels.

The State Secretariat and the Maranhão branch of the National Union of Municipal Education Officers (UNDIME) decided to make *Laboratório de Educação* the main source of early childhood education content and rapidly managed to convene 200 of the 217 municipal administrators to devise targeted plans for outreach to families with limited access to technology.

More than 150 districts have regularly distributed our content through schools' WhatsApp groups, as well as three radio stations and one television network. Over the course of three months, our videos containing book read-alouds and suggestions for parent-child interaction received over 200,000 views. In a state where 55% of adults have not completed elementary school and 16% do not have basic literacy skills, our remote learning strategy provided the opportunity for children to hear at least two books each week. Although unexpected, we had found an effective way to achieve one of our long term pre-COVID goals: to democratize access to

literature and invite parents to share reading experiences with their children, regardless of their own schooling trajectories.

Furthermore, the activities we proposed to transform daily tasks such as cooking and cleaning into opportunities for children to learn about their surroundings have sparked their curiosity and interest, while also contributing to parents' engagement. We received numerous stories of caregivers sharing favorite recipes with their children or exploring the shapes they can make with shadows before going to bed.

Unlike the read-aloud videos (in which the books take center stage), these ideas require parents' undivided attention and initiative. While we understand the videos are only a starting point, we believe that, cumulatively, these interactions will help parents and guardians feel more confident as educational agents who can promote informal learning even after the pandemic.

Now that teachers, supervisors, and principals have returned to their (now remote) activities and taken an active role in mediating communication with families, our next step is to foster the very sense of responsibility we had sought to instill through in-person activities. We have enough content and must transition to focusing on practice, in order to shift educators' perspectives towards understanding families as partners they have to work to engage and support, rather than antagonize when expectations are not fulfilled. Part of our intervention in the five municipalities still consists of modeling how to solicit and incorporate feedback from parents about how they and their children have felt as they try out our proposals.

Thanks to the knowledge we gathered about the local context and the trust we developed with municipal leaders over the past year, we have been able to celebrate our progress while also examining our limitations with honesty and resolve. Although these conversations

are not easy, we need them to remind us that the work will not be completed until the most vulnerable children in each district are served adequately by our actions.

By the same token, we deliberately proposed that the Maranhão Secretariat of Education request that municipal administrators estimate the number students they have yet to reach in the upcoming school term. Just as in 2019, these research and monitoring tools may shed light on a key dimension of our challenge: to ensure that students whose zip codes do not appear on the map do not fall through the cracks. In order to explore potential answers, we are trying to organize a follow-up meeting with representatives from the state's 217 municipalities to learn how some of them have mobilized to overcome the hurdles affecting schools located in rural communities. Throughout this process, communicating across such a vast territory using digital tools has proved to be an ongoing learning experience. As we coordinate subsequent actions, we recognize that even seemingly routine operations must adopt a formative perspective that is necessary to achieve our shared objectives.

Finally, as partners in this endeavor, we consider ourselves accountable not just in times of "success". Looking forward, we hope that through honest and open collaboration we will continue to expand our view of what is possible, so that, regardless of their socioeconomic conditions, every child has access to rich learning environments for the remainder of this crisis and beyond.

Nicole Paulet Piedra *holds an Ed. M. in International Education Policy from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a B.A. in Social Studies from Harvard College. She currently serves as Director of Content at Laboratório de Educação, where she supervises the implementation of professional development programs for public school teachers and administrators.*

A letter to my children
By Andrea Parker

Dear Jamilsom and Cecilia,

I write these words to you today, as you are 8 and 12 - and - you may not read them until you yourselves are questioning how to overcome the challenges that past generations have left behind. The impact of COVID-19 Pandemic started for our family and community on March 13th, 2020, when it was announced that schools would be temporarily closed in hopes of stopping the spread of the virus. The three of us quickly adapted, though I must also apologize for the endless hours that I spent on zoom calls, working from my bedroom on my computer, forcing you to fend for yourselves in your own remote learning environments, which frankly were not very engaging. What do you remember from this time? As your mother, I tried to keep forefront in mind that you would remember **how you felt** more than what we did, so I hope you have fond emotional and sensorial memories from each other, camping, giggles, movies, games, bike rides and of course, our new puppy, Asha.

What was I so busy doing and why could I not be your guide in learning? Well in our school district we were serving 8,000 students among whom many required special services for IEPs and 504s, received free and reduced lunches and some were even homeless or lived in trauma inducing environments, causing something called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. So, I put my values on the scales, and knowing that you had your basic needs met and that I had the luxury to work from home, I dedicated most of the working day and parts of the weekends to supporting children and families who were in more vulnerable situations. I might never know if this was the best decision, but you survived and thrived. The stories, anecdotes and reflections below are meant to be a testament to my experiences as

an education leader during the COVID-19 Pandemic - revealing long standing socio-racial-economic inequities that have existed in our society for centuries.

Some speak of the "Silver Lining" of the Pandemic and I do believe there is potential for one. Complex and bureaucratic systems have had to shift quickly and without preparation to emergency online learning as opposed to face to face. Many students did not "attend" classes while others attended but did not "engage". As an educational leader, I was faced with many questions about priorities. Was it best to address connectivity, devices and food, or should we focus on teacher development? Should we focus on writing and enforcing strict remote attendance and assessment policies or seeking to understand the reasons why learners were coming and participating in some classes and not in others. Was it perhaps enough to see kids actively engaged in one class, under the circumstances? Finally, should we follow the guidance issued by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), which had no experience driving and managing crisis of this kind, or should we make decisions with our organizations and communities based on context and needs?

What became immediately evident was the need for "grace and pace". For the first time in my career, slowing down to assess and connect was more important than ever. I would begin meetings with wellness check-ins and inquire how we were practicing self-care. As we shared and created this routine, it was clear that folks needed to "put their own oxygen masks on first" so that we could prepare to "build the plane while flying". Many of my colleagues were dealing with and caring for family members with compromised health, others had small children or elderly parents to care for, and some were dealing with the emotional toll of living alone through a pandemic, leading to compromised mental health. This was no time to demand results or outcomes, nor put the pressure on, nor require

that all staff be online all day, every day. This would only lead to burn out and decreased morale; and we would need everyone on board for phase II: Planned Remote Learning

As the crisis drew on and uncertainty extended through April, May, June and predictably through the fall, I was invited to contribute recommendations to the Commissioner for ESE (Jeff Riley). At the center of this report was educational equity. How could each student, PK-16, have equitable access to resources and opportunities for learning? Many of our English Language Learners do not have access to the language of instruction (LOA, English) in their homes, nor do they have access to the resources and support they usually have when face to face (at school). Many ELLs live in single-family homes or where both caregivers work outside the home in essential services. Our question became, "what guidance could the state of Massachusetts provide that would make access more equitable across the state, and independent of the ELL funding available to each district?" Our team's final report included trauma and crisis-sensitive approaches. Our 18 member committee met remotely, bimonthly and collaborated on a document that included perspectives from all areas of the state of MA - from remote rural areas of western MA, to large urban districts such as Boston, Dorchester and Brockton to the suburbs. Through our monthly, ZOOM meeting, I drew on adaptive and distributed leadership, even though I was perhaps more comfortable with democratic or even authoritative styles and our final report included consensus on low income, trauma and crisis-sensitive approaches.

Equity. I am a co-conspirator for anti-racism and as such, I find the extent to which Hispanic, Latino and black populations have been impacted by the pandemic itself, as well as the economic effects, criminal. Families already in low-income brackets, families who do not have assets, are not homeowners and have had lesser access to post-secondary education and higher paying career opportunities are

simply more limited in the academic and holistic support they can provide to their children. Largely white suburban neighborhoods are home to two family incomes - in which one parent can take on the responsibility of facilitating "learning at home" and/or hire private tutors and caretakers. What if we (policy makers, educators, district leaders and families) were all willing to give up part of our privilege and design systems and structures that support the most vulnerable communities? What if every student, every family, every person had a role in the educational ecosystem? If we can see the potential that lies in such a shared system and mutually beneficial system, and we build capacity in all learning spaces, then all learners will feel they belong and have a purpose. Learning then becomes relevant and meaningful. In my coaching program, we refer to this as ABC+M (Autonomy, Belonging and ---- for Motivation) (R. Bondie)

One of the most significant challenges I faced was the need to bridge an understanding between policy makers, fellow leaders in education and families, regarding what a "safe return to learning" looks like. Many would have liked to return to face to face learning inside school buildings much sooner. Others would have liked a clearer decision regarding remote learning at an earlier date, in order to facilitate planning, coordination and collaboration. In the United States, the scenario of education (and other social services), historically, has been left to states, local authorities, private and non-profit organizations, which has led to greater inequity, due to tax and funding structures for what should be a basic human right: the right to quality early childhood education, PK-16 education and health care. This compounded with the murder of George Floyd and the many black men and women, boys and girls who came before and after him, required a deep dive into the nature and culture of the educational system we have built. Many children of color and immigrant families do not feel welcome in our school building. They do not see themselves represented in our textbooks, our curricula,

or our assessments. They feel policed, reprimanded and unfairly disciplined.

So perhaps, before we consider inviting learners back into the buildings, we should take this moment to consider why they would want to be there in the first place. What are their hopes and dreams? How can we create more inclusive, culturally responsive and trauma-informed spaces, which invite and celebrate diversity as the threads that weave and unite our communities? This is where the power of student voice rings loud and clear.

So, when I reflect on what has helped me to lead during these times, the first thing that comes to mind is a supportive environment. That starts with you both, and how you are the driving force in my work. Your insights are invaluable, your smiles and your optimism fill me with energy each day. The fact that we have adapted and transitioned to life in Spain and the United States, has certainly provided us with great flexibility and adaptability for coping with unpredictability, complexity and ambiguity. Also, the professional communities that I was a part of provided the grounding and sense of community that I needed to share ideas and leadership fears in a safe and collaborative environment. Next, the grace that was granted to me and that I was expected to extend to all whom I serve was powerful and refreshing. For the first time, it seemed like we were truly putting personal wellness first, setting priorities and working together to reduce barriers. Finally, I drew on my own interpersonal skills and self-awareness to plan intentional ways to maintain and strengthen connections with myself and others. We adopted our first ever emotional support pet, we spoke openly about mental health, we created evening routines of reflecting on our high and low points, and we practiced coaching and family counselling in ways that will serve our family for years to come. As I transition into my new role, focusing on intentional system wide and culturally relevant family

engagement, I will take these practices with me. Thank you for being my source of inspiration!

Mom/Mama

Andrea Parker *serves as Senior Training Specialist for the MA statewide Family Engagement Center at the Federation for Children with Special Needs. During the onset of the pandemic, she served as a World Languages Specialist and Remote Instructional Coach. She is a single parent, living in Cambridge MA.*

Bilingual Learning during a Pandemic
By Siury Pulgar

There are 5 million children in classrooms across the U.S. who are considered English Language Learners (ELLs). As the education and content strategist for MamaLingua, Inc., my job is to create tools that facilitate learning in their native language. An education startup founded by four women in 2019 and based in Austin, Texas, our mission at MamaLingua is to help educate bilingual children through high-quality content.

We knew how challenging it was for ELL children to attain knowledge at the same pace as their peers. We also noticed how teachers struggle to get parents involved in their kids' bilingual education. Most importantly, we heard time and again how hard it was for parents to pass down their native language to the next generation. So, we created a digital platform that offers rich, engaging content from native authors in a format that's accessible to children, parents and teachers. It's called MamaLingua Go!

The Challenges

In the middle of a global pandemic, such as the one created by the spread of the coronavirus in early 2020, the education system in the U.S. faced a difficult question: How to guarantee the continuity of bilingual input while schools are shut and parents and teachers were left scrambling to figure out more pressing issues? Clearly, the health of their families and their job security became priorities. Bilingual learning did not.

Overnight, parents were asked to take on the role of teachers without any planning or resources. The reality is that schooling at home is not impossible. In fact, for some families, homeschooling works

better than traditional schooling. I, myself, decided to school my oldest daughter at home for two years while she built confidence and reached the level of independence, I felt would help her do better in a traditional school environment. And she did – but it wasn't easy. It took a lot of my personal time, quite a bit of research, and costly learning resources. It was a big commitment to make, for which I planned and budgeted. Still, there were challenges. Asking parents to suddenly take on that responsibility without proper planning was largely unrealistic, resulting in overwhelmed parents and widespread distance learning chaos.

Adapting to the Change

In normal times, my current role would take me to classrooms, teachers, students, and parents. I would be conducting beta testing with families and pilot projects at selected schools to learn from users what content best supports their bilingual journey. I would ask when, where, or how our digital platform could integrate into their daily routines: whether in a car or bus ride while commuting to and from school; at home while cooking dinner, or on the weekends, doing an activity together. I would interview teachers to learn how our content fulfills their curriculum learning objectives. But these are not normal times.

We started MamaLingua Go! because we know how difficult it is to maintain a native language. In the U.S., 1 in 3 children live in a household where at least one parent speaks a language other than English. We also know that bilingual schools are becoming popular even for monolingual parents who see the value of their children becoming bilingual, biliterate and bicultural. Nationwide, dual language programs grew from 300 in 2001 to 3000 in 2015, according to the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE). The need for bilingual content is clear, however, education looks

different for every student in 2020. The way we learn and teach has shifted.

The needs of teachers, students, and parents are different now from what they were just a few months ago. Educators need effective teaching materials they can use for distance learning. Students need resources to keep them engaged and focused. Parents need peace of mind to help them weather the storm. So, we sat down and virtually re-evaluated where to focus our efforts.

First, we narrowed our target audience to 5 to 8-year olds. This allowed us to concentrate on kinder through third grade students – those who are at greatest risk of losing their native language and young enough to add a second language. Second, we prioritized the student's experience over the adult's, since it is the child who is ultimately the end-user of our content. Finally, we made financial decisions to help us navigate the economic downturn caused by the pandemic by shifting our fundraising strategy to a crowdfunding campaign.

