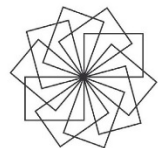# International Studies in Educational Administration

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Contents

Editorial Note

Worldwide Educational Responses to the Pandemic: Issue Four of Four

In these challenging times the Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management (CCEAM) is exploring ways to help support the education community to continue to do their important work. As one of the oldest journals in the educational leadership field, the academic journal of CCEAM, *International Studies in Educational Administration* is well placed to make an important contribution and so four issues of the journal have been devoted to focusing on responses to the coronavirus pandemic that is currently gripping our world.

As the editor, I invited short articles that either describe country or more local responses to education during the pandemic, or short articles that provide educators with knowledge to help them lead their educational organisations during this time. From more than 150 submissions, 60 papers were accepted for publication. The four issues were published between the July and October, 2020. Most of the papers are not empirical research papers, but rather informed opinion pieces documenting personal observations of local educational responses to the pandemic crisis, or about key leadership and management ideas that will help educators lead through the crisis and after.

Across the papers there are 29 countries represented, including: Australia, Bangladesh, Barbados, Canada, China (mainland, Hong Kong and Macau), Cyprus, Ghana, Indonesia, India, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Liberia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States of America, and Vietnam. There are papers also focussing on the broader contexts of Africa, Arab countries, Asia, and the wider world. Conceptual papers include foci on leadership ideas to do with adaption, crisis and future education. There are papers reporting on early empirical research. The papers were not limited to any education sector and so there are papers focussing on pre-school, school, post-school, tertiary, and other education providers.

In this fourth issue there are 14 papers to conclude the series; unfortunately some intended papers were not able to meet the requirements for publication. This issue begins with two papers that report on early empirical research of educational responses to the pandemic, and then the remaining papers are grouped by geographical location and presented alphabetically; the papers provide a diverse view of country responses from 11 countries and covering school and university sectors. The last paper is larger than the other papers. This was a paper that was sent to the journal in October for possible inclusion in a regular issue. With this last issue on the

pandemic having less than the 15 papers anticipated, I decided to publish this larger paper in this issue as it clearly is related to the special issues. Table 1 provides a summary of the papers.

Table 1: Summary of Papers for the Fourth Pandemic Special Issue

Paper	Authors	Country Focus	Paper summary
1	Stephan Huber	Germany, Austria and Switzerland	Reporting on one of the largest and earliest surveys about the pandemic impact on schools, this paper covers broad findings from 24,000 students, parents, school staff, school leaders, school authority and school system support personnel across Austria, Germany and Switzerland. Findings noted include: impact on all actors; appreciation and recognition of teachers from parents; increased use of digitisation, learning technologies, differentiation, and blended learning; increased gaps in learning and inclusion within and between schools; and, appreciation for the importance of motivation and emotion to learning. The paper suggests a school improvement strategy based on innovating, sustaining and optimising considerations.
2	Eleftheria Argyropoulou, Christina–Henrietta Syka and Markos Papaioannou	Greece	Another early piece of empirical research on school impact of the pandemic, this paper used interviews with 36 principals in Greek primary and secondary schools. Principals had to deal with technical/infrastructure deficiencies and they needed to communicate daily with school community members (teachers, students, parents) to provide guidance and psychological support. Whilst there was a strong operational/managerial aspect to keep schools functioning, there was also a heightened need for leadership focused on emotional/psychological needs of the school community.

3	Nidal Al Haj Sleiman	Arab countries	The author provides a commentary on school responses to the pandemic in the Arab region and an analysis of pre-existing gaps and deficiencies in the educational systems. Whilst critical of responses, and highlighting existing disparities between school sectors in most countries, the paper argues for engagement and empowerment of school community members as a way to enhance schooling.
4	Helen Goode, Rachel McGennisken and Emma Rutherford	Australia	This paper reports on a 64-school Catholic system in a regional area of Australia. It highlights how the system was well prepared to respond to the pandemic with leveraging existing strengths and adopting an adaptive leadership approach helpful in responding rapidly to remote learning provision.
5	Gerard Houlihan	Australia	This paper reports on a school's rapid response to a seven-month school closure during the pandemic and how the school developed a student welfare program that ensured all students had tools to help them cope (digital dashboard and coaching framework) and how they were connected to a staff member to help support them.
6	Joysi Moraes, Sandra R. H. Mariano and Bruno F. B. Dias	Brazil	Reporting on school and university systems in Brazil, the authors highlight the different responses by the private and public systems, and how the better resourced private systems were able to keep their institutions functioning well through remote learning provision. Differences across states and municipalities in terms of leadership and resources were noted.
7	Kadia Hylton-Fraser and Kamilah Hylton	Jamaica	The authors provide an overview of the pandemic on school education in Jamaica and then provide two personal accounts of the authors as parents trying to navigate remote learning. This leads to a concluding

			section that doesn't try to predict what happens next, but rather suggests that a diverse approach – edu-diverse – will provide some protection for future crises.
8	Valrie J. McKenzie and Carla St. J. Gabbidon	Jamaica	This paper explores the impact and challenges of providing a dental education program in Jamaica when universities were forced to close and move to remote learning. The paper provides a nuanced view into the management during lockdown of a program that requires practical work.
9	Winsome Russell, Greg-Louis Austin, Karlene Barton, Nadine Nugent, Donna Sanderson Kerr, Ro-Shane Neil and Teneisha Lee-Lawrence	Jamaica	The authors of this paper provide a comprehensive view of how a university in Jamaica was able to quickly respond to university closures and still provide quality undergraduate and graduate programs. Use of quality assurance processes and risk assessment strategies proved helpful during the crisis and strengthening of these areas will help the university in future crises.
10	Sena Agbodjah Agyepong, Angela Owusu-Ansah and William Ohene Annoh	Ghana	The authors describe a rapid, carefully considered university transition to remote learning through an on-line teaching program focused on quality over quantity, and which provided additional support for students in need. It seems that students have been supportive of the program provided.
11	Ndubuisi Friday Ugwu	Somalia	In this paper the author focuses on the implications on health education programs in Somalia during school closure. Closing of schools has serious health implications for students and a move to an on-line provision of health education was viewed as being important. The paper explores the challenges with doing this and recommends a range of technology and infrastructure improvements.

12	Terry W. Burwell	UAE	In the next paper, a principal reports on the work of three colleagues in the United Arab Emirates to highlight how these principals were able to move to remote learning. Leadership characterised by a people focus and showing personal qualities of being calm, cool, collected, and confident, were important for the success of these schools during the crisis.
13	Christopher J. Fornaro, Katrina Struloeff, Kimberly Sterin and Alonzo M. Flowers III	USA	The authors provide an account of their work in transitioning a STEAM/STEM summer program to an on-line format. Empathy for all, leadership decision making, mission and motivation, necessity of flexibility and technology resources, enabled the successful transition.
14	James A. Martinez and Amy D. Broemmel	USA	The final paper reports on a mixed method study of 19 teachers and 7 administrators on the effect of the global pandemic on educator professional lives. Strong teacher commitment to their students and the profession was evident. Teachers felt supported by family and friends, valued collaboration with colleagues, showed high levels of self-efficacy and felt supported by the school. Teachers had concerns about getting adequate resources for students, and the confused and conflicting communication they often received.

I encourage you to read this and the three earlier issues. All special issues are freely available from www.cceam.net

David Gurr

Editor of International Studies in Educational Administration

October 12, 2020

Schooling and Education in Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Food for Thought and Reflection Derived From Results of the School Barometer in Germany, Austria and Switzerland

Stephan Gerhard Huber

Abstract: The crisis caused by the COVID-19 virus has far-reaching effects in nearly all social areas, including education. Indeed, schools were closed in March 2020 in nearly all countries in the world. In Germany, Austria and Switzerland, they were closed in mid-March. We initiated the school barometer at this time and started to collect data one week later. We published the first findings at the end of March with regular updates on a weekly basis. An open access book publication was available on the 24th of April, and the first peer-reviewed open access articles at the beginning of and mid-June. For this paper we are reporting general observations from the school barometer online survey responses collected in Austria Germany and Switzerland with around 24,000 students, parents, school staff, school leaders, school authority and system support personnel. Findings reported here include the following. The COVID-19 crisis poses a great challenge for all actors in the education and school context. There is a high level of appreciation and recognition by parents regarding schools as an institution and the work of teachers. The field of digitalisation is experiencing an enormous upswing. Learning with and through technology, as well as about technology, is in high demand. Requirements for distance learning and digitalisation are an opportunity for differentiation in teaching and learning. Blended learning concepts offer advantages for all actors in dealing with the pandemic in the longer term (and beyond). Overall, it can be assumed that children could drift further apart in their development. In other words, differences in quality will not only become more apparent, but they will increase over time, at all levels/among all actors: among students, the teachers or in the classroom and in schools as a whole. We argue that learning is more than simply acquiring information and learning lessons. It is also about motivational and, above all, emotional aspects. Looking ahead, we promote a specific strategy in advancing the school system, that is, the ISO strategy: innovate, sustain, optimise.

Keywords: COVID-19, corona pandemic, school barometer, educational equity, disadvantaged students, digitalisation

Introduction

The crisis caused by the COVID-19 virus has far-reaching effects in nearly all social areas, including education. Indeed, schools were closed in March 2020 in nearly all countries in the world. In Germany, Austria and Switzerland, they were closed in mid-March. Due to the type of federal governance of education in Germany and Switzerland, different states or regions have proceeded quite differently (e.g. regarding holiday regulations, different ways of tutoring/caring, the presence of staff at schools and instructional arrangements). However, there are also common measures in all three countries. For example, in the first phase of the school lockdown, educators were allowed only to repeat content that had already been taught. Teaching of new content was not intended. During the course of the school lockdown, however, this has changed and new curriculum content has been delivered.

In the context of this new and challenging situation of digital learning caused by the COVID-19 school lockdown, information must be provided instantly to inform education policy and practice. Some countries have had natural catastrophes (e.g. earthquakes or floods) that caused regional school lookdowns, but these did not necessarily lead to digital learning for an uncertain number of weeks. As many countries have not yet experienced a pandemic that caused a social crisis and a subsequent school lockdown, there is limited knowledge about how to deal with the current situation and the challenges that arise from digital learning in this context.

Different actors at various levels of the education system have different responsibilities. Research could and should contribute to the current debate about schooling by providing relevant information from its knowledge base and generating new knowledge where needed and when possible. Some of this information is needed quickly. There are different questions and problems at the policy and practice levels about digital learning settings, crisis management and health procedures, to name but a few issues. Various needs are linked to pre-existing knowledge that is derived from and applied to different contexts or situations. However, of course, existing knowledge needs to be translated to the current context and the actual situation, as contextual and situational features vary between countries, regions, schools and classes. Furthermore, as this is a new situation, additional and differentiated information about the current situation is needed.

The aim of the School Barometer is to nationally and internationally monitor the current school situation in Germany, Austria and Switzerland by collecting the perspectives of various actors (i.e. parents, students, school staff, school leadership, school authority, school support system). In doing so, it aims to contribute to an evidence-based or data-informed discussion within and between persons (e.g. teachers, parents, politicians), institutions (e.g. schools, school authorities) and disciplines (e.g. education, policy).

For this paper we are reporting general observations from online survey responses collected in Austria, Germany and Switzerland between March 24 and April 5, from students (2,222), parents (2,152), school staff (1,949), school leaders (655), school authority (58) and system support personnel (80). The survey included closed and open response questions, with the questions varying depending on the actors surveyed.

To read about the aims, the theoretical framework, the research and monitoring questions, the design and some findings from the first wave of survey, see Huber et al. (2020) published on the 24th of April, and two peer reviewed articles published in June (Huber & Helm 2020a, 2020b); all three are open access publications, and, furthermore, see: www.School Barometer.net. Thanks to a great team, we collaboratively worked in an intensive and timely manner.

In the following sections I want to elaborate on central findings, analyses, conclusions and reflections based on the work of the School Barometer.

The COVID-19 Crisis Poses a Great Challenge for All Actors in the Education and School Context

The findings of the School Barometer show that the situation of school closures in the education and school context leads to major challenges at all levels of actors, i.e. among students, parents and staff. Quantitative and qualitative results on the strenuous experience show that there is a high level of stress. We assume that not all teachers or even entire schools are equally impacted and challenged by it. Regardless of individual personal and institutional coping strategies, the initial qualities (competencies and experiences in school development and in dealing with challenges) seem to play a major role. Of course, the general conditions and specific requirements also differ, for example the apparent differences among students and their families.

We recommend that specific support should be given to staff members who are currently under particular pressure as well as to schools that are facing particular demands and greater challenges. As part of responsible leadership, each management level is required to not only act within its own sphere of influence, but also to communicate to higher levels to indicate the respective pressure to act and the need for support.

There is a High Level of Appreciation and Recognition by Parents Regarding Schools as an Institution and the Work of Teachers

The qualitative and quantitative findings show a high level of acceptance for the respective measures that were initially taken. Especially the qualitative statements of the parents show that the demands on the teaching profession in the current situation are perceived more strongly. Teachers experience higher appreciation and recognition. Particularly in this time of crisis, when parents are extremely concerned with the school issues and the learning support of their children and are getting a closer look at the vast amount of tasks teachers

usually handle, they are becoming increasingly aware of the commitment of the teachers, even if it is retrospectively. Parents express their respect, show great gratitude and are of the opinion that the teachers are 'worth their weight in gold'. Some of them are actually enthusiastic about how uncomplicated and flexibly some schools are implementing the transition to distance learning.

It is highly recommended that the more intensive collaboration and mutual understanding that has grown during the crisis at many schools should be continued and developed further. Discussions, exchange and cooperative structures are suitable for initiating and implementing joint development processes for the benefit of children and adolescents in joint coordination between teachers and parents. With regard to learning itself, closer and substantial collaboration is also perfectly suited to involve students who have been left behind or lazing around in the learning processes. It provides a good way to motivate them, be it through fixed student groups, learning tandems or family groups, which not only focus on the cognitive aspects in the sense of individual teaching-learning support, but also address the motivational and emotional needs (for more detail, see Huber & Helm 2020b).

The Field of Digitalisation Is Experiencing an Enormous Upswing. Learning With and Through Technology, As Well As About Technology, Is in High Demand

The answers to the open questions often include statements about the great opportunity to rethink the school system, especially in terms of digitalisation. It is suggested that the current situation should be used for school development, focusing on digitalisation, collaboration and individualisation. This trend does not only affect schools. All actors, especially policymakers in charge of resource allocation, should be involved in this task for society as a whole. The key is to provide sufficient human and material resources to provide relief, especially for schools or teachers who are particularly challenged. It is the responsibility of school authorities and/or municipalities to provide resources without unnecessary red tape for the technical equipment of students, the technology equipment at the schools, for the implementation of hygiene regulations and for other aspects affecting schools, teachers and students (knowledge, time, technology). This would also significantly relieve the burden on school leadership.

Based on their own statements and student feedback, some teachers, especially those with higher affinity and prior knowledge of digital forms of teaching and learning, are relatively well equipped. They are seizing the opportunity to design digital lessons in a way that was not possible before. Other teachers are forced to deal with it for the first time and experience great challenges, for example in regards to suitable technologies and their application in teaching configurations.

About the technical equipment of students: Families appear to be well equipped for digital distance learning. Only 15 per cent report that they are not adequately equipped. In some

cases, students from these households can probably not be reached with digital teaching-learning forms because their domestic situation never, or hardly ever, allows them to meet the current school requirements. For example, this may be due to limited or no access to technical equipment (technical devices such as laptop or PC and up-to-date software), which is necessary for e-learning concepts, or the spatial conditions do not facilitate undisturbed work.

However, the sample may also be a false-positive. There is probably a number of unreported cases. Insufficient capacity is reported significantly more frequently in schools (around 45%).

About teacher professionalism: Just under half of the school's staff consider themselves motivated to use digital forms of teaching-learning. From the students' perspective, this is not the case to the same extent. Significantly fewer staff (25%) rate themselves to be competent for digital teaching.

A 'digitalisation offensive' is recommended. The need for digitalisation allows schools to actively use the current situation for school development, personnel development, organisational development and teaching development in the student councils and class teams within individual schools. Time is needed to work out concepts and to coordinate and validate implementation, including evaluation. Since the current situation is seen as an opportunity by school administrators and teachers, these competences could now be broadened to highly cohesive long-term strategies with opportunities for differentiation. Teaching in the context of digital transformation facilitates learning about technology such as improved (more individualised and collaborative) learning. However, it is primarily about pedagogical and didactic premises and questions and not because of technology for technology's sake. A self-serving approach is not appropriate. This situation should not turn into a hardware and software battle. It needs to focus on concepts that support educational processes and promote learning.

Requirements for Distance Learning and Digitalisation Are an Opportunity for Differentiation in Teaching and Learning

Digital teaching has proven to be very heterogeneous – at least at the beginning of the school closures. According to the findings of the School Barometer survey, its quality can be assessed as follows:

- Potentials of real learning time and mental activation could be proportionately increased even more.
- A rather low amount of work is reported for students, at least for one third of the students, and more drastically for 18 per cent.
- More precisely, 31 per cent of students work 25 hours or more on school-related matters, 69 per cent work less. One third of the students work 15 hours or less per week, which corresponds to an average daily workload of approximately two hours in a five-day week. To put it differently: One third of students work 25 hours or more, one third work

about 20 hours on average (between 15h and 25h), and one third only work 15 hours or less. This last group is a major cause for concern, especially the 18 per cent of students who spend nine hours or less on learning and doing school work.

- There is hardly any institutionalised live communication between teachers or students and between students amongst each other – at least, this was the case at the beginning of distance learning.
- Individualisation and differentiation is hardly being promoted.
- About one fifth of the students state that the communication with the teacher does not work well.

On the other hand, the survey shows that communication between teachers and students is highly appreciated in cases where it works well.

The teaching-learning forms made possible by digitalisation do more than just open different tasks and learning paths for students. The recommendation says that digital teaching-learning forms also facilitate more conscious differentiation. It is also highlighted by the qualitative data of the School Barometer survey: 'It depends entirely on the specific situation and the developmental age' (parents, ID 56, v_213); 'The younger the children, the lower the technical effort should be' (employees, ID 451, v_213). This could mean that students who work highly independently and enjoy learning receive less small-step exercises and guidance, allowing them to work on more complex tasks relatively independently and creatively instead, for example with 'learning journals, work on case studies' (employee, ID 470, v_213) or 'virtual projecting' (parents, ID 32, v_213). Teachers can focus more strongly on those students who have a higher need for support (e.g. closer supervision, less complex tasks) without completely neglecting the students who learn more independently.

However, all students need clear learning goals, a transparent structure, regular feedback on learning outcomes and learning success – all of these are the very basic factors that make for good (digital) teaching. Therefore, differentiation also means focusing on specific groups of students. Differentiation with technology opens up new possibilities and necessities to focus on these individual groups, which in turn could have a positive effect on providing equal opportunities. Consequently, positive discriminatory measures with a compensatory effect are needed.

Blended Learning Concepts Offer Advantages for All Actors in Dealing With the Pandemic in the Longer Term (and Beyond)

In addition to the compensation measures described above, part of the consideration after schools are reopened should also focus on the extent to which blended learning concepts can be effective within and outside the classroom. In turn, it will make it possible to integrate formal, non-formal and informal offerings to an even greater extent. For example, a person from the support system expressed the following: 'I would recommend that schools use the crisis to propagate school development issues, in particular digitalisation, collaboration

within the staff (opening the classroom) and individualisation' (support system, 40). It allows school and learning concepts to catch up to the social developments of digitalisation. The overall competence development of students, who thus learn through and with technology, but also about technology, opens up opportunities to connect with other areas of society, especially in the transition from school to work.

Overall, it can be assumed that children could drift further apart in their development. In other words, differences in quality will not only become more apparent, but they will increase over time, at all levels/among all actors: among students, the teachers or in the classroom and in schools as a whole.

This tendency to drift apart means: Good students become better; good teachers are creative and committed; good teaching can be adapted to the new modalities or lessons can even use the new modalities to do so; good schools can deal more readily with the crisis and its effects. As a result, the gap between more and less effective students could widen.

As the evaluations of the School Barometer survey show, large differences can be observed in all areas. There are strong disparities among students, parents, as well as within staff and between schools.

Two groups of students are emerging, which clearly differ in their attitude towards distance learning:

1. Students who have a positive attitude about homeschooling and the opportunities it offers (opportunities for self-determined, autonomous, creative learning, taking into account the individual learning pace, learning rhythm and individual learning methods/habits); and

2. Students who are critical about the homeschooling situation and consider it a heavy burden (and need more support from teachers).

The reasons are certainly a mix of different characteristics, as already mentioned above.

There are also large differences in the time weighting of different activities among students. For example, there are students who spend a lot of time playing computer games, others who spend more time helping around the home than others, and still others who spend more active time with the family. There are also differences in the amount of time devoted to school activities. Overall, the time spent at school averages around 15-17 hours per week and is thus significantly lower than regular school attendance time. In the qualitative statements, we assume that this school time is learning time of varying intensity and that students with more prior knowledge, more motivation to learn, more self-organisation and consequently more competently structured working methods use this time more efficiently.

According to one person from the group of teachers and school staff, the focus on students who were already disadvantaged before the crisis should not be lost. It should be '[n]oted that the temporal, linguistic, intellectual and technical conditions in the parental homes vary quite a bit! The more homeschooling we expect from the parental homes, the bigger the gap

will be in the end' (employer, ID 769, v_108). '(Educational) losers' in the current situation are probably students from socio-economically (highly) disadvantaged parental homes. Schools with a high proportion of disadvantaged students face particularly great challenges.

These differences in perception and handling of the situation are also reflected in the parents, who describe their children's workload and tasks very differently. About one third of the parents are concerned about their children's learning progress.

Ultimately, the teachers also deal with this situation differently. There are differences within the same school as well as between schools and school types. Some schools are already trying to act more jointly and coherently to help the students (and parents). Some have succeeded to adapt from the very beginning. For others this is a great challenge now and will be in the future.

We assume that in crisis situations, different school qualities have a clearer impact and that differences are even greater, e.g. with regard to good teaching or the design of teaching-learning concepts, collaboration within the subject departments and year/level teams as well as the whole staff, and regarding the qualities of school leadership.

Due to the radical, sudden nature of the changes caused by COVID-19, existing differences within and between schools are even more apparent. This is particularly evident when it comes to motivations and competencies in the area of digitalisation, where the gap is very wide. In the findings of the School Barometer survey, it is reflected on the three levels:

1.   Students
2.   Teachers
3.   School as a whole

The system level could also potentially be supplemented if the findings accounted for differentiation between the federal states, cantons or provinces.

It is recommended to focus on professionalism and coherence, which are required (and challenged) in terms of information flow, maintaining contact in the sense of relationship building and teaching-learning concepts, including the use of technology. Competences for crisis management, coordination of action and digital teaching-learning forms (general didactics and media didactics) are in particularly high demand.

Among other things, potential compensation efforts with regard to the disparities between students should include early reintegration of individual disadvantaged groups of students who may have been left behind or who are less experienced in distance learning into school and face-to-face teaching. Therefore, when schools are gradually opened up, particular attention should be paid to the following three groups of students:

1.   The primary and lower secondary school levels, which could also be considered in terms of development of socio-emotional skills and exchange of information and for which digital forms of teaching-learning are more limited;

2. Students at the end of their school careers, who have to complete qualification works or take final exams for transition to vocational training or university studies, where school is required in its function of qualification (also applies to vocational schools); and

3. Students with higher childcare needs, which includes school students ...
    - who show very little activity in homeschooling or with whom contact has been lost,
    - who have a higher support requirement,
    - from families with limited economic resources, who do not have the appropriate technical equipment or spatial conditions,
    - from socio-economically difficult family circumstances, whose socially emotional and cognitive development is at risk if they remain exclusively in the family for too long.

These key findings and recommendations based on the collected data are followed by further considerations, which are included in sequential numbering.

Learning Is More Than Simply Acquiring Information and Learning Lessons. It Is Also About Motivational and, Above All, Emotional Aspects

Learning is much more than just learning the current lesson. Even if they have made little progress in terms of their curricular learning material during the school closure period, we can assume that students were able to learn a great deal during the crisis: Education means personality development. In that sense, it is not only about learning material, but also about motivational and, above all, emotional aspects. Therefore, in the school reopening phase, the students should not only be assessed academically in their cognitive development, but also in their motivational and emotional states.

Thus, in the school reopening phase, the focus would be particularly on relationship work and on collecting and processing the students' experiences. It could be followed by an analysis of the learning status as well as its progress during the weeks of home learning. Ultimately, individualised learning-support concepts should be developed, planned and implemented. They should take the different learning paths into account and consider at which points students need certain forms of support (learning support, exchange, etc.).

All in all, it seems important that teachers understand and take into account the individual and family prerequisites and conditions of their students even more so than in 'normal' teaching and school environment. This 'new getting to know' could go hand in hand with establishing a relationship between teachers and students, which quite deliberately includes motivational and above all emotional aspects.

Advancing the School System With ISO Strategy: Innovate, Sustain, Optimise

Especially for school leadership and staff, organisation and coordination of these diverse demands will be a complex task in the coming months. To a great extent, this includes linking the issues of digital transformation and inclusion/diversity management. It is essential for schools to coordinate joint internal and external agreements to develop and implement carefully considered structures and processes that are oriented towards pedagogical goals. The focus hereby must be on the learning experience for each individual and the community. Minimum standards for digital teaching-learning processes must also be considered, which should be considered the minimum threshold upon implementation whereas regular standards go further and should be followed in most teaching-learning concepts.

Practices in the classroom, on school level and even on system level vary and that's why the strategy that could and should be applied on all these levels should take this into account. Depending on the development stage of the school, the school development efforts must thus be weighed differently based on the available resources (cf. Huber 2019, 2020). A school that is already successfully integrating digitalisation will focus its efforts on sustainability and thus on preserving, and will carry out smaller innovations. A school that is still in its infancy in that regard will have to focus on innovation. Different weighting will thus lead to different strategies (cf. Fig. 1).

Figure 1: ISO Strategy

ISO-Strategy: contextual integration, balance and sequential logic
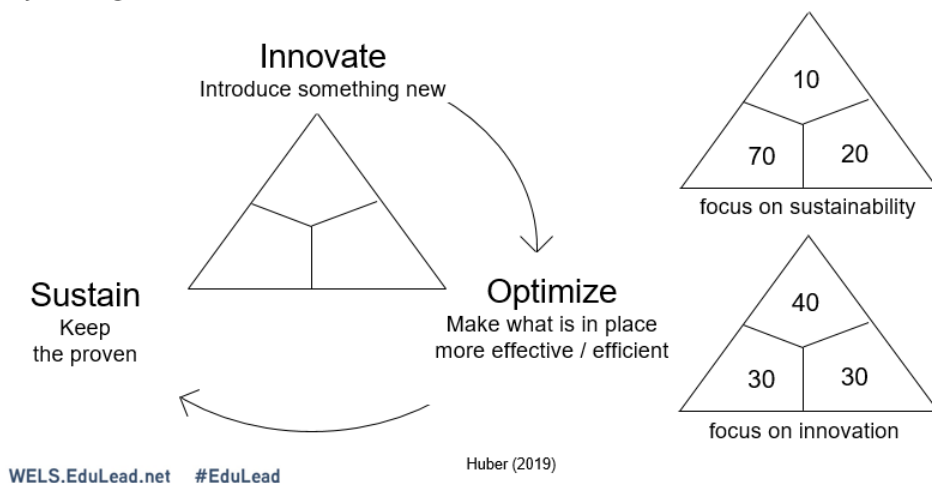
The focus of this quality management strategy must always be on maximum benefit: What are the benefits of our actions and these measures for the promotion and support of children and adolescents? The ideas for such measures are certainly manifold at each individual school. They are always faced with different contextual conditions and associated feasibility questions. With that in mind, school administrators and organisers must weigh out the different courses of action and develop solutions in their respective areas of responsibility. In doing so, they must preserve tried and tested concepts, optimise existing practices and develop new ideas. This can only be accomplished with a strategy tailored to each respective school to avoid unrelated, disjointed measures without mutual correlation. It must also be well balanced, so that ultimately feasibility and acceptance of the measures are guaranteed.

