



THE NEW NORMAL: POST COVID-19 IS ABOUT CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY

Ebba Ossiannilsson^{1*}

¹Swedish Association for Distance Education (SADE), International Council for Open and Distance Education, (ICDE) OER Advocacy Committee ebba.ossiannilsson@gmail.com

* Correspondence: ebba.ossiannilsson@gmail.com; Tel.:+46-709-954-448

Abstract

During the spring 2020 with the pandemic COVID -19, educational institutions around the world were suddenly closed while classes continued. In an age of digitalization and information technology, such emergencies are no excuse to stop continuous learning. It has been shown that the digital revolution affects people and their habits, behaviors, and attitudes when dealing with new technology. This conceptual article is based on the current discourse on the "new normal" after COVID -19, which will be about change, resilience, rethinking, reorientation and sustainability. A sustainable society requires access to successful strategies, agile and flexible leadership, digital platforms, partnerships and the ability to respond to rapid change, promote flexibility in learning and support our students. There are needs for preparing students and pupils for their futures, not our past. Based on these goals, we can prepare for the initiative UNESCO, Futures of Education - Learning to Become.

Keywords: COVID-19, ecosystem, futures of education, OER recommendation, new normal.

Introduction

We cannot return to the world as it was before

During the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020, educational institutions around the world suddenly closed their doors, and their buildings, while education and learning continued. UNESCO recommended teaching to be continued; moreover, as of 16 March 2020, it would be online. In the time of digitalization and information technology, such emergencies are no excuse for halting continuous learning. UNESCO estimated that by 29 April 2020, 1.3 billion students were still affected by school and university closures despite the reopening of educational institutions around the world. Today, 90 percent of the students worldwide are studying remotely. UNESCO launched the overall #LearningNeverStops initiative of 9 April 2020 and established a web portal that includes resources for everyone involved in communication, interaction, socialization, and ethical and social issues. It may seem that "business is as usual." However, in the short period of the lock-down, both studying and working changed. Digitalization and the digital competence of both individuals and organizations increased dramatically. Although the educational sector has lagged behind, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was forced to digitalize the educational process and move to distance and online learning. Now it is not possible to return to what was previously considered normal. It has become evident that the digital revolution concerns people and their habits, behaviors, and attitudes in using the new technology. Moreover, there is a need for innovative pedagogy and a move to syllabus 4.0. aligned with the fourth industrial revolution, which change the way we work, live, perform, communicate, and even the way we study and learn. Online education has become a strategic priority in every institution, and new and

innovative partnerships will become increasingly common (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Ossiannilsson, 2020).

In the “new normal,” online education will continue to be a strategic priority at every institution. A sustainable society requires access to digital platforms and the ability to respond to rapid change, promote flexibility in learning, and help students to achieve both now and in the future by implementing the UNESCO initiative, *Futures of Education – Learning to Become* (UNESCO, 2019a). This conceptual article is based on the current discourse on the “new normal” after COVID-19, which will be characterized by change, resilience, agility, reorientation, and sustainability.

Method

The article is based on a presentation by the author at the ICIER2020 conference on the topic of the new normal after the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on her own perspective, the author has provided examples of the ongoing debate on the “futures” of education. However, these examples do not always represent official perspectives. This article does not reflect a comprehensive review of the developments in both the field and across the globe.

Results

Post COVID-19

The global health pandemic has cast a harsh light on the weaknesses and challenges facing humanity. It has presented a clear picture of social and educational inequalities and of the progress that is needed, particularly in education, which was heavily affected by school closures (Bozkurt et al., 2020; Bozkurt & Sharma, 2021; Ossiannilsson, 2020; Ossiannilsson & Sandström, 2020; Stracke et al, 2020).

Decisions made in the context of COVID-19 will have long-term consequences for the future of education. Policy makers, educators, and communities now must make high-risk decisions, which should be guided by shared principles and visions of a desirable collective future. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed both weaknesses and the extraordinary potential of human resources. At this time, pragmatism and rapid action are mandatory; moreover, now more than ever, we cannot do without scientific knowledge. Nor can we work in the absence of principles. Decisions must be based on a humanist vision of education and development within a human rights framework (UNESCO, 2020).

In the post- COVID-19 world, the economic effects of the virus have been unequal and unfair. COVID-19 has had the potential to radically transform our world, but we must not sit back passively and only observe its effects. Now is the time for public deliberation and democratic accountability. Now is the time for intelligent, collective action (Bozkurt et al. 2020; Cheng, 2019; Huang et al., 2020; Ossiannilsson, 2020; UNESCO, 2020).

