"The Disaster of COVID-19 on Education And Suggested Solutions"

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Abstract:

The disastrous impact of the COVID-19 crisis on education has been unprecedented. It has set the timepiece back on the accomplishment of international education goals, and unreasonably affected the poorer and most helpless.

And yet, the education community has proved tough, laying foundation for the bounce back. Every harmful spiral of frustrating socio-economic circumstances suggests its reverse image of a helpful spiral, one which would lead to the future of education we want:

- **inclusive change in education delivery,**
- **unleash the potential of individuals, and**
- **united fulfilment, in all areas of life, through education investment**.

There is unlimited drive, and untapped resources, we can count on for the restoration, not only of education's essential services, but of its fundamental aspirations. It is the responsibility of governments and the international community to stay true to principles and conduct reforms, so that, not only will the children and youth regain their promised future, but all education stakeholders find their role in making it happen.

Key words: School Safety, Learning Space, Student Success, Teacher's Motivation, Compassionate Governments, Poverty, Commonsense, Corona Virus, Covid-19, Pandemic.

Introduction:

Research* shows that the **most important factor in a child's educational success is the involvement of their parents** or primary carers. In the first weeks of disruption caused by the pandemic, parents (especially of kindergarten and primary children) were essential to the coordinated effort of getting lessons up and running. Since then, they have become co-teachers and allies.

(Research Source*:https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20030924005563/en/Parents-Involvement-Childs-Education-Single-Important-Factor)

I have been a teacher and a parent at the same time. Hence it has been easy to understand and appreciate the concerns of the Parents and the teachers during the ongoing pandemic. In my interactions with various other parents and teachers I found that after the initial turmoil, they have being settling well with the online education. The teachers have adapted well and are happy with the new arrangement of online line classes. In general, students too responded well to digital platforms.

Where online classes weren't an option, parents appreciated the learning packs put together and sent by email or available for pickup from school. They were grateful for the effort teachers put into their classes. When teachers became creative, for example, by making home videos, doing science experiments or organising arts and craft activities, parents were positively impressed.

So what can we foresee for the coming school year? We do know that whatever the 'new normal' is, it's unlikely to be anything like the old one. Besides the huge operational changes in schools, some form of distance learning is here to stay and I believe it must stay.

Part - A:

Understanding and accepting the Problem before the fight starts.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created the largest disruption of education systems in history, affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries and all continents. Closures of schools and other learning spaces have impacted 94 per cent of the world's student population, up to 99 per cent in low and lower-middle income countries. The crisis is exacerbating pre-existing education disparities by reducing the opportunities for many of the most vulnerable children, youth, and adults – those living in poor or rural areas, girls, refugees, persons with disabilities and forcibly displaced persons – to continue their learning. Learning losses also threaten to extend beyond this generation and erase decades of progress, not least in support of girls and young women's educational access and retention. Some 23.8 million additional children and youth (from pre-primary to tertiary)

may drop out or not have access to school next year due to the pandemic's economic impact alone. *(Source: Policy Brief: Education during COVID-19 and beyond AUGUST 2020. United Nations.)*

Similarly, the education disruption has had, and will continue to have, substantial effects beyond education. Closures of educational institutions hamper the provision of essential services to children and communities, including access to nutritious food, affect the ability of many parents to work, **and increase risks of violence against women and girls**.

On the other hand, this crisis has stimulated innovation within the education sector. We have seen innovative approaches in support of education and training continuity: from radio and television to take-home packages. Distance learning solutions were developed thanks to quick responses by governments and partners all over the world supporting education continuity.

We have also been reminded of the essential role of teachers and that government and other key partners have an ongoing duty of care to education personnel. But these changes have also highlighted that the promising future of learning, and the accelerated changes in modes of delivering quality education, cannot be separated from the imperative of leaving no one behind. **This is true for children and youth affected by a lack of resources or enabling environment to access learning**. It is true for the teaching profession and their need for better training in new methods of education delivery, as well as support.

Last but not least, this is true for the education community at large, including local communities, upon whom education continuity depends during crisis and who are key to building back better. *(Source: Policy Brief: Education during COVID-19 and beyond AUGUST 2020. United Nations.)*

Education is not only a fundamental human right; it is an enabling right with direct impact on the realization of all other human rights. When education systems collapse, peace, prosperous and productive societies cannot be sustained.