It is a challenging yet exciting time to be an education technology startup. The need for digital solutions has skyrocketed, however the market is crowded with companies of all sizes, competing for a slice of the pie. Why did we decide to stay in the race? Because we think there is no one single technology solution that yet offers high quality content for the bilingual student population that can be easily integrated into everyday life. What we are building is culturally relevant, global, current, and exciting. We are partnering with publishing companies in Latin America to offer high quality books written by native authors. We are working with creative musicians who are producing educational music that is fun and authentic. We are building a network of bilingual educators, writers, and illustrators who are creating original content that we know works in today's world.

Looking Forward

Regardless of the abundance of digital learning products, the challenges in offering quality education to every child still remain. Access to the internet and devices is not yet standard in the U.S., and neither is effective distance learning. The case is much worse globally. In India, for example, in the absence of computers or tablets, teachers as well as students are asked to use mobile phones to continue on with classes. For many, it is an impossible task.

There is no doubt the COVID-19 pandemic will widen the educational divide across socioeconomic groups and across nations. At the height of the health crisis, in March and April 2020, there were more than a billion children out of school globally, according to UNESCO. The learning loss for the most vulnerable populations is estimated to be around 60 school days and will likely increase by the end of 2020. The start of the academic year 2020-2021 registered only 1 in 3 children in school. It might take years to fully understand the impact of this crisis in the global education landscape.

Our role as education leaders is to continue the work we are doing with even more conviction and confidence, as it is the only way forward.

Siury Pulgar is the chief education and content strategist for MamaLingua, Inc. She graduated from the International Education Policy (IEP) program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE) in 2009 and is the former curriculum director for the Habla Conmigo Academy program at Stanford University. Siury lives in California with her husband and two daughters.

Collective Leadership to Transform Crisis into a Restoration Opportunity for Education Systems
By Gustavo Rojas Ayala

Seeking to minimize health costs of the COVID-19 pandemic in Mexico, the Federal Secretary of Education (SEP) closed all schools in the country from last March until further notice. This measure allowed about one third of the country's population to stay in their homes, and allegedly, it prevented a greater Coronavirus outbreak from occurring. But it also meant risking the learning and the socioemotional wellbeing for 36 million students. By that date, there was no conclusive evidence available about the way school closures would act against the spread of COVID-19, and we did not have much data about the pandemic's progress from the federal government either. Despite that, Mexicanos Primero Sinaloa supported school closures, considering that protecting the lives and wellbeing of students and teachers was a top priority.

Now, as more recent studies and publications portrait detail the negative effects of prolonged school closures for student learning and life opportunities is clearer that the pandemic confronted us with paradoxical and contradictory choices. Being a decision maker and guiding Mexico's vast, diverse, and deeply unequal, education system through the pandemic is a role I think no one is ready to execute to perfection.

And although an important part of my work in Mexicanos Primero Sinaloa is to outline were the mistakes lie, it is impossible not to see that leading our education system during this pandemic most be an exhausting task.

Still, decisions needed to be taken, and they did. To briefly summarize how the federal government reacted to sustain education opportunity, the following actions and strategies are relevant:

- TV based education content broadcasted nationally (Arundo en Casa).
- Website to provide access to digitalized versions of official school textbooks.
- Radio broadcasts in indigenous languages.
- Delivering printed handouts in rural communities with low or no internet connectivity.
- Stablishing formal alliances with Google Education, and others to provide free access and ICT training to teachers working in public schools.

Although these resources consider diverse ways to make relevant information and content available, they pay little attention to the way students engage, interact, and learn from them. Furthermore, our research showed that social and economic conditions of families in Sinaloa were highly determining the actual opportunities student were receiving. Also, although parents-teacher communication was very frequent, their perception about student learning was roughly moderate. Thus, despite the great efforts to sustain education continuity strategy, we know many students are not successfully replacing in-person education with remote instruction.

As the 2020-2021 school year started, the federal government announced a second stage of Aprendo En Casa, now focusing exclusively on educational content produced and broadcasted nationally in partnership with Mexico's most influential TV stations. However, the local secretary of education of Sinaloa decided to give school principals and teachers the flexibility and responsibility to lead families, and to determine specific action plans to pursue

student learning remotely. This can be an interesting opportunity to analyze how decentralizing decisions can impact in student learning.

I feel very enthusiastic about our role of contributing with useful evidence to assess this changing scenario. because not having reliable data to inform policy decisions has also been a great challenge. From a very early stage of the outbreak in Mexico, federal authorities determined to follow a public health strategy that excluded testing and traceability. Thereby, we only had access to a badly underrepresented depiction of the health problem. In addition to this, education counter-reform implemented by the recently appointed Federal Government (2018) eliminated the country's National Institute for Education Evaluation (INEE, for its acronym in Spanish) resulting into a deficit of high-quality for the education sector as well[55].

I worry this might set the stage for a long period of discretionary policy decisions. The will to build La Nueva Escuela Mexicana[56] (Mexico's New School) has been accompanied by a tidal wave of cash transfers programs, seen by President López Obrador as the best way to allocate public resources, since they offer, in his opinion, less chances for misuse and theft from public servants. As of now, many educational cash transfer programs occupy a big percentage of the total education budget. However, Mexico's National Fulltime

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[55] It is important to mention that INEE has been replaced by MEJOREDU, a new public institution with similar goals, objectives, and responsibilities, but with lesser funding and without autonomy and independence from SEP.

[56] La Nueva Escuela Mexicana, or Mexico's New School, is both the ideal and the core component of the 2018 federal government's education reform. This concept relates to President López Obrador's Cuarta Transformación (Fourth Transformation) political project that seeks to *transform* public life on every single relevant field, with the goal to end endemic corruption, considered by the president as the root cause for Mexico's most pressing ailments.

School Program (PETC, for its acronym in Spanish) is facing its end. After two years of significant federal budget cuts, the program was not granted funds for next year's budget. Thanks to PETC, before the pandemic, 3.5 million students were spending between 1.5 to 3.5 more hours in school than the minimum 4.5 daily hours required by law. PETC offered broader funding opportunities to over 26 thousand schools, which provided catering services, and extracurricular activities for students, and higher salaries for teachers. This program started on 2007 and is one of Mexico's few public education programs evaluated positively by national and international organizations.

The next years will require great commitment from citizens to hold education authorities accountable for the mid, and long-term implications of the COVID-19 pandemic in our communities. Extraordinary times as these, call for extraordinary leaders, able to leave their own egos and agenda aside, and to go beyond the *status-quo-way* of usually managing things. These are moments for fear, as much as they should be times for hope. Following up on the work and ideas from many international education leaders and institutions, I too believe we face a great opportunity to shift our education systems trajectories to build back better.

Today's students will be adults within a decade, and to navigate future they will need to know how to manage complexity and uncertainty (OECD, 2018). This will require them to develop many skills, and many values. And there are two I consider very important for today's scenario. The first is the value of self-agency *"in their own education and throughout life. Agency implies a sense of responsibility to participate in the world and, in so doing, to influence people, events and circumstances for the better"* (OECD, 2018 p. 4). And the second is the capability to reconcile tensions and dilemmas as a key competency to transform society. *"In a world characterized by inequities, the imperative to reconcile diverse perspectives and interests, in local settings with sometimes*

global implications, will require young people to become adept at handling tensions, dilemmas and trade-offs"[57] *(OECD, 2018, p.5)*

My teaching experience showed me that we educate and learn by example. The words above describe what education systems should offer students to prepare them for a future that, as the Pandemic has shown to us, already arrived. Consequently, any person or institution that wishes to be a part of that transformation, will need to strive to become a life-long learner, and be a *future-ready* professional. The good thing is, that there has probably never been a better time to do this than now. Despite this chaotic scenario, I have benefited from the expertise and perspective of many talented and committed leaders that have opened their knowledge and practices for everyone willing to listen, learn and act. I want to believe that, acting and thinking collectively, all of us are knitting a web of co-created actions to spur change and hope.

As the severe social and economic effects of the pandemic unfold, local authorities are cornered to solve what they can with the tools and resources they currently have, trying to keep risk to a minimum. This explains why they have not been so responsive yet to envision this crisis as an opportunity for virtuous change to our education system. But this can change. I truly hope my experience as an International Education Policy student at HGSE helps me to learn new and better ways to collaborate with others, and to expand the horizon of the new possible for education in Sinaloa, México and the world.

Gustavo Rojas Ayala has worked for a decade in education projects focused on marginalized communities in Chile and Mexico. He has teaching experience, he has also managed collective leadership training programs for teachers, and support and intervention programs for school principals. He has also directed

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[57] OECD (2018). *The future of Education and Skills Education 2030 p. 5.*

state-branch offices of two Teach for All network's partner organizations. Since 2019 he is the general director of Mexicanos Primero Sinaloa, an education policy research and analysis NGO based in Culiacan, Mexico.

A Time for Educational Leadership Like No Other
By Sajida H. Shroff

I cannot remember a time I have heard the word "unprecedented" applied quite as much as I have since the start of 2020 and the steady spread of COVID-19 globally. Many aspects of the last several months have, indeed, been unprecedented. In recent history, COVID-19 has been unprecedented in its reach, in its inconsistent presentation, in its positioning at the forefront of media, government, and organizational agendas, and undoubtably, in its stretching and straining of educational systems globally. Altamont Group been called on to lead. Our company is deeply committed to ensuring that global best practices, while informing solutions, are thoroughly contextualized, adapted to local and regional needs as well as factors for sustainable positive outcomes. As Chief Execution Officer of Altamont Group, I strive to ensure that we, as an organization, as teams, and as individual consultants have the agility to pivot and understand challenges clients are facing so we can respond.

This agility has been especially tested by the social distancing requirements to limit transmission of the virus, one of the most challenging aspects of the Pandemic, particularly for educational systems. The necessity of school closures and stay at home orders required an agility unlike ever before. Often without too much warning, schools were having to track students, their needs, and resources and devise plans for maintaining contact with them, the difficulty of which was magnified by psychosocial effects of isolation from peers and unequal distribution/availability of resources. Educational systems were suddenly tasked with re-envisioning their approach to teaching, while students had to shift the way they learned. The Pandemic reaffirmed the range of services schools

provide in many contexts: as providers of food, monitors for abuse, and supporters of mental health, to name a few.

The Pandemic also exacerbated conditions for certain sub-groups already challenged by inequalities and obstacles to accessing education. While plenty of these challenges were evident immediately, some effects will be realized years from now. For example, in many contexts, girls are likely to have dropped out of school to cover household and increased childcare responsibilities. With commerce completely disrupted or halted and economic situations worsening for many, it is predicted that effects on girls will be magnified as they are burdened more than ever to make a difference financially for their families. Parents are also facing ongoing pressures, with women, in particular, disproportionately sharing the burden of additional responsibilities as they teach their children and are relied on even more at home, at work, and in their communities.

The global reach of the Pandemic also underscored the range of actors in positions impacting education. While these actors were making decisions on the piece they play in education, a key challenge was communicating these decisions and ensuring these decisions and their potential consequences were communicated to those interested or impacted. For example, higher education institutions had to face students, parents, faculty, and their own financial concerns, as they devised strategies to offer a "college experience" in COVID. Answers to questions like "Can I defer my admission?", "What will you do if a student tests positive?," "Are SAT scores still required?" had to be formulated and communicated as families faced time-sensitive and even life-altering decisions.

Altamont Group responded to challenges such as these by continuing to rely on the project management approach it applies outside the urgency of a Pandemic to yield successful, utilization-

focused results and recommendations for education and development. With a challenge as all-encompassing to the educational system as COVID-19, the highly collaborative nature of our approach has been integral for addressing challenges or opportunities presented by a client, while also allowing for molding and reshaping aspects in line with contexts of implementation. It would have been easy to become overwhelmed by such great needs.

However, by responding to specific challenges that have emerged, there have been opportunities to formulate questions around these and thoroughly investigate their many facets. While education's myriad effects have been researched, reported, and spoken about as never before, government lockdowns, lack of available service providers, and the inability to move freely in general has added urgency to the need to grasp fully pertinent aspects of a situation to formulate programs, strategy shifts, and recommendations well-suited to contexts while cultivating a sense of ownership through collaboration to encourage uptake.

The world's ability to track, gather, and update data as never before has been on full display in recent months. With COVID-19 a focus of so many, statistics and information have been ubiquitous with no shortage of ways to visualize, analyze, deliver, and summarize. Also, the pressing nature of this health emergency has meant more is constantly being released and interpreted at a rapid pace. With so much available, it is easy to lose the thread of what you seek to address. The risk is that recommendations will be too abstract and so general there is little possibility of implementation, much less of success. By leading on a specific response to a specific need, Altamont Group has been effective at zeroing in on relevant information, synthesizing it, and delivering specific actionable recommendations, all while working closely with stakeholders to ensure that what is finally presented closely addresses actual needs and circumstance in terms of infrastructure, capacity, and

sustainability. As a boutique advisory firm, focus is part of our corporate DNA. As a woman-owned company where 80% of employees are women and 70% of executive and senior positions are filled by women, a dedication to empowering women and girls is part of our corporate DNA as well. Gender, alongside physical, social, economic, religious, ethnic, and geographic barriers to accessing education and development opportunities, are at the forefront as we formulate approaches and recommendations.

In response to the Pandemic alongside an unrelenting demand for solutions globally, team building, delegation, and a high level of internal collaboration become even more central to successful leadership. The positive impacts of these become evident in the quality and innovation clients ultimately receive. However, it is also evident from a human resources perspective. By intentionally promoting and redoubling a commitment to teamwork internally, the present moment actually becomes a tremendous opportunity for team members to develop skills and work together in new ways, likely to continue yielding positive results well beyond COVID. Also, with the large number of women employed by Altamont Group and women indicated to be shouldering greater burdens at home as a result of the Pandemic, leading with an eye toward assembling teams and arranging opportunities for them to exchange ideas, offer feedback, and shift responsibilities as needs arise becomes key as well.