Overall, the transfer of experiences, concepts and models into school knowledge management is considered extremely important: It would be advisable for schools to go beyond an exchange of school experiences and to document its achievements and future goals in its own knowledge management. In addition to the exchange of experiences and learnings, the schools should also discuss the achievements or goals that could have been achieved as well as creative ideas that perhaps could not be implemented ad hoc and implement them in their knowledge management. Based on this newly acquired knowledge about collaborative arrangements, transformed into a shared understanding, the experiences could be used for a common benefit and elaborated. Many schools experienced a huge push, which could be processed this way and further pursued and used to improve education (especially with regard to media skills).

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School Leadership in Dire Straits: Fighting the Virus or Challenging the Consequences?

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Abstract: *This research focuses on the problems and challenges 38 primary and secondary principals in Greek schools had to deal with during the COVID-19 lockdown. By employing qualitative methodology (semi-structured phone interviews), we sought to explore participants' lived experiences of their leadership of their schools while implementing online teaching, their readiness to cope with solely digital coordination, their assessment of the process and their reflection towards a second period of lockdown. Our sample of 38 principals came from urban areas of Athens and Piraeus, where social distancing restrictions were more austere than in any other part of the country. Data were collected during the school closure period in Greece from 13th March to the end of May 2020. It was found that school leaders had to cope with multiple managerial and emotional problems demanding immediate solutions. Their workload increased due to technical/infrastructure deficiencies and the need to communicate daily with school community members (teachers, students, parents) to provide guidance and psychological support. A new aspect of school leadership emerged, based on human interaction, less control, extended use of emotional intelligence and the need to tackle ethical aspects of teaching and learning, in an attempt to keep schooling and move on together.*

Introduction

In the first semester 2020, the ravaging COVID-19 impacted on public health and affected important aspects of social life. Governments worldwide introduced several social distancing, lockdown and isolation measures to limit the spread of the infection. Schools were among the first establishments which had to close; however, schooling had to continue even with disruptions. Researchers explored the impact of the coronavirus crisis on schooling and the differentiated leadership emerging form the crisis (Azorin 2020; Fullan 2020; Harris 2020). For

example, Stone-Johnson and Miles-Weiner (2020) noted increases used of expert knowledge and school knowledge in the USA, Burke and Dempsey (2020) found Irish principals were concerned with infrastructure, student, staff and parent welfare and implementing central mandates, and in Singapore Ho and Tay (2020) found an emphasis on interpersonal relations and the empathy principals showed to their teachers: care, trust, respect and the sense that all school members are a 'family' defined effective operation of the schools. The crisis has revealed that collaboration and communication aiming at the wellness of the whole school community was the best response policy for school leaders (Hauseman, Darazsi & Kent 2020). Moreover, it was evident through the crisis that 'context responsive leadership' was needed in order to 'respond and adapt to [various] shifts in the context' (Ho & Tay 2020: 54).

The Greek Context During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The purpose of this paper is to provide practice-based evidence on how Greek school leaders dealt with the COVID-19 crisis during the spring semester, 2020. Greece was one of the first countries in the world which imposed school closure to prevent the spread of the virus. As younger victims were either asymptomatic or showing milder symptoms, children were soon thought to be a source of viral transmission to vulnerable members of society (Kelvin & Halperin 2020; Lewnard 2020). Due to the Greek society structure, elderly people are very close to the younger members of families and as school children were seen as a potential source of the virus, school closure was a solution to protect the elderly.

Shifting from physical to online teaching in Greece revealed several organisational and structural problems. As the Ministry of Education mandated that online attendance would be voluntary, students and teachers would not be obliged to advance with the teaching material. This provision was meant for the initial two to four weeks, but it was generalised as it was clear that not all students all over the country have access to online teaching platforms and the necessary equipment (Ministry of Education 2020). There were some cases of teachers and students who used this as a pretext to do nothing, however, as soon as they realised that the lockdown period was extended, they tried to catch up, often without success (Ministry of Education 2020).

Research Questions

The value of this paper is that data were collected during the first closure period – it gathered data as events were unfolding in the 'hot' phase of the crisis. It thus contributes evidence to a global pool of data enabling researchers to work on a comparative basis and offers insights through describing and explaining this novel and universal educational phenomenon of leading schools on a remote basis.

The paper seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What were the problems or difficulties members of the school community faced during distance teaching and learning?

2. How did school leaders manage the novel crisis and lead their school during the pandemic?
3. What are school leaders and teachers' worries about the reopening of schools and the oncoming second phase of the pandemic?

Method and Design

The study is based on qualitative data collected from 38 urban schools from the municipal areas of Athens and Piraeus, Greece. These areas were chosen because of the high number of COVID-19 victims during the initial phase of the crisis and the increased social distancing measures imposed.

The tool for gathering our data was the semi-structured interview, as we accept that understanding a social phenomenon requires evidence from within and grasping the meanings that informed the actions of people being studied calls for the participants' own accounts on what they did, how they did it and why.

We conducted 38 telephone interviews with primary and secondary school leaders. Interviews were taken between the 20th of April 2020 and the 5th of May2020 (within closure period), lasted 15-20 minutes each and were recorded. We used thematic analysis to process our data (Male 2016). Our sample included 20 men and 18 women school leaders from 16 primary and 22 secondary schools. Participants were aged between 52 and 65 years (mean 57 years).

Conducting telephone interviews ensured homogeneity in collecting data and wider participation regardless of the participants' access to internet connection, possession of electronic/digital equipment or computer literacy. Anonymity of participants was ensured by employing an alphanumeric, two-digit, coding using the letter D and numbers 1-38 (i.e. D 1, D32).

Results

The thematic analysis of our data was seen under four distinct 'lenses', thus forming four thematic axes: technical – infrastructure problems, personal/individual issues, students and teachers.

We sought to identify initial and persistent technical problems associated with the lack or insufficiency of the infrastructure teachers and students faced when they shifted from physical to online teaching. Also we explored how students, parents and teachers experienced personal difficulties associated with the sudden closure, social distancing and home education schemes. A summary of the extent of these issues is provided in Table 1. We also recorded the ways leaders responded to these issues and the best practices they adopted. Table 2 summarises these findings and provides both school leaders' broad responses and main practices they used.

Table 1: Identification of Problems

Level	Identification of Problems	Teachers	Students /Parents	School Leader
Technical	Lack of equipment		✔	
	Insufficient equipment devices [lack of headphones, cameras, etc.]	✔	✔	
	Lack or insufficiency of computer literacy	✔	✔	
	Lack of access to Internet		✔	
	Failure to access available or appropriate websites		✔	
	Failure of the official platform and network due to increased workload	✔	✔	✔
	Optional participation in the remote learning process	✔	✔	
	Partial unwillingness to participate in remote learning process	✔	✔	
	Lack of training on distance learning facilities and method	✔	✔	
Personal	Family sharing of available equipment	✔	✔	
	Stress of multiple origins	✔	✔	
	Increased working hours	✔		✔
	Various family-based problems	✔	✔	

Table 2: Greek Principals' Responses to Problems Caused by the COVID-19 Crisis

Level	Identification of Problems	School Leader's Response	Best Practices – Ways to Achieve
Technical	Lack of equipment	Provision of available equipment	
	Insufficient equipment devices [lack of headphones, cameras, etc.]	Provision of available additional equipment	
	Lack or insufficiency of computer literacy	Guidance, encouragement, empowerment	Create teams for learning – work together with the IT teacher –organising teleconferences for familiarisation and practice

	Lack of access to Internet	Guidance	Individual telephone or email guidance
	Failure to access available or appropriate websites	Guidance and empowerment	Create teams, delegate responsibilities to those more familiar with IT to help others
	Failure of the official platform and network due to increased workload	Fixed centrally [by the Ministry of Education]	Guidance on adapting recent central changes-organising teleconferences for familiarisation and practice
	Optional participation in the remote learning process	Encouragement	Explaining why and how Communication [telephone, email]
	Partial unwillingness to participate in remote learning process	Encouragement	Explaining why and how Communication [telephone, email]
	Lack of training on distance learning facilities and method	Training and guidance	Together with the IT teacher Training fellow teachers Training parents and young students [Primary]
	Family sharing of available equipment	Provision of available additional equipment	
Personal	Stress of multiple origins	Discussion and empowerment	Explaining why and how Communication [telephone, email]
	Increased working hours	Encouragement	Telephone Communication
	Various family-based problems	Discussion and encouragement	Telephone Communication

We expand on some of these findings below and throughout this participant quotations will be used. Sometimes there will be multiple citations to a quote. What this means is that the actual quote is from the first participant, and the other participants have similar supporting statements.

Technical Problems

On the technical/infrastructure level, the problems were more intense in the beginning of the closure period and dealt mainly with lack of basic equipment or insufficient equipment for all members of a family.

> Some teachers did not have a laptop … others, especially the older ones, were not familiar with IT. Several teachers had to share one laptop only with their children … it was extremely difficult for teachers with three or more children. (D15), (D16)

School leaders provided teachers with what stocked equipment they had at school or in the school IT labs to help them design and implement online teaching. Apart from teachers, students also lacked equipment. This problem was fixed centrally by the Ministry of Education and the school leaders acted only as the responsible persons to record the needy students and deliver the equipment.

> Most parents and students do not have the necessary equipment; they try to have access using their mobile phones. (D14)

Digital Knowledge

The second major problem was computer illiteracy and difficulties with digital learning. Not all teachers were well familiar with distant learning platforms and tools, and students and parents had very little knowledge of how to join the learning platforms and exploit the best of them.

School leaders formed peer learning teams, usually of three or more members: themselves, the deputy heads, the IT teachers and teachers with a higher IT knowledge to guide colleagues, parents and students.

> I organised the whole process for my teachers…. How to acquire knowledge on using these new tools … not all of them know how … we formed mixed teams and the most knowledgeable helped those less familiar with IT (D4)

Initially, the central platform system had problems and often crashed due to the sudden increased workload.

Leadership Presence

School leaders were among the few employees who were mandated to go to their workplace during the closure period and be in constant communication with their superiors in order to normalise emergencies.

… so many issues to settle, working with the borough officials to mobilise the provision of laptops for students, collaborating with the LEA for the refugees education during crisis (D10)

… work together with the borough about preparing school spaces … with the LEA to plan split classes for reopening. (D32)

Communication

However, what the great majority of our sample stressed was the need for daily verbal communication with teachers, parents and students. Communication was realised through many channels: telephone, email and teleconferences. Thus, school leaders attempted to substitute physical face-to-face communication. The purpose of communicating with every school member was to provide support, encouragement and empowerment to go on. School leaders proved particularly sensitive to individual problems and worked towards alleviation of personal difficulties or dilemmas.

… I phone the teachers every day to see how they are doing at home. (D5, D13, D1)

… to say a word of comfort. (D11, D27, D6)

… to kindly remind everyone that we are still working, we are not on holiday (D1, D16, D38) … to keep in touch. (D2, D17, D20, D31)

… for social reasons, not to cut bonds, not to move away from each other. (D2, D6)

… for psychological support; it is comforting for the teacher to see that the principal is standing by him/her in their personal difficulties. (D24, D27,D9)

… to support each other so as to be able to support our students and their families. (D13, D14)

Our teleconferences aim more at supporting each other, rather than gaining information on digital teaching; psychological health is more important as our daily routine stopped abruptly; to see your colleagues, even on the computer screen, and talk and exchange experiences, is very positive for all of us (D12)

Long-Term Concerns

Additionally, school leaders expressed their worries about 'the next day': what is going to happen when the schools reopen or whether a new lockdown will be imposed during the next school year [2020-2021]? They noted a lack of clarity and confusion from the Ministry of Education. Though their worries refer to short-term managerial aspects of everyday operational issues, they unveil deeper ethical dilemmas. More specifically:

… it is easy to mandate on the central level … how are we going to impose health measures with the 1st or 2nd grade children? (D3)

… for examples how am I supposed to split so many classes to keep safe distance? In a school with 450 students! It means morning and afternoon shifts…. And how this

affects our lives and students' lives? I will have to be in my office all day and all night! (D19)

…. I am afraid that people at the Ministry are incapable of understanding what happens on the basic level… they are confused themselves… we are asked to provide for physical education and for online education at the same time… it is not impossible, though, for those who have been used to it.. we are not a university … we are a neighbourhood school … (D25)

… and what about continuity and equity for all … big words with no meaning in the real world? ... how to secure that home delivery of the curriculum is successful for every student? (D31)

… I wonder how I am to secure safety and psychological support to everybody, if lockdown will continue … I am stressed myself…. I do not know whether I will keep supporting others … (D17)

Discussion

Answers to our research questions provided insight on how the school leaders of our sample responded to the first phase of the crisis. They acted on two distinct levels:

Operational–Managerial

They had to make many on-the-spot decisions to execute central directives and keep their schools operating during the pandemic and made short-term plans of actions based on sharing knowledge, collaboration and peer learning activities. They realised the difficulty of planning in uncertain times, so they followed the simplest strategic pattern of solving a problem the moment it happened with whatever resources they had at hand. In other words, there was a contextually based response, which had also been noted by other researchers exploring responses to the pandemic (e.g. Ho & Tay 2020).

Emotional–Psychological

They realised that it was important to keep communication going by using digital technology. They incorporated it in their daily leadership practice. Moreover, they emphasised the human relation element by providing encouragement and support to all members of the school community. The great majority of the school leaders exercised emotional intelligence to its full potential to keep teachers working virtually together and enhance students' participation with a view to equity of learning. This finding is in agreement with the many papers exploring responses to the pandemic (i.e. Brelsford et al. 2020; Fernandez & Shaw 2020; Hauseman et al. 2020; Ho & Tay 2020).

Concluding Remarks – Implications

Though it is still quite early to conclude on an emergent type of differentiated school leadership mentioned by a number of researchers (Azorin 2020; Fullan 2020; Harris 2020), we observed similar tendencies in the behaviour of the principals in our sample:

- A pattern of networked leadership based on human interaction
- Less control, more support to move on together
- Greater use of professional emotional intelligence
- A greater need to address ethical aspects of school leadership (new ethical dilemmas regarding equity and equality for all)

Reflection on these changes leads to a number of questions for further consideration regarding the assumption of a new 'paradigm' of school leadership:

- Are we moving towards a more collaborative culture?
- Is this a bond stemming out of necessity, or through a deep understanding of the ephemeral nature of life?
- Did necessity make school leaders more sensitive? Will this sensitivity be in place after the crisis?
- Is school leadership capable of securing equity and equality for all, or has the crisis exacerbated existing gaps and opened up new ones?

As the crisis is not over yet, further research on how school communities reacted all over the world will show whether the lessons from the COVID-19 crisis have been learnt and whether the emergent paradigm of school leadership for the wellbeing for all is sustainable in the long term.

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Manifestations of Neo-Liberalised and Politically Incapacitated Societies: Educational Response to the Pandemic in the Arab Region

Nidal Al Haj Sleiman

Abstract: *This paper offers a commentary on the response to the pandemic in the Arab region and an analysis of pre-existing gaps and deficiencies in the educational systems. Due to the shortage in empirical studies in this area, this commentary was written based on current observations and an analysis of relevant literature and scholarly work, mainly Freire (1970) and Giroux (2011). This critical paper paints a gloomy picture but also offers hope for education in the Arab world. It concludes by discussing how the engagement and empowerment of teachers, students and parents can contribute to a possible reinvention and redesign of the educational system.*

Keywords: Arab region, neoliberalism, private sector, public education

Response to the Pandemic: The Digital, Economic and Social Divide

The COVID-19 outbreak has caused a major education crisis, resulting in school and university closure and disruption across the globe. Education in the Arab region is one of the sectors mostly affected by the pandemic (UNESCO 2020a). In a fragile educational system where 13 million children and youth were already out-of-school due to political and economic reasons, an additional 100 million learners (El-Kogali & Krafft 2019) are now affected by school and university interruption. Despite a series of reforms, the region remained stuck in a low learning-low skills level and poor outcomes compared to average international rates (El-Kogali & Krafft 2019). Arab education regimes have been described as tenuous, stuck in low attainment levels, and traditional; thus, struggling with serious gaps long before the pandemic (Ghanem et al. 2013). Although different countries have developed solutions and strategies to face this interruption, their response can be described as insufficient due to persisting gaps (UNESCO 2020b).

While this paper focuses on educational responses to the pandemic and the major underlying gaps in the educational systems in the region, it will not be possible to discuss educational problems in isolation from political, economic and societal realities. Understanding the context surrounding educational regimes provides a wider lens to view the problematic nature of education in the region. Response to the educational lockdown has strongly mirrored pre-existing structures and ruptures in educational organisations as well as issues of accessibility and digitisation. Only a limited number of schools in the region might have responded adequately by transferring their academic programmes into online platforms through fast-paced solutions and an effective communication process. The community associated with this group of schools mostly belongs to a minority of middle and upper middle class families or the wealthy population who could provide their children with suitable working spaces and the needed tools to connect with their academic programmes. The remaining majority was divided into three tiers:

The first tier includes for-profit medium- or small-sized private schools that provide minimal to adequate services during normal circumstances. They serve low middle class communities which have enduring economic and social difficulties, and are not entitled to governmental or corporate financial support. Their reaction to the crisis was mainly focused on coping mechanisms and cost-reduction; thus, responding with limited capacity to the crisis. Many of these schools had difficulties managing remote teaching and learning, and consequently, struggled to provide quality training and resources. Others struggled with maintaining consistent wages.

The second tier of schools belongs to the impoverished public sector which encompasses a large portion of the student body across the region except in Lebanon (Rugh 2002). Public schools and universities have been least responsive to the COVID19 crisis with a teaching body that has been enfeebled and undermined for decades. Response to the pandemic was limited to delivering content through online platforms in the most fortunate areas with limited interaction and attendance, while in other areas this was not possible due to limited or no accessibility. Some teachers used social media applications to share instructional material, whereas others used short messaging systems due to lack of connectivity in their areas (O. Al-Barghouti, Coping with the pandemic, Manhajiyyat, 2020). In Lebanon, Tunisia and Iraq, for instance, governments allocated a TV channel to present lessons for key subjects and higher grade levels. This one-sided delivery model was available to those who were lucky to have electricity but it lacked any form of interaction, assessment or feedback. The relationship of teachers and students was completely disconnected.

The third tier includes hundreds of thousands of refugee students who were completely 'robbed' of their education due to the COVID-19 outbreak (Shuayb 2020). Refugees, who can't afford school fees in the host countries (Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq) are usually admitted to public schools where international donors pay the governments to educate them or, rather, to keep them in the region (Shuayb 2020). They are not mixed with local students due to high rates of racism and xenophobia (Shuayb 2020); instead, they are squeezed into afternoon

timings with part-time teachers, ambiguous recruitment policy and unclear guidance for instruction and curriculum, poor or no assessments, in addition to limited resources. Palestinian refugee students, on the other hand, are mostly enrolled in UNRWA funded schools, mainly in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. These have been poorly functioning due to severe budget cuts since 2018 (UN 2018). Refugee students have limited accessibility to devices, connectivity and electricity. They live in crowded houses, rooms, or tents with no adequate working spaces. In some areas of Yemen, Libya, Syria, Palestine, Sudan and Iraq where millions of people are internally displaced (GEM 2019), the discussion of educational response is poor or non-existent due to the daily concerns around safety and survival. The schools that host them are little more than conventional, poorly managed, and in many cases corrupted (Shuayb 2020). These students are now neglected in dehumanising camps among vulnerable communities where education is the least of their concerns.

Response

Given the circumstances, the educational response to the COVID-19 crisis over the last six months mirrored the existing divide. Most private schools were busy finding ways to cope and train their teachers to adjust to new models of schooling. Their leadership and teachers redesigned new forms of relationships with students and changed their academic conduct. Also, due to the economic crises caused by the pandemic, enrolment rates for 2020-2021 dropped; a situation that was remedied by cutting wages or dismissing teachers. No official response to this situation was reported so far.

On the contrary, public schools' response seemed to take place below adequate lines. The response divide was beyond digitisation, academics, and wellbeing. Teachers worked with limited facilities and limited or no training, and many of them worked based on personal initiatives. Families, however, hardly questioned this situation and official educational authorities seem to be helpless or completely absent. The intense division between private and public schools was striking and represented a history of marginalisation of a whole community that is more concerned with urgent needs. While different countries in the region might have different educational problems and deficits, the narrative of under-performing public schools and universities is mostly homogenous across the region with the exception of a few Gulf countries.

As a matter of fact, many families are destitute and helpless or absorbed in self-blame for not enrolling their children in private schools instead of demanding the right to accessible quality education before and amidst this pandemic: an Arab version of Katz's (1989) notion of the underserving poor, where people are blamed for not engaging in the system. A trope of individual responsibility and neoliberal citizenship can describe the social scene in most Arab societies. With welfare state devolution, retraction, decomposition and intrusive political apparatus (Wolford & Nelund 2013), education is not in good shape. The neoliberalisation of education has been widely normalised among most social groups whereas conversations of

the broad picture of educational goals and outcomes have been ignored. The notions of good education for a better quality of life, democracy, and social wellbeing seem to be domineered by sermons of education for employability and social status. Nonetheless, an economically deregulated private educational sector that is better structured than the public sector has not resulted in improving educational quality. According to the 2016 Arab Human Development Report (cited in Muasher & Brown 2018), overall, the quality of education is poor and student learning is disappointing, both by national and international standards. 'Education by rote learning is still in fashion in much of the Middle East' (Doyle 2018: para. 6) and youth unemployment is relatively high (Rugh 2002). Responding to the 2020 pandemic has been just another version of the pre-pandemic reality: investing in technology and communication platforms and enacting these in daily teaching processes while deeply ingrained rifts and problems are still persistent.

Historical Context

Modern educational systems in the region emerged through the colonial era (1940s-1960s) and continued to develop within the agendas of national liberal movements that soon turned into neoliberal structures forcing the constitution of new social, economic, and educational identities (Nicholls 2010). Constant political turmoil continued to impact different areas of the region; persistent occupation, civil wars, sectarian regimes, corrupted or militarised systems to name a few. At the moment, public schools occupy a large portion of the population in different countries and suffer from sluggish development and constant deficits in funding, management, training, and outcomes (Nasser 2018: n.p.). Public education continued to operate in outdated structures while private organisations were flourishing since the 1990s under different names; international, religious, sectarian, and elite schools. Currently, most private schools and universities are engaged in corporate investments, partnerships with the public sector, or with politicians, and benefit from existing or relaxed legislations which made them too powerful to be questioned. The notions of quality control and evaluation were non-existent or ceremonial. The only exception to this reality were the 'Gulf states where governments have lately invested in educational reform' and a mechanism for overseeing private schools, nonetheless, 'it is too early for them to show educational gains' (Nasser 2018: n.p.).

This complicated political reality can be described as a hindrance to the development of educational systems. Despite the development of some reputable private organisations, it should not be understood though that privatisation is necessarily equated with quality. The existing neoliberal economy supported by politicians and the socio-economic elite not only created business-like models of education, but gradually debilitated the general belief in the significance of public education especially when paralleled with an incapacitated public sector.

Neoliberalism fostered the conception of exchangeability and allowed notions of service and consumerism to dominate the social structure. It is now an inherent belief that schools offer services and that teachers serve their employers and get paid for their service. The widely accepted notion that you get what you pay for in education is a dangerous one. Families who view themselves as clients in a business-like school system, or as incapable citizens in outdated schools and societies have been deprived of social agency. The absence of educational accountability and political responsibility and the lack of social agency contributed to a declining trust and a rising sense of despair; a situation that is highly legitimised or probably misrecognised (Bourdieu 1977), due to constant turmoil and exhaustion in the Arab world.

Marginalisation and Political Alienation: Prevalent Issues of Education, Politics and Society

Decades of neoliberal economy and political instability lead to fragmented societies that are not only impoverished but politically alienated with no form of democratic participation and no hope in reform. 'With neoliberal agendas shaping the future of education many of the Arab publics are pessimistic' (Thomas 2017: n.p.), due to a stagnant political culture and immutable political structures that characterise much of the Middle East (Zayani 2014). Their engagement in political life beyond election is rather low or hardly exists (Thomas 2018). Issues such as educational quality, equity and accessibility are not a part of public conversations. Amidst all of this, educational discussions and demands of improvement seem to be a privilege; in many cases these demands were politicised and blue-pencilled.

What Does the Educational System Look Like?

The socio-economic and political state of the region resulted in a poorly governed public sector that is constantly drained and disempowered where teachers were vulnerable bearing the cost of working in a defected system or facing the threat of unemployment. The private sector, on the other hand, is totally or partially owned by the political minority or their partners, whether local or multinational corporations, and serves corporate or combined corporate and political agendas. Their staff and teachers are trained to teach towards ensuring high test scores that are advertised to secure high enrolment rates of those who are willing to identify with a specific social class or simply reproduce their status. Conformity and compliance as well as service and survival are the norms. Leaders and teachers are expected to comply rather than to lead. Leading is minimised to managing and reproducing rather than functioning as reflective 'public intellectuals who contribute to creating critical consciousness or social development' (Nicholls 2010: n.p.). Their role is confined to content and product-delivery rather than promoting critical thinking and social identity (Freire 1970). Decades of denying productive dialogues with teachers and leaders and reducing the scope of educators' and families' engagement to one of demand and supply have resulted in the absence of an

educational identity, ideology and direction. The fact that this reality is not problematised in the Arab world is highly concerning.

The teaching profession has been a victim of multiple policies which consistently de-empowered teachers by censoring or restricting their unions, if they ever existed (MEE 2020). Decades of privatisation and neoliberalism aligned with the impoverishment of the public sector and insignificant public accountability systems, as well as poor democratic infra-structure, fragile laws, low income and minimal professional development created a sense of despair. On the other hand, private schools were supported in different ways, through political or economic partnerships, particularly, in terms of training, technology, and digitisation (Nasser 2018: n.p.). However, the same neoliberal discourse governing the private sector made teachers economically insecure, exposed to harsh management decisions, performative work styles, payment cuts, overworking, or being randomly dismissed. This is particularly dangerous in countries where social welfare systems are absent, and political accountability is missing. As a result, most teachers in the private and public sector alike were left to face this pandemic alone with no professional bodies to rely on.

Why Does This Matter?

The general absence of a collective interest in improving accessibility to modern education, teaching quality, curriculum, and educational outcomes in the region reflects a perilous inclination towards marginalising education and relegating freedom and human development. According to Freire (1970), education that does not promote critical social consciousness is eventually harmful because it transforms people into subjects rather than agents. The more critical part is subjectivising teachers and leaders, deprofessionalising them, and denying their social agency.

Although the pandemic did not reveal unknown facts about educational systematic gaps in the Arab world, it contributed to expanding the learning crises by maximising the size of the marginalised population and reducing the margin of the privileged minority. 'While neoliberal fascism' and political corruption are 'circulating' around most Arab societies and their 'harmful impacts have been normalised' (Giroux 2020: n.p.), a contextual understanding of educational issues is needed as well as a thoughtful review of the reasons leading to the side-lining of educational problems as trivial issues. Marginalising educational discussions around national curriculum goals and priorities, key learning gaps, and disconnecting schooling from broader social goals cannot be incidental. It is a major problem that has led to an educational crisis in the region for many years and has resulted in detrimental influences economically, socially, and politically. It is also a critical indicator of what the region will look like over the next few decades. While educational reform is strongly needed, it should not be only based on school improvement, funding, and digitalisation; it should also focus on citizen engagement, stability (Doyle 2018) and social justice.

Is There Hope?