Part B:

Three step Solution to Teaching younger kids:

The importance of emotions in personal wellbeing, decision making and educational success: How did our students respond to the break in routines and the constant bombardment of information about a dangerous virus that was keeping them from school? Some children may not want to return to old routines (or new and more baffling ones) after spending time at home. Others will embrace it. We are all searching for ways to integrate the 'new normal' into our lives.

Action points:

- ✓ Find out how the pandemic affected your students and their families. Some will have been brought closer together while others will have lost family members. Some may have gone through, or are still going through ill health or job losses.
- ✓ Describe the way the pandemic affected you. Saying how we felt and what we struggled with reassures our students that their feelings, doubts and uncertainties are valid and natural in a time of confusion.
- ✓ Discuss the effects of the pandemic worldwide, so that children develop an understanding for others and can think about solutions to the problems we face in times of crisis.

The importance of technology and adaptation: Most of us had experiences with online classes or meetings or family video calls to know it was possible. There should be regular email and telephone contact between parents and the school. Teachers should be able to share lessons and materials with families. But it might not work well with all students; so we need to improve by building upon what went well.

Action points:

- ✓ Find out what technology your learners have at home and what kinds of problems they faced. Some issues can be easily resolved while others will mean making alternative plans.
- ✓ Teacher training in digital education is essential, including sessions where teachers share their experiences and best lessons during lockdown. Parents may need training, too.
- ✓ Globally, over half of children have no access to home computers. New ways of providing lessons need to be designed. Can teachers pre-prepare lesson packs? What changes would improve learning by mobile phone?
- ✓ Adaptation isn't just about technology. We need to plan lessons which transmit a sense of curiosity and enquiry, encouraging students to observe and learn independently from the world around them.

The importance of family in education: Most parents I spoke to were positive about teachers' input during confinement. However, some felt that teachers didn't understand the pressures at home or were unsympathetic to their child's needs. We need to listen to parents' experiences and learn from them – as well as recognising the profound influence parents have on their child's future.

Action points:

- ✓ Look for connections between subject matter and family life. Cooking, playing sports and looking after house plants or pets are all important activities. Parents and children reading together improves enquiry, language and literacy.

- ✓ Extra languages give huge benefits. **All children should feel proud of the languages they speak at home.** If parents don't speak English, can they learn alongside their children?

- ✓ Teachers should be interested in parents as people with skills and interests. This includes encouraging parents to see themselves as inspirational in their children's lives. Can an interest in music, art and nature be fostered by projects started at school and developed at home?

Supportive Source: Karen Elliott, teacher living in the north of Spain.

(https://www.cambridge.org/elt/blog/2020/08/07/involving-parents-teachers-tips-teaching-learning-time-covid-19/)

Part C:

Ways to Comfort Kids Without Physical Contact: Strategies for Teachers and "Pod" Parents During COVID-19

Kids need help calming down sometimes. But if you're a teacher or day-care provider during the corona virus pandemic, or a parent looking after kids as part of an at-home learning group, **COVID-19 social distancing rules have taken away one powerful calming method: appropriate physical contact**.

1. **Pause and take a deep breath.**
   a. **Take care of yourself.** As a teacher, you have one of the most important jobs right now: Helping kids during these unusual times. Make sure you are able to sleep, eat and exercise as well as you can.
   b. **Role model how to communicate and remain calm.** Kids are always watching, and they learn more from what we do than what we say. Show them how you use your strategies with your actions.
   c. **Take notes**. Each child is a little different. What might work for one child might not work as easily for another. Each child has their own set of strengths. Find a way to play to them!
   d. **Remember that you've got this!** Whether in the classroom, day-care or home, you have been using these skills with kids all along. Since times are more stressful during social distancing, reviewing these tips will help you continue to do what you have already done to support kids during less stressful times.

2. **Make it a safe space to communicate.**

   a. **Give permission to share feelings.** Let kids know its okay to communicate their feelings. The COVID-19 pandemic, and all of the changes that have come with it, is tough for everyone.

   b. **Use a system to communicate.** Feeling sad or anxious is an internal feeling, and some kids don't show signs until they are ready to emotionally fall apart. So give them a silent method for communicating how they're feeling that does not disrupt the flow of class. There are many approaches: You can use a thermometer, a colour-based system, or a smiley/emoji system.