A key aspect of leadership is having or knowing where to find people with the knowledge, skills, and tools to be part of these teams, contribute to projects, and help in moving towards an answer. The Pandemic has made travel virtually impossible, removing the possibility to network in person. While a face-to-face meeting is still possible with Zoom and it is now practically a synonym of "meet," it is challenging to adequately recreate the informal interactions that so often accompany face to face meetings: breaking for coffee,

waiting for a session to begin, waiting for the elevator, milling around between panels. Often it is a casual comment or follow up question made spontaneously in these spaces that sets into motion a chain of communication that yields cooperation and formulation of solutions.

As the leader of a network of consultants in more than 15 countries and manager on projects with clients worldwide, digital tools have always been integral to our ability to interact. However, we have had to rely on them even more recently. Fortunately, we were already familiar with them and their potential. Thus, the greatest shift has been the intentionality necessary to ensure informal and unstructured moments are incorporated to continue to grow connections as we deliver results.

At Altamont Group, our motto is "Education. Shift. Paradigm." This "shift" is not unidirectional, however. As a leader, I am committed to the belief that in order for education to shift paradigms, the paradigm of education must itself shift. The truth of this is now evident unlike ever before as educational systems negotiate COVID-19 and its aftermath. Remote learning, online learning, and homeschooling have been forced into the mainstream as school systems respond. Homes have become schools, parents have become teachers, screens have become paper, and airwaves rather than buses bring classes together. This is education unlike ever before and it is only possible with an openness to leading the shift.

It is also, I believe, more possible only when you incorporate business growth management principles into educational system strategy, design, and evaluation. Resources constraints have emerged and, in many contexts, have added to resource strains already present. Innovations to leverage what is available, and their responsible use, are imperative if gains made are to be sustained. At the same time, we must continue to look ahead, remaining abreast

of research, recommendations, and innovations adopted elsewhere by regularly engaging through our networks globally, connecting with clients as they implement strategies, and serving individuals and families seeking our advice through, for example, our CSR programming to understand their questions, concerns, and worries. All of this must run in parallel with ongoing self-reflection and solicitation of feedback to continue tweaking and enhancing the work we lead.

With over 25 years of experience in education and development, it is impossible not to be deeply concerned about losing precious gains that have been made for education: at a governance and managerial level shifts in thinking, messaging, priorities, resources, time; for students, loss of skills, activities, program involvement, and supports. The future of education post-COVID will need to draw from a collective memory of recent months, as communities, cities, town, countries, organizations, businesses, and schools assess. It is likely that many education systems will feel a need to respond to student needs all at once, immediately triaging students once they return based on cognitive, behavioral, health, economic, and psychosocial needs identified and returning to their multi-faceted role as a pillar of caring for children and youth. With its unprecedented reach, it is likely, and it is hoped, educational systems will call for support as they transition back to something slightly more familiar. While the paradigm shift that occurred at the height of the Pandemic is likely not to remain completely intact into the future, nor do we want it to, it is imperative that reflection happens and is captured, ensuring that what has been learned is not forgotten, mistakes are examined to become learning opportunities, and successes are captured in detail.

A convergence of factors means this is likely not our last disease outbreak, epidemic, Pandemic, or far-reaching catastrophe. While we are likely to continue encountering impacts of the Pandemic for

years to come, leadership will mean continuing to draw from lessons learned to prepare. We cannot afford it to be otherwise.

Sajida H. Shroff *is the Chief Execution Officer of the Altamont Group.*

Leadership in times of COVID-19 uncertainty
By Juan de Dios Simón Sotz

The first Covid-19 case reported by newspapers in Guatemala was on March 13th, 2020. At the time of this writing, the Ministry of Health and Social Assistance reported 77,828 confirmed cases of COVID-19, and 2,862 deaths in Guatemala (MSPAS, 2020). The projection is that we will have 100,000 people with COVID at the end of December.   Additionally, the Guatemalan Minister of Education Claudia Ruiz informed that "schools will not be open anymore during school cycle 2020"; this means that all teachers and children will finish the year trying to interact and learn from home. Of course, the challenges will be greater for most indigenous children in rural areas of the Western Highland who don´t have access to internet; very few have smart phones and some don´t even have electricity.

Educational leadership challenges during Covid-19

On March 16th, 2020, the central government announced restrictions in terms of land and air transportation, work schedules changes and recommending to public and private entities that they allowed their employees to work from home. All churches and restaurants were closed. Public events were cancelled, including closing of malls and schools. The government promoted teleworking at all levels. In those early days of the Pandemic, the main ideas were about how to protect people and media focused on health, safety and right to life.   In the middle of lack of information and no scientific evidence of what to do, the only three actions recommended were: physical distance, wash your hands with soup and wear a mask in public areas.

I am the Program manager of the Educo Foundation in Guatemala, and the Covid-19 has shaped my leadership from certainty to uncertainty. I was accustomed to work in an office dealing with my responsibilities with a group of coworkers, with specific schedules, face to face meetings, defending children's rights. I didn´t know that in my comfort zone managing plans, results, objectives, budget, annual work plans and everything else was going to be changed. COVID-19 woke me up, with short notice I transitioned to working from home.

I could not go to meetings with government officials anymore. My bedroom at home was adjusted to put an operative office, relying on a computer and telecommunication tools such as Zoom, Teams or Skype. Many calls from the field and from regional contacts were answered in the middle of uncertainty. After a shower and breakfast, running to brushing my teeth, I didn´t have to change my cloths, I could just start working in my pajamas.   Meanwhile, I was helping my 7-year-old daughter with her schoolwork as she also could not go to school. She would do her schoolwork on her iPod and thought that we would be staying at home just about three weeks. We were wrong about the timing to go back to the office and about kids going back to school safely!

I had to rethink my role as I work with a group of professionals and our programs and projects are implemented by local partners in rural communities of the wester highlands, particularly in Quiché. Now I had to balance work, home, and family, which were all taking place together in the same space. In the middle of everything I heard stories about broken businesses, people losing their employments and many children having more difficulties with food security. Some white flags were in the street, meaning that some people needed food.

The other challenge I faced was switching from being able to work with others relying on in person meetings to relying on distance communication.   As a parallel I thought about education and distance education in Guatemala. While Covid-19 didn´t create inequalities in Guatemala it is widening inequality and increasing despair as COVID-19 cases continue to rise. All our contributions as an NGO to the educational reform in Guatemala in terms of curricula, teachers training, and production of materials were designed to transform classrooms.   But suddenly, schools were closed, teachers were asked to stay home, and children went back home. So, no teachers training face to face, anymore.   In rural areas of Guatemala, distance education is not an option as most of the children don´t have internet, nor TV.   The majority don´t have computers, nor smart phones; some do not even have electricity. A teacher told me in one of our conversations that they only have a Radio, and that was for the father, not for the child to listen to. Some kids needed to visit relatives in order to access the program Learning from Home "Aprendo en Casa" from the Ministry of education. So, given these serious needs what should we do to adapt our programs and projects? We relied on mindfulness and emotional awareness and rethought all our projects, modified our strategy and pondered the financial implications of these changes.

Listen to the children during the pandemic.   One of the initiatives of our office was to listen to the voice of children and adolescents. Most of the time we listen to government officials, adults, and local partners, but in the middle of Quarantine, it was important to listen to the rights holders.   Every two weeks we needed to make a report about the status and news about Covid-19 in rural areas. So, it was an excellent opportunity to conduct a survey and ask the children to answer it through phone or computers if they had access to them. The table below shows the children's responses to questions in the survey.

Question: What do you miss the most during COVID-19, while you are at home?

Total Participants (400)	Girls	Boys	Total Girls and Boys
Answers	%	%	%
Go to school	24.58	24.51	24.56
Play with my friends	20.5	21.45	20.93
Visit my relatives and friends	19.14%	14.92%	17.28
Go out and play outside	13.42	16.78	14.86
See my teacher	10.61	10.38	10.49
Go to the park (Square)	7.36	7.94	7.63
Others	3.39	2.74	4.25

Source: Educo, 2020.

For children schooling and education are seamlessly integrated into their lives. They don´t see any difference between schooling and their lives. They like to go to school, but not necessarily because of the content of the curriculum they access or because the interaction with teachers but because of their friends, they liked to play with

them; they also missed visiting relatives and going to play outside of home.

Reformulation of projects and preventing more inequalities.

We realized as an organization that kids being at home was a challenge and we redirected our attention from supporting schools to supporting families. We adopted new three priorities:

Food security and child protection. We needed to make sure that children had their meals, as they used to have at school. Some kids went motivated to attend school because the free lunches they received there, in addition to the interaction with their friends. Since children were now at home, we had to support their families and not just their schools. As we asked questions in the field, we realized that some children faced challenges in terms of distress, and some girls, besides helping with some domestic work, were now supporting their siblings as caregivers. Some girls now were victims of physical violence or sexual abuse from drunk relatives, or from fathers who had lost their job because of Covid-19.

According to the Ministry of Health, at the end of June 2020: there were 46,863 teen pregnancies in total.   1,912 pregnancies were between 10 to 14 years old and 44,901 pregnancies between 15-19 years old.   According to the Public Ministry in charge of the investigation of child sexual abuse during the pandemic: there were 3,821 complaints registered against adults-relatives for sexual violence against girls. Many families are afraid to report them because they live with the abuser at home.

What can you do if the government tells you to stay home because of COVID-19 but your abuser is at home? What can you do when schools are closed, but the sexual abuser lives at home? Therefore, protocols of child protection were implemented.

Water, sanitation, and hygiene. We understood that promoting social distance, washing hands with soaps, required water. But reality showed us that some families needed to walk blocks from home to get water. Not all families have water at home and promoting the use of water and soap was useless, some very poor kids didn´t even have money to buy soap. So, collaboration with kits of health composed by gel, soap and giving masks were essential.

Education and child protection. In theory distance education with the program "Aprendo en Casa" of the Ministry of Education was a solution, but not for many. For example, Juanita a schoolgirl from Quiché explained to us, that her brother had to to her Aunt´s house to watch the classes because they didn´t have TV at home. Some parents motivate their children to do their homework at home, but others took advantage of them, sending them to work in the fields.

In summary, my leadership was challenged in terms of focus, shifting my work model, my zone of comfort. I took a class to manage stress, I took another class related to mindfulness to pay attention to my emotions, active listening, dialogue, identify the emotions of others and develop more the emotional intelligence rather than focusing only on complex reasoning and quantitative data.

During the time of uncertainty, I also realized that strategic thinking was always conditional to external circumstances. For example, many of the irregular migrants who were captured in the USA and then were sent back home to Guatemala, tested positive with COVID-19. Some in communities were infected because of an immigrant and sadly, the community with lack of information could react unkindly, protecting themselves.

As member of an international NGO, we needed to reformulate all the projects in process of implementation for the fiscal year 2020. As a Program Manager I coordinated meetings to set up urgent

dialogues with local partners in the western highlands in Guatemala. I was challenged to think about paying salaries without working in the field, costs of opportunity between protecting lives, and promoting health or think about financial execution, particularly with external donors, no matter what. If we don´t achieve results in terms of schooling learning and outcomes, what do we need to do? How can we attribute results of our programs if they are not fully implemented as planned? We needed to reformulate and changes some goals.

So, with inputs from our headquarters in Barcelona, Spain and from our external donors we analyzed all our projects to determine which required modification, and this would involve substantial modification or no substantial modifications. Depending on the answers, with just a Yes or No, we could process and approve the reformulation of the projects. Below is the framework we used to analyze our projects.

The current Project needs to be modified?	A. Substantial modification							B. No substantial modification	In case you need to make a substantial modification, what type of reformulation implicates?	
	Modification in objectives and results?	Changes in target?	Changes in geographical zone?	Changes of local parters?	Do you need an extension of more than 6 months?	Is the budget changing for about +/- 10%?	No changes at all, section A.	Budget remains the same and only accounts are reclassified?	Technical	Budget
Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	X	X

The announcement of the Ministry of Education this week, that children will not go back to school; changed my scenario for next year. I am the program quality coordinator of 12 projects and most of them are centered in supporting schools. Now, the big challenge is to plan next year, not as an emergency response, but as part of the normalization of the new reality. Train teacher from rural areas with

limited connection to internet or keeping them in small places wearing a mask does not resolve the situation. All the project activities for workshop and teachers support changed drastically.

As a parent myself, I am also worried about my daughter. My wife has told me that besides being a professional she has a second or third job; taking care about me and my daughter. This exemplifies how some parents need to work outside of home, make some money hoping they don´t get in touch with COVID-19 and come back safely home.

What helps me to wake up and start working each day is the idea that I can make a difference, there are more people facing worse difficulties, and now that I am aware that having a job during a social, health or financial crisis is a golden opportunity.

I really believe that there will be emotional consequences for children for the next 5 years in terms of how suddenly they were forced to stay home, losing some freedom and the opportunity to play. But as an eternal educator, I know we will overcome these challenges. School closures and extended periods of isolation at home may negatively impact the mental health and well-being of children and youth, but responsible adults, need to make a difference.

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Education Leadership in a Pandemic
By Aarushi Singhania

This story is living evidence of five months of uncertainty, hard work, and resilience, assisting an Australian education institution during COVID-19. International education in Australia is the third-largest export industry and worth $37.6 billion to the economy[58].

Australia's higher education sector experienced the negative effects of crisis quite early on, as the country could not welcome the expected cohort of more than 100,000[59] international students to Australian university campuses in February 2020. Soon enough, it became clear that the international student market is expected to blow a $30-$60 billion[60] hole in the Australian economy.

As I was absorbing these statistics, I was also living the day to day reality of the pandemic crisis at my organization. The week of 22nd March 2020 was historic, what would generally take years or even decades to happen, the whole university decided to go virtual within days and weeks. Since then I have spent more than 800 hours of working from home, 200 hours of zoom meetings, whilst also supporting the actual day-to-day operation of running 'an old university in the new world'.