While the tone of this commentary might seem anxious and pessimistic, it is through this anxiety and critique that we can imagine a new reality and conceive a sense of hope. Education that is based on critical thinking, cognitive engagement and dialogue is key to the development of our educational systems. It is also a matter of planning, funding, digitisation, accessibility and teacher training. A path that empowers teachers, students and families is strongly needed where they can act as 'critical agents who can hold power accountable and work in the future to eliminate the economic, political, and educational conditions that allow such pandemics to erupt in such death dealing forms' (Giroux 2020: n.p.). While we need to acknowledge the complicated situation, a serious conversation can help to revive education as a means of social and human advancement. 'A pedagogy of denial will not be helpful' (Nicholls 2010: n.p.). Raising these difficult questions might be a starting point to addressing complicated educational problems in the region. According to Giroux (2020: n.p.) 'a discourse of anxiety should give way to a discourse of critique and a discourse of critique should give way to a discourse of possibility, and a discourse of possibility means that you can imagine a future very different from the present'.

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An Adaptive Leadership Response to Unprecedented Change

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Abstract: *This paper explores the leadership within the Catholic Education Diocese of Ballarat in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic. It demonstrates how context has always played an important part in the educational practices within remote and rural communities and shows how the Diocesan leadership team and the community responded to the new unprecedented challenge of COVID-19 and developed key strategies that supported the whole educational community. Quickly leveraging existing strengths and adopting an adaptive leadership approach were found to be helpful in responding rapidly to remote learning provision.*

Keywords: Change, adaptive leadership, crisis management, rurality, isolation, remote learning

Introduction

When we discuss education and educational practices we do so within a context. Leadership in context has been the focus of numerous writers in the field of leadership (Gurr, Drysdale & Goode 2020; Hallinger 2018; O'Donoghue & Clarke 2009). Context has rarely been more important than in the current pandemic. This paper explores the COVID-19 response of the Catholic Education Diocese of Ballarat and demonstrates how adaptive leadership can help manage unprecedented change.

The Catholic Education Office in the Diocese of Ballarat provides a multi-tiered system of support to 53 primary (elementary) schools and 11 secondary schools ranging in size from 1,400 students to 32 students. It covers a vast area in rural Victoria, extending across the west of the state, over 500kms from the Murray River at the northernmost point, to the Southern Ocean. Many of the schools in the diocese are set in isolated areas.

Crisis, challenges and disruptions are not uncommon in rural settings, but 2020 has been exceptional. In January 2020, children, teachers and educational leaders all over Australia returned to school to begin the year (the Australian school year runs from January to December), under the literal cloud of an overwhelming national emergency, as large parts of the country had experienced devastating bushfires. The Catholic Education Community of

the Ballarat Diocese responded through prayer and support for those impacted by fire; families whose loved ones had lost their homes, their livelihoods and even their lives. Resilience, flexibility and adaptability are hallmarks of people working in challenging circumstances. Regional Victoria is no stranger to devastation. From decades-long droughts, to 'once in millennia' floods, this self-reliant community and school leaders know what it takes to survive the unexpected. The bushfire crisis was only the beginning of the most extraordinary school year in living memory.

This paper poses the question, 'Is the challenge of COVID-19 different to the challenges that staff and school communities have faced in the past, and, if it is, does it require a different response?' Towards the end of World War 11, Winston Churchill commented that we should, 'Never let a good crisis go to waste'. In July, 2020, Yong Zhao, a professor at both The University of Melbourne and the University of Kansas, repeated this truism in a webinar (https://education.unimelb.edu.au/news-and-events/webinar-series-propelling-education-th rough-a-COVID-19-world) citing the three things we can take from this pandemic: it has given us a reason to stop and think; it has connected more people; and lastly, it has tested traditional ways of teaching, and thus, education has become more student driven. The educators of the Ballarat Diocese acknowledge that their profile and circumstances have required specific solutions and extraordinarily adaptive leadership, and this paper suggests they have ably risen to the occasion

Background

When schools across Victoria were compelled to shift to remote learning in March 2020, the diocese was in a good position to respond. An online component, *The HIVE* website (https://hive.ceob.edu.au/), was already developed to support the most isolated students, teachers and leaders.

In 2019, three Diocesan Education Officers with recent school leadership experience conceived a project, named *The HIVE*. Having perceived a gap between the Catholic Education Ballarat (CEB) resources, both material and human, and school knowledge of and access to those resources, they saw an opportunity to support schools by building an online suite of school improvement tools. The title *The HIVE* was inspired by the title of the school improvement framework, 'Characteristics of Highly Effective Catholic Schools', the 'HI' of Highly and the 'VE' of Effective. The project was approved, a team established and work had begun when in March 2020 the outbreak of COVID-19 in Australia and the move to remote learning redirected the whole project. That *The HIVE* project and team were already in place enabled this support structure to be leveraged into an immediate response to resource and connect schools as they adapted to remote learning. *The HIVE* website became a reference point, not only for the diocese of Ballarat, but for other systems, leaders and teachers throughout Australia.

Ongoing Challenges

The vast expanse of the regional Victorian landscape, and the diversity of the people who call these beautiful, rugged and at times dangerous places home, depend upon unique and extraordinarily resourceful ways of living. School days can be long. Some teachers and their students travel by bus more than an hour each way to school and, in some cases, are also expected to participate in farm work feeding animals, and milking cows and contributing to their family's often fragile dependence and vulnerability to life on the land. In many of the schools in the diocese, the day to day practice of being a school leader is so much more than running the school. In these communities, school leaders wear many hats, often running a local sporting club, protecting homes and lives in the local fire brigade and volunteering in local church charity and support groups. Consequently, these schools, their leaders and their communities need greater support to ensure equity of educational opportunities, health care, and individual and community wellbeing.

Responses to These Challenges

The 64 diocesan schools are supported by around 100 CEOB staff who provide support, service and leadership and build capacity in principals, leaders, teachers and students to ensure continuing development and growth. There is a commitment to partnering; working with and learning from each other and the schools of the diocese as the shared vision of 'As partners in Catholic education and open to God's presence, we pursue fullness of life for all' is lived (Catholic Education Ballarat 2020: 4). For this reason, in 2014, the diocese adopted the principles of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), the tenets of which include Lave and Wenger's (1991) concepts of a focus on collaboration and a commitment to work in communities of practice.

In a workplace extending across hundreds of kilometres of rural Australia, terrain presents several additional challenges, not the least of which is connection. However, it can be dangerous for people to come together and for CEOB staff to provide schools with the service and support they need. CEOB has policies for extreme heat contingencies, to mitigate the risks of driving long distances through empty landscapes in 45°C heat; and for minimising the very real risk of colliding with animals such as kangaroos. Long distances, unsealed roads, areas of no telephone service and few other vehicle sightings add to the hazard of travel.

Distance has other implications, including cost. Opportunities for teachers to come together for network meetings or professional learning often necessitates an overnight stay, travel expenses and replacement staff. This presents further challenges of equity and access. The introduction of PLCs across the diocese was one way to reduce the sense of professional isolation.

Meeting the Challenges

To support these PLCs, the diocesan schools and offices were equipped with video conferencing equipment to mitigate the tyranny of distance. While this initiative was adopted to varying degrees by the schools and offices, a general preference for 'face-to-face' meetings endured. COVID-19 swiftly took that option of real-life meetings away. In March 2020, the Victorian Government mandated work from home for those that could, and schools pivoted into the tumultuous and indefinite intermission of remote learning.

The New Challenge – A Seismic Shift to Remote Learning

With schools plunged deeply into the unknown and responding to daily, sometimes hourly, changes to government directives and the advice of the Victorian Chief Health Officer, the CEOB rallied to ensure that students were offered the best possible remote learning opportunities. Existing system strengths were leveraged – the blessings of already having one-to-one digital devices in many schools, the strong relationships that schools had with each other and with CEOB leaders, and an ongoing and unwavering commitment to partnering. These strengths helped to ensure that no school, leader or student was left feeling isolated.

Table 1 provides a summary of the structures CEOB had in place to enable the rapid response to COVID-19 and remote learning.

Table 1: Summary of Structures

Diocesan Schools	Catholic Education Ballarat	HIVE Team
1:1 digital devices in many schools - Technical expertise in many schools - Widespread, long term commitment to partnering	- Brokerage of networking opportunities - Promotion of collaborative practice and partnering - Shared language and processes of advocacy and inquiry - Commitment to innovation	- Clear vision - Engagement from all stakeholders - Post-graduate study in relevant domains - Recent school-leadership experience - Allocated time and resources
◄------------------------------ Strong, positive relationships ------------------------------►		

One of their early stewardship responses of the CEOB was to redeploy *The HIVE* team to create an additional digital resource to support and connect schools. This was another example of the effective leveraging of existing strengths because the establishment of this team and the creation of *The HIVE* was an initiative already well advanced in the planning stages, albeit in a different form. *The HIVE* team members had already articulated a clear vision for online professional learning and the need for a one-stop-shop of resources for school improvement. Even though the team was relatively new, it benefited from the CEOB's systemic shared language and approach to advocacy and inquiry, to create and communicate a clear vision. This was shared with both office and school-based personnel, and authentic feedback and insights gathered.

With *The HIVE* team already cohesive, aligned and enthusiastic, and system leadership open to innovation when the pandemic hit, the site moved quickly into being effectively reimagined. All stakeholders were ready and willing to collaboratively pivot to harness the technological opportunities and produce a just-in-time emergency resource for schools. The positive relationships between CEOB and the schools of the diocese ensured that schools embraced *The HIVE* and made it an authentic centrepoint for the duration of remote learning.

COVID-19 was a challenge of unprecedented complexity that placed extraordinary demands on school leaders. *The HIVE* formed the architecture for multidisciplinary teams and networks to rapidly gather and share the resources and information needed for adaptive leaders to problem solve and navigate the storm. Following several months of precision planning for *The HIVE* Project, COVID-19 necessitated letting go of the ambitious strategy mapped out and prioritising speed and efficiency to meet current needs. COVID-19 was an opportunity to let go of assumptions, take new risks and learn by doing. A new site was built that would invite synchronous, public contributions from education stakeholders within not only the Ballarat diocese, but across the state and around the nation. Catholic Education Ballarat leadership encouraged exploration and innovation, shining a light on the talent and expertise needed to respond to the crisis with high urgency and high trust.

The diocesan schools, with their vastly different contexts and environments, coped with lockdown and the shift to remote learning in different ways. For some schools, particularly in the secondary sector (Years 7-12), and primary schools (Years F-6) lucky enough to have access to digital technicians and reliable internet connectivity, the transition to streamed classes and online learning packages was quick and efficient. Others, with less access to the digital world, relied on hard copy learning packages, often delivered by the school principal to isolated farming families.

The Learning Exchange and Remote Learning TV – Connecting Educators

Many schools leveraged the power of social media, both to communicate learning information, and to bolster community connection and spirit with heartfelt, creative video

messages. School leaders became anchors of trust for increasingly fearful communities, guiding and reassuring families as they faced the uncertainty and unpredictability of the COVID-19 crisis. *The HIVE* Learning Exchange was actioned to provide a forum for all the school leaders, teachers and support staff to share resources, ask questions, offer suggestions and source inspiration. Within days, hundreds had joined the Learning Exchange Google Community (located with *The HIVE*) and were supporting each other in the delivery of quality remote learning information and experiences.

As the crisis evolved, stress, fatigue and the pervasive universal experience of lockdown began to take its toll, and it became increasingly evident that resourcing wellbeing was paramount. Site analytics indicated that most school-based contributions to the Learning Exchange related to student, staff and family wellbeing. *The HIVE* team took another opportunity to leverage existing technology to meet the evolving needs of the schools. Remote Learning TV was an open invitation for diocesan schools and the wider educational community to meet virtually and connect. The Remote Learning TV episodes were simply Google Meets, hosted by CEOB, attended by educators across and beyond the diocese, and sometimes featuring special invited guests. Each Meet was planned around a specific need – for example, 'Managing the Return to Onsite Learning' and advertised via the Learning Exchange. Sessions were recorded, and then added to *The HIVE* as an asynchronous resource. School-based presenters were particularly well received. Valuable feedback for *The HIVE* team in designing future episodes of HIVE TV (or HIVE LIVE).

Adaptive Leadership

'Adaptive leadership is the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive' (Heifert, Grashow & Linsky 2009: 14). It is adaptive leadership that enables change to thrive. The experience of managing change through something as unprecedented as the COVID-19 pandemic has taught staff of CEOB and specifically *The HIVE* team much about the importance of adaptive leadership. Alongside with school-based colleagues they have learnt to leverage existing strengths and rather than focus on, 'What we don't have?', focus on, 'What do we have that we can use right now?' The team has grown in understanding that leadership requires flexible, vulnerable management of complexity. Present, transparent imperfection can be far more helpful and authentic than delayed, distant perfection. Egos and the need to be considered experts should not be the default leadership position.

Adaptive leadership is most likely to be enacted successfully when it's based on a foundation of existing strengths and works in concert with effective technical leadership (Heifert et al. 2009). Maladaptive thinking or resistant decision making during the COVID-19 crisis may have risked polarising schools, teachers and students at a time when they were already feeling more alone. Leaders from CEOB and across the diocese navigated the crisis by opening the lines of communication, adopting a flexible, patient stance, considering wellbeing as well as academic priorities and, perhaps most vitally, by connecting with others. Responsibility,

authenticity and presence, the virtues of ethical leadership (Starratt 2005), have been modelled. As one deputy principal reflected in conversation with one of the authors:

> We all had our days and moments, but no one fell at the same time. When someone was having a hard day, there was always someone to pick them up and support them. When things were too hard, there was someone there with a problem solving or open mindset that could pull the rest of us through.

In many ways, across this distant, diverse landscape, our observation is that people in the diocese of Ballarat now find themselves less remote than prior to the pandemic. An authentic sense of community, warmth and connection has been created in the midst of crisis. The CEOB has indeed adopted Winston Churchill's advice; they have not wasted a crisis.

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Navigating Change in This Year of Wonders

Gerard Houlihan

Abstract*: The COVID-19 pandemic has been a catalyst for school systems across the globe to experiment with new ways of delivering curriculum and wellbeing programs to students. This paper provides an overview of one school's use of improvement science, specifically the PDSA framework, to reimagine the school's teacher-student relationships to better facilitate community connectedness and help students thrive during an extended period of remote learning. In doing so a powerful new model facilitating student agency and voice emerged, creating a nexus between academic learning and wellbeing. The Navigator Program involved teachers and select non-teaching staff conferencing weekly online with each student and their parents to check progress and surface issues. Students and parents were taught how to monitor their progress using a digital dashboard and a coaching framework to help formulate goals and plan strategies. This will now be explored as an ongoing opportunity for the school.*

Keywords: Student wellbeing, student agency, improvement science, PDSA framework, wellbeing dashboard, relationships, coaching, remote learning, COVID-19

Introduction

When I was a schoolboy, one tale that wholly captured my imagination was that of Sir Isaac Newton. Retreating to his family farm to escape the Great Plague, Newton embarked on a prolific sequence of projects – including reflecting on constructs of the universe and, amongst other discoveries, inventing the mathematics of calculus. While Newton's effort puts my own isolation projects of sourdough and gimlets to shame, he shares common ground with many admirable friends and colleagues who are also experimenting and experiencing breakthroughs precipitated under crisis. In the face of this terrible pandemic, we are witnessing some extraordinarily creative and resilient global responses, marking another *Annus Mirabilis* (Year of Wonders).

Newton investigated the phenomenon of inertia, whereby matter continues in its existing state unless acted on by an external force. As individuals, we have our own tendency to inertia – not just the physical kind described by Newton, but also the psychological. Most of us

require some form of crisis, such as a health or financial scare, to jolt us out of our daily routines. Usually it is accompanied by a fresh perspective, a reappraisal of our values, and the formulation of new expectations and directions. At a systems or societal level, economics coined the term 'exogenous shock' to describe the resultant paradigmatic shift to a 'new normal'.

So we remain … until the next shock. One cause of inertia is simple human folly, a failure to secure the gains we make. When the pressure is off, we tend to take the status quo for granted; if we *do* resolve to change – say, in the New Year – we allow these gains to peter out over time. Whether it be starting a morning workout or adopting a complex business model, 'old habits die hard' when it comes to establishing new habits or routines.

Recognising this aspect of the human condition, the ancients embodied it in the myth of Sisyphus, condemned by Zeus to eternally push a huge boulder uphill … only for it to roll back again once nearing its zenith. Although described by Homer as 'the most cunning of men', Sisyphus would have benefited from a lesson or two in continuous improvement.

Improvement science is about making many small intentional and purposeful shifts in the right direction. This means creating and locking in standards – an action analogous to a 'chock', a small triangular wedge placed under a wheel to stop it rolling backwards.

The Solution

In 2018, the Head of St Michael's Grammar School introduced the leadership team to the *PDSA Framework* (Moen, Nolan & Provost 2012) with a renewed focus on improvement science processes. We used this cycle to evolve the St Michael's *SchoL-AR Online Learning Program* in response to the need for remote learning because of the COVID-19 pandemic (see Figure 1). The *PDSA* Framework – Plan - Do - Study - Act – allows for the rapid prototyping of pilot programs, with feedback mechanisms coupled with an expectation of organisational agility. Evidence gathered from the *Do* and *Study* (checking) phases informs improvements made in the *Act* (adjusting) phase. Standards are applied and new norms established as this iterative process continues, which 'chock' the whole system in place before taking stock and readvancing.

Nimble leadership is essential here, counteracting the outdated model of leaders at the pinnacle filtering plans down to workers at the coalface. St Michael's acted early in inverting the leadership triangle, ensuring management at all levels could be truly responsive to the community's needs in this stressful time.

The School Leadership Team was restructured accordingly. At the outset of the crisis, a COVID-19 Leadership Team, led by the Head of the School, and an Online Learning Steering Committee, led by the Associate Head (Teaching and Learning), were formed to augment the capacity of the School Executive and School Board. Membership extended beyond the traditional base of executive participants to include representatives from Years K–12, the

Director of Sport, the Director of Performing Arts, the Risk and Compliance Manager, and the Health Services Manager. This extended reach created a truly aligned and holistic response from the School to support the learning continuity of all our students.

Figure 1: The PDSA Cycle Used to Evolve the SchoL-AR Online Learning Program
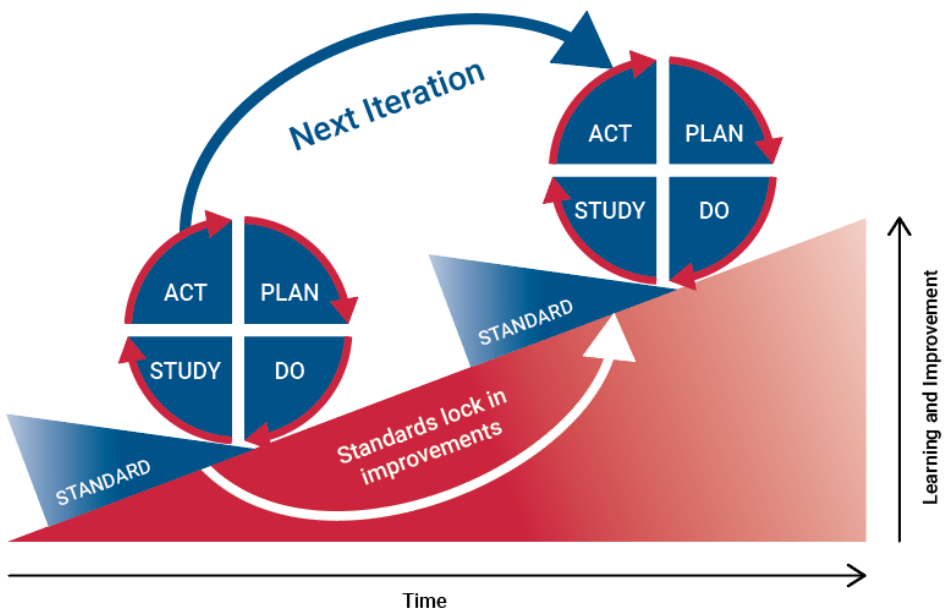
Adapted from Moen, Nolan & Provost (2012)

Promoting Student Flourishing

The same distributed leadership model is also required for students' wellbeing. With an enrolment exceeding 1,200 students, each with their own unique persona and needs, the challenge was to ensure that no student slipped under the radar. In most schools, the traditional pastoral care and wellbeing structure relies on a tutor (or mentor) taking direct responsibility for their homeroom students' welfare. This can be done effectively by 'eyeballing' and conversing with students daily in the homeroom. With the risk of students disengaging or suffering inertia, this became a Herculean task for tutors in the new remote learning environment.

In response to this challenge, with responsibility for wellbeing across K to 12, I designed the overarching framework for the School's innovative *SchoL-AR Online Learning Program*, which negated social distancing by privileging connections and engagement through weekly family conferencing, class, sport, music, clubs and wellbeing activities. The *SchoL-AR Program*

deliberately uses the term 'physical distancing' instead of 'social distancing'. Because humans are fundamentally social beings, collaborative engagement between peers, parents and teachers is fundamental to all learning communities (Clinton 2020).

To further connection and belonging, the School's sport, music lessons and student-led co-curricular clubs were maintained by implementing a longer school-wide lunchbreak. Lunchtimes for primary and secondary students were aligned so that all students could participate. Families received daily opportunities to unite in professionally delivered health, fitness and wellbeing exercises including yoga, boxing, home workouts, jazz ballet, hip-hop, and prayer and gratitude sessions – all delivered by qualified professionals.

Who are the Navigators?

The key to ensuring continuous improvement in the St Michael's *SchoL-AR Program* lies in the 'Navigators', a role newly introduced for the program's duration. Navigators sit immediately below Tutors in the school's Wellbeing Triage process. Notably, the role of the Navigator was not limited to teaching staff. By engaging members of the School Executive and select support staff, the school's reach was extended to ensure every child was individually mentored. Students conferenced with a Navigator weekly along with their parents or guardians, strongly focusing on progress through the *SchoL-AR Program*.

Progress was accurately monitored by staff, parents and students regularly accessing their online wellbeing dashboard, operating on similar principles to the digital dashboards described by Bennett and Folley (2020). This innovative new facility gave point-in-time summary statistics for each student, including their engagement self-ratings for each subject, in addition to feedback on effort, behaviour, attendance, punctuality, and academic progress. This was linked to a database with records on prior issues and communications as well as customised information to support additional learning needs. An *RUOK?* feature was added for students potentially at risk when away from school, which they could activate to contact their pastoral carer and alert the School Psychologist.

A comprehensive report on the science and practice of learning by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2018) highlights the difficulty people experience when self-regulating their own learning and therefore the need for teacher interventions to train, engage and empower students to this effect. The research indicates this works best when compulsory and when the data are integrated into a regular feedback routine. Facilitating this approach, the Navigators guide students towards meaningful goals and strategies, monitor motivation, and provide holistic feedback to promote positive academic and wellbeing outcomes.

Every Navigator's core dispositions were formulated with continuous improvement in mind:

Partnership – Each Navigator mentors eight students, meeting weekly on MS Teams with guardians/parents to check progress and identify issues. They record communication about

the meeting on a shared searchable database, partnering with relevant staff according to the school's triage framework for academic, social, emotional, and other supports.

Problem-Solving – Navigators monitor progress, identify issues and recommend necessary actions via data available from Records of Communication, Additional Learning Needs notes, the Student Wellbeing Dashboard, and conversations with teachers, tutors and Heads of Houses. This accords with the best practice advocated by Sharratt (2019) in focusing on student data as evidence for planned interventions.

Empathy – Navigators build relationships making each child's needs paramount in their actions and decision making, and attend to their wellbeing, engagement, and learning success. These relationships are critical in linking academic learning and wellbeing as a necessary precursor for students to thrive (Clinton 2020).

Coaching – Navigators guide each student by identifying goals, issues and actions, engaging in a series of discussions framed by Harvard Zero Project's 'Compass Points' thinking tool (Ritchhart, Church & Morrison 2011). This was adapted to explore what's working well, what needs work, whether support is needed, and what further steps are required for progress (see Figure 2). It lends itself well to coaching as it enables students to consider their situation from different angles, and to avoid rushing their judgements and actions.

Figure 2: St Michael's Coaching Framework
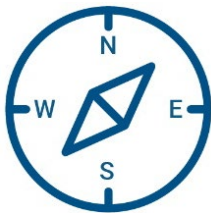
COACHING PEOPLE

Navigators guide each student by surfacing relevant goals, issues and actions:

E - What are you **Enthused** about?
W - Is there anything you are **Worried** about?
S - How can the School **Support** you?
N - What are the **Next** steps?

Adapted from Ritchhart, Church & Morrison (2011)

Tangible Benefits

The Navigators' guidance, coupled with the support of the school and their families, enables our students to emulate the *PDSA Framework*. The students consider their circumstances, set realistic goals, undertake the week's business, analyse results via rich discussions and data, and lock in standards and adjust their course. The coaching of each student in the presence of their parents makes their thinking visible to all parties, which ensures better accountability and support.

Having experienced the Navigator role for six months, staff reflected on the program. Some of the feedback is shared below:

- It was beneficial to be able to view the scope of evidence to get a 'big picture' on each student's feedback and experience and workshop a path forward in collaboration with the student and their parents. It highlighted the value of the program for many parents, the students felt increasingly motivated and directional and it was a very satisfying 'teacher moment'.

- I think this provided great insights into understanding our students holistically, what makes them tick and how we can appropriately support each student as an individual learner.

- The reflection was a powerful platform for students. One of my most unlikely achievers presented a stunning reflection that very pleasantly surprised me and his parents. It reminded me that students have to be cognisant of the learning process before they can realise their potential.

- There was a more meaningful relationship and rapport-building with the students and families comparative to the larger Commons group.

- It's a program worth hanging onto as it helps avoid a lot of issues escalating.

- Parents and students were very appreciative of the contact and connections gained from the Navigator program. I also benefitted from the connections I made with students and families of students who I teach, but also with students who I don't teach. Being a Navigator definitely gave me a deeper sense of purpose and belonging to the St Michael's community during a time when we were disconnected from our students and colleagues.

I am inspired by the consequential growth I witnessed in my own Navigator students, especially regarding resilience, agency and efficacy. There has been a discernible shift in their ability to focus and maintain attention, in their autonomy and personal accountability, and in their ability to analyse and articulate their needs surrounding fitness and health, positive emotions, engagement, relationships, personal meaning, and accomplishments. They know that life is not always easy, and that they will have to shoulder their share of life's boulders. But with an improvement science mindset and the analytical tools education provides them today, they are already far in advance of poor old Sisyphus.

Just as Newton retreated to his farm, our enforced retreat into our own houses has created opportunities for personal growth and discovery. No one is doubting the wretchedness of this pandemic, but the forces it has unleashed have impacted our collective inertia; in turn, we have countered with an equal and opposite reaction of creativity, coupled with a reassessment of how we learn, teach, and care for ourselves and each other. Our *SchoL-AR Program* is just one example of the broader education community's response, which has revealed humanity's potential, resilience, and capacity to achieve so much more than we may have ever first imagined.

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Author's note: After an immensely positive response to infographics shared with peers on social media, the SchoL-AR Program was among a select few school programs published by A School for Tomorrow in their 'Continuous Learning Toolkits', accessible at www.aschoolfortomorrow.com/toolkits-1

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Education Systems' Response to COVID-19 in Brazil: Highlighting Social Inequalities

Joysi Moraes, Sandra R. H. Mariano and Bruno F. B. Dias

Abstract: *In Brazil, almost 39 million students enrolled in public schools and more than two million in public universities have no classes for more than three months in 2020. Most schools and universities funded by the government suspended teaching activities in March 2020 and did not reopen until mid-July. Meanwhile, students enrolled in private schools and universities were using different kinds of technological resources to continue educational activities. The private sector was creating their own solutions, while public ones were being left behind. In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, the country is amid a crisis in education. The Brazilian President is part of right-wing populism and has led a coronavirus-denial movement. His inability to lead in times of crisis and to coordinate actions to promote positive results for all became evident. Brazil does not appear to have a plan that drives the public education system during the pandemic context and social inequalities have become more evident.*

Keywords: Brazilian education systems, response to COVID-19 in Brazil, social inequalities

Introduction

Brazil had the most coronavirus cases (1,800,000) and deaths (70,000) in Latin America (on July 10th, 2020). The country was, and is, struggling to provide education during the pandemic. However, the Brazilian education system is a decentralised arrangement formed by the federal government, 27 states, and the 5,570 autonomous municipal systems (MEC 2018). There are large differences among them in size, per capita income, and living expectance and there is no coordination by the Ministry of Education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This complex collaborative regime in education works with coordination and cooperation, providing compulsory and free-of-charge basic education for all in public schools (Segatto & Abbrucio 2018). Municipalities are responsible for offering childhood and elementary education (nursery, pre-school, primary and lower secondary school), states are responsible

to provide secondary education (years 10-12), and the federal government is responsible for higher education and system coordination. According to the Ministry of Education (MEC 2020a), there are almost 48 million students enrolled in 180,600 basic education schools in Brazil, and 8,450,755 students in 2,537 higher education institutions. Of all schools, 80.9 per cent are public schools funded by government and attended by low-income students, with private schools enrolling the remaining students in schools attended mostly by middle class families. In higher education, private universities and colleges dominant with 75.4 per cent enrolments (INEP 2019). In basic education, the strategy adopted by the Ministry of Education to implement and coordinate national education policies is through transferring resources to states and municipalities for the implementation of certain guidelines and federal programs (Segatto & Abbrucio 2018). Whilst the Ministry of Education is only partially responsible for funding, it is responsible for monitoring, regulating, coordinating, and evaluating the entire system. Overall, Brazil has a fragmented system with a deeply unequal distribution of funding.