3. **Use words of affirmation.**

   c. **"You are not alone."** Remind kids that you're right there with them. You can even urge them to say a version of this out loud as a mantra: "Let's say it together: I am not alone. I am not alone. I am not alone."

   d. **Validate feelings.** Ask, "Can you tell me what's wrong?" Repeat their words back to them, or help them label what's going on (for example, "You seem a little sad"). This helps kids accept how they're feeling – which helps them move past it.

   e. **"It's okay to feel this way."** It's important for kids to know that sadness, anger and other big emotions might feel really uncomfortable – but they're also normal. It's healthy for them to experience these feelings.

4. **Meet kids where they are and redirect their attention.**

   a. **Find something to praise.** This can be as simple as, "I'm proud of you for sharing your feelings right now" or "You're doing a great job taking deep breaths."

   b. **Ask, "What would make you feel better?"** and offer a choice between two appropriate options: "Do you want to sit here quietly for a few minutes by yourself, or do you want to join the class in art time?"

   c. **Sing a comforting song together.** Try a few refrains of "You Are My Sunshine," "We will overcome", or another song with feel-good, affectionate lyrics.

   d. **Find the good.** Try saying, "I know you're feeling sad / frustrated / mad, and that's okay. But can you also help me name three happy thoughts right now?"

   e. **Use what you know already works.** Take a break. If you know a child likes humour, acknowledge how they are feeling, and offer up something distracting by being silly or showing them a cute animal video clip to help them find an emotional perk-up.

5. **Use gestures and mirroring.**

   a. **Show kids how to hug themselves.** Come up with a silly name for it, like a "gorilla hug" or "panda bear hug" or something else that makes them smile. When a child is sad, announce that it's time for a "gorilla hug." Wrap your arms around yourself, have kids wrap their arms tightly around themselves, and together, count to 20. By mirroring kids, you create a sense of connection.

b. **Put your hands on your hearts.** If a child is upset, put a hand on your own heart, and have them mirror you. Can they feel the warmth of their hand on their chest? If they pay very close attention, can they feel their heartbeat? This gesture of support will also connect them to their senses, which has a calming effect.

c. **Teach kids how to give themselves a hand massage.** Demonstrate how to press one thumb into the wrist, palm and back of the other hand, gently rubbing between the bones to release any tightness.

d. **Sit with them.** For younger kids, suggest that you both sit on the floor while you talk about what's going on. Even while social distancing; being on the same level creates a sense of companionship.

6. **Teach breathing and mindfulness exercises.**

a. **Lead 3-2-1 breathing.** Breathe in for a count of three. Hold for a count of two. Breathe out for a count of one. Repeat. Each time, go a little more slowly.

b. **Ask where in their body they feel upset.** This takes some practice. But once a child can label a feeling as belonging to part of their body – for example, a knot in their stomach – it can help make the sensation a little less overwhelming. Direct them to take deep breaths and "send" breath toward that spot to relax.

c. **Guide the child through a soothing visualization.** Here's one example: Ask their favourite colour, or guess a colour that will make them feel relaxed. Then do it with them: "Let's take a deep breath in, and imagine calm, cool blue going down our throat and into our belly. Breathe out, and feel that calm, cool blue travel all the way to our fingertips." Repeat.

d. **Counting is a calming activity.** If a child is upset, let them know that you wish you could give them a hug – or even two or 20 or 100 hugs. Use it to coax kids into counting: "How high can you count? Let's try it" or "Let's count backwards from 10 together."

e. **Teach kids calming exercises.** For exercises that incorporate movement, exaggerate the movements to make kids laugh.

Part D:

Teaching from Home: How to Engage & Instruct Students Remotely?

1. **Create a centralized location for communication with students and families.**

- Maintain a communication "hub" where you can update information for your students and parents.

- If your school is equipped with an existing learning platform, like Canvas, Blackboard, or Moodle, utilize your class site(s) to provide information there. If not, consider online tools like ClassDojo, Padlet, and Google Classroom.

- Email the class (including parents) at least twice each week to direct families to updated information on the class "hub". Weekly updates should include the week's schedule of assignments, instructions for completing and submitting work, reminders, and teacher contact information and availability.

- Use group text messaging tools to send quick reminders to the class, or a group of students.

- Suggested services include Classpager, Remind101, and ClassParrot.

2. **Think "flipped classroom" model**

- Send students resources such as texts, videos, podcasts, etc., to provide background knowledge that they can apply in subsequent learning activities like group or one-on-one discussions.