While the pandemic hit, I was working as a Senior Advisor, Education Policy and Research at RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia. RMIT University has existed for more than 130 years. The

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[58] https://www.macrobusiness.com.au/2019/11/australias-37-6b-international-student-export-con/

[59] https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/over-30-000-chinese-students-have-arrived-in-australia-since-travel-ban-started-20200312-p549fm.html

[60] https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/loss-of-international-students-set-to-blow-30b-60b-hole-in-economy-20200416-p54kif.html

university has a special place in Australia's tertiary education fabric because of its multi-sector status preparing students from all walks of life with a motto of 'a skilled hand, a cultivated mind'.

My role at the university has changed rapidly from week to week in the last five months, broadly providing advisory services to sub-teams on testing, monitoring and evaluating education innovation programs, and developing policy propositions for senior executives to have an influential impact on Australia's education policies.

In normal times, change is often met by constant resistance. In times of crisis, there are myriad level of challenges that come with fast-tracking the change or reform process. The rest of my essay discusses the key challenges and leadership traits that helped me to support a leading Australian education institution in COVID-19.

Challenge 1: How do education advisors support political champions to have a strategic and influential impact on education policies and systems?

Since the early days of pandemic, the unusual nature of my role meant that I operated in the middle ground at the intersection of education policy, politics, and academic research. At that time, the National Cabinet was making stimulus support announcements daily. One of my responsibilities was to get across the impact of announcements to senior executives at RMIT as fast as possible and to support the advocacy process for amendments to any gaps if required.

In many ways, crossing this domestic policy, politics, and academic divide is like learning to speak another language. In pre-pandemic times, I lead with data and evidence but as the crisis hit, I learned evidence on its own is not enough for influencing education policymaking.

You don't become proficient at influencing policy making, until you spend time in the country, learn how to communicate with the locals, use their terminology and language, and appreciate the different accents. You may always be conscious you're the foreigner, and the need to be polite while having a voice on the table, but that doesn't happen on Day 1.

You pick up an understanding of the culture and traditions during the water cooler chats, follow the local print media, listen to the popular political shows and debates, and dig deeper into domestic values and ideologies, that are often part of these conversations. For example, in Australia, one of the core values in the constitution is that of 'mateship', and you have to understand what it means and how it is used in everyday life and work to develop relationships and have a meaningful impact in the public sphere.

Strategy 1: Blend collaborative leadership with a deep understanding of evidence, domestic know-how, cultural intelligence, and political ideology

To be a high performing advisor in crisis, you learn quickly to be constructive rather than combative. You realize that showing a willingness to collaborate to achieve a suitable policy solution is more effective than simply criticizing a policy or, worse still, refusing to engage.

Working in between academia, government, and policy can be intellectually and emotionally demanding. The stakes are high as you see both sides of the coin – how the universal nature of policies won't serve the practical needs of all beneficiaries and why beneficiaries' needs are not the utmost priority of the government in the power.

As advisors, it is important to understand both sides of the institutional divide so that we can benefit both academia through practical insights and policymaking through a deeper understanding of the needs of individuals and local communities. This involves the investigation of evidence, local know-how, cultural intelligence, and a deep understanding of political ideology so that we don't feel outsiders among conventional academic or specialist policy-delivery roles.

Challenge 2: How do we adopt alternative entry pathways into the university?

As the higher education sector in Australia operates in the new environment alongside increasing unemployment rate and drop in migration due to COVID-19, one of the many educational challenges that I ponder upon is, *'How can Universities (specifically RMIT University) be a part of the solution towards Australia's economic recovery and growth in the post-COVID world?'*

The dominance of job losses for the adult Australians and disproportionate unemployment for the workers in the 30-39-year-category meant there is a huge opportunity to retrain and upskill the workers who are out of work so that they are prepared with future skills and for high-income jobs[61]. The higher education universities have a critical role to play in being a part of the solution.

Even before COVID-19, RMIT University was exploring lifelong learning pathways to normalize alternative or flexible entry pathways

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[61] https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-21/covid-19-costs-6-per-cent-of-jobs-in-3-weeks/12168670 and
https://www.nationalskillscommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-06/NSC_a_snapshot_in_time_report.pdf and
https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/the-young-australians-hit-hard-during-covid-19

from school or work into the university. One of the silver linings has been that the pandemic amplified the need to activate these lifelong learning pathways so that current and future students, displaced workers, and vulnerable cohorts could be trained for industry-relevant jobs in a short period.

To help Australians upskill and reskill, the Morrison Government also showed its support to lifelong learning pathways by announcing $4.3 million funding to build a one-stop-shop for micro-credentials and supported additional funding to roll out short-form online courses in fields of national priority such as health, science, teaching, and information technology that could be accredited and offered from May to December 2020[62].

Now the challenge for the university sector and education leaders is how to be at the forefront and collaborate with the government and industry to operationalize this policy.

Strategy 2: Lead with a sense of hope and be open to adaptations

When money is tight, change is the only solution, and the system isn't ready – how do you convince both the government and beneficiaries to adjust and adapt to the new normal?

In Australia and more broadly globally, vocational education, short-form courses including nano degrees, micro-credentials, MOOCs, and alternative education pathways to a degree are more often recognized as the secondary choice of the learners. Furthermore, an undergrad and/or graduate study is considered as the only pathway

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[62] https://www.dese.gov.au/covid-19/higher-education/higher-education-faq and https://ministers.dese.gov.au/tehan/marketplace-online-microcredentials

to employment, however as the society and economy adapt, education leaders must adapt their mindset towards new forms of qualifications.

Today, as young people face the choppy seas of the contemporary workforce where a 15-year-old today will experience a portfolio career, potentially having 17 different jobs over five careers in their lifetime[63]. The growing need to adapt and upskill through a range of different careers and jobs means that lifelong learning is more important than ever before. With this goal in mind, it is important that as system thinkers, education leaders, and innovators, we need to lead with a renewed sense of hope and be open to adapt to the changing needs of the future of work and workforce to prepare future proof citizens and workforce.

As education leaders, we have to lead with a sense of possibility and be able to think long-term, not two or five years but 20 years. We need to understand the constant shifts in the drivers of change including technological, demographic, and environmental factors and their implications on the future of education systems, policies, and future of qualifications.

Looking to the future

As I began to reimagine the future of tertiary education, I would like to make two predictions for the post-COVID Australian education system:

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[63] https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/the-future-of-work-17-jobs-and-five-different-careers-20170728-gxko39.html

1. *Normalize Lifelong Learning Pathways*

Activation of digital micro-credentialing, acceptance of learner profiles, and the 'slow death' of Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) are the next new normal in Australian education[64].

> The message across the nation is clear that the ATAR is not going to follow students for the rest of your life, and neither should there be any correlations between low socio-economic background and a low ATAR score. It is a simple measure of academic performance for over 18 months, but that's all. The score doesn't measure all the wonderful things that make a young person who they are including their cooking skills and what makes them funny. It doesn't measure many different kinds of intelligence.
>
> There are many things more important than a standard ATAR score. To measure these different things that a student learns about life and the world in which they are living throughout personal and professional life, the next five years will see the normalization of Learner Profiles in the Australian education system.
>
> The profile would be a common way to progressively record, represent, and identify a full range of attainments and capabilities of young people (starting from school into work-life) across a broad range of domains. The profile would record not just the results of standardized testing but a complete record of skills, certified courses, professional development, workplace learning, and micro-credentials they accumulate across their lifelong learning journey. The

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[64] https://uploadstorage.blob.core.windows.net/public-assets/education-au/pathways/Final%20report%20-%2018%20June.pdf

concept of a 60-year curriculum will begin to germinate in Australia's education landscape.

2. *Rebirth of the international student markets*

The COVID crisis saw the sudden evaporation of international student markets in Australia, the US, the UK, and Canada. By 2025, the enrolment statistics on the international student market for countries like Australia will pick up and begin to stabilize and might even reach the same level as an all-time high enrolment of 2018 and 2019.

International students moving to Australia for higher education or vocational education qualifications will have to strategically plan their careers to both have the longevity of their professional life and be beneficial to the domestic economy. The Australian government is constantly working on updating future skills lists including higher levels of demands for digital, teaching, Information technology, nursing, and advanced data science and analytics capabilities. These fields will open up opportunities in high-skilled jobs and enable young professionals to have meaningful economic and social contributions to local communities and global economies.

Aarushi Singhania is Senior Advisor for Policy and Impact at RMIT University, Melbourne. Over the last few years, Aarushi has worked as an international development consultant and educator globally including in the US, India, Australia, and Bangladesh. She has extensive experience in international education research and policy development, evaluations of professional development programs, and writes actively on the future of work, teaching and learning.

Costa Rica's *Symphony No. 8* in Education: A Costa Rican Private School During the COVID-19 Pandemic
By Peter J. Swing

As the current president of a private K-12 international American school in Costa Rica (Berkeley Academy for Multicultural Studies), leading the educational management and administration of approximately 300 students and their families, in addition to 35 full-time staff and faculty members, is an everyday challenge. Our diverse community includes children of military veterans, refugees, agricultural workers, ambassadors, diplomats, small business owners and employees representing more than 30 nations. Our school is a unique place peopled by the world with a tropical paradise as its backdrop.

However, having a beautiful range of diversity in our constituents does not make our school community immune to differences, misunderstandings and value conflict. In fact, having myriad cultures, religions, ideologies, languages and ethnicities, sharing one-third of their day together in a confined space, is a breeding ground for differences. Leading a community like this to diplomatic resolutions on a daily basis requires many qualities similar to that of a conductor of an orchestra: thorough preparation, attention to detail, teamwork, communication, confidence and, most importantly, clarity of vision.

If our school community is the orchestra in this analogy, then COVID-19 was a catastrophic event that caused major destruction of both our instruments and instrumentalists creating fear, frustration and anxiety for everyone. After seven years of hard work in trying to perfect a metaphorical harmonic Costa Rican symphony

in education, we were met with a challenge that rocked our foundations in March 2020.

Challenges: Transitioning to a Virtual School Platform

On March 5, 2020, the Costa Rican Ministry of Health reported its first suspected case of COVID-19, confirming the case one day later (Costa Rican Ministry of Health, 2020). According to the World Health Organization, the worldwide tally of reported cases at that time was just 95,324 (2,232 new cases for that day), with 80,565 of the cases being in China (WHO, 2020). As panic and hysteria among the general Costa Rican population began, I knew that our community needed to hear an immediate response from our school's leadership — just as instrumentalists would look to the conductor first, after dropping their sheet music. Whether it be searching for guidance or simply feeling reassured that there is a plan in place for the worst possible scenario, communicating messages expeditiously during crisis situations is crucial to maintaining a sense of order among the community. Prioritizing a clear goal and message during times of uncertainty is difficult. However, in this instance, the objective was easily identifiable as the global death toll due to COVID-19 reached 3,281 (WHO, 2020). Our priority was, and still is, student safety.

I drew upon my personal experience in the U.S. Marine Corps, not only in leadership development, but also as a Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Defense Warfare Specialist to help provide a sense of composure to our community, especially for our elementary students who were already filled with fear and anxiety about the future. Through a school-wide special assembly for all students and staff regarding best practices and preventive measures for reducing infection, students began to feel relieved and confident in our school's ability to protect them and their own ability to protect each other. Feeling empowered, our innovative high school students

made a public service announcement video for social media demonstrating creative ways for students of all ages in Costa Rica to safely greet each other without using their hands, minimizing contact. Despite our students' newfound confidence, parents' concerns for risking their children's health during in-person instruction increased simultaneously with COVID-19 cases. While Costa Rica's government deliberated polices and postures, our school administration decided not to wait and immediately prepared for a national closure. Substituting an annual *Holi* celebration for training sessions with students, faculty, and staff for a new virtual school platform meant, for students, that the transition from in-person to online instruction was indeed serious. We had to act fast anticipating that the window of opportunity to train students in-person was closing. It took two days of comprehensive training to review and prepare all of our students' and faculty's electronic devices to transition them seamlessly to our virtual school platform on March 11, 2020. Five days later, Costa Rica's government officially declared a national emergency regarding COVID-19 on March 16, 2020, but our faculty and students had already found their sheet music (Costa Rican Ministry of Health, 2020).

Challenges: Bracing for the Negative Economic Impact

Fast forward to March 29, 2020, and our school's administrative inbox was filled with emails regarding layoffs, profit losses, business closures, reduction of hours and the overall inability to pay monthly tuition in full. Despite offering one of the most economic options among international American schools in Costa Rica, our families immediately felt a major hit to their incomes and financial stability. In just the previous month on February 10, 2020, before the pandemic hit, Moody's Investors Service downgraded the Government of Costa Rica's long-term issuer and senior unsecured bond ratings from B1 to B2 (Moody's Investors Service, 2020). This downgrade was the culmination of years of financial challenges and

fiscal mismanagement. Hotel, restaurant, and tourism-related business closures due to COVID-19 policies placed the country's preexisting economic recession in a dramatic free-fall, as Costa Rica's tourism sector accounts for approximately 6.3% of the country's GDP (Costa Rica Institute for Tourism, 2020). Following our analogy, our instrumentalists of the orchestra, slated to play their symphony, were not only stuck in traffic to attend their performance, but all highways and roads to get to the venue were shut down.

Deciding on the ways to extend support to families while considering the families of our own staff and faculty, made conversations behind closed doors with school administrators near frantic. By offering a general discount to our family members, our administration would reduce the monthly operating budget and subsequently affect the amount of resources allocated to essential administrative functions and student and staff services. Keeping our student families and staff as a priority, we made the decision to offer a broad financial relief package and applied a 40% discount to all families for the duration of the quarantine, while maintaining full salaries for our staff. We informed them, however, that our emergency savings would eventually run out if the quarantine was prolonged into the summer. Anticipating how long the quarantine would last was a secondary thought at this point, though the answer to this question would be crucial to financial planning and operational sustainability. Our main priority at the time, after implementing our plan for a virtual school platform, was to see how we could support families in maintaining school attendance through alleviating some financial distress. In essence, we provided our instrumentalists an alternative vehicle (in some cases a bicycle, for others the ability to walk) just to get to the show.