On March 17th, a federal decree closed temporarily schools and universities to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. On April, the National Board of Education published guidelines for emergency remote education actions. However, only students enrolled in private schools continued to have access to education using distance learning approaches. Private schools adapted quickly to use different kinds of technological resources to continue school activities. Private higher education institutions did the same. They migrated on-site classrooms to a learning management system (LMS). Meanwhile, students enrolled in public schools and universities faced serious difficulties because most of them have had suspended teaching activities for almost four months (although teachers have been paid).

Unfortunately, in addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, the country is amid other crises. President Jair Bolsonaro, a far-right politician, assumed a negationist stance. At first, he described the conoravirus as a little flu, a trifling cold and accused the media of manufacturing hysteria. In fact, the coronavirus-denial movement in Brazil has been led by the President. COVID-19 has revealed his inability to lead in times of crisis and to coordinate actions in order to promote positive results on education (U. Friedman, The coronavirus-denial movement now has a leader, *The Atlantic*, March 27, 2020; Editorial El País, Nefasta gestão, *El País*, July 9, 2020; Ricard & Medeiros 2020). The former Minister of Education is an example of right-wing extremism in Brazil. He was involved in illegal activities against democracy and left the country on June 19, 2020. Since his dismissal, Brazil has had an interim Minister of Education. After four months from the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, the central government did not have an articulated plan or a deliberate process to drive the education system during the pandemic context.

However, some remote educational initiatives have been implemented by public schools and universities to provide support and education to students. This paper describes those initiatives and provides a national outline. This study uses data from the Brazilian Census of Basic Education and Brazilian Census of Higher Education, a web-based, public, and free-

access secondary database reported by the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research (INEP), a bureau within the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) of Brazil.

Public Schools in Brazil During COVID-19

Schools are categorised into seven levels according to their socioeconomic context, measured by the Index of Brazilian Basic Education Schools (INSE) and this is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Socioeconomic Index of Brazilian Basic Education Schools (INSE)

Levels	Monthly family income	Parental level of education	% Total	% Cumulative total
INSE I	up to 1 minimum wage	Not educated at all or incomplete primary school	5.4%	5.4%
INSE II	up to 1 minimum wage	Incomplete primary school	15.4%	20.8%
INSE III	1 to 2 minimum wages	Incomplete primary school	40.5%	61.3%
INSE IV	1 to 2 minimum wages	Upper primary. Some have high school education	27.5%	88.4%
INSE V	2 to 12 minimum wages	Upper primary. Some have high school education	9.4%	97.8%
INSE VI	Above 12 minimum wages	University degree	2.2%	100%
INSE VII	Above 12 minimum wages	University degree	0,0%	100%

Source: INEP (2014, 2019)

Note: Brazilian Monthly Minimum Wage, in 2020: R$1,045 (US184)

Just 11.6 per cent of students enrolled in public schools are in the levels V or VI (the more developed ones), and the majority of these schools are located in Southern states (Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina e Paraná) and Southeast of Brazil (Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo). There are 88.4 per cent of students in public schools (kindgarden-K12) living in families whose monthly income is up to two minimum wages. In 61.3 per cent of families, parents did not finish primary school education. Students at INSE I and II levels do not have a computer at home. Students at INSE III and IV have a computer at home, often without internet access. Figure 1 shows the percentage distribution of schools in the Brazilian

regions according to INSE. In the Northeast, for example, more than 70 per cent of schools are in levels I, II, and III. In the North, 85.25 per cent of schools are in levels I, II, III, and IV. The students of these schools live in families whose monthly income is up to two minimum wages.

Figure 1: Percentage Distribution of Schools in the Brazilian Regions According to INSE
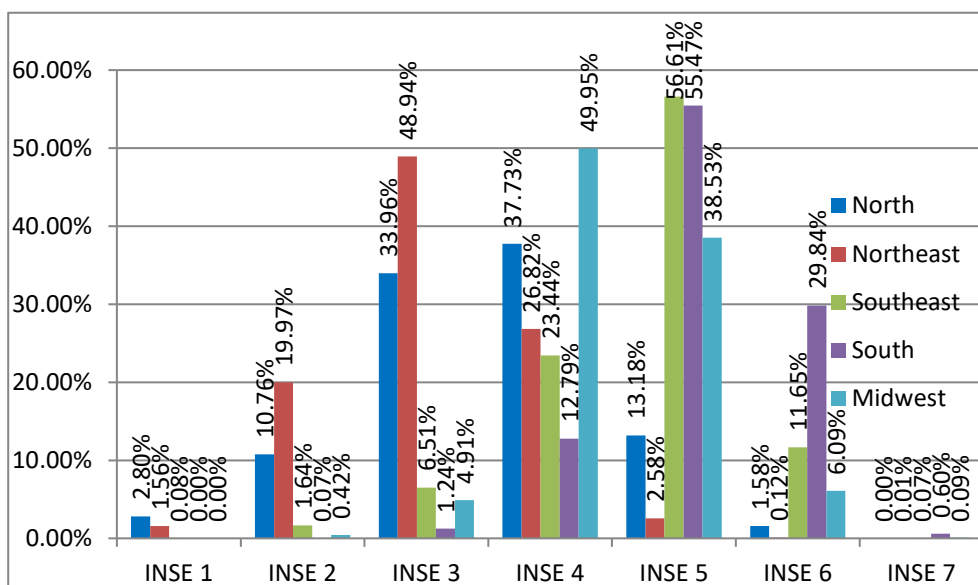
Source: Based on INEP (2019)

The inequality of basic education among regions explains, at least in part, the priorities and responses given by the government to COVID-19 to the urgencies of each context.

Priorities and Initiatives in Public Education in the Context of COVID-19

The following are some of the significant actions that occurred across the public education sectors.

The federal, states, and municipality government's main priority has been to provide daily meals since the schools were closed. Two strategies became popular: a) supermarket voucher distribution for up to R$100 (US 18) a month per student; and b) basic food basket distribution for students' families. Whilst this is undoubtedly important, it is surprising that there was not a greater effort to provide remote learning through the school closure period.

At the time of writing this paper, on site classes were suspended all over the country, and yet there has been little coordination of how to maintain learning. A national survey of municipal education departments conducted from March 24-26, and funded by the Innovation Center

for Brazilian Education (CIEB 2020), showed that only 10 per cent of the departments had a remote learning strategy in place. According to CIEB (2020), 63 per cent of municipal education departments (K1-K9) did not provide guidance or have a distance learning strategy during the closures, and 37 per cent did not use technological resources. Among the ones that had some distance education initiatives, schools made available, via social networks: digital materials made by teachers for their students (18.9%); generic guidelines to support textbooks (12.4%); and video-lessons recorded by teachers (7.45%). For students who do not have equipment or connectivity at home, 6.4 per cent of municipal education departments provided printed material. More than 90 per cent of municipal education departments were not collecting data on student educational activities.

In state education departments (K10-K12), 40 per cent of schools used some technological resources (Google Tools and the Department of Education Platform). According to the National Council of Education Secretaries (CONSED 2020), 22 per cent of state departments used radio, television, virtual classes, and printed material; 26% used virtual classes and printed material; and 33 per cent used only virtual classes. More than 85 per cent of state departments were not collecting data on student educational activities.

Overall, it appears that there were almost 38 million students in basic education with suspended classes and no learning activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some state governments were planning to return to classes in August, but, unfortunately, most schools have remained closed, with teacher unions opposed to a return to face-to-face classes

Higher Education in Brazil During COVID-19

In 2018, Brazil had 8,450,755 undergraduate students enrolled in higher education and 288,590 graduate students in approximately 2,000 graduate schools (INEP 2019). Table 2 provides a comparison of key features among the private and public higher education sectors.

Table 2: Higher Education in Brazil – Private and Public Institutions in 2018

	Total Brazil	Private	Private	**Public**
Institutions	2,537	2,238	88.2%	**11.8%**
Enrolments	8,450,755	6,373,274	75.4%	**24.6%**
On-site	6,394,244	4,489,510	70.2%	**29.8%**
Distance learning	2,056,511	1,883,764	91.6%	**8.4%**
Faculty/staff	384,474	209,442	54.5%	**45.5%**

Source: Based on INEP (2019)

Private universities continued to operate, using LMS, to support their faculty to quickly adapt to remote classes. Meanwhile, students enrolled in public universities did not have the same opportunity. Public universities employ 45.5% of all university faculty, and they have tenure and cannot be dismissed. The public sector fully finances staff salaries, and the undergraduate courses are completely free. However, until now (early July), most of these staff refused to use the LMS to provide online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Figure 2 shows the status of undergraduate and graduate classes in Federal Public Universities in June 2020.

Figure 2: Undergraduate Classes in June, 2020 and Graduate Classes in June, 2020
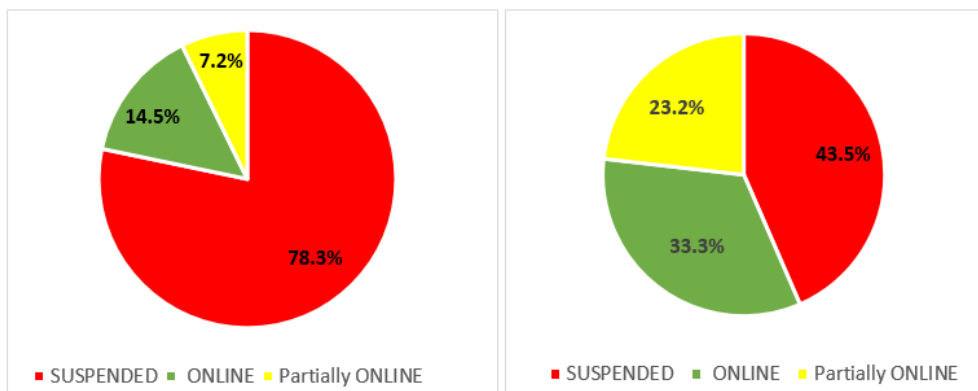
Source: Based on MEC (2020a)

The staff in federal public universities tried to keep undergraduate activities suspended. They argued that some of the students do not have conditions to participate in remote classes, as they do not have computer or internet access. Therefore, if some students cannot attend remote classes, universities should not provide remote classes at all. The argument was based on the idea of 'no student should be left behind'. However, the students at private universities continued to have access to education during the pandemic. At the end, public university students have been left behind.

There is no incentive for faculty to migrate to remote classes. They are tenured employees; the evaluation system is poor and dismissal of staff in federal universities is exceedingly rare. During the pandemic salaries have been paid without interruption. So, their job is not at risk even if the undergraduate classes remain closed for long periods.

There appears to be no leadership and coordination at the Ministry of Education level to define directions for the 69 federal universities. Although federal universities are part of the federal higher education system, subordinate to the Ministry of Education, each one has the autonomy to decide what to do. They are almost 100 per cent funded by the Ministry of Education. Therefore, if faculty decided to close entirely undergraduate class activity, there are no consequences for their job or universities' financial sustainability. It is a diametrically

opposite situation compared with private universities, funded almost 100 per cent by student tuition fees, with faculty employed on regular contracts.

As time passes, civil society and the press are pressuring federal universities to resume undergraduate classes as soon as possible, as the Ministry of Education authorised the use the LMS in all undergraduate classes (PORTARIA Nº 544, DE 16 DE JUNHO DE 2020) (MEC 2020b).

However, that have been some initiatives in public universities that have been implemented. Even before formal authorisation from the Ministry of Education, some public universities were already using an LMS in undergraduate classes, denominated 'Emergency Learning Activities'. We describe two examples: Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF), with 50,000 students and 3,543 faculty, in Rio de Janeiro, and Universidade Estadual de Campinas (UNICAMP), with 35,652 students and 1,867 faculty, in São Paulo.

UFF has implemented several educational initiatives. Whilst on-site classes are planned to gradually return, starting in 2021, student numbers in classes will need to be reduced. Therefore, during the pandemic, UFF are trying to serve students who have access to the internet, through the use of an LMS for undergraduate classes. Some undergraduate students are using Moodle, Google Classroom, and through Google Meet for online class with faculty. At the same time, through their database and a student survey, 10,000 students (25%) were identified as being vulnerable, and provided with an Inclusion and Digital Access Support Program, with affirmative action scholarships, and equipment loans like notebooks, chips, and tablets. However, this was a slow reaction because approximately 90 per cent of students had to stay without classes for almost six months. Public universities are beginning to use the LMS because federal government resources are being made available according to the number of graduates per year.

UNICAMP, which is part of the public system of universities in the State of São Paulo under leadership of its Rector Marcelo Knobel, migrated on-site classes to the LMS in undergraduate and graduate courses in early April. At the beginning of the pandemic, UNICAMP carried out a mapping to identify students who did not have access to the internet and provided mobile chips to access data for the neediest students as well as negotiating cheaper plans with telephone companies. It provided a learning platform and trained faculty in record time. UNICAMP requested donations and loans for equipment from the community and companies. UNICAMP transformed the transportation aid, used by more than 2,000 students, into remote emergency assistance for internet access. It is an aid of the order of R$200 (US35) that helps students to buy an internet plan. This is a unique case in a Brazilian public system of higher education.

Considerations and Implications for Brazilian Students

The Brazilian educational system was strongly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The system's known inequalities have been amplified. In public basic education, the lack of

coordination by the Ministry of Education led to the abandonment of states and municipalities. The richest and best-structured states and municipalities are trying to provide educational alternatives for students, in addition to providing nutritional support to students. However, most public schools continue with suspended classes, compromising student learning and increasing the probability of dropout. Private schools responded with great agility and offered remote solutions.

In higher education, there was also a significant difference between the response offered by the public and private systems. Private institutions quickly migrated to remote classes, engaging students in the new model, training teachers, and making technology available. Most students completed the first semester on the remote model.

Federal public universities, on the other hand, have offered great resistance to migrate to remote classes. Most faculty are against remote teaching with the argument that this was an excluding modality because students who did not have access to computers and the internet would be left behind. The staff also argued that they did not have the skills to teach classes in virtual learning environments. There is no coordination by the Ministry of Education, and there are no guidelines for public universities. Thus, each university has defined its own strategy. There is clearly a marked difference in the response to the crisis offered by the public and private system in Brazil.

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Building Educational Resistance – A COVID-19 Jamaican Perspective

Kadia Hylton-Fraser and Kamilah Hylton

Abstract: *The world as we know it has been irrevocably changed since the emergence of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Jamaica, like many other countries, has not been left unscathed by COVID-19. On March 12, 2020, schools were ordered closed for an initial period of 14 days. Since that time, the closure was extended for the rest of the academic year. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Information (MOEYI) then had to initiate a COVID-19 response plan to deal with the new reality of schools being conducted remotely. This paper firstly documents the sequence of events that unfolded as a consequence of the Ministry's response. Secondly, it shares our experience as parents (who are also educators) of children at two different levels of the education sector (primary and secondary) trying to navigate the nuances inherent in remote learning. Fundamentally, the paper provides some insights about critical things to consider not only in times of crisis, but as we move forward to ensure the education sector transcends learning that is not based merely on depositing content (Freire 1970), but more on how students can activate their own learning.*

Keywords: Education, educational resistance, parent re-education, remote learning

Banking on Education

The traditional approach to education to which we have been accustomed, depended largely on repetition and reinforcement, which are grounded in the behaviourist school of thought (Hartley 1998; Thorndike 1932). The belief was that learning occurred through activities with clearly defined objectives that were consistently reinforced – otherwise, learning could not 'objectively' have said to have occurred. We were taught how to take exams and pass them, instead of an emphasis being placed on facilitating an understanding of why systems function as they do. Importantly, we were not encouraged to question the content our teachers presented or the curriculum, as culturally, that was perceived as a sign of disrespect. Customs dictated that we should passively sit and become receptacles for the content being poured from our 'sages on the stage'. This approach lends credence to Dewey's (1897) belief that 'without insight into the psychological structure and activities of the individual, the educative

process will, therefore, be haphazard and arbitrary…. it will result in friction, or disintegration, or arrest of the child's nature' (p. 77).

On March 13, 2020, the Jamaican education system experienced a disruption extraordinaire. The Government of Jamaica (GOJ) issued a directive that all schools were to be closed for an initial two weeks. This interruption in the education system that COVID-19 created has forced all stakeholders in the education process to rethink the 'haphazard' and 'arbitrary', in a bid to ensure that students are not treated as objects to be acted upon, but rather as individuals who must be actively involved in the learning process. At the point of the 'temporary' closure, educators and parents alike crossed their fingers and hoped they would be able to return to face-to-face instruction in short order. This was especially so because we were only a few weeks away from the Easter break. The individual teacher's response ranged from doing nothing, to sending worksheets via WhatsApp to using *Zoom, Google Classroom, EdModo* (or other similar platforms) to host classes and provide assignments.

Once there was the recognition that this situation was not going to change anytime soon, there was a scramble to convert our traditional modalities to one that would facilitate online learning. This process of conversion highlighted the need to think creatively and also revealed stark disparities in access. Additionally, COVID-19's disparate impact on the most vulnerable segments of society was further highlighted in the education sector. Those students with limited telecommunications infrastructure and socioeconomically disadvantaged students with no devices saw their formal education grind to a screeching halt. Students without data restrictions and unlimited devices in their households continued almost uninterrupted, albeit with other challenges present. These discrepancies presented us with the opportunity to create individualised solutions that required a greater consideration of the learner's context.

Consequently, the experiences we share below are personal and reflect only a snippet of what would have been experienced by other parents during this time. Importantly, we acknowledge our own privilege in being educators who were able to sufficiently support our children's education, with the caveat, however, that our own philosophy of education requires revamping.

Vignette 1

As a parent working full time, navigating learning from home with a young child was demanding. Remote learning challenged my multi-tasking skills as the child required constant supervision and had to be with me in the workplace as I was required to be on site in the initial stages to oversee the implementation of COVID-19 resistance strategies. The first two weeks involved everyone (including the teacher) familiarising themselves with the new online learning approach and dealing with connectivity issues. During this period, I understood and shared the general frustration of other parents who felt the amount we were being asked to pay for school fees was unreasonable as we had now become our children's teachers, served as playmate, cafeteria staff and IT help desk. A particularly difficult situation

to manoeuvre was to get my child to take school seriously while being in the comfort of her home or at my office where there were several distractions. Maintaining the students' focus also proved to be arduous for the teacher who could frequently be heard saying, 'Student X please sit up, why are you lying down?' or 'Please turn off the TV.'

Once we surpassed the internet issues and students became reasonably familiar in the new environment, I could see this arrangement working – if and only if:

1. parents had nothing else to do while their child was in class;
2. the parent was not a teacher, forced to balance their own teaching duties along with their child's supervision;
3. teachers are well trained in the modality to ensure student engagement;
4. parent/caregivers are tech savvy and capable of providing the necessary support;
5. there are no other children present requiring supervision; and
6. there are enough devices available in the house to eliminate the burden of sharing.

Fundamentally, the experience made me query my education philosophy. Why was it so important to sit hovering over a child instead of having her generate her own meaning based on her interaction in this new environment? I had previously established in my own mind that I was 'anti-banking concept' and that education does not only occur within the four walls of the traditional classroom. Yet, I sought to help her in ways that I normally would not have been able to just to ensure she 'got everything right'. I prevented the natural learning that occurs from getting things wrong, or what some researchers refer to as productive failure (Kapur 2008; Kapur & Bielaczyc 2012).

My actions highlighted that there were remnants of the old approach embedded in my psyche. These approaches linger because parts of the current system continue to measure school achievement and student success based on 'the one best way' method redolent of scientific management principles of efficiency and productivity (Taylor 1911). This is despite the MOEYI in recent times embracing a constructivist approach and seeking to adopt curriculum that encourages critical thinking and student creativity. This approach envisions the preparation of a cadre of individuals who are adaptable and innovative and compelled me then to think – how did these teachers adapt and innovate? How did they use what they had to fabricate a context-specific solution?

On the other hand, my 14-year-old – who I had also babied – was presented with an opportunity to blossom. He demonstrated a self-directed confidence and began to take responsibility for his learning in a manner that would not have likely been possible otherwise. I observed an individual who was able to take pieces of information, assimilate and question content and approaches. We began to have debates about pedagogical strategies and their effectiveness for students. He has found that some of the new methodologies utilised by his teachers gave him greater freedom of expression and latitude to demonstrate the knowledge he has gained in a manner that is authentic to him.

Vignette 2

I am the parent of two children, one who is in preschool and another who is in high school. Furthermore, I am studying overseas, trying to monitor and help with schoolwork remotely, while my spouse supervised our younger child. Unfortunately, due to my own class schedule, as well as a time difference, it was not always possible to monitor what was happening. This challenge was further compounded by my spouse's work requirements and the reality that his office environment was not conducive, nor physically suited for online classes for children. On those days when he went to work, the younger child had to remain in the company of his grandmother who is not technologically savvy, which invariably meant he missed several days of instruction. Ultimately, it was a juggling act that was at times less than successful.

Our other child, the 12-year-old, was still in the process of adjusting to high school with its concomitant and often competing demands from multiple subject teachers. For him, online engagement was undesirable, and he struggled to keep abreast of assignments, class schedules, and numerous email communications. These were seemingly ad hoc, even against the background that his school already operated a fairly robust online platform. I recognised that he needed the physical social environment of classmates and friends that is crucial for children to make meaning and create learning (Darling-Hammond, Flook, Cook-Harvey, Barron & Osher 2020). It was ironic that he struggled so significantly when he has no challenge spending several hours engaging in games and flight simulations or watching YouTube videos. Both children became further disengaged as the weeks progressed and it was increasingly difficult to get them to attend and participate in classes. I wondered, therefore, what the presumed loss would be for them and what we would need to do as their parents to help to mitigate that loss.

Upon reflection, however, the unease I experienced as a parent stemmed from the prior desire we have cultivated within education (and beyond) to conform to some 'standard' or 'average'. The degree of linearity with which education often operates is counter to the way in which humans actually function on a daily basis. Education's goal should be to spark purpose and creativity within our students if the intention is to increase student engagement and their eventual success as they progress beyond the school's confines. That definition of success, however, should not be the remit of a few persons who have decided who or what a successful student looks like – perhaps, one who is adept at recalling facts and recounting finite bits of information, rather than one who critically interrogates what is being taught as they assume control of their own learning.

Consequently, Jacobs (2010) maintains that a major shift is required in transforming schools. These shifts would include new curriculum, new pedagogies that incorporate new content and new skills. This transformed education will create the kinds of individuals who are equipped to confront the future about which we remain largely ignorant. Those skills which transcend eras such as communication, teamwork and problem-solving are more easily

developed in an organic, non-linear way. Our education system must therefore not superficially provide choice, but intentionally seek to disrupt the model that currently prevails so that 'education may be a reality and not a name or a slogan' (Dewey 1986: 252).

Rethinking Education

Evidently, things seem to work when the education system follows a predictable pattern. However, when that pattern is disrupted, it reveals the inherent gaps in the teaching and learning process, which may create difficulty for stakeholders to adapt. Simultaneously, however, it is a unique opportunity to relinquish the traditional role of 'sage on the stage' to incorporate the reality of students leading, guiding and taking charge of their own learning.

As we both grappled with the myriad issues foisted upon us by COVID-19 and confronted our persistent views about education, we examined the Ministry's response and sought to determine its impact on teaching and learning. To its credit, the MOEYI quickly began working with public and private entities to extend access for students without computers as well as to provide education packets to those without the required infrastructure. These included printed learning kits, the use of radio and television programming for those without internet access or associated devices and meals for students who receive assistance through the Programme for Advancement Through Health and Education (PATH).

However, on June 8, approximately 74,900 students in grades 11-13 returned to school for face to face classes to finalise their preparation for regional exams that would normally have ended in June but were rescheduled to July (MOEYI 2020). The Ministry, in summarising its approach for advancing to the new term, indicated that it would be partnering with private schools to provide extra space to ensure that physical distancing protocols would be observed. For students progressing from the primary to the secondary level, they would advance based on assessments done between grades four and six. Additionally, the Ministry has designated the first three and a half weeks of the new school year as a period of review and assessment so that teachers and students are able to determine readiness for the new grade level (MOEYI 2020). Importantly, all students are to progress to the next level.

In one sense, the Ministry seems to be embracing a summative assessment strategy and this worked to its advantage for the grade six students, who were not able to sit the final portion of their exit examinations to enter high school. We found, though, that it was still necessary for upper level students to do 'snapshot' exams, which appears to be a reversal of the approach the MOEYI would have been cultivating in the last five years. While we acknowledge that education is a complex process involving multiple parts, at a minimum, COVID-19 presents us with an opportunity to rethink our concept of education.

There were many things we thought had to happen in a prescribed manner in order for a child to learn. The global pandemic has dictated that we question these norms and further, that we develop innovative and varied approaches to engage our students. Some parents

opted out of online instruction and taught their children instead to sew, to bake, garden, among other critical skills. Would it be fair for us to say they did not learn? Moreover, principals and teachers tried to implement creative solutions for students to still have access to educational materials including personally delivering content to students' homes. Regardless of the situation, we need to think about the resources at our disposal and how they can be leveraged to create remedies in times of crisis. In order to build an education system that can absorb shocks, it must be diverse – nature shows us that biodiversity is key to the longevity of the species. This means there should never be one way of doing things. Each part must be recognised for its strength and role in the ecosystem and so every component has a role that is as important as and dependent on the other.

In biological terms, resistance refers to an ability to avoid or repel attack by an external agent. Having encountered COVID-19, it is clear that adaptations will be necessary if we are to counter the impact this virus has had on human operation and, specifically, education. We posit, therefore, that similar to natural ecosystems, we must encourage diversity and employ different tactics. Only in an 'edu-diverse' environment will we be best poised to sustainably nurture healthy human beings who experience a sense of fulfilment and are able to contribute to society. We dare not say what that may look like but argue that it will appear different for different people with the knowledge that 'children have individual needs and trajectories that require differentiated instruction and supports' (Darling-Hammond et al. 2020: 98). Therefore, leadership at all levels of the education system must be equipped and flexible to manage 'more turbulent times' ahead (Cunningham 1985: 18), while simultaneously transforming the educational experience for students.

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Managing Dental Education at the University of Technology, Jamaica in the Disruption of COVID-19

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Abstract: *Dental education at the University of Technology, Jamaica is offered through the College of Oral Health Science. The dental programmes are based on the community-based dental education model. This entails students' utilisation of public and private settings, community outreach projects and the college dental clinic which is opened to the public. During the COVID-19 epidemic students and staff experienced a 'tan a yuh yaad' restriction which affected how dental education was delivered. To accommodate online learning, faculty utilised concurrent use of multiple digital learning tools; this portrayed the technological adeptness of faculties. The solution advocated for the pre-clinical and clinical aspects of dental education is cited to be a long-term one grounded in academic revision.*

Keywords: Dental education, technology adeptness, digital learning tools, 'tan a yuh yaad'

On March 10, 2020 Jamaica had its first case of the coronavirus, SARS2 COVID-19. By March 15, 2020 the University entered into lockdown mode – a lockdown implemented by the government to contain the spread of the disease. It occurred more than half way through the semester.