- Explore education websites like Khan Academy, Teacher Tube, Newsela, BrainPop, and Smithsonian Learning Lab. Additional resources can be found on Open Culture.

- Example: Students will listen to a podcast on the Industrial Revolution, and then engage in a peer debate representing opposing sides of an argument.

3. **Create tutorials and short lessons**

- Record yourself delivering a lesson that can be shared with your students via URL or an email attachment.

- Recorded lessons create the opportunity to maintain your "presence" and to engage your students as you would in the classroom, without having to get everyone in the same virtual room at the same time.

- Some options for creating recordings include:
  - Voiceover and recording functions in multimedia presentation software
  - Screen and video recording tools like Loom or Screencast-o-Matic
  - Record functions in web-conferencing applications like AdobeConnect or Google Meet Smartphone video or computer webcam recording

4. Encourage student collaboration and discourse

- Weekly lesson plans should include opportunities for students to respond to questions in a discussion board format to encourage collaboration and idea sharing.
- Request that students read and comment on one another's work.
- Be sure to communicate expectations and norms for students' posted responses.
- Design assignments using online, shareable documents so that students can collaborate in small groups.

5. Offer office hours

- Block off 1-2 hours each day and make yourself available, either in a web conferencing room or by phone, to students and/or caregivers to answer questions and provide academic support. Include your office hours in your email signature and on the communication "hub" so students and parents are aware of your availability each day.

6. Provide students with individualized support and feedback

- Call students who need additional support in their learning and provide personalized, targeted instruction over the phone or through web conferencing.
- Ask students which learning activities they enjoyed in order to better understand their interests and learning preferences.
- Ask students what material they found to be most challenging.
- Ask students content-based questions to assess their understanding and skill-development.
- Work through problems or questions together with the student to hear their thinking and find opportunities for instruction.
- Communicate to students the resources available to them on the "hub" and your availability for instructional support.
- Reach out to students to celebrate their growth and/or successes.

7. Design opportunities for hands-on learning

- Consider the types of projects students can complete in their homes or within their communities that align to and enhance what they are learning in various content areas.
- For example, environmental studies students could explore learning opportunities in their local parks.

8. Offer enrichment opportunities

- Provide virtual enrichment opportunities for students such as puzzles, educational games, science experiments, and art projects. Also consider opportunities to encourage students to move and be active. Suggested websites include:

  - Enchanted Learning
  - World Book for Kids
  - Brainpop

  - Everyday Mysteries
  - GoNoodle
  - Science Bob

9. Assess student learning

- Students can submit assessments using online tools, or teachers can send assessments to students via email attachment to be completed and emailed back.
- Suggested online assessment tools include Google Forms, Kahoot, and Quizlet.
- Additionally, students can submit video recordings of themselves using applications like Flipgrid.
- Teachers should provide timely, specific, and instructionally focused feedback.

10. Provide self-assessment opportunities

- Students can reflect on their learning and performance, set goals, and create action plans.
- Self-assessment strategies include student reflections, graphic organizers, oral assessments, and individual targets.
- Throughout the learning process, students can ask themselves:
    i. **Before:** What are my learning goals? How will I achieve my goals?
    ii. **During:** Am I making progress toward my goal? Am I sticking to my plan? Are my study and learning strategies effective?
    iii. **After:** Did I achieve my learning goals? How effective was my plan? What would I do differently next time?

Conclusion:

In the face of global closures of educational institutions and the halting of non-formal training, there has been remarkable innovation in responses to support learning and teaching. But responses have also highlighted major divides, beginning with the digital one. Learning losses due to prolonged school closures mean that many educational outcomes are at risk. For a number of reasons, we cannot return to the world as it was before. The massive efforts made in a short time to respond to the shocks to education systems remind us that changes previously considered difficult or impossible to implement are possible after all. We must seize the opportunity to find new ways to address the learning crisis and bring about a set of sustainable solutions.

1. Focus on addressing learning losses and preventing dropouts, particularly of marginalized groups.

2. Offer skills for employability programmes.

3. Support the teaching profession and teachers' readiness.

4. Expand the definition of the right to education to include connectivity entitlement.

5. Remove barriers to connectivity.

6. Strengthen data and monitoring of learning.

7. Strengthen the articulation and flexibility across levels and types of education and training.

(Supportive Source: Policy Brief: Education during COVID-19 and beyond AUGUST 2020. United Nations.)

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