Though our students, families, staff and faculty were now settled into our virtual school program, we were confronted with yet another challenge that related to our financial sustainability: adhering to the

newly established national guidelines and policies regarding in-person instruction post-COVID-19. These measures, with the intent to reduce infection and provide a safer environment upon students' return to school, are required by the Costa Rican Ministry of Education (2020) to be implemented well before the reintegration of students. Although our administration agreed entirely with the measures to protect our students and staff upon their return to campus, a large capital investment would be required for expanding common areas, infrastructure of classrooms and sanitizing stations. Working diligently under immense pressure, the school's director of finance, Santiago Alberto, and vice president and director of administration, Yorlenny Aguilar, found a financially feasible way to cut costs and negotiate payments (that were inflexible for school owners, despite the financial distress the pandemic caused), making the structural renovation possible.

At last, the instrumentalists of our orchestra, now all present and accounted for, took their seats ready to participate in the symphony, but they never expected to find completely different, modernized instruments from the traditional ones they were so used to playing.

Educational Consequences and Opportunities

Almost half a year into using a virtual school program, Berkeley Academy for Multicultural Studies has been successful in providing engaging classes that meet outlined learning objectives per grade level. Much of this success was due to intense summer preparation where our faculty members peer-reviewed and audited each other's virtual mock classes, providing feedback, recommendations and constructive criticisms. As a veteran teacher, seeing younger tech-savvy teachers impart virtual classes with a high level of creativity and innovation was beyond impressive. Teachers that I once advised to be more vocal and stricter during in-person classes, were now the stars in their natural habitat of the virtual world and classroom. While

this made me realize that educational consequences due to the pandemic may include some positive takeaways, the negative educational consequences were unmistakable.

Looking beyond the spectacle of privileged students in Costa Rica (or anywhere in the world for that matter), the pandemic continues to underscore the indisputable necessity for the access to technology for education and communication purposes. In stark contrast to our private school, under-resourced municipalities that were barely surviving on constrained operating budgets for education before the pandemic left public schools paralyzed without platforms to teach their students during it. Approximately one million Costa Rican students have been affected by the pandemic and many have completely stopped learning altogether. As their indeterminate hiatus of school lingers through January 2021, the education gap between those with access to technology and those without widens.

Underserved communities in the province of Limon, where native indigenous populations like the Cabécar and Bribri and the largest Afro-Caribbean population in Costa Rica resides, who were already struggling with education outcomes, are left frozen in time. No instruments, instrumentalists or conductors means no symphony for the people of Limon and those without access to technology. The silence is both painful and deafening because these children, in many ways, are dying to hear the music.

In 1822, the Austrian composer Franz Schubert authored *Symphony No. 8*. It is more famously known as the *Unfinished Symphony* because Schubert, writing only two of four movements, failed to complete it. Many composers, paying homage to Schubert, over the years have taken the liberty to complete the movements with their own interpretations. Some renditions follow Schubert's musical schema, others depart far away from it. In any case, however, Schubert's symphony has been completed by various composers throughout

history using their own unique, musical interpretations. More recently in 2019, one of those interpretations came from the Chinese technology giant Huawei as they utilized artificial intelligence to complete it (Huawei, 2019).

Just as Schubert completed the first two movements in *Symphony No. 8,* many schools around the world completed their first two academic semesters before the pandemic using traditional methods. As educators, we can learn a great deal from *Symphony No. 8* and how it has evolved. We are facing a time where leaders need to make their own renditions, no matter how close or far away we are from its original, for the sake of completing the symphony. What is of utmost importance is recognizing that our renditions completing the last two movements cannot be compared as better or worse than the original two movements, just different and necessary. For educational leaders, just as conductors, the task, while not easy, is threefold: first, to simply not drop the baton; second, to listen carefully and intently to the new, innovative symphony being played; and lastly, to take charge in helping the instrumentalists find new instruments and provide music where there is silence.

"The conductor of an orchestra does not make a sound…his true power derives from his ability to make other people powerful."
- Benjamin Zander, conductor of the Boston Philharmonic, *The Art of Possibility: Transforming Professional and Personal Life*

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Hope in Uncertain Times
By Daniel Tapia

We are facing difficult and unprecedented times. The social and economic consequences of COVID-19 will be catastrophic: the number of extremely poor people will increase, millions of job losses, lack of access to quality-health services, higher inflation rates, income losses, low rate of economic growth, among others. This situation has allowed us to verify, once again, the remarkable capacity for adaptation that our society has in times of adversity.

At the onset of this crisis, many educational leadership challenges arise. While I am writing this essay, millions of students, parents, teachers, principals, and decision-makers in the education sector are struggling with the implementation of the school year (2020-2021) due to COVID-19. In a country like Mexico, where I live, more than 30 million students will be forced to learn remotely. Despite the efforts and policies implemented, the Mexican government, as many others, was not prepared to move towards a model of digital education.

Due to the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19, many children from disadvantaged backgrounds will be left behind due to the lack of resources (computers and internet connectivity) and levels of exclusion (poverty, hunger, and vulnerability). In addition, the negative perspectives on health-care resources, remittances, investments, and jobs will erase the possibility to generate growth, prosperity, and opportunities for the society.

In response to school closures, the different stakeholders in the educational systems have faced this crisis with professionalism and commitment. Teachers have used as many means as possible. They have adapted their own homes in classrooms, altering their spaces to

share, teach and inspire. In extreme cases, they have gone into debt buying materials and supplies to facilitate the teaching-learning process.

For students, the abrupt changes in daily routines and isolation from their peers and teachers has presented concerns about their future. Suddenly, students have had to move from a face-to-face model to a virtual one. They have had no choice but to understand that "*the new normality*" would deprive them of socializing with other students, realize that collaboration will be promoted differently and understand that learning and interaction through different modalities (apps, platforms and web sites) will be mandatory. Students have been the silent witnesses of this transformation. We talk a lot about learning, undoubtedly a nodal element, but little do we analyze the scars it will leave on the emotional states of our students. At times where learning can be messy and frustrating, students will be significantly impacted by a rising stress, anxiety and depression.

Many families are facing complexities to adjust to stay-at-home responsibilities dealing with anxieties that have arisen at a time of great uncertainty. As a parent and a professional, the challenge has been enormous. Having to combine both roles in a confined state implies patience, resilience and perseverance, skills that are difficult to maintain on a constant basis. I have worked remotely several times, but I have never done it with two children in virtual school and leading my own firm remotely for four months.

In my professional field, education and public policy, COVID-19 exacerbated uncertainty. Projects, initiatives and contracts that my firm had switched from "*business as usual*" to "*complete lockdown*". Some ongoing projects have been delayed or cancelled due to COVID-19. Despite this situation, I wanted to stay calm and lead in these turbulent times. First, I learned to be there for my team. The impulse to cut costs was understandable in my head but this impulse did not

feel right on me. I wanted to adopt a different response. Therefore, despite of the difficult moments, I decided to share with them a clear message: "*We are going to get out of this, and we are going to do it together*". Secondly, I became readily available for my team and their context. At the end of March, I decided to keep my team safe and we decided not to come to our office. I encouraged them to prioritize health and their families before our professional duties. I was aware that productivity was going to decrease. However, we were more focused on strategic tasks and we conducted this situation thinking about the individual first.

Definitely, this emphatic approach let us understand that well-functioning teams are very important to deal with crises. I have been very impressed by how our team has stepped up during these uncertain times. Members of our team are helping others - individuals, small enterprises, and institutions – by contributing with actions to deal with this pandemic. By the end of the first semester of this year, I realized that if empathy involves generosity and care, then my firm will have a unique opportunity to mainstream these qualities into our culture and vision. In sum, I have learned that values such as hope, compassion, and kindness will transcend the way we lead during these times and will set the standard for our society.

Also, one of the greatest challenges that I have faced is to clearly communicate to my kids, my students and collaborators a narrative of hope, compassion, and kindness. This is a difficult task. COVID-19 is particularly isolating, sometimes, even members of families are forced to keep their distance with their loved ones to prevent infection. Several times, we might think that everyone is facing this difficulty with the same resources than we do. This is not true. We are all facing this raging storm, but we need to recognize that not everyone is dealing it in the same conditions. As the COVID-19 crisis expanded, my fear increased. At the end of each day after the

virus got in our lives, I felt disconnected from my colleagues, friends, and community. Avoiding any contact - shake hands, hugs, and respecting social distance- was very difficult.

Many nights, I have felt overwhelmed and stressed with all the information about COVID-19. But one day, I realized that it was ok to feel like this. It is very hard to find balance in the emotional turbulence that we are facing. But I understood that I needed a more stable and solid emotional intelligence to lead. So, although what you communicate is important, how you do it and how you share it is crucial. While I was working with decision-makers, international foundations, school leaders, teachers, and students, I realized that I was dealing with a trust deficit due to poor leadership from different perspectives – public, private, social, and academic sectors.

Therefore, I decided to share with them that we would get through this situation together and back it up with empathy and compassion to continue working for a better perspective for education. Our commitment was to support our partners and clients by solving problems and finding answers to help navigate this crisis. To adapt to this change, our firm suggested to develop action plans to address goals effectively by mitigating risks and assessing impact on their key stakeholders for our clients and partners.

I am trying, as best as I can, to share advice and to offer support to different clients – from international organizations to non-governmental organizations - revealing the need to both respond by designing and promoting creative solutions, while also figuring out more equitable and resilient education systems for the short and medium term. I believe that the engine of any crisis response is alignment and, eventually, collaboration. Once we unify vision, we must take fast and effective actions toward recovery and provide clarity about our path to others. As Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella

recently underlined in a recent interview: "*respond, recover, and reimagine*".

We are experiencing a situation unfaced by humanity, we do not know what it is going to happen with accuracy. Nevertheless, we can realize that this challenge will bring us closer together and to stand for each other. This current situation is really forcing me to ask deep questions about how I lead and how I can inspire others. This context is forcing me to engage with others and develop new and creative ideas to overcome this crisis.

To regain my sense of hope and faith in humanity, I started looking for inspiration. I have found inspiration from two sources. The first one has been what I have called the "*invisible*" survivors. Those whose stories we have not heard but that they have suffered tragedy and human losses. Parents, professionals, and students gently reminded me with their faces and gestures that "*we will figure out this together*". I understood that those tiny actions had an impressive effect on me. Sometimes you don't need to say a word, a smile or an action can inspire others. I truly understood that those acts were authentic.

Moreover, I have been inspired by the courage and leadership that every person passionate about education is doing in Mexico and outside our borders. Leadership is about action and practice. And, fortunately, I have been surrounded by many talented people and networks leading with clarity and vision. I have realized how hope can be a relevant asset during crisis.

Hope is contagious. Different colleagues – educators, public servants, entrepreneurs – are working from a deep sense of calling and mission, committed to serve others in these difficult times. Some will say that this challenge is too big and that solutions are ambiguous. However, I am certain that we have the potential, as a network, to generate and share new knowledge and innovation.

There are several and important lessons that we can learn from this pandemic. Undoubtedly, there will be a loss of learning for all students. For that reason, it is imperative to assess students once they return to classes to determine their learning levels. Governments must ensure to promote quality of education and inclusive learning as a policy response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education. It is possible to think that millions of children will not be able to access remote learning because of their contexts and circumstances. But we must be vigilant that this situation will not result in children never returning to school. For that reason, we need to think beyond the immediate. Governments must invest more on education to close gaps, strengthen quality of education, and in making educational technology more accessible for more children

Moreover, the COVID-19 crisis represents a unique opportunity to reimagine education and education systems. Currently, some educators, social entrepreneurs, and policy makers are developing innovative programs and interventions to catalyze transformation in our schools. We must follow that path keeping up the momentum for stronger partnerships to make things happen and address the most pressing education challenges.

I realize that solutions to this complex phenomenon also require the actions of governments, firms, universities, and civil society with vision and hope. In a challenging situation, as the one we are living, collaboration is essential to save both lives and futures. Their role must be constructive, not obstructionist. In my professional experience, the main challenge about collaboration is not about good ideas. The big problem is figuring out how we scale a good idea to have a greater impact. For that reason, we need to nurture good ideas, imagine scenarios, and take action to solve humanity´s most pressing challenges. Blending public, private and social efforts is crucial to shape future for the coming decades and beyond.

Finally, we must lead by example. Currently, it is the most important contribution: lead and inspire. This is not the time for blame, judge or divide. We need to define a new chapter by collaborating to reinvent education and our future. Positive leadership does not go unnoticed. This is the time for different leadership. Not focused on individual leadership but collective one. Building trust, inspiration, and hope will be the main challenge. Leaders must recognize that the way they behave today will be remembered for years to come.

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International Cooperation in Higher Education Should be Continued

By Naoki Umemiya

Introduction

The Pandemic affected every aspect of our life, including international cooperation activities of my organization, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). JICA is the agency for Official Development Assistance of the Japanese Government, extending its support for development of developing countries in different areas. Education is one of its priority areas of cooperation. It has been over 20 years since I started to work for JICA in 1997. I currently work at JICA HQs in Tokyo, as Deputy Director General of Human Development Department, leading a team in charge of JICA's higher education development programs in our partner countries.

In the higher education sector, JICA extends support for leading universities in our partner countries to enhance their education and research capacity, by giving advice by academic staff dispatched from Japan as JICA Experts, by providing training in Japan for academic staff of our partner universities, and by providing facilities and equipment. Meanwhile, it promotes strengthening academic networks among our partner universities and Japanese universities for academic exchanges and co-creation of knowledge through joint research activities.

The outbreak of COVID-19 brought about significant impact on all these activities. As the Pandemic expanded all over the world in early 2020, our partner countries, one after another, started to stop comings and goings of people from and to foreign countries including Japan. Our partner universities also started to close their

campuses and shift to on-line education. Some JICA Experts working in our partner countries were required to evacuate to Japan, while others continued to remain in the country with a strict request to stay at home. Now everyone works remotely either in the country or from Japan.