This lockdown which was supposed to be quite temporary kept extending like some lengthy work probation. The Prime Minister urged Jamaicans to 'Tan a yuh yaad', meaning 'stay at home'.

Dental education at the University of Technology, Jamaica is offered through the College of Oral Health Science at an off-campus site. There are five dental programmes: Masters in Dental Therapy, undergraduate degrees in Medical Dentistry, Dental Hygiene, Dental Laboratory Technology and a Diploma in Dental Assisting. There are just under 300 students enrolled in the dental programmes. The dental programmes are based on a community-based dental education model. This entails our students' utilisation of public and private settings, community outreach projects and the college dental clinic which is open to the public. Students develop their competencies and hone their skills by working on live patients. The

college offers calendar year courses of study, hence when the 'tan a yuh yaad' directive was given, students as well as some members of staff welcomed the break.

The college has a simulation laboratory, two wet and one dry dental laboratories. The clinical area is commonly referred to as the pods; these comprise of 36 dental units placed in three separate pods. Prior to COVID-19, the College was making use of white boards, smart boards, projectors, simulation software and other pieces of small technological instruments and equipment to aid in delivering dental education. The College through the University was also actively seeking to purchase an educational dental practice management software.

During the first week of 'tan a yuh yaad', there was a relative state of limbo as the staff expected that after the two weeks, normalcy would resume. The University Management was in continuous mitigation planning meetings. The Dean of the College was newly minted and in the orientation stage at the University. The Vice Dean was also a newcomer to the college and not familiar with the nuances of dental education. By the second week, a WhatsApp group was created for the college. This was to provide communication in real time to monitor a fluid situation. It should be noted that although the entire staff was accommodated in the group, farther along, many of the members removed themselves from the group. Some of the reasons given were information overload and technological issues. There were also other subgroups which were specific to committees and courses of study. In the second week, direct instructions were given to staff to complete the semester by going online. Hence, without any modification to the curriculum, staff and students made a hasty move to an online learning environment. The University has a learning management system in place. Irrespective of such a system in place, less than one per cent of the modules offered in the college were placed on the system. Now, with the advent of COVID-19, staff were urged to utilise the University's learning management system. Heedlessly, staff employed whatever digital learning tools they could easily manipulate. This resulted in a potpourri of online technological tools among the lecturers. These digital learning tools were: Easyclass, Schoology, Cisco Webex, Zoom, and Classmarker. The latter was used as an assessment platform. A corollary of the simultaneous use of multiple platforms meant that the students had to switch between platforms in a matter of minutes in order to attend their classes. The semester was then extended by two weeks to complete theory. Preclinical laboratories and clinicals were deferred as a number of the clinicals had to depend on patients from the public sphere.

At the end of semester 2, a review was conducted by the College Distance Learning Liaison on the digital tools used to complete teaching and learning. It was identified that none of the staff were using Moodle and Blackboard Collaborate which comprises the University's learning management system. The most widely used digital tool was Zoom followed by Cisco Webex and Classmarker. The educators mainly used a hybrid-model which incorporated emailing lessons to students. The method evolved from the lack of technological adeptness by some staff and internet connectivity issues which involve lack of access and poor network connection for some students and some staff alike.

Mention of technological adeptness speaks to adopting and using technology in regular activities. It is usual that individuals who are low-tech lack technological adeptness.

Hence the major categories of issues identified were: The design of the course of study, the concurrent use of multiple digital learning tools and the technological adeptness of staff.

The community-based education model design of the course of study has implications for clinical practice. Notwithstanding, dental education is grounded on simulation and clinical practice. In the process of waiting for a resolution to this global crisis, creative methods to continue the practice of dentistry off site were being contemplated. The options for face-to-face simulations or clinical practice on real patients to maintain skills recently acquired was redundant. Hence no practising could be done until the 'tan a yuh yaad' restriction was lifted and social distancing could be guaranteed.

One was hoping that the summer session would have been cancelled as it would have given us enough time to prepare for the new academic year. However, this was not so as dental students who had failed modules were provided the opportunity to re-do them. The Diploma in Dental Assisting is a one-year course of study and sponsored students were to return to their work and for the other courses of study, they were given directive by the Dean to bring forward didactic modules so that the length of the course would not be too much affected by the 'tan a yuh yaad' restriction.

Pre-COVID-19, a minor or major change to the curriculum would have to go through the curriculum process. However, a matter like this was left to the discretion of the Dean. We also find that during this period there are other decisions which are made on the spot as the college tries to stay atop of the situation. It should be noted that staff were directed to use only the University's learning management system.

The first online class for the summer session was used to solicit feedback on the students' experience from the previously ended semester. Students observed that some faculties were not adept at using technology, some classes were not appealing as they lacked creativity and this was coupled with challenges like internet connectivity issues or community background noises. Students were also irritated by the fact that as stakeholders their views were not sought regarding some of the policies (like how they would return to school), there was an inflexible approach to lessons which were not adjusted to the online environment, and the use of multiple digital learning tools applications which, when they downloaded, impacted their phone memories.

In order to deal with the preceding issues, several strategies were used. The leadership of the College tasked the clinical director with the formation of a committee to focus on infection control and implementing COVID-19 measures in anticipation of the lifting of the 'tan a yuh yaad' ban, whenever that would be. The committee comprised academic, clinical and administrative staff.

The distance learning liaison officer with a team of faculty resource personnel concerned themselves with improving the technological adeptness of the staff. Faculty resource persons

were individuals selected from each course of study. They possess knowledge and technological adeptness. They are the individuals who course directors would have as their contact on a course of study and they work alongside the Faculty Distance Learning Liaison.

Prior to organising workshops, the Faculty Distance Learning Liaison extracted information about the adeptness of staff from a data sheet. Then training was organised appropriate to the level of the staff technological adeptness. At workshops, faculty resource persons provided individual assistance. This proved very helpful to the staff and students as it portrayed organisation and standardised the digital learning tools required in the University.

In the early part of the summer session, the Dean announced that pre-clinical and clinical activities would resume August 3, 2020. Due to the fluidity of the situation, staff and students were warned against a sudden change in plans which could occur. Albeit, they had to maintain a state of readiness. The phased reopening commenced with supervised face-to-face simulation and individual scheduling in order to maintain social distancing. The student to instructor ratio was set 1:6 while implementing a maximum of 50 per cent occupancy of the total capacity at any given time. During the down periods some students were given exercises to maintain newly learnt clinical skills. They were instructed to submit pictures and create videos to satisfy particular objectives. Prior to resumption, students were being mentally reassured, and they, like the staff, would get continuous updates in messages from the desk of the Dean. The systems implemented were reflective of those observed in the general practice of dentistry. Extra precautions include triaging as per national guidelines before entering the premises for elective oral health care.

The Chief Dental Officer released a protocol on how to treat dental education. This suggested that clinical resumption would see students being tested before they start seeing patients and testing should be done for all clinical staff, followed by a monthly testing. The University indicated that it did not have the resources to conduct such a testing. The Chief Dental Officer indicated that the ministry of health would do the testing. However, when it was time to do so, the promise could not be fulfilled because of under resources.

The use of public and clinical settings could not be used to expand the skill and competence of the clinical students. The matter of liability for contracting COVID-19 became an issue for students. None of the parties believe that they should be held liable for any student contracting the disease even though they were touting that society will have to learn to live with COVID-19. The lifting of the 'tan a yuh yaad' policy was also affected by the curfew orders which were still in effect in some of the areas where students were living.

Most of the strategies were employed concurrently. The dynamics of the situation was a major challenge to planning. Most of the planning was short term and short lived. A long-term solution is to re-write the curriculum and where clinical practice can be executed as a matter of internship, it should be done. Using the appropriate digital tools will help in the delivery of preclinical and clinical education. The college ought to consider collaborating with other dental schools so resources can be pooled, especially so, as the world is experiencing an

economic fallout due to the pandemic. Investing in a virtual learning environment software will ensure continuing development of pre-clinical skills as well as clinical skills.

Continuous review of strategies implemented and refinement of strategies is important on going forward in this climate.

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A 'Quality' Response to COVID-19: The Team Experience of the Office of Quality Assurance, University of Technology, Jamaica

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Abstract: *The University of Technology, Jamaica (UTech, Ja.) through the Office of Quality Assurance (OQA) ensures the quality of undergraduate and graduate courses. In mid-March 2020, in response to COVID-19, most operations at UTech Ja. had to move from a face-to-face modality to a virtual one. The OQA team, being cognisant of its role in maintaining the quality of all courses of study, quickly responded by organising to carry out our job functions from home to ensure that, as far as possible, normalcy was maintained. The importance of adequate equipment, clear instructions across the University, a structured communication strategy within the OQA, accountability and the continuation of providing service to our customers all contributed to our team effort to keep quality as a priority within the University. In working from home, the OQA team experienced some challenges as well as several positive outcomes. These are discussed in the paper along with our self-evaluation using a focus group of the level of success achieved in carrying out our job functions while working from home. Based on the experiences of the OQA team during the COVID-19 pandemic several recommendations for maintaining the quality of courses of study while working from home are made.*

Keywords: Developmental academic advisement, emergency remote teaching, remote audits

Background

The Office of Quality Assurance (OQA) is responsible for quality assuring courses of study. The staff complement of seven is headed by the Associate Vice President - Quality Assurance with four Quality Assurance Officers and two Administrative Support Staff. The key operational functions carried out by the OQA include: accreditation, academic quality audits,

student instructor-module evaluations, academic advisement, evaluation of new courses of study, and evaluation of anomalies of academic performance. The academic quality management system comprises quality assurance committees at two levels of the University: those at the College/Faculty level and the University's Quality Assurance Committee.

Courses of study are also audited by an internal team of Academic Quality Auditors on a cycle of three years. These audits mirror the components of the external reviews carried out by the University Council of Jamaica, the local accrediting body. The results of these internal academic audits provide the academic units with information for making improvements to the quality of the courses of study.

The Student Instructor/Module Evaluation was developed to allow students to evaluate the face-to-face delivery of academic instruction and modules. This is administered at the end of each semester. Through feedback, faculty members can better understand their teaching strengths and weaknesses and gain ideas for improving the quality of instruction. A summary report with quantitative and qualitative information is provided for each lecturer, copied to the respective academic manager.

The accreditation function of the University of Technology, Jamaica exists to assure the quality of its academic courses of study to all stakeholders. The Office of Quality Assurance (OQA) has responsibility for accreditation matters which include the collation and submission of accreditation reports as well as the preparation for accreditation visits. Additionally, the OQA plays an integral role in the maintenance of Institutional Accreditation.

The University of Technology, Jamaica recognises academic advisement to be a critical component of the educational experience and student success. A split academic advisement model is adopted where the OQA provides policy and operational guidelines for the eight academic units (three Colleges and five Faculties). Developmental academic advisement is provided at the College/Faculty level by respective academic advisors who are assigned to students. The University also recognises that there are vulnerable populations in tertiary education including online learners for whom academic advisement must be provided.

Changes in University Operations

In mid-March 2020, the University of Technology, Jamaica, moved at breakneck speed to transform its operations from a face-to-face modality to a virtual one, within two months, in response to COVID-19. The University found that its students and Colleges/Faculties were creative and resilient in making this transition. In addition to moving its academic courses to a virtual environment (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust & Bond 2020), the University was also faced with providing student services as well as continuing to run the business of the campus remotely.

A COVID-19 Risk Mitigation Committee was assembled to steer the University's response to the 'new normal' since the closure of the nation's educational institutions was imminent. Staff

capable of working remotely were advised to do so, and in some instances were forced to, given the implementation of government mandated curfews in some locations. Students residing in the University's Halls of Residence were strongly encouraged to return home during the period, this eventually became mandatory by the end of March 2020. Commonly accessed high traffic areas such as the University's library were ordered closed; the issuing of parking tickets was also suspended as this increased the risk of contact with the virus. At the onset, there was an uptick in the use of Zoom Video Conferencing. Subsequent to this, virtual training sessions spearheaded by the Office of Distance Learning (ODL) in the use of Blackboard Collaborate gained traction as the preferred means for the continuation of classes online. The Information Systems Department also organised the issuing of specially configured laptops to those operational areas charged with executing essential services from home.

As it became increasingly apparent that the suspension of classes would continue well into the course of Semester 2 of the Academic Year 2019/2020, the Committee was tasked to present a position on the matter of final examinations in consultation with the Heads of Colleges/Faculties. A decision was made to extend the period of teaching by four weeks until early May 2020 in an attempt to complete as much of the syllabus as possible. For most modules, coursework assessments were given as an alternative to final examinations. Some courses with a practical component sought to have their students submit portfolios. However, many had to adopt a wait-and-see approach as online alternatives were non-existent for mandatory laboratory experiments and fieldwork. Adjustments had to be made regarding academic delivery and the provision of support services.

The response of the OQA staff to the changes resulting from the passage of the COVID-19 pandemic reflected some positives including flexibility and more efficient use of time. The following are some comments by staff members:

> It was a welcome change and allowed flexibility.

> It allowed for flexibility and working outside of work hours.

Additionally, there were some challenges which included anxiety, concerning the logistics and the availability of resources to work efficiently from home. In this regard, staff stated:

> The first two weeks were not productive as anxiety set in with how people would manage during the pandemic.

> It was a period of anxiety as there was not enough epidemiological evidence as to the scope of the virus.

> I had no internet service at home and had to immediately sort that out.

> I had no working computer of my own [and] no designated office space at home so that was challenging.

OQA's Response to COVID-19

Consequent to the formation of the COVID-19 Risk Management Committee, operational units were asked to submit Risk Mitigation Plans. In addition, the OQA developed the following strategies in order to assist its staff to maintain key operational functions:

- To complement work email accounts, google accounts were established for each member of staff; this facilitated the real-time document processing activities.
- A WhatsApp group was created for ease of communication.
- Virtual staff meetings were convened at least twice per week.
- Work plans were submitted to the Associate Vice President-Quality Assurance every two weeks.

In order to maintain key operational areas of the OQA, this required a greater dependence on technology; staff initially used personal devices to carry out work from home. After approximately a month, laptops were provided by the University to those staff members who needed to access specific systems. In the OQA, these systems, included budgets, academic advisement and student evaluation. The laptops also allowed for the continued service to customers who called in, as extensions were forwarded to them to facilitate incoming calls to the OQA.

Staff members reflected on the provision of resources and support provided during this period. Some comments made were:

> I received a laptop from the University to carry out my job function.

> I think UTech did not do badly in responding to the needs of critical areas. A laptop was provided to me by the University which was adequate.

> [The] Information Systems Department was accessible; my password had expired and was promptly changed once they were alerted.

Execution of functions of the key operational areas required some adjustment to facilitate activities in a virtual environment.

Accreditation. During the period, the OQA team worked on the Annual Institutional Accreditation Status Report. This process involved collecting data from all operational units. The staff had to rely heavily on virtual meetings and increased communication via telephone and email. However, this proved challenging at times as the response time especially for the submission of documentation from the operational units was delayed.

Academic Advisement. In light of the cessation of face-to-face activities at the University, the OQA in collaboration with the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) provided an avenue for academic advisement services to be realised remotely which was not normally done.

A link requesting academic advisement was placed on the University's website (easily accessible through their student portal) and replicated on the Students' Union Instagram page. On clicking the link, a form requesting basic information inclusive of name, identification number, College/Faculty, email and telephone contact became visible. On a

daily basis, the information collected was tabulated and a Microsoft Excel sheet sent via email to the responsible officer in the OQA. The data were then sorted by College/ Faculty and sent to the individual academic advisement coordinators and copied to the respective deans and vice-deans. These coordinators then managed the engagement of the advisors and advisees through the use of video conferencing, telephone and email communication. An e-report (on a template provided by the OQA) was submitted by the respective College/Faculty to the OQA where an assessment was made regarding the quality and impact of this initiative.

Reflections of the Senior Quality Assurance Officer with responsibility for Academic Advisement outlined that:

> [O]nce the laptop was provided, I was better able to do my tasks. The Academic Advisement link was efficient and feedback was promptly received. I was able to attend meetings with a great level of success and found it to be a more flexible arrangement.

Evaluations. With the untimely shift to remote instruction, the OQA moved quickly to implement online student evaluations for which plans were advanced. The proposed instrument was revised for that semester to capture information on the students' experience of online/remote learning. The OQA thought it prudent to collect information on the students' experience of online/remote learning to gain feedback with regards to emergency remote teaching.

Therefore, the evaluations for semester two and the summer session were administered as online surveys through the Office of Institutional Research via the students' portal.

The Quality Assurance Officer with responsibility for evaluations noted that 'the pandemic provided an opportunity to advance the move to get the Instructor Module Evaluation (IME) online'. This allows for the elimination of a lengthy procurement process associated with the paper based evaluation.

Academic Quality Audits. Even though no audits were scheduled for the summer session, plans had to be made to conduct the audit exercises remotely as of the Academic Year 2020/2021. Remote audits are done by direct observations carried out through an electronic medium to achieve the audit objectives (ISO 9001 2020). This will allow for the flexibility to achieve the stated objectives, increased efficiency, increased safety, better timing and inclusion of personnel who may not be easily accessible. At the University, these remote audit exercises would include convening meetings and conducting interviews. However, some activities, for example touring of laboratory facilities, will remain as face-to-face exercises. To accommodate these changes, the Academic Quality Audit Policy was revised to include a section on conducting remote audits.

Additional observations of the Associate Vice President – Quality Assurance relating to the management of meetings include:

> I have found meetings [to be] more productive, there is less disruption and side conversations. It has proven a more efficient use of time.

> I found myself double booking some of the meetings and over-subscribing to webinars etc. There were fewer distractions so there was more focused effort in doing my tasks.

An observation of the Administrative Support staff was that 'minute-taking was much easier because persons would wait their turn to speak and there were no distracting side conversations'.

Recommendations

The University recognises that maintaining a culture of quality is imperative more so at this time but also realises that it requires changes in the operations. Additional and dedicated resource allocation and a contingency/mitigation strategy must be executed. Based on the experiences of the OQA, the following recommendations are being made in providing a response to maintaining quality assurance during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond:

1. Develop risk analysis framework.

2. Develop quality management guidelines in collaboration with the academic managers for working remotely.

3. Develop and maintain sustainable frameworks for the execution of key operational functions of the OQA.

4. Provide guidelines to ensure smooth remote operations of the areas of the OQA administration (staff meetings, resource allocation-laptops, operational plan, projects, outputs).

5. Create training opportunities for OQA staff especially Administrative Support staff in the efficient use of video conferencing tools and other communication.

6. Provide continued guidance to wider University in relation to quality assurance in blended learning.

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Ashesi's 360 Approach to the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: *Following the government directive to close schools in March 2020, a meeting of the academic leadership of Ashesi University devised a 360-degree response to the COVID-19 pandemic with decision making underpinned by simplicity and flexibility. The Admissions Department, supported by Student Life, led the evacuation and safe return home of all students, with students with challenging situations placed in homes the week of the announcement. Concurrently, the Academic Affairs team suspended all regular activities for two weeks, and with the assistance of the Operations and IT teams, developed the operational response plan, piloted the following week. Faculty and Academic Affairs stressed best practices, and in response to Student Life, emphasised the quality of instruction over quantity; rigour and higher-order thinking over the amount of learning. Pursuance of quality assurance was through weekly and clear master plans on teaching. Student Life, Admissions, and Academic Affairs used a devised student activity sheet to provide support to students to mitigate attrition, which was less than 0.2 per cent at the end of the semester. They regularly engaged students in virtual town hall meetings. Parents were included in students' study needs and invited to visit classes. Vendors for the grounds, cafeteria, security and cleaning services have been supported during this period. Most faculty and students have begun to enjoy the online teaching and learning experience with no request for a tuition refund, but rather, high student demand for summer school.*

Keywords: Human capacity, decision making, employment, education, qualitative research

Introduction

Ashesi University, situated in Ghana, is a private, not-for-profit, nationally accredited institution offering professional degrees in computer science, engineering and business administration, all grounded in the liberal arts. Its mission is to educate a new generation of ethical and entrepreneurial leaders in Africa and to cultivate within students critical thinking skills, concern for others and the courage it will take to transform the continent. Ashesi has

1,173 mainly Ghanaian students; 17 per cent from 23 African countries; 48 per cent female; and 43 per cent on scholarship.

Since its inception, and before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, Ashesi operated as a traditional residential campus, with basic technological operating systems: a Learning Management System, a system for student academic record-keeping, and most recently, a teleconferencing tool. To support its community to understand better and navigate these technological tools, the University has an established IT support centre.

Armed with these essential technological tools, the University's executive decided to move teaching and learning online when the COVID-19 pandemic hit Ghana. Ashesi has been hailed as one of the few universities on the continent to transition to online education successfully (Tamrat & Teferra 2020). This account of Ashesi's response plan will present a summary of the Government of Ghana (GoG) directive to provide some context, juxtapose Ashesi's response plan to three theories on pandemic management and report on the successes, challenges and lessons learned.

National Response Plan

On the 12th of March 2020, the day Ghana recorded its first two COVID-19 cases, Ghana's President described the pandemic as an 'all Ghanaian matter' and implemented a coordinated response with stakeholders including political, religious, traditional and civil society leaders (Ayeni 2020). The GoG's response to reduce the spread of the virus involved banning all public gatherings and closing schools.

Education-related protocols affected approximately 9.2 million learners from kindergarten to senior high schools (K-12), and over 500,000 tertiary learners. The disrupted academic calendars have led to the need for psycho-social support for students studying from home, especially, marginalised students (Ministry of Education, Ghana 2020). The President's directives for school closure made provision for rolling out distance learning programmes via radio and a 24-hour dedicated, free-to-air broadcast channel for the K-12 levels.

Ashesi's Response Plan

Overall Strategy

Ashesi's response can be described as a proactive and strategically planned response, though details developed as the plan unfolded. On the 12th of March, when the President of Ghana described the pandemic as a national security issue, the University's Executive Committee (ExCo) moved into planning mode to prepare for potential school closure.

The ExCo's immediate response reflects the Copenhagen School's securitisation theory (Buzan, Weaver & de Wilde 1998). The securitisation theory propounds that an issue becoming a security issue is a matter of construction, as 'the utterance is the primary reality'

(Buzan et al. 1998: 55). In this case, the utterance by the President of Ghana served as the primary reality for the ExCo. The theory further explains that where a 'threat', which is the pandemic, in this case, is presented as a security threat by a 'securitising actor' defined as 'someone, or a group, who performs the security speech act' (Buzan et al. 1998: 40), the President of Ghana, in this case; there is the acceptance by an audience. The ExCo is the audience in this case. Buzan et al. (1998) further explained that successful securitisation must fulfil both parts, and 'the issue is securitised only if the audience accepts it as such' (p. 25).

Some influential stakeholders of the University thought the ExCo was overreacting by planning to close on-campus operations immediately. The ExCo had however accepted the securitisation of the pandemic by the President, and hence by Friday, March 13, they had detailed a response plan. They additionally identified triggers for setting the response plan into motion. The three primary triggers included: a Ghanaian government directive concerning COVID 19 (directive does not have to be directly associated with higher education to be a trigger); anybody in a nearby community contracting the virus; anybody on the Ashesi campus contracting the virus, i.e. student, staff, faculty or third party vendor.

On that same day, measures that were enacted, such as the Dean of Students calling off the University's Student Council Week scheduled to take place the following week, banning all international travel of Ashesi community members, and others, allowed Ashesi to prepare in advance, for the execution of its plan.

On Sunday, March 15th, the newspapers reported two students in a nearby community with the virus and the ExCo immediately activated the response plan by halting all campus activities and communicating an interim operational plan to the community. That same evening, the President of Ghana announced a ban on all public gatherings and mandated all educational institutions to shut down on-campus operations and adopt online modes of teaching and learning until further notice. The occurrence of the triggers within a couple of days of planning and the reaction of the ExCo again reflected the securitisation theory.

Evacuation of students from campus was the priority. On Monday, March 16th most local students began to leave campus, with travel arrangements made for international students and other socio-economically challenged local students. In some instances, Ashesi rented accommodation for students whose homes were not conducive to studying.

Preparation of faculty for online teaching occurred during the evacuation period. There was a two-week pause on all teaching and learning and other campus operations. The first week focused on investigating the possibilities for teaching and learning online and training faculty on how to use various instructional technology. In the second week, faculty piloted online classes to fine-tune skills, ask questions and adapt their course content to the online tools available. At the end of the second week, classes transitioned fully online, and teaching and learning resumed.

The academics team restructured the semester. The semester was divided into two main parts to take into account teaching and learning in the two different contexts; different modes of

instruction; and the numerous locations and time zones. The period before the pause on campus was Segment A, while the online was Segment B. For the sake of equity to students and faculty, Segment A and Segment B were separate but parts of the same semester. Students could defer Segment B if they did not have access to the internet in their home locations or had other challenges.

Different operational support units strategised and transitioned to remote digital tools to facilitate online instruction. A 24/7 hotline team, among other administrative and academic support units, was established to supplement the University's Support Centre. The hotline team provided around the clock support to faculty to navigate the online tools and transition course content online. It also served as a resource for students who were also new to online learning.

Leadership in Executing the Strategy

The evidence of leadership shown through the actions and inactions of the ExCo fall under three leadership approaches. This triad comprises equally prominent leadership theories which together, produces effective management during disease outbreak (Arifah,Tariq, Rosliza & Juni 2018). They are contingency theory, participative leadership, and transformational leadership.

Ashesi's leadership has traditionally followed the contingency theory of leadership. This theory propounds that the optimal course of action is contingent upon the internal and external situation (Volberda, van der Weerdt, Verwaal, Stienstra & Verdu 2012). When the pandemic hit, our University President was on sabbatical, and the existing internal and external situation caused the ExCo to maximise each other's strengths and to take turns to lead the University to safety. Participative Leadership was also evident among the ExCo's which according to Bhatti et al. (2019) has an impact on citizenship behaviour and plays a crucial role in building trust and commitment in work colleagues. The leadership of Academic Affairs appealed to faculty who agreed to collate and share among themselves their various know-how in online technology to serve as a community of peer-mentors. Odoardi, Battistelli, Montani and Peiró (2019) further note that participative leadership provides an opportunity for employees to share creative ideas, offer helpful solutions to issues and be accountable for its implementation. One such innovative solution implemented was done during student evacuation. The Cameroonian border was closed at the time. The University liaised with the Cameroonian embassy to provide Cameroonian host families for affected students and support these families to care for the students.

According to Bush and Glover (2003), participative leadership is a collective action, and its success depends on the commonality in vision and deeds. Ashesi's vision was simply safety and quality learning, with its success dependent on the community working as one. The response plan was co-developed by the ExCo and academic and administrative heads of departments. The ExCo raised issues in round-table meeting settings, and decisions

collectively made. The ExCo together with departmental teams and leaders proposed iterations of the solutions and conclusions.

Another type of leadership evidenced in this strategy implementation was Transformational Leadership. Transformational leaders lead by example and work towards increasing optimism, enthusiasm and attention of followers (Alqatawenah 2018). According to Conger (2002), transformational leadership allows leaders to positively influence employees and other stakeholders to achieve more than expected, going beyond incentives for performance to transform their concerns into an essential part of the organisation's mission. The University provided internet data individually to approximately 1,200 students and 120 faculty and staff. The Academic Affairs team encouraged faculty per department to submit detailed plans of their teaching each week so the hotline could prepare for specific tools; students could manage their week of connectivity and learning; and faculty could be transparent about quality assurance.

Additionally, to maintain cohesiveness and optimism, the Academic Affairs and Student Life teams communicated each day of the working week with the various mobile chat groups created with students and a staff member, to provide additional support. The two departments also held town hall meetings with each class of students to assess and improve online teaching. Faculty and Academic Affairs stressed best practices, and in response to Student Life, emphasised the quality of instruction over quantity; rigour and higher-order thinking over a reduction in learning.