Futures of Education

In autumn 2019, a crucial milestone was achieved when almost 200 countries worldwide adopted the UNESCO Open Educational Resources (OER) recommendation, which was preceded by a series of declarations and initiatives on open education in the previous 20 years

when the concept of OER was first launched in 2002 (Ossiannilsson, 2020; Ossiannilsson et al.; UNESCO, 2019a UNESCO b). The Recommendation will contribute to the development of open and inclusive knowledge societies and the realization of the United Nation Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG4, which is aimed at inclusive and equitable quality education and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all. The OER Recommendation also addresses other SDGs, including SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), SDG 10 (reducing inequalities within and between countries), SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals). UNESCO's most recent definition of OER is included in the UNESCO OER Recommendation: "OER are learning, teaching and research materials in any format and medium that reside in the public domain or are under copyright that have been released under an open license, which permit no-cost access, re-use, re-purpose, adaptation and redistribution by others. The Recommendation goes beyond just resources and materials. They cover in particular five areas: (i) building the capacity of stakeholders to find, re-use, create, and share OER; (ii) develop a supportive policy; (iii) ensure inclusive and equitable access to quality OER; (iv) nurture the creation of sustainability business models for OER; (v) facilitate international cooperation.

The Recommendation supports the objectives of UNESCO's global initiative, Future of Education: Learning to Become, which is aimed at rethinking education and shaping the future. The International Commission on the Futures of Education was founded by UNESCO 2019 to rethink how knowledge and learning could shape the future of humanity and the planet. The initiative, which involves broad public and expert engagement, is aimed to stimulate a global debate on how knowledge, education, and learning could be rethought in the increasingly complex, uncertain, and precarious world.

Even though the Commission on the Futures of Education was inspired by the feeling that the world's uncertainty, complexity, and fragility were increasing rapidly, it could not predict that a global health pandemic would occur in just a few months, which would remind us that dramatic changes can occur more suddenly and unexpectedly than anyone expects. Based on the sense that the future is now and the realization that our response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its many disruptive effects will have significant effects in both the short- and long-term, this initiative has taken on a new necessity and urgency. The pandemic has brought many existing patterns and trends to the surface. On one hand, it has revealed many weaknesses and vulnerabilities, including increased inequalities, risks associated with the privatization of education, and our lack of preparation for the massive switch to digital and distance learning. On the other hand, some positive features have also become increasingly visible within our societies. It is obvious that the response included solidarity and strong resilience to challenges faced in many societies. Increased attention to the public good has been noted. Likewise, the ingenuity, commitment, and creativity of the many teachers, families, and students who have collaborated in building remarkable learning experiences.

The COVID-19 pandemic has endangered public education, increasing the risk of fragmentation and disintegration. Some have claimed that the current emergency and ad hoc measures in response to it should be transformed into permanent reforms. There is increased awareness about the multiple roles that schools play in addition to academic learning, such as the well-being, health, and nutrition of children and young people. This increased awareness and appreciation could serve as the basis for a new path for public education. The pandemic

has forced a massive shift away from learning and teaching in traditional environments that depend on physical interaction.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development contains many necessary signposts and guidelines. We cannot forgo guiding principles in areas where high-stakes decisions made today will have significant long-term consequences in the future. The UNESCO report by the International Commission on the Futures of Education presents nine recommendations for concrete actions that will advance education in navigating the COVID-19 crisis and its aftermath:

- Commit to strengthening education as a common good.
- Expand the definition of the right to education to address the importance of connectivity and access to knowledge and information.
- Value the teaching profession and teacher collaboration.
- Promote student, youth, and children’s participation and rights.
- Protect the social spaces provided by schools as we transform education.
- Make free and open-source technologies available to teachers and students.
- Ensure scientific literacy within the curriculum.
- Protect the domestic and international financing of public education.
- Advance global solidarity to end current levels of inequality.

Figure 1

The nine key principles for the Futures of education (UNESCO, 2020)



The New Normal: Change and Sustainability

UNESCO’s nine key principles serve to guide the way through the COVID-19 crisis and its aftermath, including the unprecedented disruption of economies, societies, and education systems. It is obvious that there is no return to the world as it was before. One of the strongest messages worldwide is that our common humanity requires global solidarity. The disruption caused by the pandemic has exacerbated inequalities both within and between countries. There are needs for urgent investment and structural changes to prevent short-

term setbacks from developing into major, long-lasting problems. There is a serious risk that because of the COVID-19 pandemic, several decades of progress.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented us with both challenges and responsibilities. It has shown us the extent to which our societies exploit power imbalances, and our global system exploits inequalities. There are calls for renewed commitments to international cooperation and multilateralism as well as a revitalized global solidarity characterized by empathy and the appreciation of our common humanity at its core. The ideas stated in UNESCO's Commission report on the Futures of Education invite governments, international organizations, civil societies, education professionals, learners, and stakeholders at all levels to debate, engage, and act.

In the renewal of education, human interactions and well-being must be a priority. In times of turbulence, the greatest danger is not turbulence; it is acting based on yesterday's logic (Drucker, n.d.). The global pandemic pushed us to assess and rethink current digital platforms for distance and lifelong learning. There is a need to adopt the pentagon theory of learning intelligences (Cheng, 2019), which includes social, technical, cultural, political, and economic intelligences. There is a need to build an ecosystem of learning. Technology, especially digital technology, which enables communication, collaboration and learning across distances, is a powerful tool. It is not a panacea but a source of innovation and expanded potential. To understand and adopt this new paradigm requires the smart use of digitalization, learning analytics, and artificial intelligence.

Global horizons, local concerns, and individual creativity must be considered in developing resilience and sustainability during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The future belongs to those who can imagine, design, and execute it. There are needs for preparing students and pupils for their futures, not our past.

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