Educational Leadership Challenges

Under normal conditions, we always plan and implement our higher education development programs through face-to-face communications with our partner universities. Now, however, we cannot visit our partner universities to discuss our activities face-to-face. We need to make decisions through remote communications with our partners who are also facing an unprecedented event of closure of their universities.

The priory role of the leadership under these conditions was to secure the safety of our JICA Experts. We needed to decide whether they should stay in the country or evacuate from the country to Japan, based on the Pandemic situation in the respective countries, and then to make sure that the transition operation is done smoothly and safely. Then I needed to lead the team to review and revise our activity plans, so that our partner universities can continue their education and research activities as much as possible even under this outbreak of COVID-19. These challenges have been completely different from the challenges of leading the team under normal conditions.

Means to Take on Challenges

Facing these challenges, flexibility and quick decisions are required. Our team at HQs immediately started to discuss with our Experts and our partner universities to revise our activity plan and resource allocation plan, based on the needs of the sites affected by the

Pandemic. For example, we now do not need the budget secured for travels of our Experts and our counterpart personnel, which is now available for reallocation for other newly proposed activities. We made our position clear that HQs was ready to welcome changes of initial plans with new proposals that would contribute to addressing new challenges.

Another action I proposed to take immediately was to set an international on-line meeting with all our JICA Experts in higher education in different countries all over the world, once they had completed their evacuation. Experts from everywhere, from Malaysia to Vietnam, from Kenya to Egypt, gathered in May 2020, to share and discuss their experiences and knowledge in coping with the Pandemic. The reason why I proposed this meeting was that I had been informed of some good new initiatives that some of our partner universities had initiated with our JICA experts to cope with challenges faced under the Pandemic. I thought information on these good initiatives should be shared among other JICA Experts for their reference.

Even under the forced closure of their campuses, almost all our partner universities, as the leading institutions of science and knowledge in the respective countries, had started their initiatives bravely to contribute to solving the issues brought by the Pandemic through research and development activities. In addition, some universities were discussing with their Japanese counterpart universities to conduct on-line student exchange sessions while others were discussing international joint research projects and seminars.

The international on-line meeting led the JICA Experts to get informed of initiatives of their counterpart universities in other countries, which stimulated them to move on to start their own activities. In the meeting, the Experts and JICA HQs agreed to do

our best to support the initiatives of our partner universities that try to address issues brought by the Pandemic.

Followings are some of the examples of such initiatives that JICA decided to support. At the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) in Kenya, researchers and students are developing ventilators. The demand for ventilators has been surging due to an increase in the number of COVID-19 infected patients in Kenya. To compensate for the shortage of ventilators, the research team proceeds with their development facing many constraints, such as the difficulty of obtaining parts due to store closures. JKUAT is also working on the development of web-based infection trend prediction systems and applications to trace the history of infected persons' contacts, bringing together researchers from different fields, such as IT, Medicine and Mechanical Engineering. JICA and JKUAT have a long history of collaboration. JICA started to support JKUAT in 1977 through the provision of equipment and technical cooperation. With the support JKUAT has become one of the top universities in the field of science, technology and innovation not only in Kenya but also in the region of Africa. It was designated as a hub university to host Pan African University Science Technology and Innovation (PAUSTI), which is the international graduate university initiative launched by the African Union in 2010 to improve the level of higher education in the region. Under this Pandemic, JICA decided to continuously support these research and development initiatives of our partner universities by providing competitive research fund and technical support from JICA Experts.

The support is not limited to research activities in a country; we decided to offer research fund for international joint research proposed by our partner universities under ASEAN University Network/Southeast Asia Engineering Education Development Network (AUN/SEED-Net). AUN/SEED-Net is an international inter-university network composed of 26 universities from the

Southeast Asia region and 14 Japanese universities. Through scholarship programs, collaborative research programs and networking activities, AUN/SEED-Net has developed a strong academic network among researchers in the Southeast Asia region and Japan in different fields of engineering, such as Civil Engineering, Environmental Engineering, Materials Engineering. Under this network, researchers from different countries have been working together to conduct joint research projects that address common issues faced by different countries in the region, such as disaster management and climate change. Now the Pandemic is the common issue which researchers should take on with priority holding their hands. JICA makes itself ready to support their collaborative research projects.

Another important activity of AUN/SEED-Net that JICA supports under the Pandemic is regional academic conferences. Under AUN/SEED-Net, member universities, on rotation, hold regional academic conferences in 10 different engineering fields every year that bring together researchers in the same field from within and outside of the region to discuss their research activities. The gatherings have been strengthening existing researchers' networks and creating opportunities for them to meet new researchers as prospective partners. The Pandemic now prevents researchers from getting together to meet and discuss face-to-face. However, AUN/SEED-Net Secretariat and JICA decided to hold the conferences on-line, even though it is going to be a big challenge for us all to hold them on-line with participants from different countries with different internet circumstances. We considered it very important to maintain the platform for researchers from different countries and universities to come together even under the Pandemic.

The other activities that JICA supports are on-line student exchange activities. Taking advantage of having our partner universities all

over the world, JICA promotes and supports creating cross-border learning opportunities for their students to learn together. One such initiative was an on-line exchange session between Sophia University in Japan and Egypt-Japan University of Science and Technology (EJUST) in Egypt on July 30, 2020. EJUST was established in 2010 as a joint venture of the two governments of Egypt and Japan, and JICA has been supporting EJUST since its establishment. As with a request from Sophia University, I teach International Higher Education at Sophia University in the 2020 Fall Semester as a visiting lecturer, I proposed to EJUST to have an exchange session with Sophia University, knowing that students at EJUST and Sophia University now have lost all kinds of study abroad opportunities. The objective of the session was for the students to understand global tend and issues of higher education through a short lecture and an exchange session. Following my short lecture on global higher education trend, students from both universities made presentations on their country and culture, their higher education system, as well as their university life and learning under the Pandemic. In the group discussions, students exchanged their views and opinions and enjoyed their interactions. A similar session was held between Sophia University and Malaysia Japan International Institute of Technology, which is another international joint university supported by the two governments. Other sessions will follow among other universities including JKUAT.

The last action that I proposed our team to take is to actively promote Public Relations. I considered it very important to share with the public, news that our partner universities are proactively taking on the Pandemic with their education and research functions, which would inform the public of the importance of international cooperation in higher education, and which would encourage all the stakeholders who are fighting against the Pandemic all over the world.

Impact of Pandemic on the Future of Higher Education

The Pandemic is bringing about significant impact on the present and future of higher education. The world had been seeing a dramatic increase in the number of international students in higher education. While the number in 1975 was only 0.8 million, it increased to over 5 million in 2019, with an expectation that the number would continue to increase. Then, an outbreak of COVID-19 occurred, which completely changed the landscape. Now it is difficult for students to travel and study abroad. Travels of researchers are also limited, which prevent them from meeting and working together face-to-face.

I believe international cooperation in higher education is even more important than ever in today's world, where national particularism is accelerated by the Pandemic in many countries, trying to divide the world. Global education should be continuously offered for young generations to understand other countries and other cultures for mutual understanding. Universities can provide such education through, for example, on-line student exchange programs with their counterpart foreign universities. In addition, there are many issues brought about by the Pandemic which researchers from different countries can and should work together to take on, based on trust and strong relationship nurtured through collaboration of many years under international inter university networks. International cooperation in higher education should be continued.

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Never to waste a crisis: Reflection from a policy advisor

Le Anh Vinh

Ten years ago, I came back to Vietnam after completing my PhD in Mathematics at Harvard. Witnessing the education of Vietnam at its crossroad where the long-established ideologies and practices were impelled to encounter and accommodate fresh movements from the wider world, I felt determined to serve the country's public system and contribute to the making of changes that would benefit students. My deep-rooted belief on the significant influence of teachers on students and their being essence in education reforms urged me to embark on my first position as an academic faculty at the Department of Mathematics, Hanoi University of Sciences. My career goal at the time was to inspire generations of students to find motivation and interest in the pursuit of their study. As soon as one year later, I came to realize that the influences I was trying to create could have been magnified significantly more if my learners were teachers-to-be, rather than simply Math students. Training teachers and delving into the realm of educational sciences made my targets when joining University of Education under the Vietnam National University. The six years experiencing multiple positions under University of Education, from the Principal of the High School of Educational Sciences (an annex school of University of Education) to the Dean of Teacher Training Faculty later on, has widened my understanding about teacher capacity building and related issues that extend far beyond university pre-service training programs. Realizing that teachers' motivation to change is most of the time hindered by systemic constraints which require large-scale reform policies, from an education practitioner, I became an education strategic policy advisor as the Vice Director General of Vietnam Institute of Educational Sciences (VNIES), the think tank of Ministry of Education and Training.

Like many educational institute leaders in the world, I was made to face novel leadership challenges and acquire firsthand experiences when leading the system through the Covid-19 pandemic. Managing in this unique situation may provoke a lot of reflective thoughts for educational leaders around the world. This note would detail my leadership experiences at multiple levels and perspectives: an academic faculty, an institute leader and a policy advisor, as well as my expectations of the pandemic educational consequences in the near future.

A university lecturer

During the lockdown period, I was in charge of two masters and one undergraduate level courses. The switch to digital teaching mode made me feel under great pressure in managing and motivating my students. It is much more challenging to maintain students' attention span and commitment from a distance. That was even more a problem for my master's students who are also teachers themselves and had to climb mountains of work to adapt to the new teaching modes during the school closing down period. Even though schools have tried to provide timely IT infrastructure support, the difficulties in preparing lessons and interacting with students remain mountable for teachers. Prior to the pandemic, transformation of pedagogies had always been a core topic in both pre-service and in-service teacher training. However, only under this crisis that the renovation of teaching methods be given so much attention and prove its criticality. Teacher training universities are even going to launch new modules on online teaching methods and digitalization of education in their programs to help prepare trainee teachers for the ever-baffling educational perspectives in the coming future.

Another notable issue that I have been aware of is the problem of quality control: how should the assessment of online teaching and learning quality be carried out? While the Government has been

active in stimulating the shift to distance learning, there has not been any official legal framework for assessment and accreditation of online education programs. Recognizing this issue, in August 2020, the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training has introduced a newly developed drafted Circular on regulations of online teaching organization for general education institutions. The document, expected to come into effect from late 2020, specifies three forms of online learning: (i) online resources in support of conventional learning, (ii) blended learning where online components replace different components of conventional classes and (iii) online learning completely replaces conventional classes, which will only take place under lockdown condition. This Circular aim to maximize education access for students who cannot go to school due to external circumstances, particularly those from vulnerable groups. Besides, legalization of online education would help stimulate digital transform and innovation in teaching and assessment methods, hence reforming and lifting the quality of education system as a whole.

An institute leader

Like many other educational bodies in the country, the pandemic outbreak making more than 300 researchers work from home was a topsy-turvy situation for my institute. Many of the Ministry and national level projects were in the data collection stage and countless of conferences, seminars, training workshops and courses had already been planned for the year 2020. All of those ended up being delayed or cancelled as a result of social distancing. In order for research activities and other duties of the Institute to continue through the crisis, there have to be innovative solutions to approach problems, organize tasks and mobilize resources.

For example, a major function of VNIES is curriculum research and development. Back in 2017, researchers from VNIES had been

deeply involved in the simplification of the existing curriculum to be better compatible with the new one. This was to secure smooth transition of students from elementary to lower secondary level when their curriculum is due to change. Therefore, when the curriculum had to be simplified and rearranged as a result of shortened academic year, VNIES researchers, with prior experiences and expertise, have been active in collaboration with MOET officials to make adjustments in the curriculum for the second half of the 2019-2020 academic year and also the first half of the coming year. This was an effortful initiative given the limited time, resources and difficulties caused by the pandemic.

Another important project of VNIES is the development of education sector plan every ten years. As the Vice Director General of VNIES, I am in charge of preparing the national project on education sector analysis for the 2011-2020 period and strategic plan for 2020-2030, towards the 2045 vision. The original project proposal requiring data collection travel in eight provinces had to be adjusted and some components of the investigation have been conducted online. Funding for consultancy visits was reallocated for the organization of online webinars with experts from external organizations.

A policy advisor

What challenges leaders at policy level, besides solving problems and dealing with consequences, is the ability to envision the future, anticipate and prepare for the time to come. What is more important for a research institute such as VNIES is to investigate the scope of the pandemic aftereffect and set out a timely preparation and action plan that connects all relevant stakeholders, including schools, universities, and educational agencies.

Only three months after the first official reported case in Vietnam and two months of school closing down, VNIES has initiated the investigation and writing up of an overview report on the educational effects of Covid-19 across the country. Three research groups were established within the institute to focus on pre-school, general education and higher education levels. Local Departments of Education and Training of 50 provinces were requested to provide data and input using guidelines specified by VNIES, mostly focusing on implemented measures by local authorities and educational agencies in prevention and securing the well-being of students and staff, the preliminary effects on students' continuity of learning and school financial issues. My responsibility as the project lead was to manage the collaboration of 60 researchers who received real time local data, synthesized the input from different regions of the country and put together information in the final report.

Implementing such a large-scale project under the emergency social distancing situation in a tight 10-day time frame was a significant leadership challenge. What made a real difference in this case, from my observation, is the commitment and determination of everyone involved. The experience of such a unique situation has shifted people's perception of their responsibilities to extend beyond everyday duties. Like thousands of teachers and educators in the country during this hard time, researchers in my institute showed utmost level of willingness to work towards the final outcome product for helping improve the overall situation.

However, an overview report is certainly not sufficient. VNIES is planning to conduct in-depth investigations into the impact of Covid-19. Among those is the joint project with UNESCO using reallocated funding due to cancellation of consultancy visits from the national education sector plan project. This research aims to examine the effects of the pandemic in terms of equity in education access, learning loss of students, particularly those from disadvantaged

background and severely affected by social distancing, and financial constraints and deficits, as well as solutions to the maintenance of investment level for education by the Government. The research is expected to provide the basis for a section on pandemic crisis effects and planned ahead responses in the sector strategy plan.