Looking Within: Successes and Shortfalls

Ashesi's stakeholders received this collaborative 360 response plan to the pandemic well. Students described the response plan as quick and collaborative. Student leaders were instrumental in its conceptualisation, and students attested to their voices being heard. Online office hours, mobile message applications, and other technological solutions made faculty more accessible to students and increased the levels of engagement. Faculty and staff appreciated the regular team and individual meetings because the constant communication allowed for rapid remedial actions. It also provided the necessary support in the uncertainty and adaptation to remote work. Resources made available to staff and faculty members guided them through the transition and helped them implement various aspects of their workflow. For faculty, FAQs provided at different key operational points of their role such as upload processes and grade submission, Segment A and B explanations and its effects on teaching and learning, among other interventions guided them on critical remote and online tasks.

The hotline team developed a database of students, their parents and guardians contacts, as well as a weekly student inactivity tracker to monitor student engagement. The tracker highlighted students who were missing classes, not submitting assignments, experiencing psycho-social challenges, among other challenges, and escalated to the right support offices.

The success of this inactivity tracker was very instrumental in reducing attrition and the number of students who initially opted for deferment. Students who appeared on the inactivity list were contacted individually (via phone and email). For academically at-risk students, the Provost, Academic Registry, Academic Advisor or Counselling & Coaching team scheduled meetings with them weekly, and most became academically successful. Additionally, the University provided laptops for students who needed them; stipends to support the upkeep of scholarship students at home; and deferred payments in tuition arrears for financially challenged students. These were in a bid to ensure that no student was left behind due to their socio-economic conditions.

All third-party service contractors, i.e. landscaping, canteen operators, and the likes, were supported by matching a proportion of their employee salaries. They suffered no income reductions or layoffs (External Relations Office 2020). Instead, they underwent COVID-19 prevention training and are currently maintaining the campus. The maintenance of staff and faculty incentives such as medical health insurance, transport allowance and paid medical leave further promote Ashesi's values of citizenship.

This strategy was not without shortfalls. Mobile data were critical to access learning and administrative materials to teach, learn and perform general administration duties. Mobile data distributed to students, often did not get to students promptly. Time zone differences also made it relatively complicated to sync classes. Most students in different time zones had to resort to viewing pre-recorded class sessions and scheduling one-on-one office hours with faculty at mutually convenient times.

Conclusion

The Ashesi response and management plan to the COVID pandemic brings to the fore the appropriateness of the Copenhagen securitisation theory and the Arifah et al. (2018) framework of participative leadership theory, contingency theory and the transformational leadership theory, as the analytical lenses in the management of disease outbreak.

Additionally, the response and management plan aligned with the checklist adapted from a disaster-preparedness framework designed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC 2016). The major items on the checklist include a plan for the impact on the business; a plan for the impact on employees and customers; policies to be implemented during a pandemic; allocation of resources to protect employees and customers during the pandemic; communicating with and educating employees; and helping the community. The checklist provides a 360-approach to responding to pandemics. Figure 1 shows how it aligns with Ashesi's response plan.

Figure 1: Ashesi's Preparedness for the COVID-19 Pandemic

PLAN FOR THE IMPACT ON THE BUSINESS

Set up of Pandemic Committee; ExCo and HODs managing pandemic; Contractors supported by University; Health team updating ExCo; Health team keeping ExCo informed; COO responsible for University wide communications; Provost responsible for faculty communications; plan piloted in a week; communication of key support personnel and their contact information.

PLAN FOR THE IMPACT ON EMPLOYEES AND CUSTOMERS

Capacity building for faculty to aid teaching and learning; Avenue to communicate absences; Virtual operations with little to no face-to-face operations; Communication with students and other stakeholders virtually; Regular COVID updates from the ExCo; Counselling support and guidance; Students given faculty/ staff mentors for this period.

POLICIES TO BE IMPLEMENTED DURING A PANDEMIC

Halting on-campus activities; Moving teaching and learning on-line; Virtual operational support; Strict protocol for on-campus visitation; Campus closed to international visitors.

ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES TO PROTECT EMPLOYEES AND CUSTOMERS DURING THE PANDEMIC

Hand hygiene products for employees and surrounding community members; data bundles sent to entire community; VPN access provided to access on-campus resources; Accommodation for students with poor living conditions; Accommodation for foreign students who could not return home; Stipends sent to scholarship students; Paying salaries of third party vendors during the pandemic.

COMMUNICATING WITH AND EDUCATING EMPLOYEES

COO sending periodic updates and pandemic fundamentals to community; HODs regularly engaging their departments to educate them and learn about their challenges to trigger the University's support system; Communications vetted and approved by ExCo or ExCo member; Dedicated webpage for updates and educational material on the University's website.

HELPING THE COMMUNITY

Sharing best practices with international and local partners through publications, panels and other gatherings; Maintaining a strong relationship with health insurance partner; Share practices with National Accreditation Board.

A significant concern for most universities at this time is the quality and rigour of learning. The impact or outcome of the 360-approach, in the era of disruption, includes an increased graduation rate for the Ashesi Class of 2020. Another change noticed was an increase in Summer School 2020 enrolment which was online. Ashesi has experienced the University's highest traction rate yet, with a 19 per cent increase in enrolment numbers from 2019. Students and faculty who were panicked by the idea of online teaching and learning generally seem to have adjusted well to online instruction and conversations about the future of education at Ashesi are ongoing. The ExCo has decided to continue the Fall 2020 academic semester online. The 360-approach, where everyone in the institution is included and supported by management, results in sustainable success in responding to and managing pandemics.

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E-Option for Health Education Amidst COVID-19: An Examination of Somalia Contexts

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Abstract: *As everyone is homebound following the closure of all institutions as a global response to the outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19), researchers predict that this confinement will lead to a rise in unhealthful behaviours which are made worse by the proliferation of fake health information on social media and folk sources. In consequence, post-COVID-19 predictions suggest that there is going to be a dramatic rise in the cases of STDs, teenage pregnancies, unsafe abortions, heart diseases and obesity, among others. This urgently calls for online Health Education especially for poor African countries like Somalia whose educational and health systems were in a precarious situation even before the pandemic. This study examined the constraints that might impede e-learning in Somalia, and, hence, impact on health education. Power poverty, network snags, poverty, harsh socio-cultural practices and the activities of the insurgents are the major constraints against e-learning. Recommendations that may address these constraints were proffered.*

Keywords: E-learning, health education, Nigeria, internet, electricity

Introduction

If there is any time health education would be mostly needed in poor African countries like Somalia, it is in this current state of global crisis when everyone is homebound following the closure of all institutions including school following the outbreak of COVID-19. Across the world, the lockdown has prevented an estimated 1.54 billion young people from receiving vital health education (Plan International 2020).The collateral damage of this is an increase in unhealthful behaviours revolving around sex, feeding and physical exercise with their attendant health consequences.

There are pieces of evidence linking the lockdown to unhealthful sexual practices. Girls will likely spend 'more time with men and boys than they would were they to be in school, leading to greater likelihood of engagement in risky sexual behaviour and increased risk of sexual

violence and exploitation' (World Vision International 2020: 3). This is troubling considering the fact that the lockdown has hindered girls from accessing important sexual and reproductive health information and services (Plan International 2020). The foregoing will lead to an upsurge in teenage pregnancies, unsafe abortion and maternal death, and spread of STDs (CNBC-Africa 2020; International Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics 2020; OCHA 2020; Partridge-Hicks 2020). The lockdown is further linked with the rising physical inactivity and sedentary behaviour with attendant risks of overweight, obesity and cardiometabolic complications (Margaritis et al. 2020). On the whole, the effects of this pandemic on education and health are disproportionately worse for those from more unstable and weaker economic and social backgrounds including poor African countries like Somalia.

Even before the pandemic, Somalia was regarded as one of the most acute in the world in terms of education deficit (African Educational Trust 2020). Due to decades of civil war, terrorism, and poverty, the students were forced to abandon schooling (UNICEF 2019). With the pandemic around, additional millions of Somalia children are made homebound as they lose access to any sort of learning let alone completing their academic year (Mwanjisi 2020). This condition has consistently exposed the children to violence of all sorts. According to UNICEF (2020), the Child Protection Agencies (CPAs) in Somalia have reported a consistent rise in violence against the children. For instance, 41 per cent of out of school children are faced with increased vulnerability to conflict and sexual and economic exploitation (UNICEF 2020). Mogoatlhe (2020) observed that Somalia has the highest rate of female genital mutilation (FGM) in the world and the lockdown will make it worse. This is because the procedures are usually carried out during school holidays when the girls are often at home. Mogoatlhe (2020) added that the rising poverty in Somalia during the pandemic is also encouraging the cutters to move from house to house in search of girls to cut. More so, the lockdown has led to decline in the provision and utilisation of essential health services in Somalia for fear of being infected while seeking or providing health care services (OCHA 2020).

Deriving from the foregoing, if the lockdown persists, unhealthful sexual activities, poor sleeping and feeding habits, self-medication, drug abuse and sedentary living would likely increase. Expectedly, this increase would be parallel to the consequent rise in the cases of sexually transmitted diseases, teenage/unplanned pregnancies, reckless and unsafe abortions, heart diseases, obesity and mental/emotional health problems. This situation would be worsened by the inability of children to access the health education required for making right health choices, in addition to wanton sharing of myths, conspiracy theories and other misleading health information on different social media. Regrettably, poor and developing countries like Somalia will continue to suffer enormous disadvantages if they do not acquire basic health literacy (Healthy Lincoln County 2013). Therefore, what is urgently needed in every home to prevent another public health crisis in Somalia is health education (HED).

In times like this, HED is required to fortify communities by assisting them in building better public health environments and by supporting people of all ages in making healthier lifestyle

choices. It is essential in guaranteeing both the immediate and future well-being of individuals and communities through organised health promoting programmes that discourage health compromising behaviours linked with abuse of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, and promote mental and emotional health, proper nutrition, physical activity, prevention of diseases/injuries, as well as healthy sexuality and family life (Healthy Lincoln County 2013). Now that students are at home with their parents, HED is hoped to be even more productive since forging strong partnership between home and school is an important facet for effective health promotion (Clelland, Cushman & Hawkins 2013). In order to effectively deliver the dividends of health education to homebound students in this social distancing era, the only option is to heed the recommendation of UNESCO (2020) for all people to embrace e-learning.

E-Learning

Electronic learning or e-learning is a teaching/learning interaction that occurs in virtual classrooms. E-learning is a set of teaching and learning tools designed to enhance a student's learning experience by the use of computers and the internet in the learning process (Rouse 2011). The learning environment typically provides the opportunity for participants to engage either in synchronous or asynchronous teaching/learning or both. In synchronous mode, the communication devices are used at the same time, enabling an immediate sending and receiving of message among the participants, as if they were in the same room. Video or audio call and Zoom meetings are examples of synchronous mode of teaching and learning. This is different from asynchronous mode where the information sent by a participant may not be seen or responded to immediately by the receiving participant(s). Examples of asynchronous communication systems include e-mail, online fora (WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram, twitter etc.) and short message service (SMS).

One of the best features of e-learning is its ubiquity, a feature that offers learners the ability to have access to quality education whenever, however and wherever they want it without physical contacts with either their teachers or other learners through a combination of multimedia materials including: textual (PDF, word, excel etc.), audio-visual (video, graphic interchange format (GIF), cinema, audio or voice notes) and pictorial (diagrams, graph sketches) to be shared among the learners. However, there are essential requirements for e-learning to thrive. There must be a stable power source, internet connectivity, possession of a functioning smart device (android, IOS or Window phone, tablet or computer), as well as possession of requisite ICT know-how by the participants.

Constraints to E-Learning in Somalia

An examination of Somalia contexts reveals that there are some constraints hindering adoption of e-learning as a tool for health education delivery. Somalia has continued to experience serious civil war, political instability and insurgency which, for the past two

decades, have disrupted its educational system (Hare 2007; Mannings 2014; United States Agency for International Development 2020). This instability creates an unfavourable environment for e-learning to thrive. Although e-learning is gradually making its way into Somalia and is hoped to be a solution to her complex educational needs, it is still faced with myriad of challenges including poor network infrastructure, lack of reliable electricity, self-efficacy factors, poverty and cultural factors (Aung & Khaing 2016; Omer et al. 2015).

Somalia has continued to witness electricity deficits because of years of unrest as a result of terrorism and civil war with accompanying destruction of electrical installations (Aung & Khaing 2016). Although replacements are being made, they focused on the major cities, leaving the rural and suburban population unconnected (Omer et al. 2015). On the average, Somalia still suffers what Knoth (2013) described as energy poverty. Lighting Africa (2020) reported that Somalia does not have central electricity grid and above 70 per cent of its population lives without electricity. The remaining 30 per cent of Somalis are served by privately owned diesel-powered mini-grids, for which they pay among the highest rates in the world, the report added. The point is: without electricity, teachers and students cannot power their devices, let alone have access to the internet (M. Jackoski, Education needs electricity, *Borgen Magazine*, August 12, 2013).

Apart from suffering power poverty, Somalia is at the bottom in the global league of internet access (Mumin 2018). Fuku and Hirsi (2018) observed that Somalia has the lowest internet penetration rate in the world. Only 10% of her population has access to the internet (Fuku & Husseini 2020) with fewer than 2 per cent of its people regularly online (Mumin 2018). People would have to travel to the cities to access internet where coverage still remains patchy, expensive and unpredictable even in the capital city of Mogadishu (Mumin 2018). To worsen it all, Al-Shabaab Islamic militant group has forced the closure of internet services in many areas of the country (Business Wire 2019). This portrays Somalia as a worst place for internet activities particularly with limited ICT devices even in its schools.

Provision of ICT infrastructures was mainly for selected schools in the big cities. Farrell, Isaacs and Trucano (2007) observed ICT devices are of limited access and use in rural areas. Few of the ones found in secondary schools were for the purposes of administration and not for education (Omer et al. 2015). This is coupled with lack of trained teachers (UNICEF 2020). All of these limit development of the ICT skills required for e-learning among the students. For instance, in a study conducted to examine the novice users' experiences of e-learning in Somalia, Omer et al. (2015) reported that lack of computer skills was among the major challenges experienced by the novice users of e-learning.

Another constraint to e-learning is socio-cultural influence which is disproportionately against the girls. Cultures like FGM and early marriage prevent the girl-child from exploring the world on their own unlike their male counterparts (Mogoatlhe 2020). Furthermore, the nomadic culture of the communities has made it difficult to keep children in school due to this lifestyle (Cline 2018).

On the whole, gross inequalities in access to formal education, electricity and ICT are the major hindrances to adoption of e-learning for health education in Somalia. The rural dwellers, the girls, the nomadic children, the poor and children with disability have limited access to formal education, electricity and ICT compared to their respective counterparts. For instance, UNICEF (2020) observed that children living with disabilities face even more challenges whereas those from nomadic pastoralist communities are constantly on the move and often denied of their rights to education. Somali girls are expected to stay at home and carry out domestic works and the majority of female jobs outside home (like tending to livestock or milking animals) do not require an education (Cline 2018). All of these deny the children the access and utilisation of ICT which are prerequisites for e-learning.

Although the Somalia government is doing its best to address some of these constraints, their efforts are of greater benefits to the city dwellers. The supports of donor and international agencies like WHO, UNICEF, USAID and UNPFA among others are appreciable, but much is still left to be desired. Therefore, to avoid worsening the existing inequalities that impinge on adoption of e-learning for health education, solutions targeting the inclusion of the marginalised children are needed.

Recommendations to Facilitate the Adoption of E-Learning in Somalia

Several recommendations to facilitate adoption of e-learning arise from the previous discussion.

- Among African nations, Somalia has the highest renewable energy source (onshore wind power and solar energy) and it could produce between 30,000 and 45,000MW (ESI Africa 2020). All that is needed is for its government to leverage these natural assets to tackle power poverty including providing a low cost multipurpose mobile solar power box for the Somalis.
- Internet connection can be enhanced in two ways. The government could partner with Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to install VSATs at the unreached areas. Secondly, the government can advise or encourage the mobile network operators (MNOs) to extend their coverage (which must include 3G and 4G) to remote areas. This strategy should be backed with provision of an adequate legal framework and security by the government for protection of those installations and the Somali people.
- Government should ensure adequate supply of ICT facilities in needy schools and compulsory computer training for all the teachers and students.
- Government should fund a one-home-one-device initiative. This is to ensure that every home has access to an internet-enabled device, radio or television for them to continue to have access to sexual and reproductive health education and counselling without face-to-face appointments. In addition, government can employ health educators and computer trainers/facilitators in each village.

- One way of tackling harsh cultural practices that undermine school enrolment and apathy to ICT utilisation is awareness creation among the parents, traditional and religious leaders on the importance of education. This could make them embrace change.

Conclusion

As the Somalia students are confined at home following the lockdown of schools as a measure for controlling the spread of COVID-19, they are exposed to unhealthful practices, namely: sexual violence and exploitation, unprotected sex, poor feeding habits, sedentary living, FGM and drug abuse, among others. These have been predicted to lead to a rise in sexually transmitted diseases, teenage/unplanned pregnancies, reckless and unsafe abortions, heart diseases, obesity and mental/emotional health problems. Regrettably, had they been going to school, they would have continued to have access to school health education that would help them in gaining experiences for making healthful choices as they are confronted daily with these unhealthy circumstances. However, for the students to continue to have access to health education like their counterparts in advanced nations, Somalia would have to rely on e-learning. This study examined the constraints that might impede the adoption of e-learning for delivering health education to the homebound students in Somalia. Poor electricity and internet services, poverty, harsh socio-cultural practices and the activities of the insurgents were the major constraints against e-learning. Among other things, the study recommended government's intervention and public awareness to address these constraints.

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The Impact of COVID-19 on School Leadership, E-Learning, and Student Achievement in the United Arab Emirates

Terry W. Burwell

Abstract: *This paper chronicles the leadership experiences of three United Arab Emirates-based principals. In particular, this paper focuses on the self-efficacy skills and aplomb of three educational leaders: Isabelle, Fiona, and Bruce (pseudonyms) who represent the educational jurisdictions of Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, and Dubai. Inculcating by example, they and the schools they served chartered a course which was unprecedented in educational history. Each leader strove to embody four Cs of leadership – calm, cool, collected and confident -- into the fabric of their professional and personal well-being so that staff, student and parental well-being would remain resilient, strong and positive. What follows is the story of how 'Maslow before Bloom's' became embedded in the terminology of their daily leadership practice.*

Keywords: Self-efficacy, COVID-19, well-being, leadership, workload intensification

Introduction

Epictetus once said, 'The greater the difficulty, the more glory in surmounting it. Skillful pilots gain their reputation from storms and tempests.' The year of 2020 has witnessed unprecedented times in educational history where conditions for learning oftentimes changed on a weekly, sometimes daily, basis. Almost overnight, schools in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) were thrust into a never before experienced E-learning environment where student well-being and achievement were challenged in a manner never before experienced in the UAE. Above all this, the focus remained the same: meet the needs of the students, parents and teachers while remaining confident and calm in the midst of the COVID-19 tempest. Without a doubt, 'Maslow before Bloom's' (Doucet, Netolikcy, Timmers & Tuscano 2020: 1) became their daily mantra. The importance of clear, constant, and focused communication where individuals were encouraged to share their learned experiences, in

addition to their frustrations, in a safe, positive and trusting environment cannot be underestimated. The experiences presented here are raw, and the challenges faced by the principals, students, parents and educators are real. This is their story, and these are their learnings.

Identifying the Problem

Imagine trying to convince the educational authorities in the UAE to abandon in-class teaching for 15 weeks and make every teacher teach remotely into their students' homes each day, and all with one week's notice. Add to this the requirement that teachers will need to teach the parents how to be involved while they struggle with running a home and ensuring that all their children are accessing their online studies each day. This would never be approved! But it happened in the UAE and in most parts of the world. In addition to this, you need to inform the schools that an external agency will be evaluating their newly created online learning experience and that they will be making each school's report public for all to see. And if that isn't enough, add to this the constant pressure to not only maintain student enrolment, but to actually increase student numbers through many tuition discount drives, while seeing your salary reduced because of unpaid and overdue fees. All this sounds like a perfect storm and yet this is how it unfolded beginning in March 2020.

Isabelle, Fiona and Bruce are three experienced western principals who work in Abu Dhabi, Sharjah and Dubai respectively. Isabelle is principal of a new school in Abu Dhabi that delivers a British curriculum to students from Kindergarten to Grade 7. Fiona is principal of a K-12 American curriculum school in Sharjah, and Bruce is principal of a British curriculum school in Dubai that delivers programming to students from Kindergarten to Grade 9. All three principals are in their 50s and have extensive international experience in leading schools. All three work for the same international education company which has over 700 schools in eight different countries. All three participated in this study because each had first-hand experience in leading their respective schools while in the midst of a global pandemic.

The added stress and responsibility of the COVID-19 crisis for Isabelle, Fiona and Bruce could not have come at a more inconvenient time as principals were already struggling to deal with the growing work intensification (Pollock 2014, 2015, 2016; Walker 2019; Wang, Pollock & Hauseman 2018) and work challenges impacting their physical and mental well-being (Phillips & Sen 2011; Riley 2012, 2013, 2014; Wang et al. 2018). Principals must lead in a manner that leads to sustainable school improvement (Fullan 2010; Lambert 2007; Shields 2011), and they must do so while remaining sensitive to relationships existing between staff members (Spillane & Anderson 2014). Ensuring that everyone's well-being is attended to is a growing task (Doucet et al. 2020; Federici & Skaalvik 2012) and it is impacting the physical and mental well-being of principals who are struggling with ever-increasing workload and pressures (Doyle & Locke 2015; Henebery 2020; Leithwood & Azah 2014a, 2014b; Pollock 2014, 2015, 2016; Riley 2012, 2013, 2014; Walker 2019).

This increase in workload and pressure is commonly referred to today as work intensification. Citing Pollock, Wang and Hauseman (2015), Walker (2019) defines work intensification as 'increased workload, work demands, and reliance on new media to communicate and adhere to stringent policy standards to improve student achievement' (p. 59). Work intensification, the changing nature of the principalship (Armstrong 2015; Beausaert, Froehlich, Devos & Riley 2016; Drago-Severson 2012; Drummond & Halsey 2013; Fullan 2008, 2010, 2014), and the tsunami of information communication technology (Gurr 2004) in the form of WhatsApp messaging, Zoom meetings, Google Hangouts, surveys for local educational authorities, weekly online parent meetings, and daily staff inquiries all had an impact on Isabelle, Fiona and Bruce who reached out and supported each other several times a week. Without this support, the pressures put upon them most certainly would have negatively impacted their ability to lead (Phillips & Sen 2011; Pollock & Hauseman 2015) since they were expected to be available 24/7 whilst they prepared their schools for mandatory school inspections (Doucet et al. 2020).

'Maslow's before Bloom's' was needed not only for students, parents, and teachers, moreover, it was needed for Principals as well. To quickly review, Maslow's hierarchy of needs are physiological; safety; love and belonging; esteem; and self-actualization. Bloom's Taxonomy has six levels: knowledge; comprehension; application; analysis; synthesis; and evaluation. Therefore, 'Maslow before Bloom' was key in approaching distance learning during this pandemic and remained at the centre of Isabelle's, Fiona's and Bruce's vision. The sudden thrust into a completely online learning environment had created Gladwell's (2002) tipping point when an idea, trend or social behaviour crosses a threshold and spreads like wildfire. The transition to online learning became their tipping point, and students, parents and teachers were all looking to them for direction.

Increased Support for Students, Parents, and Teachers

Isabelle, Fiona and Bruce agree that students, parents and teachers needed increased support because online learning had never been trained for, let alone delivered, in any of their schools. However, before deep and personal learning could take place, taking care of students' physiological needs, safety, and sense of belonging became their main priority. They needed 'Maslow before Bloom'. All three were in agreement that their schools served as a service hub connecting students to basic needs they required each day. It was also the social hub for students, parents and teachers because schools were the site where positive interactions took place each day (Barr & Saltmarsh 2014). Students reported feeling empowered when in school, but online learning had created anxiety and stress. In essence, students were mourning the loss which the structure regular schooling provided. Bruce shared:

> We are human beings and human interaction is key to our survival. We need to connect with one another, and we need to feel connected to the community in which

we live. That's what community means: common unity, and that is what school provides for all of us.

Fiona shared that Maslow was the priority for parents as well:

> We had to empower and educate them, some had lost jobs, many were not fluent in the language we were serving them in so there was the language barrier that needed to be overcome. This we accomplished through weekly Zoom sessions with parents which were held on Monday and Tuesday evenings.

All three agreed that once Maslow's hierarchy of needs was taken care of for parents and their children, then the teachers were able to proceed. Isabelle, Fiona and Bruce confirmed that many of their teachers were parents too. Hence, Maslow became their priority too. Isabelle said:

> We worked hard at ensuring our teachers were taking care of themselves through daily check-ins and personal communication. They were encouraged to have accountable friends who could speak honesty into their lives if they noticed them struggling for whatever reason.

What the three leaders wanted to avoid was a wave of mental health issues that could ultimately disrupt student learning (Chaplain 2001).

Teachers are human beings and their welfare was key to each school's success. Many reported feeling anxious about job security and the health and safety of their loved ones in their home countries. All three principals agreed that if they didn't address teacher welfare from the outset that they would have more collateral problems than answers to the pandemic crisis (Chaplain 2001). To this end, daily check-ins occurred with staff members, and weekly staff meetings reminded teachers of the importance of maintaining a health work/life balance. Clear, open and honest communication with all of the stakeholders was critical to each school's success reported Isabelle, Fiona and Bruce. Bruce commented, 'If we didn't make sure our students, parents, and teachers were taken care of, Bloom's would have never happened.'

Perhaps most importantly, each principal sheltered their staff from the distraction of the constant requests for information and data which were coming from their respective educational authorities. In some instances, three to four surveys were being requested in a single week from educational jurisdictions, and oftentimes the results of these surveys were never communicated back to the schools. However, the biggest ill-timed distraction was the decision of the educational authorities to conduct school inspections and evaluations based on the online learning experience of the students. Schools were not prepared for inspections such as these since this type of learning was brand new to the country. Regardless, Isabelle, Fiona and Bruce, along with their colleagues across the UAE, did a masterful job in easing the worries and concerns of their teachers and removed distractions that deterred from their core business: student well-being and achievement.

Conclusion

There is much media about the losses, the increased negative effects on the disadvantaged, and the widening equity gap, but it is far too early to accurately ascertain whether this is accurate or not. Students will not forget what they have learned just as a person does not forget how to ride a bike, how to swim, how to ice skate, or how to read and write. It may require some review, but their knowledge base and their skill set will remain intact. Unfortunately, media has fueled this fear amongst the populace and has gone from an entity that once reported the news, to an entity that now creates the news we ingest. A genuine battle for our minds has ensued and public and private schools have been dragged into the political foray. Interestingly, Mexico is looking at offering online learning through its network television providers and local radio stations as a means of ensuring all their students have equal and fair access to their studies. Herein lies the rub for all educators: creating equity in opportunity for all students once and for all.

The online learning experience was not all negative and such categorizing of students and absurd assumptions may mean schools miss those who are truly disadvantaged. Many things went well, and many UAE students thrived in the online learning environment. Teachers discovered new ways of engaging their students without having them directly in front of them in the classroom. As one student put it when speaking about their online learning experience: 'I love it. No one teases me.' Schools need to learn from what went well; what did not; who thrived and who struggled; and then schools need to investigate the why behind all of these findings.

At the time of this writing, media reports indicate a second pandemic wave, lockdown 2.0 as some are calling it, will impact schools again as early as October. Many returning to onsite learning, such as those in Israel and the Far East, have witnessed a returned spike in COVID-19 cases. Other educational jurisdictions like the UAE and North America for example, are slated to resume in-class learning by the first of September with wide-ranging safety precautions in place. Much remains uncertain, and much remains unknown. For educational leaders striving to navigate COVID-filled waters, your ability to 'stay calm and carry on' is needed more than ever (La Placa, McNaught & Knight 2013). Should Lockdown 2.0 strike the planet again, will there be harsher rules, deeper confusion, and outright rebellion? Will neighbor turn against neighbor? Alas, only time will tell.

