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The Changes we need:
Education post COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused both unprecendented disruptions and massive changes to education. However, as schools return, these changes may disappear. Moreover, not all of the changes are necessarily the changes we want in education. In this paper, we argue that the pandemic has created a unique opportunity for educational changes that have been proposed before COVID-19 but were never fully realized. We identify three big changes that education should make post COVID: curriculum that is developmental, personalized, and evolving; pedagogy that is student-centered, inquiry-based, authentic, and purposeful; and delivery of instruction that capitalizes on the strengths of both synchronous and asynchronous learning.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education is both unprecedented and widespread in education history, impacting nearly every student in the world .

The unexpected arrival of the pandemic and subsequent school closures saw massive effort to adapt and innovate by educators and education systems around the world. These changes were made very quickly as the prevailing circumstances demanded. Almost overnight, many schools and education systems began to offer education remotely. Through television and radio, the Internet, or traditional postal offices, schools shifted to teach students in very different ways. Regardless of the outcomes, remote learning became the de facto method of education provision for varying periods. Educators proactively responded and showed great support for the shifts in lesson delivery. Thus, it is clear and generally accepted that "this crisis has stimulated innovation within the education sector".

However, the changes or innovations that occurred in the immediate days and weeks when COVID-19 struck are not necessarily the changes education needs to make in the face of massive societal changes in a post-COVID-19 world. By and large, the changes were more about addressing the immediate and urgent need of continuing schooling, teaching online, and finding creative ways to reach students at home rather than using this opportunity to rethink education. While understandable in the short term, these changes will very likely be considered insubstantial for the long term. The COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to be a once in a generation opportunity for real change a number of reasons.

First

The pandemic was global and affected virtually all schools. As such, it provides the opportunity for educators and children to come together to rethink the education we actually need as opposed to the inflexible and outdated model that we are likely to feverishly cling to.

Second

Educators across the world demonstrated that they could collectively change en masse. The pandemic forced closure of schools, leaving teachers, children and adults to carry out education in entirely different situations. Governments, education systems, and schools offered remote learning and teaching without much preparation, planning, and in some cases, digital experience.

Third

When schools were closed, most of the traditional regulations and exams that govern schools were also lifted or minimally implemented. Traditional accountability examinations and many other high stakes tests were cancelled. Education was given the room to rapidly adapt to the prevailing circumstances.

It is our hope that as we transition out of the COVID-19 pandemic and into an uncertain future that we can truly reimagine education. In light of this rare opportunity, we wish to urge scholars, policy makers, and educators to have the courage to make bold changes beyond simply changing instructional delivery. The changes that we advocate in this paper are not new but they never managed to gain traction in the pre-COVID-19 educational landscape. Our most recent experience, however, has exacerbated the need for us to rethink what is necessary, desirable, and even possible for future generations.

Changes we need

It is incumbant upon all educators to use this crisis-driven opportunity to push for significant shifts in almost every aspect of education: what, how, where, who, and when. In other words, education, from curriculum to pedagogy, from teacher to learner, from learning to assessment, and from location to time, can and should radically transform. We draw on our own research and that of our colleagues to suggest what this transformation could look like.

Education will undoubtedly go through major changes in the next decade as the combined result of multiple major forces.

These changes include curricular changes that determine what is to be learned by learners. It is likely that more students will be moving toward competency-based learning that has an emphasis on developing unique skills and abilities. Learning has to become more based on strengths and passions and become personalized. In response, education providers will need to make student autonomy and student agency key to transforming pedagogy and school organizations.

Students will prosper by having more say in their own learning and their learning communities. Moreover, schools will have a unique opportunity to positively and proactively change as a result of COVID-19 and the need for global connections. It is possible to see schools rearrange their schedules and places of teaching so that students can at the same time take part in different and more challenging learning opportunities regardless of their physical locations. Relevant online learning will be on the rise and perhaps becomes a regular part of the daily routine for many students.

Of course, we cannot forget that not all students have equal access to technology, both in terms of hardware and digital competency. The issue of digital divide remains a significant issue around the globe. It is important for us to reimagine a better education with technology and find creative ways to make education more equitable, including wiping out the digital divide.