Education in the next five years after the pandemic

Covid-19 outbreak made the role of digital transform in education immensely more critical. Online and distance learning is no longer a choice or a vague concept that we only talk about, but rather a must from now on. The advancements of educational technology are expected to stimulate knowledge and material sharing, which inadvertently fosters self-directed and regulated learning capacity of students. Adaptive and personalized learning, therefore, will emerge to be the targets of coming global movements. This will in turn reinforce greater transformation and innovation of pedagogical practices. What is also critical about digital transform in education, on a large-scale policy level, is to direct its focus to benefit and improve educational equity for disadvantaged groups. Although the overall prospect might seem to progress positively, the performance and access gap in education can actually widen without necessary interventions in investment and practical implementation.

Digitalization of education would not take widespread effects without strong partnership between private and public educational sectors. Despite Government's strong commitment, public investment alone would not be sufficient to overcome the difficulties posed by the pandemic. In order to help minimize the learning loss of students, many private educational institutions in Vietnam have voluntarily contributed to the development and production of free TV lessons or unlocked their online learning materials to be open access to students all over the country during the lockdown period. Private and public partnership in the provision and allocation of

resources is essential to develop established technological infrastructure for digital transform in education.

Despite the growing global trend of technological application, I hold a great confidence in the position of teachers. During the pandemic, they have proved their warrior spirit: preparing lesson plans and digital learning materials for zoom classes, delivering printed handouts for those unable to stay connected to the Internet from home, providing academic and mental support to their students while coping with their own struggles and hardship. In some of my online training workshops, I saw teachers, many of those are in their late career, make every single effort to pick up the most recent updates in the field so as to serve their students the best tuition, regardless of the crippling disease. Together with the driving force of digital transform in the coming period, the role of teachers will not diminish but rather become more apparent, switching from leaders to instructors and facilitators. In the new normal after coronavirus, every one of us will have learned to better value and appreciate the essential workers, including our educational warriors.

No matter under which circumstances, people are still the key driving force, since the pandemic has given us an opportunity to realize how far we can go together with a strong will. And this is particularly true when it comes to the nurturing of our little minds for tomorrow.

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Embracing the mantra, "Nowhere to go, but up!": Story of Teach For India's efforts in adapting their training Institute for the incoming cohort during the times of pandemic.

By Revanth Voothaluru

The Indian education system consists of fragile imperfect parts loosely connected by the infrastructure of schools. Most of the children who attend public schools or low-income private schools in India are first-generation learners whose learning time is confined to the time they spend in school. Before the pandemic, there were classrooms where all children could come and sit together. They could be with their friends and engaging in some kind of learning.

There was the mid-day meals scheme which ensured that every child had at least one healthy meal at school no matter what they ate at home. The pandemic broke this entire structure, leaving the unpleasant truths of the system for all of us to see. The gaps in learning widened. The challenges in access to education further multiplied. The role that poverty played in the life of every student we worked with was no longer concealed by the thin films that once hid some parts of the reality. Within two weeks, there was a strict lockdown imposed and the abrupt announcement across different cities affected the families of our students the most. Most of the parents of these students worked as daily wage labourers. Since they could not go to work, they had no money. They struggled with the lack of basic supplies or medicines at home. All of us at Teach For India (TFI) witnessed these harsh realities helplessly.

During this time, a question came to all of us. "*What is our role in the lives of our children right now?*" Teach For India has existed for the last eleven years. With these new challenges, everything that worked for

us in the past, currently seems obsolete. Be it the experienced staff or the Teaching Fellows who have been in classrooms for one year - we all were inexperienced in addressing this challenge. Apart from all this, one of the biggest impacts the pandemic was going to have was on the incoming cohort of Teach For India. The Fellows signed up for the program months ago and were all excited to walk into their classrooms and teach in person. What was their role going to be? None of us had the answer to this question.

One of the most important experience that all Fellows at Teach For India unanimously believe to be effective is the five-week residential *"Institute"* The training at Institute aims to create multiple immersive experiences for the new cohort to orient them to the idea of "Teaching as Leadership" It also fosters deep meaningful connections between the cohort members who will continue to teach in different cities post the Institute. The planning for Institute begins in early December and the operations are finalized by February every year. This ensures that the Institute happens in two different times, one early in the summer and the other one later in June. I was a part of the six-member core-team that designed this Institute for the academic year 2020-21. All our plans and operations were in place, ready for execution. As we were planning our first staff training, the pandemic hit India.

The demands of the pandemic made us rethink all our roles. All of the current teaching Fellows had to engage in relief work. Every staff member was working for over fifteen hours a day, figuring out the operations to enable the Fellow efforts. In the storm of events that kept happening, multiple questions emerged for us, *"What about the new cohort? What about their Institute experience? What is their role? How will we get them invested in this work? What will support for them mean?"* While battling these myriad questions and the uncertainty they came with, exploring a virtual medium for the entire duration was the only feasible choice. The very idea of adapting to the virtual mode meant

that we will be compromising with multiple best practices that demonstrated success in the last ten years of TFI's existence.

Over the years, the challenges at Teach For India have been around catering to varied learning needs in under-resourced classrooms and retaining the Fellow motivation in the process of doing this. Ten years of our work has given us a repository of practices that we can implement to address these challenges. These practices are shared through the Institute training with the beginner teachers. The five hundred Fellows who were selected to be the 2020 cohort, joined the program because they wanted to teach in person.

Almost all of them left lucrative job opportunities to be able to teach in a classroom. Right now, the pandemic changed our definition of school. The role of a TFI Fellow was beyond just teaching. We had to focus on relief work, well-being, access, attendance and learning. The incoming cohort needed to be motivated and supported for this work. The staff team had to design ways to inspire individuals in a virtual environment and build orientation to leadership through zoom meetings instead of experiential learning. Above all, we had to teach these Fellows the pedagogy for instruction in the virtual medium which none of us has any expertise or experience with. We did not have enough time to read any research, discuss and align. We had less than two weeks to redo all of our plans to adapt to the current situation. *Where do we begin? What will make this efficient? How do we ensure that our impact is not compromised? What do we need to prepare our Fellows for?* We all had questions that we did not know how to answer. There was so much work to be done. There was no time to delay. We needed to re-imagine all of our support spaces. We had to strategically change bets from executing sessions through experiential learning to reading and watching. We had to try, fail, learn and try again as quickly as we could. We had to find powerful alternatives to these learning experiences. We had to see all the opportunities within this challenge. Challenging situations foster the

ability to leverage the strengths that we never knew we had. Challenges we face, build our leadership. Usually, we spend four months planning for our Institute training. We had to re-do the entire design in less than ten days. We all had to operate with creativity, high sense of possibility, resilience, adaptability and vulnerability. We were vocal about our challenges not just to our design team but to the wider audience. We opened the entire design to all of our staff and Fellows from the previous cohort. With the feedback that kept coming from different people, we adapted the design as fast we could. In less than two weeks, we had our final draft of Institute was ready. We were prepared to welcome five hundred Fellows to this movement in an attempt to end educational inequity.

Finally, the Institute happened. We saw many examples of promising leadership. We saw Fellows raise funds in the first week of their training to procure mobile devices for their students. We saw Fellows move away from traditional *"chalk-talk"* and use innovative presentations to captivate the attention of children. We saw Fellows use media like WhatsApp to conduct parent-teacher conferences in the third week of teaching. We saw Fellows deliver worksheets and learning packets to children's houses because some of the children had no access to the internet. The Institute was successful in some respects. Owing to the fact that we were doing it for the first time, we struggled with some aspects. We encountered confusion with communication. We had not factored in upskilling the Fellows on how to use technology. We did not have evaluation tools to monitor teacher practices as they facilitated virtual learning. There were a lot of challenges like zoom fatigue, lack of technology devices for all children in the classroom and the lack of effective remediation for skills that were not mastered by the Fellows. By no means was this perfect. By no means was this easy. We had to try, fail, learn and adapt as quickly as we could. Two months ago, this entire project seemed like an ambitious fantasy. After executing it, we realized that

with courage, creativity and collective leadership, we will be able to unpack complexities and combat challenges.

In the motion picture, "*Mary Poppins Returns*", when everything gets difficult, the protagonist reminds the other characters that "*There is nowhere to go but up!*" If there is one leadership lesson I learnt in the pandemic, it was this. We had to operate with a high sense of possibility. Pessimism and complacency were not choices we could afford. We had to operate with high levels of creativity. No matter what, we had to remember that we had nowhere to go but up! The harsh realities of the system needed to be fixed. This situation encouraged in us the courage and creativity to dream big even when the odds were against us. We had no choice but to be optimistic and find ways to go up. As a result of this optimism, we as an organization were successful in inducting five hundred new teachers into this journey during the most challenging times in this world.

The COVID-19 crisis pushed us to ask ourselves many difficult questions about what our education system is built for. According to the Central Square Foundation's State of the Private Schools report 2020, about 50% of the children are enrolled in the 4.5 lakh privately managed schools across the country[65]. I believe that an unfortunate consequence in India is likely to be that the enrollment in public schools which are already understaffed would multiply further. This is because many families are forced to withdraw their children's admission from private schools and admit them in free public schools due to the decrease in their income. This will increase the "number of students to teacher ratio" and further compromise with

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[65] State of The Sector Report on Private Schools in India, Central Square Foundation:
https://centralsquarefoundation.org/State-of-the-Sector-Report-on-Private-Schools-in-India.p1df

learning quality. On the other hand, to compensate for the losses over the last few months, private schools in India might charge exorbitant fees due to blended learning and the inequity gaps will widen further. Things are not going to get any easier. Hence the role of educators, school leaders and philanthropists will become all the more important.

Despite all the daunting realities it uncovered, the pandemic strengthened the realization that schools are not the only places where learning is possible. It forced teachers to think creatively, design engaging learning experiences and use different ways to measure learning. It brought in a holistic lens of balancing the well-being, engagement and learning of a student instead of a unidirectional focus on mastery. It also taught us that a student can learn from a teacher anywhere in the world. While there are enough challenges, one needs to look at the opportunities that are possible.

It is true that the gaps in achievement will widen. Hence the need to identify effective ways to bridge the gap. It is true that teachers in public schools will struggle to deliver instruction. Hence the opportunity to introduce effective teacher development tools. It is true that these challenges are going to stay for a long time post the pandemic. Hence the need for us to develop rigorous strategies to strengthen school systems for the years ahead. We need optimistic leaders who will paint the picture of hope even during these turbulent times. For with optimism, courage and high sense of possibility, we can attempt to beat the odds and create a world where no child is left behind.

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Service Above Self
By Jordan Wolff

Goals and work

2020 was a tough year for us all. I certainly didn't envision abruptly ending my fruitful time with classmates at HGSE nor did I wish to celebrate the culmination of all the blood, sweat, and tears during the school year through an online graduation, but all in all, I have been tremendously blessed. 2020 provided me with the birth of my first child, a healthy son, and it reaffirmed my fire to make a difference in the field of education, specifically through education leadership. The pandemic certainly threw a monkey-wrench into my career plans, but as the dust has settled, I believe it has placed me exactly where I am supposed to be: The Head of the English Literature Department/Director of International Initiatives at Chicago Hope Academy High School in Chicago, Illinois, USA.

Stepping into a new leadership role in a high school that serves low-income urban youth in downtown Chicago during the time of Covid-19 has certainly brought a slew of challenges. The immediate challenges arise from the decision of whether or not we should open up in the fall for in-class learning. Like most major cities, Chicago still remains uncertain with how to proceed with its public-school system (strongly leaning towards going remote) but our private high school has already made that decision: we will be open. This decision can be debated on both sides, but for the sake of this essay, I will refrain from entering the weeds of politics and focus on the task at hand: preparing our school to deliver a high-quality education to students that desperately need it and deserve it among a community hit harder than most during the pandemic.

The first major challenge needs to start with the kids. We have been told that 80% of our student body will come to class while 20% have elected to stay at home to receive their learning. From a leadership perspective, this opens up the challenge of how to effectively reach and teach two entirely different groups of students. I am especially concerned with how to educate our incoming freshmen who have had very poor educational experiences prior, and how they react to the choice of staying at home or coming to school. We can't force anyone to come to school; besides the lawsuit that would come with that, many would view that as unethical. So how do we handle students that alternate between being active at school and attempt to be at home? My team (including many first-year teachers) will need to find a meaningful way to educate both the in-class and the at-home students in an equitable manner.

The second major challenge will be to prepare our staff to be even more flexible than they already are. Adapting and being flexible is the name of the game for teachers, but this year we need to ratchet it up several notches. There is a very real possibility that we may start the year in-class and need to switch to online and back and forth at any given time in response to the city and state guidelines. As a result, that means that our teachers, syllabi, and school need to be prepared to be folded into an in-class school, online school, and or hybrid situation at any given moment. That is not an easy task, but it is one that we are meeting head-on.

Before working at Chicago Hope Academy, and before attending the Harvard Graduate School of Education, I was the academic principal for an international high school in Chengdu, China. None of the challenges above existed within our affluent high school and community. Our in-coming freshmen were prepared to learn, our teachers were prepared for what the year would bring, and we knew that we would be teaching solely in the classroom for the duration

of the year. In short, this year is about as unpredictable as it gets, and in the past, it was quite predictable.

For example, this year we are continuously readjusting our plan for the school year. We are currently a week away before classes start and my team has just been informed that we will spend one day a week teaching in our classrooms while all of our students watch from home via Chromebooks. We will also need to teach both in-class students as well as remote students (via a zoom call from a well-positioned Chromebook) simultaneously for the rest of the four days during a given week. That will be new territory for all of us as instruction methods and pedagogical strategies will need to adjust day by day.