Andy Bernard from NBC's *The Office* fame said, 'I wish there was a way to tell when you're in the good old days before you actually left the good old days.' I long for a return to the good old days; that is, before COVID-19 disrupted our world. For principals around the globe, take heart in knowing your leadership is needed more than ever before. Stay encouraged and embrace the words of Martin Luther King: 'We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.' Be good.

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Uncharted Territory: Educational Leaders Managing *Out-of-School Programs* During a Global Pandemic

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Abstract: *This study highlights the experiences of four administrators as they transitioned their in-person summer science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) program to the virtual environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Best practices and lessons learned were synthesised from semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and participant as observer observations (Billups 2020). The paper focuses on how these administrators adapted the ways they provided support for instructors and students in this new context over the course of the summer. These supports included academic support, technological support, operational support, and interpersonal relationship support. The summer STEAM program is one branch of an organisation called Pathways which provides in- and out-of-school programming for 5th-12th grade students during the academic year and over the summer. Recommendations for best practices for administrators implementing support systems in the virtual environment are provided.*

Keywords: Out-of-school programming, STEM, COVID-19, summer programming

Introduction

This study explores support systems and lessons learned from the transition of an in-person summer science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) program to a virtual setting due to COVID-19. This research focuses on an organisation called Pathways which provides in- and out-of-school programming for 5th-12th grade students during the academic year and over the summer. This paper investigated one of Pathways' programs, a summer STEAM program for 5th-9th grade students from across a large urban Northeastern city in the United States. While the program is classified as STEAM, one administrator noted that it lacked significant arts integration and for the purposes of this paper it will be considered a STEM program. The summer STEAM program has approximately 100 students, 20 instructors and 10 administrators. Students in the summer STEAM program take a grade-

level mathematics course and an elective. Some examples of the electives offered are bioengineering, robotics, and journalism. The mathematics courses are taught by certified instructors while electives are taught by certified instructors and undergraduate students. The varying experience of instructors is addressed by administrators by offering differentiated supports. The 6-week summer STEAM program ran Monday to Friday. Each day began with a 30-minute advisory block that consisted of team building, information sharing, and social-emotional skills such as mindfulness. After advisory on Monday through Thursday, students started with a 75-minute math or elective block followed by a 60-minute lunch after which they took their second class of the day. Fridays in the program consisted of advisory, a 75-minute capstone project, 60 minutes for lunch, and ended with clubs and office hours. The clubs ranged from book club to trivia to hearing from speakers. Office hours were a time for students to meet with instructors and review or get more challenging work.

This study focuses on four administrators from Pathways and the experiences they shared from a 30-minute semi-structured interview at the conclusion of the summer STEAM program. The administrative team was made up of academic support deans, student support deans, grade team leads, and a director. In addition to the four administrator interviews, the lead author has been a mathematics teacher in the summer STEAM program for the past two summers. Through these experiences, he was able to conduct document analysis and participant as observer observations (Billups 2020) over the course of the summer. These three forms of data were triangulated to explain planning, support systems, and lessons learned of administrators as they transitioned an in-person summer STEAM program to a virtual setting (Merriam & Tisdell 2016). Three of the authors are second year doctoral students at Drexel University. Each of the authors has years of experience working in the secondary educational environment. The authors' diverse backgrounds, interests and experiences have brought them together to collaboratively work on various projects to include: educational leadership, STEM education, and pathway programs. The last author is an Associate Professor and Program Director of the PhD program at Drexel University. His research focuses on STEM education, student identity development, and diverse issues within education. Throughout this research process, he has guided the students in the areas of STEM education, P-20 education and qualitative research.

Out-of-School Programs and the Educational Context

Out-of-school programs have demonstrated they are effective at incorporating integrated science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) curricula (Kelley & Knowles 2016). Additionally, out-of-school programs have demonstrated increased academic and behavioural factors such as content knowledge; opportunities and access, and increased student engagement (Gates 2017; Mac Iver & Mac Iver 2019; Roberts et al. 2018). Programs that take place outside of the classroom can be rich experiences that drive interest in STEM for students by providing hands-on projects that there may not be time for in a classroom setting (Gates 2017; Roberts et al. 2018**)**. However, out-of-school programs are not without

their challenges. Out-of-school programs can struggle with attendance due to students being enrolled in multiple programs, logistical issues, or student's lacking interest in the program (Moreno, Tharp, Vogt, Newell & Burnett 2016). Strong, interesting programming can help keep students enrolled in programs by keeping them engaged.

Instructors of out-of-school programs are not necessarily classroom certified teachers. As a result, they may lack formal pedagogical training. Furthermore, they may not be experts in STEM disciplines which could lead to discomfort with the lessons they are expected to teach (Cohen 2018; Kelley & Knowles 2016). To mitigate some of this discomfort, a strong out-of-school program that is supportive of instructors is required. Professional development is one factor that could contribute to instructors feeling more successful with out-of-school STEM programming (Cohen 2018). Ensuring that instructors of STEM programming are comfortable with material is an important factor towards an effective out-of-school STEM program.

Best Practices and Lessons Learned

The three sections below are broken up to represent the stages of programming: (1) Pre-program planning and supports, (2) evolving instructor supports during the summer, and (3) reflections of administrators.

Pre-Program Planning and Supports

Planning for the summer STEAM program started in April of 2020 as the new reality of the educational impact from the COVID-19 pandemic set in. With classrooms in the Northeastern United States shifting to a virtual setting due to local and state guidelines, planning became vital for the Pathways' summer STEAM program. One administrator shared how administrators from the various Pathways' programming met weekly to share 'best practices that we were building and creating. How have you done this on [video conferencing tool]? How have you shared it with students? … talk about work with our operations team to ship supplies' (Administrator 4). Frequent collaboration around lessons learned and best practices became even more important to smooth the transition to a virtual setting as new challenges continued to arise. While the transition of Pathways' regular school programming meant that there were established supports with families who participated, starting the summer STEAM program with new families and instructors meant building a new community. Pathways did not have the luxury of relying on established relationships as many of the students and instructors coming to the summer STEAM program were new.

Determining if students had laptops, headphones and access to virtual programming was part of the planning process. While during the academic year students were provided laptops through their school districts, the students were not guaranteed to keep their school district computers or receive continued technology support over summer. Pathways utilised a 'number of staff available to call kids, run computers to kids, just troubleshoot problems that will come up' (Administrator 4). The administrators and staff that worked towards getting

students ready for the first day of the summer STEAM program, enabled the program to hit the ground running. Administrators worked through wireless issues and provided laptops, headphones, and school supplies so students could engage with course material in a virtual space.

Instructors were given many supports before stepping into their virtual classrooms on the first day. Instructors were able to collaborate with an academic support dean and received funding for professional development and planning time. Academic support deans were available to give feedback and support about scope and sequence, lesson plans, and virtual engagement. Additionally, they provided lesson plans for capstone projects, summative assessments for mathematics, and shared out pertinent background information of incoming students. While instructors would be accountable to academic support deans over the summer, the deans were flexible and understanding. Administrator 1 noted that:

> I put a lot of thought into the meetings that I had with [teachers] thinking about how can I maximise their time and make sure that they get something out of it and they feel like they're not leaving the meeting with a whole bunch of more action items to do and they're overstressed.

Academic support deans planned weekly one-on-one support meetings with all instructors. The purpose of these meetings was to receive feedback on lesson plans and implement the suggested changes with the aid of the academic support deans. Instructors walked away with a product and tools, rather than feeling more overwhelmed. Another example of instructors' time being respected was that they were compensated for 10 hours of planning time before the summer began. Furthermore, there were five full days of paid professional development, two with students, dedicated to setting up a digital course page, learning the video conferencing software, discussing student support documents in a shared cloud storage service, and walking students through the process of navigating the virtual space. While there will always be unforeseen circumstances, the level of planning and support ensured instructors and students were able to work out many of the kinks before the program started.

Evolving Instructor Supports During the Summer

A new addition to the summer program was the hiring of university students as teaching assistants (TAs). While the initial role of TAs was not clear, they became pivotal throughout the summer as one administrator shared that 'the TAs we hired, I hired them not really sure what they were going to do because it was so unclear what the needs would be in a virtual space' (Administrator 4). TAs would frequently 'call students to get students online or to find out where they were or to come into a breakout room or whatever it may be so [teachers] can continue teaching as uninterrupted as possible' (Administrator 4). While administrators were willing to step in to provide assistance, instructors found having a TA assigned to their class to quickly help out was extremely beneficial. Surveys, informal feedback and group meetings detailed the praise of TAs, such as: 'they got outstanding feedback from teachers'

(Administrator 3) and 'the TAs, from the survey at the end had great reviews on how much they were helping' (Administrator 3) While TAs roles were not established going into the summer, TAs and instructors found ways for them to benefit the overall program and learning experience.

An early challenge that emerged was the engagement of students in the virtual space. Administrators and TAs were able to utilise breakout rooms to work with students. Often, instructors would reach out to administrators and TAs via phone, or through the web-based group chat application. Other times, administrators and teaching assistants would pop in on classes for observations and support. One administrator shared:

> Sometimes I'd be in the class and be like, 'Well, what's happening?' And I'd be like, 'Okay, I'm going to take these three kids into a breakout room to work on this thing because they don't understand. We'll be back.' (Administrator 1)

The ability for administrators to quickly move between rooms to support instructors was incredibly powerful. Furthermore, administrators were able to make breakout rooms and pull students without disrupting the overall flow of the lesson.

Administrators missed having the ability to have quick conversations with each other and instructors to check in, brainstorm solutions, or follow up on action items. One administrator shared that the virtual setting made following up with accountability items as 'more formal' (Administrator 4) and said, 'I think that for teachers, because teachers are humans ... do so much better when you can just talk them real quick on the side' (Administrator 4). As the summer progressed, administrators transitioned these informal conversations from emails and meetings to utilising a collaborative online word processing tool. Administrators tagged each other and instructors with a comment in support documents, lesson plans and agendas to ask for tasks to be completed, communicate about student issues, and provide reminders. Changing the mode of communication was one way administrators worked to 'prioritise people's mental health … [as] there's a million things you need to get done all the time really fast when you're virtual, because you can't do in-person check-ins' (Administrator 1).

Reflections of Administrators

After the completion of the summer program, administrators were asked to critically reflect on their experiences through part of the semi-structured interviews. Specifically, what changes could be made for students, what supports they would provide or enhance for staff, and to share the most impactful moments for them as leaders. All interviewees approached their response with a strength-based mindset, noting overall how the transition to online learning went under the conditions. The improvements for students centred around increased successful student engagement by creating 'more opportunities where kids can just have fun and design their own stuff, and talk to each other, and be interactive, and do partner work, and more collaborative experiences for kids' (Administrator 1). Administrators also felt the need to ensure the program for students allowed for building on past STEAM experiences to

be more student driven. Finally, administrators noted the need for an additional infusion of offerings and projects that engage in the creative arts to better fulfil their mission of STEAM programming.

In addition to focusing on peer interaction and collaboration, administrators sought to explore the operations of the day by examining best practices for structure and online learning. One administrator commented, 'I would like to see us infuse a little more data in terms of how long we're online with the kids or how we're breaking it up ... infusing a little bit more of some research-backed strategies' (Administrator 2). Two participants addressed the desire to push for increased differentiation of activities and program tone to ensure distinction between traditional schooling and the out-of-school STEAM opportunity.

When responding to what additional support they would like to provide to instructors, every administrator noted the need for additional staff in various capacities including support from TAs, deans, co-instructors and operations. Though two administrators recognised that the current crisis forced them to make more decisions from a top-down approach, they noted that in the future they wanted to provide staff with 'more time to collaborate' (Administrator 4) and allow for more 'instructor design' (Administrator 1). Resounding agreement from all administrators was around the need for additional specific professional development in technology, tools and classroom management in a virtual environment.

The role of administrators became increasingly important for logistics, decision making, and support. Building and maintaining the community of the program through relationships with the staff, students and families was vital for administrators. It is also important to note that it is the impact on youth and relationships that are the drive and motivation for these leaders. Throughout the interviews each administrator portrayed care and excitement around interacting directly with the students and seeing their growth. One of the administrators noted that 'seeing kids present was always a joy and just being really wowed by their ability' (Administrator 4). While the other claimed:

> That was one of my best moments, when they started to go on their own ... Those moments were the best moments, when you just see the kids get so independent over the summer program and start doing everything on their own. (Administrator 2)

Overall, the administrators reflected on this experience in crisis leadership and transitioning to online programming with a vision towards the future.

Conclusion

Throughout the process of transitioning the summer STEAM program from in-person to a virtual setting there were lessons learned and best practices developed by administrators. Below is a summary of selected best practices found from this study.

Empathy for All. Continuing to hold an understanding that educators, families and students have differing situations as a result of COVID-19 is of the utmost importance. This can be

shown through caring and kindness around expectations and the demonstrated value of others' time and resources.

Leadership Decision Making. Decision making and leadership styles need to vary in context. During quick planning, top-down decisions may be required to set policies, but leaders should ensure staff and instructors have voice and buy-in when possible. Leadership in a time of crisis requires the ability to change and to continually adjust decisions for the success of the program.

Mission and Motivation. Dedicating time for meaningful engagement with other educators and students ensures that the community can be grounded in the overarching mission for the program. Additionally, revisiting activities that highlight the group's motivations and engagement provide for strong community building. As instructors and administrators are stretched in new ways, reminders of overall goals and mission are impactful.

Necessity of Flexibility. Unprecedented times require staff to be flexible and willing to take on new and different roles as needs emerge. Families and students will also be faced with new ways they will need to adjust to programming or staffing changes. Shared appreciation and verbal acknowledgement of flexibility is encouraged.

Technology Resources. Ensuring students have access to technology to engage in coursework in a virtual setting including laptops, wireless internet and headphones is crucial. Utilising available software and programs for staff communication and engagement allows for higher efficiency and environments for successful learning.

While these best practices were uncovered through the course of this study, the list is by no means exhaustive. The lessons and practices provided here should be considered part of the larger conversation as educators around the globe navigate their own educational contexts.

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Pencils Down: Educators Respond to the Uncertainty Amidst COVID-19 School Closures

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Abstract: *The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally affected K-12 schooling in the United States. Knowing that schools were facing challenging circumstances, we wondered how teachers and administrators felt about support, self-efficacy and equity during the first weeks after school closures. Nineteen teachers and seven administrators were surveyed and interviewed to gain an understanding of the effect of the global pandemic on their professional lives. Self-efficacy (Bandura 1977) was used as the theoretical framework for the study. Although interviews varied, surveys revealed that participants were satisfied with levels of support, would advocate for their profession, and equitable practices were being utilised. This study provides information for practitioners and policy makers as they prepare for future events that affects schools on a grand scale.*

Keywords: Administrators, teachers, self-efficacy, disaster, pandemic, equity

Introduction

By mid-March 2020, most US schools were physically shuttered and thrust into what has been called 'crisis schooling' (Baker 2020: 12) in response to the novel coronavirus pandemic. Many districts scrambled to provide remote instruction to their students with little notice. They were forced to consider their ability to support all stakeholders as they made decisions about how to carry out the rest of the academic year. Some schools continued providing instruction remotely, but even that solution was complicated by the fact that approximately 15-16 million students and 300,000-400,000 public school teachers live in a home without internet access or a digital device; somewhere between 55 and 60 per cent of them lack both (Chandra et al. 2020). Other school districts decided they couldn't require any type of online instruction since they couldn't ensure equitable access for all students. Knowing that districts were facing these challenges, we wondered how educators felt in the midst of the upheaval. What supports were offered to them? Were they able to be effective in their positions? How did they feel about the teaching profession overall? What were their concerns? We surveyed and interviewed educators about these issues.

Related Literature

Most of the research about disasters and schools focuses on the impact of acute disasters—those that strike quickly and leave a lasting impact. This research almost always takes place after the crisis (Fletcher & Nicholas 2016). The research described here is unique in that it captures a moment in time during which educators were living through a sustained crisis and the uncertainty associated with its long-term impact.

We searched Education Source, ERIC and PsychInfo databases for peer-reviewed articles using combinations of terms, including unique search terms, such as 'principals or administrators or school leaders or teachers'; 'disaster'; 'self-efficacy'; 'perceptions or attitudes or opinion or experience or view or reflection or beliefs or feelings'; as well as 'pandemic or epidemic or outbreak'; 'elementary school or middle school or high school or K-12'. When transition-related descriptors (e.g. 'transition to online learning', 'transition to online teaching') were added to the search, they returned no additional results. After the abstracts were reviewed and duplicate results were removed, 33 were relevant to our research. These relevant studies pointed us to an additional 11 related works. We grouped results into five categories: (a) disaster research, (b) disaster preparation, (c) action in the midst of disaster, (d) disaster's impacts on educators, and (e) educators in a pandemic.

Disaster Research

Revel (1996) defined 'disaster' as '[when an] environmental disruption exceeds the adjustment capacity for the affected community, thus requiring external assistance' (p. 290). Smawfield (2013) identified '… sudden and calamitous events producing great material damage, loss, and distress' (p. 2). Crepeau-Hobson (2018) takes a broader approach in defining what she terms 'crisis events' (p. 18), noting that the psychological, social and functional consequences of them often last longer than the physical effects. Seyle, Widyatmoko and Silver (2013) note that large-scale traumatic events impact even those who are not directly exposed and often disrupt the functioning of communities.

Researching disasters is a growing area of study across a number of fields. Most of the available research has been conducted in the wake of a natural disaster such as a tornado, earthquake or hurricane. Much of the research related to schools has drawn from a broad body of research in an attempt to offer insight on school preparedness (Mutch 2014). Most research happens after a disaster, and little research has focused on educational leadership during such times (Fletcher & Nicholas 2016). However, the literature demonstrates that schools have proven to be an essential part of a resilient community during and after a natural disaster (Pang et al. 2008).

Disaster Preparation

Much of the research literature around disasters focuses on the need for effective preparation, usually in hindsight. Studies of the impact of events like earthquakes, arson and meningitis outbreaks point to the necessity of disaster preparedness predicated on clearly defined roles, priorities, and use of resources (Akbaba-Altun 2005; Gomes, Smith & Ashlock 2008; McKen 2001; O'Connor & Takahashi 2014; Winters 2007). These authors explicitly call for moving beyond a single comprehensive emergency management plan, to multiple plans tailored to specific emergencies, along with regular reviews of and updates to emergency plans.

Disaster plans should involve the broader community (Crepeau-Hobson 2018; Mutch 2014), ensure physical safety (Crepeau-Hobson 2018), focus on student and teacher well-being (McKen 2001; Lazarus, Jimerson & Brock 2003), and articulate clear processes for sharing information (Crepeau-Hobson 2018; Flanagan 2007). The literature suggests that getting schools up and functioning should be a priority in terms of the psychological factors involved in returning to normal, but cautions that a return to normal should be a long-term rather than a short-term goal (Crepeau-Hobson 2018; McKen 2001; Mutch & Gawith 2014).

Action in the Midst of Disaster

Although teachers are often considered to be first responders in the midst of disaster, it is typically school administrators who must make decisions that impact the short- and long-term consequences of schooling. Yet, Fletcher and Nicholas (2016) note a 'dearth of research on educational leadership and management at times of natural disasters' (p. 359). Despite this lack of research, Pepper, London, Dishman and Lewis (2010) identified four effective actions K-12 leaders demonstrate in crisis: a) identifying immediate priorities, b) focusing time and effort on the priorities, c) communicating frequently with stakeholders, and d) remaining sufficiently detached. These actions provide a frame for the related research, summarised below.

Identifying Immediate Priorities

Huff (2019), a superintendent who led his district through the devastating 2011 Joplin, Missouri tornado, suggested that having a vision for moving forward is key in the midst of disaster. Akbaba-Altun (2005) reported that, following earthquakes in Turkey, principals prioritised checking on their school building, getting reports about the school, and making sure damages were reported among their primary concerns.

Bishop, Fifolt, Peters, Gurley and Collins (2015) interviewed nine K-12 leaders who survived a tornado outbreak and determined that decisiveness and planning based on the district mission were critical, especially as the community looked to educational leaders to guide them. School leaders managing the impact of devastating earthquakes in Christchurch, New Zealand also sought ways to adjust to their schools' circumstances, including recognising the place the school held in the wider community and working to generate a sense of belonging in spite of the disaster (Fletcher & Nichols 2016).

Focusing Time and Effort on the Priorities

Much of the literature examines efforts focused on the well-being of the people affected by the disaster. For principals in Christchurch, understanding the impact of the earthquakes on teachers, students and families meant that administrators recognised the vulnerability of each, endeavoured to alleviate ongoing traumatic stress, and understood that increases in student misbehaviour were a result of earthquake-related trauma. Bishop et al. (2015) found that administrators emphasised responding to the emotional needs of staff and students in the midst of crisis management. Akbaba-Altun (2005) also found that after addressing the physical damage to the school building, principals' immediate concerns turned to reaching out to and reassuring teachers and other personnel. Administrators in these studies demonstrated caring and moral responsiveness as they worked to connect multiple systems within their schools and larger communities.

Communicating Frequently With Stakeholders

The need for effective communication was noted in nearly every study of schools in crisis. Fletcher and Nichols (2016) found that principals prioritised staying connected with students and parents, particularly regarding distribution of food and water. Principals noted the need to adjust to their circumstances, through use of email, text, the school website, or even landline phones, in order to prioritise ongoing communication. Other research acknowledged building relationships in the wider community as critical in facilitating successful outcomes after a crisis (Bishop et al. 2015; Huff 2019). Hawes (2011), a principal from Christchurch, prioritised communication with all stakeholders, checked on the status of each staff member, and requested that teachers contact each parent to ask how the family was faring.

Remaining Sufficiently Detached From Students

While detachment seems to stand in contrast to frequent communication, an element of detachment shows up across studies of leadership in the midst of disaster. In the case of the Christchurch earthquakes, principals were forced to trust other school-based faculty to take care of students and schools so that they could take a more active role in ensuring access to resources in the larger community (Fletcher & Nichols 2016). The superintendent of a post-Katrina Mississippi district stated, 'It's almost like I don't even focus on the kids being in school anymore because I'm so focused on gathering data' (Hardy 2006: 6). Undoubtedly, administrators need to balance detachment with compassion in order to most effectively handle such a crisis.

Adaptive leadership that formulates, communicates and implements responsive strategies is most effective in crisis situations (Bishop et al. 2015; Goleman 2000). The work of O'Connor and Takahashi (2014) found that leaders who emerge from a crisis with strengthened relationships within and outside of the school community take control, put people first, weigh evidence, and make firm decisions. Undoubtedly, administrators need to balance detachment with compassion in order to most effectively handle such a crisis.

Disaster's Impact on Educators

In the wake of disaster, schools often take on the role of resource distribution within a community (McAdams Ducy & Stough 2011). Baum et al. (2019) stated, 'Teachers have been viewed as the most convenient way to deliver services to children, but have not been seen as individuals who might require post-traumatic support in their own right' (p. 64). Research involving 43 teachers in Indonesia indicated that teachers reported levels of post-traumatic distress similar to those of other adults in their community following an earthquake. Lazarus et al. (2003) stated that teachers must address their own anxieties and insecurities if they are to be expected to help students cope with the ramifications of a disaster.

A return to normalcy can provide social networks that serve as psychosocial supports and ease feelings associated with grief (Cohen & Mannarino 2011; Lazarus et al. 2003; Norris et al. 2008). However, both McKen (2001) and O'Toole and Friesen (2016) found that teachers are often expected to meet unrealistic timelines to return to normal imposed by district level administrators. Approximately 40 per cent of the teachers interviewed by O'Toole and Friesen indicated that when they were required to return to work, after about three weeks, they were not ready; 25 per cent felt unsupported by their schools when they did return. This type of situation, in which teachers are forced to act normally in a situation that is not typical can lead to increased uncertainty and stress (McKen 2001). Furthermore, McKen (2001) found that poor communication and lack of input from teachers allows misinformation to proliferate and forces teachers into a reactive state. O'Toole and Friesen (2016) emphasised the need to balance efforts for the effective return of students with efforts to ensure staff recovery. They noted that 18 months after the Christchurch earthquakes, teachers indicated that when school management was accommodating, supportive and appreciative, teachers had an easier time transitioning back to work.

Educators in a Pandemic

There is emerging research related to our current disaster, the worldwide novel coronavirus pandemic, that is beginning to be published.

Carlson (2020) invited nine teachers to share their views about pivoting to remote instruction, and most discussed stress surrounding the uncertainty of the situation and transition to virtual platforms along with their attempts to create community, demonstrate flexibility, and model caring. In an editorial, Baker (2020) pointed out stressors including lack of internet access, particularly in rural areas, and the stress of being thrust into a parenting role which included home-schooling.

A survey of over 8,000 teachers and school leader members of the Alberta Teachers' Association found that their top concerns were school safety, student readiness to return to school, and the mental health and well-being of the school community (Hare 2020). Respondents mentioned issues of equity, increased poverty and food insecurity, curricular gaps, the burden of standardised tests, and the pandemic's impact on vulnerable student

populations (e.g. students with special learning needs, English Language learners, refugee students).

Adams (2020) studied the impact of the 1918 influenza pandemic on the largest non-reservation Indian boarding school in the U.S. at that time. This was the only research we found that related the 1918 pandemic to schools. While Adams focused more on documenting the events and their impact on students at the Oklahoma school, it may be relevant to note that the headmaster prioritised institutional survival over the well-being of the students, consistently downplaying the severity of the crisis in communication with the government, community and parents.

In addition to these, journals have produced special issues. For example, the *Journal of Professional Capital and Community* is producing a special issue in 2020 that will share international perspectives on innovative, creative and productive responses to the pandemic. *International Studies in Educational Administration* (ISEA) has devoted four issues to exploring empirical research, descriptions of country or more local responses to education during the pandemic, and short articles that provide educators with knowledge to help them lead their educational organisations during this time – these are available open-access at <www.cceam.net>, and, of course, this paper is part of the fourth of the special issues. In this issue of ISEA, Huber (2021) reports on one of the largest and earliest surveys about the pandemic, covering responses from over 24,000 school community and system personnel across Austria, Germany and Switzerland. As noted by Gurr (2021) in his editorial to this issue, the study has shown that there has been: impact on all actors; greater appreciation and recognition of teachers from parents; increased use of digitisation, learning technologies, differentiation, and blended learning; increased gaps in learning and inclusion within and between schools; and, appreciation for the importance of motivation and emotion to learning.

Theoretical Framework

We approach this work through social cognitive theory (Bandura 1977) focusing on self-efficacy (Bandura 2000) – 'people's beliefs in their capabilities to perform in ways that give them control over events that affect their lives' (p. 12). For professional educators (i.e. teachers and administrators) these capabilities are centred on performing tasks in school settings (Hoy & Hoy 2013; Imants & De Brabander 1996).

Hoy and Hoy (2013) distil expectations related to self-efficacy into four categories, including: (a) mastery experiences, (b) psychological and emotional arousal, (c) vicarious experiences and (d) social persuasion. This study focuses on our participants' mastery experiences, their 'own direct experiences, the most powerful source of efficacy information' (p. 161).

Finally, this study takes up Ziegler's (2014) psychosocial domain of adult development, which includes the reciprocal relationship between how society and culture shape people and vice versa. This lens allowed us to better understand how the immediate impacts of COVID-19 influenced educators' perceptions of their professional lives. Throughout surveys and interviews, participants passionately conveyed how the challenges posed by the pandemic

affected their emotions, interactions, experiences, and general sense of mastery in their work as professional educators.

Methodology

This sequential, mixed methods study (Teddlie & Tashakkori 2009) was designed to elicit administrator and teacher insights on their concerns and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on self-efficacy. Thus, the primary research question was, 'How did the COVID-19 pandemic professionally impact educators?' Sub-questions included:

1. How did educators perceive levels of support in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic?

2. In what ways were educators' perceptions of their self-efficacy impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?

3. In what ways were educators' perceptions of the profession altered due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

4. In what ways were educators concerned about issues of equity and access?

This study was approved by the University's Institutional Review Board.

Participants

Twenty-six graduate students within a large geographic area of the Southeast United States participated in the study. The participants were enrolled in a fully online principal preparation program (PPP) administered at a major research university. At the time of the study, seven participants were serving in administrative roles, while the remaining 19 were teachers. Participant demographic information is included in Table 1. To ensure confidentiality, all participant names were replaced by pseudonyms.

Table 1: Study Participant Information (n=26)

Participant Name (pseudonym)	Role	School Type	School SES*	Age	Sex	Race **	Highest Degree Obtained ***	Years of Teaching Experience (years)	Years of Administrative Experience (years)
Andrew Carson	Teacher	Elementary	4	37	Male	4	2	5	0
Arthur Martin	Teacher	HS	3	30	Male	4	2	8	0
Alison Kemp	Teacher	Elementary	4	29	Female	4	3	4	0
Amber Anderson	Teacher	Elementary	3	52	Female	4	2	21	0
Brenda Benton	Teacher	Elementary	4	34	Female	4	3		0

Bill Parsons	Teacher	HS	4	39	Male	4	2	16	0
Claire Gibbons	Administrator Coordinator	District	5	45	Female	2	3	14	1
Charlie	Teacher	MS	4	30	Male	4	2	3	0
Ellen Townsend	Teacher	HS	2	31	Female	4	2	5	0
Erika Barkley	Teacher	MS	5	26	Female	4	3	5	0
Howard Mason	Teacher literacy and dean of students	MS	3	27	Male	4	3	5	0
Jenny Edwards	Teacher	MS	4	34	Female	4	3	5	0
Kevin Cosgrove	Teacher	HS	4	29	Male	4	3	4	0
Kelly Ackerman	Administrator	HS	5	35	Female	2	3	10	2
Kim Bellview	Administrator Coach	HS	5	26	Female	4	3	2	2
Leslie Millhouse	Administrator literacy and dean of students	Elementary	5	34	Female	4	3	12	1
Mason	Teacher	Elementary	1	23	Female	4	2	3	0
Marcy Gibbons	Teacher	Elementary	3	29	Female	2	2	7	0
Mary Lewis	Teacher	MS	5	28	Female	4	2	7	0
Monica	Teacher	MS	3	28	Female	4	2	7	0
Rebecca Abrams	Administrator literacy and dean of students	K-8th	3	37	Female	5	3	0	4
Robin Mitchell	Teacher	HS	2	25	Female	4	2	3	0
Shelley Kopp	Teacher	Elementary	5	28	Female	4	2	7	0
Theresa Dillon	Administrator literacy and dean of students	MS	4	27	Female	2	2	4	2
Tammy Baker	Administrator	HS	5	44	Female	2	3	15	5

Wendy Howard	Teacher	MS	4	27	Female	4	2	5	0

* School SES: 1=Mostly Affluent; 2=Middle Class to Affluent; 3=Middle Class; 4=Middle Class to Low SES; 5=Low SES

** Race: 1=American Indian or Alaskan Native; 2=Black or African American; 4=White; 5=Other (Middle Eastern)

*** Highest Level of Education: 1=Associate's Degree; 2=Bachelor's Degree; 3=Master's Degree; 4=Education Specialist; 5=Doctorate

Data Collection

The first author, also the instructor of a class which included the participants as students, conducted semi-structured interviews with each of the participants via Zoom during the first week of April, 2020. The participants responded to five questions which investigated their feelings of self-efficacy, support and equity as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The questions were:

1. Tell me your feelings about the professional support you provided/received from your administrators/administrative team during the COVID-19 pandemic? Personal support?
2. How has your sense of how well you think you can do your job been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, are you more/less likely to encourage others to join your profession?
4. Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, are you more/less satisfied with your choice to be a professional educator?
5. What about equity and access (food, instruction, communication, technology) for all students during the COVID-19 pandemic?

After the interviews, the participants completed a 13-question online survey which included participant demographic information and responses to the first four interview questions using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. The fifth interview question was not included in the survey due to its inherent qualitative nature. Upon completion of data collection, the raw video files of the Zoom interviews were uploaded to YouTube, where unedited transcriptions from the interviews were produced. All transcripts were revised for accuracy using the corresponding video segments as a reference. Demographic data were collected from the surveys. Descriptive statistics were calculated for each scaled item of the survey.

Data Analysis

Interview Analysis

Both authors were involved in the data analysis. We began the coding process by randomly selecting six interview transcripts for in vivo coding, in order to prioritise the educators' voices (Miles, Huberman & Saldana 2014). A codebook was created to guide the analysis of the remaining interview transcriptions (Saldana 2016). Coding proceeded with another six transcripts, intentionally selected to ensure that both administrators and teachers were represented. Each author coded individually, recording their analysis in a shared web-based document.

The authors met via a video conferencing platform to review and compare codes, making clarifications to the original codebook through an iterative process supported by open discussion, (Saldana 2016). We identified participant responses which were expressed with significant clarity as exemplars. Coding proceeded using the same process (individual coding, discussion, and codebook clarifications) with the next seven interview transcripts, and then again for the final seven.

We then revisited the first six interview transcriptions, using the finalised codebook, to ensure consistency. After all 26 interviews were coded using the codebook, the researchers had an inter-rater reliability of 88 per cent, well within the 80-90 percent benchmark suggested by Saldana (2016). Areas of disagreement were further discussed to the point of consensus. Codes were evaluated for patterns and grouped into categories, and from those we identified the predominant concepts for each question.

Survey Analysis

In addition to the interviews, the participants completed a web-based survey which included statements that directly correlated to the first four interview questions. The survey statements used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' in order to ascertain the degree to which participants agreed with statements about professional support, sense of self-efficacy, and overall feelings about the teaching profession during the pandemic. Survey data were used to enhance the trustworthiness of the qualitative data. While the interview questions allowed for verbal responses, the corresponding survey statements required participants to select a single Likert scale response from five options, including: (a) strongly agree, (b) agree, (c) neither agree nor disagree, (d) disagree, and (e) strongly disagree. These survey questions asked the participants to indicate the degree to which they agreed with the following statements:

1. I was provided adequate professional support to fulfil my professional role during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. My feelings of how well I perform my job was affected positively by the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, I am more likely to encourage others to join my profession.

4. Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, I am more satisfied with my choice to be a professional educator.

Results

Results of interviews and surveys involving this study's 19 teachers and seven school administrators provided insights into their feelings about support, self-efficacy and students' equity of access to resources.

No participant strongly disagreed with any of the survey questions, which focused on support and self-efficacy. The in-person video interviews allowed the participants to further elaborate on their relative agreement to survey questions, as well as ideas related to equity/access discussed in response to the interview's fifth question. Table 2 provides the results of the four survey questions for teachers and administrators participating in the study.

Table 2: Participant Responses to Survey Questions (n=19 teachers, n=7 administrators)

Question	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	Teach	Admin	Teach	Admin	Teach	Admin	Teach	Admin	Teach	Admin
1 Support	6 (32%)	1 (14%)	7 (37%)	4 (57%)	2 (11%)	1 (14%)	4 (21%)	1 (14%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
2 Self-Efficacy	4 (21%)	0 (0%)	6 (32%)	5 (71%)	4 (21%)	0 (0%)	5 (26%)	2 (29%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
3 Encourage Others	2 (11%)	1 (14%)	7 (37%)	1 (14%)	9 (47%)	2 (29%)	1 (5%)	3 (43%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
4 Relative Satisfaction	5 (26%)	5 (71%)	7 (37%)	1 (14%)	7 (37%)	1 (14%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Professional Support

In response to the first survey statement, which required participants to rate their level of agreement with whether they were provided adequate professional support to fulfil their professional roles, 69 per cent of teachers and 71 per cent of administrators agreed or strongly agreed. However, with over 30 per cent of all participants disagreeing or neutral in their assessment of support, it is worth investigating the reasons why many of these educators did not agree with this statement, and interviews provided further insight. Participants focused their interview responses primarily on frequency and modes of support (e.g. digital versus analogue platforms, district-level versus building-level communications). Categories for this question are provided in Table 3.

Table 3: Coded Participant Responses to Interview Question 1* (n=26)

Category/Concept	Teachers (%)	Administrators (%)	Both (%)
Colleague support beyond that provided by administration	11 (18%)	2 (11%)	13 (16%)
Frequency of communications provided by administration	19 (31%)	5 (28%)	24 (30%)
Mode of communications provided by administration (e.g. phone/email/video conferencing)	19 (31%)	6 (33%)	25 (32%)
Support affected by administrator disposition	7 (11%)	1 (6%)	8 (10%)
Support by non-professional persons (i.e. friends and family members)	2 (3%)	3 (17%)	5 (6%)
Limits to communication by administrator due to size of school	3 (5%)	1 (6%)	4 (5%)

Note: *(Describe) your feelings about the (personal and) professional support you provided/received from your administrators/administrative team during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ellen, a high school social science teacher, explained her perception of administrator support, stating, 'I mean (the principal) is available if you need him and he'll always answer the phone or call you right back so the support is there, but you really have to seek it out.'

In terms of timing and substance of communications related to school closures, Howard, a 7th grade literacy teacher who also served as a middle school dean of students stated that:

> There were a lot of us waiting around to hear, and it was a bit frustrating at times because a lot of parents and even our students were asking about stuff, and we basically just had to say we don't have anything yet. So it…was concerning when you looked at other districts who were already rolling and going with it, but I understand why they wanted to have one singular voice and message for the county.

A number of teacher participants described the use of video conferencing technology for remote meetings between administrators and teachers, and their appreciation for connecting with colleagues. Erika, a middle school social science teacher, said:

> 'We did a group ... like a staff meeting over Zoom which was really great ... I mean ... you see these people all the time and then you don't so then it's kind of like, oh, I actually miss you guys.

However, not all participants were comfortable with remote collaborations. Jenny stated, 'The older colleagues (like me) are having a little bit more difficulty with the digital aspect of it than the younger ones, that's for sure.'

Overall, survey responses and in-person interviews focused on the topic of support during the COVID-19 pandemic provided evidence that participants highly valued communication by their supervisors. The mode and frequency of these communications was of utmost importance to them, and thus are the primary concepts associated with this question.

Sense of Professional Self-Efficacy

Survey question number 2 asked participants to respond to the statement, 'My feelings of how well I perform my job was affected positively by the COVID-19 pandemic', with their level of agreement whether their sense of professional self-efficacy was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Fifteen participants agreed or strongly agreed (58%), four participants stated that they neither agreed nor disagreed (15%) and seven participants disagreed with this statement (27%). None of the participants stated that they strongly disagreed with this statement. However, the interviews showed much more nuanced feelings about their own teaching efficacy, as only six participants expressed explicitly positive changes. The interviews allowed the participants to explain how their sense of self-efficacy was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Categories identified in their responses are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Coded Participant Responses to Interview Question 2* (n=26)

Category/Concept	Teachers (%)	Admin (%)	Both (%)
Some change based on actual direct connection (phone/Zoom/person) with students	11 (58%)	1 (14%)	12 (46%)
Some change based on degree that participant is helping academically	14 (73%)	3 (43%)	17 (65%)
Some change based on resources available to participant at home	4 (21%)	2 (29%)	6 (23%)
Some change based on the degree that participant is supporting colleagues	0 (0%)	1 (14%)	1 (4%)

Note: *How has your sense of how well you think you can do your job been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?

The concept most associated with this question was change. All participants expressed that there was some change in their sense of how they could perform professionally due the pandemic. Reasons included: (a) the amount of direct connection they had with students (46%), (b) the degree that they felt they were helping students academically (65%), and (c) their feelings that they have resources to support students at their homes (23%). Only one participant, an administrator, expressed that their sense of job performance was affected by their ability to support professional colleagues.

Charlie, an eighth-grade math teacher, voiced a common theme among teacher participants, stating:

> I'm just kind of finding my way as well as any other teacher is right now ... no one really knows which way is up and we're just, I think, making the best of a very unique and uncomfortable situation.

Other participants were less comfortable with transitioning to online instruction. Howard shared, 'I think I'm capable with all the online resources and making it simple for students to understand, but if this was what teaching was, I would not want to be part of it ... I like being in the classroom with the students.' Wendy, a sixth-grade teacher, commented:

> I became a teacher to interact with students and I'm not getting that daily interaction and so I would say there's a little bit of a decline [in motivation] just because it's not— you're not getting, that day to day ... that face-to-face interaction and seeing [students] grasp concepts and get excited.

Robin, a high school animal sciences teacher, said, 'it's ... been more emotional for me as I don't know how to support [my students'] emotions very well without being there physically.' Anxiety about online instructional environment was experienced by administrators too. Rebecca, a school principal, shared her feelings about the complexities of visiting classrooms online:

> I have all the Zoom links [so] I can log into anybody's class at any time, but it's just not the same ... particularly with younger kids because they get so excited to see [me appear] on the screen and then they get distracted.

Many teacher participants were adapting to the changing ways that they needed to communicate with parents. In his interview, Kevin, a high school science teacher, shared:

> I'm using star 67 to block my number because I don't want half of the county having my phone number and we were told that was totally acceptable, but at the same time I think that makes the parents and the students hesitant to answer.

Survey and interview responses indicated that participants valued connections with students and strove to provide substantive academic support for them, regardless of format, during the early weeks of the pandemic in the U.S.

Joining the Profession

The third survey item asked participants to respond with their level of agreement in regard to the statement, 'Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, I am more likely to encourage others to join my profession'. Eleven participants, both teachers and administrators, agreed or strongly agreed that they were more likely to recommend the teaching profession to others compared to before the pandemic (42%). An equal number of participants (nine teachers and two administrators) stated that they neither agreed nor disagreed, and four participants disagreed with this statement (15%). None of the participants stated that they strongly disagreed with this statement.

The third interview question encouraged participants to explain why they were more or less likely to encourage others to join their profession. Detailed information for both teacher and administrator participants for this interview question is provided in Table 5.

Table 5: Coded Participant Responses to Interview Question 3* (n=26)

Category/Concept	Teachers (%)	Administrators (%)	Both (%)
Dependent on whether teacher has 'heart', regardless of world events	6 (32%)	2 (29%)	8 (%)
Dependent on ability to form productive relationships, regardless of world events	5 (26%)	1 (14%)	6 (%)
Dependent on personal connections with students/families/communities while online	3 (16%)	1 (14%)	4 (%)
Dependent on how difficult tasks related to teaching are	4 (21%)	4 (57%)	8 (%)
Dependent on the amount of public approval/recognition is related to the profession	4 (21%)	1 (14%)	5 (%)

Note: *Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, are you more/less likely to encourage others to join your profession?

In the interviews, nearly one-third of teacher (32%) and administrator (29%) participants mentioned the importance for those considering work as an educator to have a 'heart' for the profession, regardless of circumstances. Brenda, a fourth-grade language arts teacher summed up many of the participants' feelings by stating, '[it] would be like saying ... "I was gonna be a nurse but after this pandemic ... I just don't know if that's for me." If your heart's truly in it, then yes you need to follow through.'

Results show agreement between teachers and administrators in their responses to this question, with two exceptions. Teachers were more likely than administrators to focus on whether a potential educator is adept at forming productive relationships (26% versus 14%) and administrators more strongly emphasised the need to recognise the difficulties inherent to the profession than teachers (57% versus 21%). Tammy, an assistant principal, said:

> There are going to be surprises in any profession [but] I think my conversation will be different [with aspiring teachers] you have to be just aware that changes will happen at any moment ... more so than before, very quickly and sometimes [with] the changes, we [administrators] may not know how to deal with it and we're learning as administrators to deal with it with you.

Howard addressed a future emphasis on online instruction, stating, 'if there's more of (remote instruction) to come, I would say absolutely not ... I would dissuade people [from being an educator].' Shelly, a second-grade teacher participating in the study, expressed cautionary advice to potential educators, saying, 'I would still encourage them to be to become a teacher,

but I would definitely tell them that I think there will be shifts ... because [the pandemic] has left a lot of people with not knowing what to do or feeling ... helpless.'

In general, survey responses and in-person interviews coalesced around the ideas that recommendations for entering the teaching profession consider both the intrinsic qualities of the person inquiring (i.e. disposition, attitude), as well as external considerations (i.e. changing school environment) that substantively affect the operations of schools.

Satisfaction With the Profession

The fourth and final survey item asked study participants to respond to the statement, 'Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, I am more satisfied with my choice to be a professional educator'. Responses to this survey question showed more than two-thirds of the participants agreeing or strongly agreeing (69%), and none disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Eight participants (31%) stated that they neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. Coded interview responses related to this interview question are provided in Table 6.

Table 6: Coded Participant Responses to Interview Question 4* (n=26)

Category/Concept	Teachers (%)	Administrators (%)	Both (%)
More, because of personal response with professional obligations related to pandemic	2 (11%)	0 (0%)	2 (8%)
Unchanged	6 (32%)	0 (0%)	6 (23%)
Dependent on the degree that COVID-19's effect on professional tasks have been	3 (16%)	3 (43%)	6 (23%)
More, because of degree that connections to students/teachers has improved/broadened	4 (21%)	1 (14%)	5 (19%)
More, due to recognition of financial security, even as professional role has changed	3 (16%)	1 (14%)	4 (15%)
More, due to the increased public approval/recognition for the profession during pandemic	1 (5%)	1 (14%)	2 (8%)
More, due to increased support of colleagues	2 (11%)	1 (14%)	3 (12%)

Notes: *Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, are you more/less satisfied with your choice to be a professional educator?

In the interviews, none of the teacher or administrator participants stated that they were less satisfied with their choice to be a professional educator than before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Their reasons for increased satisfaction included: (a) their personal response to the situation, (b) the improved connections with students and support of professional colleagues, (c) their appreciation for job security (i.e. pay) after schools closed, and (d) the increased public approval/recognition for serving as an educator during the pandemic.

With regard to public approval/recognition, Kelly, a science instructional coach, stated:

> The parents ... have become the teacher ... I think that's big as well because they see what we deal with on a daily basis. It's not just hearsay, but you're actually seeing the work and the challenge that exists with teaching children, so people have a new respect for the profession.

In terms of financial security during the pandemic and the perception of the teaching role after school closings, Bill, a high school math teacher, stated:

> I've had people I've met through business say, 'Are you drawing unemployment now?' I'm, like, well ... no. I said, 'I'm on a contract so I'm still getting paid' and they said, 'Well you're not working right now', and my response is, 'You have no idea what's going on right now ... I mean, I've placed more phone calls in the last two weeks than I have probably in 15 years of teaching.'

Ellen felt less burdened by her duties, saying, 'selfishly I am okay with [teaching from home] because I feel like I have job security when so many people don't ... I'm essentially getting paid to be at home right now and kind of being told not to do much.'

In general, survey responses and in-person interviews related to participants' ratings of job satisfaction, relative to before the COVID-19 pandemic, supported the concept of increased satisfaction and appreciation for being recognised for the work that they do.

Equity and Access

Question 5 in the interview prompted the participant to respond to the prompt, 'What about equity and access for all students during the COVID-19 pandemic?' Due to the qualitative nature of this interview question, there was no survey counterpart question. Coding of participant responses to this question are provided in Table 7.

Table 7: Coded Participant Responses to Interview Question 5* (n=26)

Category/Concept	Teachers (%)	Administrators (%)	Both (%)
Supplying adequate technology and internet connectivity for distance learning	16 (84%)	6 (86%)	22 (85%)
Supplying food and other basic supplies to students and their families during the pandemic	14 (74%)	6 (86%)	20 (77%)

Supplying families with hardcopies of instructional materials	7 (37%)	0 (0%)	7 (27%)
Access by students to assistance with schoolwork by parents/others while at home	5 (26%)	0 (0%)	5 (19%)
Effects on student motivation of providing instruction on review material (no new content)	3 (16%)	0 (0%)	3 (12%)
Teacher/school communication with families whose native language is not English	2 (11%)	2 (29%)	4 (15%)
Effects on student motivation of grading policies (pass/no credit) due to inequities	2 (11%)	0 (0%)	2 (8%)

Note: *What about equity and access (food, instruction, communication, technology) for all students during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The majority of participant responses related to equity and access during the COVID-19 pandemic centred on the concepts of student access to food, basic household supplies, and instructional technology. Eighty-five per cent of teachers and administrators referenced the importance of instructional technology (i.e. computers and internet connectivity) to access content and communications related to their education. Seventy-seven per cent of participants were concerned about providing food and other basic supplies to their students, and the potential health/financial burden that families would face if their students could not access these basics.

Wendy, a sixth-grade teacher participant, related a personal account about equity/access, sharing:

> There was a grandmother last week ... She is raising three grand[daughters]. She said, 'I can pick [the Chromebooks] up, but where I live ... we live so far out there's no internet ... I've called every cable company, every internet company, they're not coming ... how far behind are my girls going to get?' and it's heart-breaking.

Participants mentioned other factors related to equity/access, including communications with non-English speaking families (15%), supplying students with hard copies of instructional materials (37%), access to assistance with schoolwork by family members (26%) and the effects of grading policies and restrictive instructional content on student motivation, voiced by 11 per cent and 16 per cent of teachers, respectively. Howard spoke out about the principles of equitable treatment of students at his school, stating:

> Our school did do a parade the other day where [teachers] drove through neighbourhoods, but [they] only drove through, like, the nice neighbourhoods, so I didn't participate because I thought it was an equity issue [since they] didn't go through the trailer park that [includes students that] we serve.

Erika mentioned curricular issues that were being affected as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, stating:

> [Our 8th graders] were about to start talking about the Civil War and then we have to talk about Reconstruction and … I can't do that because I can't give them any new resources … and then in high school, US history [teachers] pick up after Reconstruction so they'll just never know about the Civil War …

A variety of concerns about motivation were voiced by participants in the study. Some had concerns about how motivated students would be with reduced accountability measures adopted by school districts. Other participants worried about how motivated students would be with the change from assigning letter grades (i.e. A-F), to a pass/no credit format, adopted after the school closings. Charlie spoke to student motivation under newly-adopted policies, stating:

> A lot of the issue that I've seen is just a lack of engagement from students ... we're not able to make the work mandatory, everything is optional right now for us ... everything comes down to just intrinsic motivation from our students.

Wendy expressed concern about the validity of student work, stating:

> There's things that I cannot teach because I can't see them … I can't send home a map quiz [and] hold them accountable for that … they're gonna use whatever they can to do it you know and so I feel like there's things that I can't assess them on and it'd be valid.

Throughout the interviews, participants recognised the uniqueness of serving as an educator during the COVID-19 pandemic, having to respond to the changes to the educational environment. Charlie, an eighth-grade math teacher, summed it up by saying:

> This is just a completely unique once-in-a-lifetime sort of scenario … and I think that a huge part of the impact is just how much it caught us off-guard … If something similar to this were to ever happen again, we'd be infinitely more prepared for it than we are right now.

Overall, study participants expressed that, regardless of adverse circumstances, teachers would always have a role in the lives of students. As Ellen eloquently said: 'No matter how long [the COVID-19 pandemic] goes on and what the next year looks like, I feel like you will have to have teachers … I mean, we can't be replaced by Khan Academy.'

Discussion

The answer to our research question, 'How did the COVID-19 pandemic professionally impact educators?' is, not surprisingly, 'It depends.' While the majority of participants felt positive about their levels of support and their self-efficacy, as well as the status of the teaching profession in general and their place within it, they voiced concerns about student equity of access to resources as a result of the pandemic.

Communication was often among the types of support provided, echoing much of the literature (Bishop et al. 2015; Fletcher & Nichols 2016; Hawes 2011). This communication was described as primarily top-down, moving from district to principal to teacher, with teachers then bearing responsibility for communicating directly with families and students. In this way, administrators were more distanced from students (Fletcher & Nichols 2016).

Participants attributed feelings of support to family and friends and collaboration with colleagues, attributions that were not evident in the related research. It was clear that the educators in our study valued such collaboration. Alison said, 'You could consider it like a faculty meeting but [my principal's] whole plan is … more or less just kind of supporting each other … just kind of connecting with each other and seeing how everybody's doing.' In this case, Alison's principal seemed to be prioritising the emotional needs of the staff, knowing that that too often their needs are overlooked in order to return to some sort of normalcy (Bishop et al. 2015; McKen 2001). Though such a return was not possible under the circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, schools represented in this study did take on resource distribution, as they often do after disasters (Norris et al. 2008). Resources consisted primarily of food, and in some cases, technology, and many participants also expressed concerns about gaps in equity and access to resources.

Self-efficacy, used as the theoretical framework for this study, allowed us to focus on participant beliefs about their capacity to serve as educators during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic. In survey responses and interview statements, participants voiced their concerns about the degree that they had 'control over events that affect their lives' (Bandura 2000: 12). Hoy and Hoy's (2013) distillation of professional work expectations (i.e. mastery experiences) was connected to participant understandings of how well they were adjusting to changes in instruction, collaboration, and student welfare. Ziegler's (2014) psychosocial domain provided a lens for understanding how society and culture shaped the participants' perspectives of their profession in the context of the pandemic. Most educators in this study expressed mixed emotions concerning their teaching lives, contextualising how they felt about their ability to teach with answers framed with sentiments like, 'It depends on the day', 'I do what I can', and 'I don't know'.

Researchers rarely have the opportunity to explore the educational impact of a disaster as it unfolds, but the unique nature of the COVID-19 pandemic allowed us to do that. The mixed methods approach provided depth in educators' perspectives that would not have been evident from survey results alone. The combined findings demonstrate that teachers are overwhelmingly committed to the profession and their students. Despite the uncertainty of *how* they would teach (or in some cases *if* they would teach), the majority remained as committed if not more committed to their profession. Most concerns focused on students and how those students would get the resources and support they needed. This study also appears to reinforce the need for thoughtful school preparation that explicitly outlines expectations for communication and support in the event of any number of traumatic scenarios (Crepeau-Hobson 2018; Flanagan 2007). While most educators in this survey were generally

understanding of the sometimes confusing and conflicting communication efforts, there was frustration related to both the timing of and expectations for sharing information.

There are a number of limitations in this study. The sample size (n=26) is relatively small, resulting in smaller variations in collected data. Moreover, the sample data were collected from participants serving in schools in three states in the Southeastern United States, so generalisation of the findings from this study are limited to geographic areas with similar demographic profiles. Additionally, the reliability of the survey instrument used will limit the results and potential for the use of this survey in other studies exploring similar phenomena. Delimitations were based on the researchers' interests in the particular group of participants. Finally, convenience sampling restricted participants to graduate students who were enrolled in online coursework taught by the principal researcher.

There are a number of areas for further study which would substantively add to current and past research on educator responses to disasters. Considering that future responses to school closures will force educators to implement online teaching strategies, more specific research on educator self-efficacy related to instructional technology is warranted. Future research could also include an analysis of the relative differences between novice teachers and more veteran teachers, in terms of digital proficiency. Additional collection of data to increase our understanding of support, self-efficacy, and equity/access from a larger group of participants and/or from a regionally/nationally representative geographic area may increase the generalisability of results. Finally, measurement of the effectiveness associated with different modes of communication used by supervisors to support educators during adverse conditions has the potential to link past and current studies and inform educators about best practices in preparation for future events where schools and associated constituents are adversely affected.

The COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented in terms of its effects on education and society. The importance of gathering and interpreting early data provided by educators regarding their perceptions of self-efficacy, support and equity/access cannot be overstated. Unlike most disaster research, this took place in the midst of an ongoing event without the benefit of retrospect. Responses gleaned from interviews within weeks of school closings as a result of the virus reveal attitudes about the manner in which support was provided to the participants themselves, as well as to students. Scholars from a variety of fields, within and outside of education, can benefit from this early study to better understand the effects of large-scale changes on employees, the workplace, and management practices.

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International Studies in Educational Administration

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Journal article
Gurr, D., & Drysdale, L. (2008). Reflections on twelve years of studying the leadership of Victorian schools. *International Studies in Educational Administration*, *36*(2), 22-37.

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