To make up for all that our students have lost, we will have to teach like we never have before. Our staff will need to be extremely flexible. Our curriculums have to be ready for a switch to online learning. For example, as a literature teacher, it pains me to do this, but all of my texts this year will come via PDFs and online. We will be as digital as possible this year. We are lucky that our kids will have Chromebooks this year thanks to all the generous help from various organizations and non-profits and so we will rely heavily on them (And we pray that our kids won't sell them to local pawnshops like many Chicago Public School students did last Spring). Google classrooms and zoom calls will be our best friends this year and we aren't naïve to the set of challenges that both platforms will certainly bring as well.

It is one thing to ask the students to meet these challenges, but I also have to ask a lot more from my staff. My teachers are providing in-depth lesson planning to a degree I have never required in the past and I am providing a lot more hands-on and emotional support than what was called for in the past. Teacher workshops will be regular and even more vital this year. Students, teachers, and administrators

have a lot of work as well as adjusting in front of us. I must admit, it's not the best year to enter into the field of teaching, but that is exactly what a lot of my team is doing. In a year where we have already seen many teachers quit out of safety concerns for their own health, it will be my job to make sure our whole team feels motivated, supported, and heard during this wild school year.

Besides weighing the danger of bringing the virus back to my new-born baby, and being unable to connect to students through a fist bump, a handshake, a hug, or being the only adult cheerleader for a kid at a basketball game, I am scared of what this pandemic will do on a societal and global level. I am afraid that the pandemic will aggravate and vastly expand the already unacceptable education gaps that we see from our low SES students and our privileged students. The students that I will teach this year are already coming from impoverished and challenging environments, and now they have to adjust to a way of learning that frankly, most schools are not equipped, trained or prepared to teach whereas the wealthy schools might have a solid shot at providing a strong online/hybrid education. In the past, inner-city youth had other ways of empowering themselves, for example: sports, school events, and college visits. Now educators will have to come up with new ways to encourage, empower, and grow our students' confidence.

But it is disheartening. Just last week during our freshman orientation, a freshman came up to me and told me that the only thing he was excited about for the school year was just canceled (high school football). And that is the situation in urban schools across America; I can't imagine what it would be like teaching in rural China or other parts of the world where Chromebooks and online learning will be off the table. This year will sadly feed the fire of inequality that most educators are trying to squelch.

Leonard Cohen once said, "There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in." I can't tell you how amazed I am by the teaching staff at our school and their response to putting the service of empowering our youth above themselves. Every one of these teachers came to our school to make a difference in the lives of these kids, and this year it comes with added risk. This year will be a daunting task, no doubt, but the response has been remarkable. We are seeing more and more donors and more community members coming to our aid. We are all fighting the good fight. So, I do think that this pandemic has made our mission all the clearer; we are here to help these kids change their socio-economic status and find success in higher education and beyond—that is our mission. If anything, the virus has just reinforced that mission and shown the need more clearly. So while we may be burdened with numerous challenges and find ourselves deep in unchartered territory, we are all far more motivated than ever before and that alone makes me wake up with a spring in my step every morning far more than the coffee ever could.

Clearly, the ripple effect of the pandemic will run its course. It's really hard to say exactly what that means. The simple answer will be that our fears will be realized; that our impoverished communities and students will fall backward; the equity gap will increase; and the mission of many will take a punch on the chin. That may happen, but I do think we will have the opportunity to reinvent education and what it can be for so many across the globe. I believe that online learning will take leaps and bounds forward and in return, will perhaps ultimately extend the reach of a quality education to those that wouldn't have otherwise received it. HGSE last year was a great example; I was part of the cohort that had to learn and graduate online. I watched countless professors, staff members, and students learn, stumble, adjust, and ultimately excel in their new learning environment.

I also believe that the pandemic will continue to bring previously invisible lines and barriers out in the open. The Black Lives Matters movement is a great example of this. In Chicago, the black community has been hit extremely hard by this virus. Chicago has represented nearly half the deaths in the state, and the black community makes up about half of those deaths. These deaths obviously have nothing to do with race alone, they are about socio-economic issues. As with crime, gun violence, educational opportunities, health, wage gaps, and so on; it all circles back to socio-economic status. So, with BLM, people are tired of the injustice. Voices are being raised and heard. The pandemic has created an unfortunate but needed platform to call out inequality and I believe that it will continue to call out other inequalities. It is my hope that these voices will lead to real change—change that will honor the lives lost and impacted during this challenging time, but that our mission will survive and we will all be stronger educators for it.

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Leading through Crisis: City Halls in Africa and Latin America Tackling Coronavirus through Education and Innovation

By Sarzah Yeasmin

Goals and Work: The Need for Education in City Halls

Education is one of the sectors most disrupted by Covid-19. 87% of the global student population has been affected by school closures[66] and we are yet to see the ripple effects that will occur from this disruption. The world has entered the worst recession since the Great Depression.[67] The pandemic has exposed the depth of inequality, fragility and the decrepit ruins of our social systems. The pre-pandemic international political landscape left unfulfilled the promises of global solidarity as fear and polarization became the dominant approaches to problem solving. The precarious foundations of global leadership triggered more dire and unequal outcomes. Nine months into the pandemic we ask, did it have to be so bad? Public messaging is one of the most challenging aspects of this crisis as it has become increasingly a grueling task to separate fact from fiction, purpose from propaganda, and ignorance from intentional inaction. Amidst the lack of credible leadership, it has become increasingly important to establish a community that can

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[66] Strausse, V., 2020. 1.5 Billion Children Around Globe Affected By School Closure. What Countries Are Doing To Keep Kids Learning During Pandemic. [online] washingtonpost.com. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/03/26/nearly-14-billion-children-around-globe-are-out-school-heres-what-countries-are-doing-keep-kids-learning-during-pandemic/> [Accessed 30 August 2020].

[67] Chan, S., 2020. 'World Faces Worst Decline Since 1930S Depression'. [online] BBC News. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-52273988> [Accessed 30 August 2020].

foster trust, reliance and provide a sense of direction. Creating this community has only been possible through education. This moment in history will be investigated and analyzed, and therefore it is imperative to produce good lessons from it. Protests, from Minneapolis demanding justice for George Floyd and Black lives, to demonstrations in Bamako, to women marching down the streets of Minsk, show the power of collective response in initiating the politics of change.

In the absence of national leadership, we pivot to local governments and municipalities that are more accessible, and that determine the parameters of our daily lives. The pandemic has also shown us how effective and timely local governance at the city and state levels have led to better outcomes and prospects for recovery despite the national inertia in the crisis. Opportunities of executive education for mayors and senior officials in city government have had much positive impact in pushing for innovative practices in tackling issues of inequities in race, housing, employment, public health and community engagement in the pre-pandemic world. Leveraging that same educational infrastructure for executive education, the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative (BHCLI), a joint collaboration by Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard Business School, and Bloomberg Philanthropies, is providing mayors and senior leaders in African and Latin American cities with educational tools, data, and a robust network to manage the crisis.

Over the course of the past few years, I have worked for the Innovations in Government program at the Kennedy School and have supported initiatives and efforts to educate mayors and build innovative cities. This work has provided me with the opportunity to witness transformational growth in cities through education and innovation. The sessions on crisis leadership that were provided in pre-pandemic times are more important than ever as case studies used to debate and discuss leadership strategies amongst mayors now

have real time implications. The pandemic has presented a new set of challenges in learning and teaching. But the initiative has also managed to find opportunities in the challenge through rigorous impact assessment and the institutionalization of change-making by tracking the course of change. Change is happening in real time and there is no one approach to problem solving, but we now have a better sense of what might work and what does not work.

Impact: A Brave Space for Collaboration

During our sessions with city leaders we have had top experts from the World Health Organization and Pan-American health organizations, epidemiologists, and leadership experts from research universities respond to mayors' inquiries into innovative approaches and leadership challenges. This community of city leaders and experts have also leveraged resources and networks to fight against miseducation and misinformation. This virtual classroom has connected cities in two continents and has enabled mayors to share the leadership challenges in their own cities and learn from the innovative approaches from other cities. The vast majority of city leaders in the program have found the sessions to be integral in helping them to respond to the pandemic. There are more than 60 cities and close to 200 city leaders attending these bi-weekly virtual classes which allows them to access verified sources of information, a network to rely upon, and educational tools and information that allow them to make informed data-driven and outcome-oriented decisions.

Challenges: Zoomed Out

Research universities are risk averse and are not prepared for crises. Researchers take years to conduct research and produce new knowledge and become experts. Sessions with city leaders that take months of preparation have been produced with only weeks of

planning. As change is happening at an unprecedented rate and in real time, knowledge is becoming obsolete at a faster pace. Adopting new pedagogies and teaching with a purpose under time pressure in Zoom classrooms present both adaptive and technical challenges for educators. There are gaps in technical knowledge and resources between the experts teaching in the US and the city leaders from African and Latin American cities.

This is the first time that there is a leadership session series that is solely focused on cities in the Global South. As a team member who conducts research for the Leading through Crisis sessions, I am constantly involved in translating various political and cultural contexts. We are producing new knowledge and operating with little information as a crisis team addressing the high stakes of these sessions. We transitioned as a team from producing US-centric education content to producing more materials geared towards city leaders in the Global South.

I produce research on city governments and countries which have very different political systems, on issues such as innovative practices, public health, leadership strategies, and fiscal challenges. In some cities, such as Harare, Zimbabwe, the national government overshadows the local government. By contrast, the local governments in Brazil play a more prominent role and operate more autonomously. How do we standardize content and teaching methodology to fit such different and diverse systems? Leadership concepts may be transferrable across contexts, but public health directives lack appropriate contextualization. The balancing act is a big challenge when professors are delivering content under time pressure. "Student"-mayors are busier than ever. Therefore, this process of standardizing content plays a crucial role in determining the success of these sessions because city leaders, regardless of varying government structures, should take away some useful lessons for their cities.

In my work with the online executive education innovators, I witness how decisions are made to conduct synchronous vs. asynchronous sessions, virtual coffee, formats for office hours, zoom breakout rooms to create close-knit working groups and facilitating exchanges in chat-boxes and Slack channels. Regardless of the sophisticated system in place to address technical challenges, much more time is allocated to session planning to troubleshoot unexpected interruption issues, leading to a whole new set of responsibilities. In square-foot Zoom classrooms, every student can be in the front row but if the session is attended by fifty people, the expected sense of intimacy is lost. Therefore, opportunities of student engagement must be deliberately designed into the session to ensure quality interaction.

With the rising salience of racial disparities and the diverse group of city leaders to which the executive education sessions cater, there has been an active effort to have subject matter and regional experts from diverse backgrounds lead these crisis leadership sessions. However, the framework to understand and analyze problems and talk about solutions is still rooted in limited and US-centric perspectives. For example, education on public messaging to promote social distancing and the "3 Ws" of wear, wait and wash, may not be useful for cities like Cape Town where overcrowding in low-income Black townships has made social distancing unenforceable. Cities are also vastly different in their innovative approaches to tackling the pandemic as they have varied capacities and histories and are in different phases of the pandemic. While Kigali has drones supplying medical essentials to residents, indigenous communities in Amazonian cities are struggling to access health care facilities. Some cities are only using mandates, curfews and police enforcement, and have yet to define what innovation means for them.

Providing standardized education is not the only challenge in delivery. This is the first session that is translated into multiple languages. Even when everyone speaks the same language, there is a language barrier, because of how differently we deliver and perceive communication norms across cultures and under time pressure. City leaders navigate vastly different terrain of customs and traditions and making my research relevant to the specific educational needs of city leaders is yet another challenge. The problem with using US-centric frameworks to understand issues in the Global South has become more salient. City level data is scarcer for cities in the Global South. Data scarcity was a challenge pre-Covid, but the pandemic has intensified the urgency to expand data collection and access.

Despite facing several challenges, the initiative has provided a robust network for city leaders all over the world. The engaging and rigorous educational retreats where mayors bonded through public and common narratives and social events have been replaced by chat boxes, Slack channels, breakout rooms and email chains. As the teaching team performs on camera it deliberately orchestrates networking opportunities into the session and find moments to bring in students into the conversation.

Lessons Learned: Seeing Opportunities in Crisis

For a long time, I have been interested in having an executive education program dedicated to cities in the Global South. When the pandemic mired the world in crisis and BHCLI extended its programs to African and Latin American cities, I saw an opportunity to contribute to the production of knowledge. The initiative had open registration for cities instead of the usual rigorous selection process. This has opened opportunities for civic education for city government from smaller cities, leading to broader and more inclusive collaborations, when previously the initiative engaged primarily with larger cities. Engaging more cities is also an

opportunity for local governments to build stronger data infrastructure as they improve their response to the crisis and share lessons with struggling cities.

Virtual collective spaces of sharing and learning are vital to tackling the crisis and much of the adaptive challenges have been mitigated by collaboration and meaningful partnerships across the organizational hierarchy. Our channels of communication were more top-down pre-Covid, but the pandemic has pushed us to have action committees, more breakout rooms and instant texting, organically leading to a more horizontal chain of communication which has addressed much of the collaboration challenges in educational leadership within the team. There are constant opportunities presented by the crisis as it has pushed followers to become initiators. As we struggle to hold onto some semblance of normalcy, it is inspiring to see how purposeful my work is and see that purpose translated into real changes through education for city leaders in the Global South.

The consequences of the pandemic will make remote learning more acceptable and accessible. Organizations and teachers will have to adapt to disseminating content online with increasing reliance on asynchronous mode of delivery to accommodate the learning aspirations of as many students as possible. In-person class time with fellow students and instructor may become more valuable and be properly utilized, in-person class sizes may become smaller with more online options. Education may become more accessible to underserved communities and non-traditional students as we invest in building online infrastructure. Building resilience and agility into our teaching models will have to be prioritized to ensure the endurance of the program. This pandemic might have isolated us into squared boxes but the greater connectivity and cooperation through education and the stronger impetus for innovation have united the global community in this common fight for good.

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