



Vol.5 No.1 (2022)

Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching

ISSN : 2591-801X

Content Available at : <http://journals.sfu.ca/jalt/index.php/jalt/index>

Fernando M. R., & Francisco, J. M. (Eds., 2022). University and school collaborations during a pandemic. Sustaining educational opportunity and reinventing education.

Fadhil Ismail^A

A

Lecturer, Kaplan Higher Education Institute Singapore

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37074/jalt.2022.5.1.22>

During a time of crisis, the reactions and decision-making processes of global education institutions will naturally come under scrutiny (Hodges et al., 2020). The pandemic had drastically altered the manner education institutions operate, create new programmes, develop contingency plans during crises, and most crucially, perceive education itself (Rudolph et al., 2021). The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic was an unprecedented crisis and the world witnessed the adaptability and resilience of many education institutions and societies in different parts of the world (Tan et al., 2022). The significance of this book lies in its argument about how universities are organic and flexible in their approaches which characterised their responses to mitigate and manage the impact of the pandemic. It highlights the crucial role of universities in supporting and sustaining educational opportunities in very difficult circumstances and brings to attention the crucial role of research and innovation in these universities.

In their book, the editors integrated the contributions of various authors from different higher education institutions around the globe to observe their response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, with an acute analysis of their continuity approaches and processes. This book reveals that despite the serious challenges brought about by the pandemic, universities have been able to successfully sustain educational standards and opportunities. To achieve this, universities have had to capitalise on their research capacities and outreach capabilities to develop sustainable solutions to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. Despite being labelled, albeit inaccurately, as 'ivory towers' (p. 336) – institutions detached from the realities of societal challenges and everyday problems – the universities have been able to shape positive futures by creating 'open systems' (p.12) and forging relationships with communities through innovative solutions.

In the first chapter, the editors – Fernando Reimers (an expert in the field of global education) and Francisco Marmolejo (the higher education president at Qatar Foundation (QF), where he leads the support and coordination activities of eight universities in Qatar) – found that universities were able to not only develop useful and innovative solutions to

sustain educational opportunity and to improve them, but as a result of this innovation, they were able to enhance internal university processes. Using a survey administered to the leaders of 101 universities and 20 in-depth case-studies, the editors weaved together the reactions and initiatives of a network of different types of educational institutions (a mix of public and private institutions) in different parts of the world, including Qatar, Spain, Turkey, and Vietnam, into a coherent whole (see section 1.5). Reimers and Marmolejo found that universities engaged schools and saw this as part of their mission to 'advance knowledge' and 'support the integration of teaching and learning efforts' across different institutions (p. 31). The results of the survey highlighted the evolving role of universities in supporting schools within the community and demonstrated their capacity to respond to a global crisis.

The case-study presented in the second chapter illustrated how Fundação Getulio Vargas (FGV) schools in Brazil created a digital education tool, consisting of online content and teaching materials, to create online programmes and guide policy makers to improve Brazil's Basic Education system. What is important here is that this digital tool was not only helpful to provide basic education to schools during the pandemic, but it improved efforts to build more innovative structures for learning in Brazil, one of the poorest performers in PISA, whose education systems will likely deteriorate even further from the effects of the pandemic. The next chapter (3) presents the case of another institution in South America, Pontificia Universidad Catolica de Chile. Similarly, this case-study also highlighted the importance of collaboration among Chilean universities to respond to the emerging needs of schools in the wake of the pandemic and support school continuity.

Chapter 4 discusses a case of another successful collaboration in Chile between the Centre for Advanced Research in Education from the University of Chile and Andalien Sur Local Public Education service. The initiative for the collaboration was originally intended to prevent school exclusion before the pandemic but was instead redesigned and adapted for the same purpose during the pandemic which exacerbated the problem of school exclusion. Similarly in Colombia, it is

reported in Chapter 6 that EAFIT University worked closely with the Ministry of Education in Colombia to guide the provision of education at the provincial and municipal level.

As discussed in the third chapter about the far-reaching benefits of collaboration, Chapter 5 examines how two programs by Tsinghua University (China) were able to create an immersive learning experience for students who were unable to attend school physically due to the challenges created by the pandemic with far reaching benefits. Two outstanding benefits of the program were firstly, the new content students had access to and secondly, students from remote areas and diverse backgrounds could now form online communities facilitating peer learning which allowed for learning continuity even after the pandemic.

In Symbiosis International University in Pune, India, the university successfully transitioned into a virtual learning and teaching environment during the pandemic, and assisted eight elementary and secondary schools in both urban and rural areas. This collaboration established active partnerships with parents and teachers and this proactive approach has raised expectations and encouraged schools to improve the quality of their delivery. However, this case study also points out three challenges associated with the transition of education to online platforms. It highlights that first, the entire process is dependent on technological access and support and as such, rural students who usually do enjoy stable connectivity and suffer from poorer bandwidth caused a disruption in their access to the learning resources. Second, parents of students in urban areas expressed concern about the increased screen time students experienced during the pandemic. Finally, it highlights the deterioration of students' social development due to the increase in online interactions, thus reducing the time spent to develop social skills.

These disadvantages were also observed in the case of Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP) in Mexico in Chapter 9. This institution, a guide of social and economic development in the state of Puebla, is crucial for moving education from schools to homes where access to education and connectivity is a challenge for at least half the population. In Mexico, education has a significant influence on social mobility, poverty reduction, sustainable development, innovation, and care for the environment (Mundial Banco, 2020; Saavedra, 2020) and in this case, BUAP could play a vital role in establishing continuity for students.

It is also described in Chapter 10 how the Flexible-digital Model (FDM) developed by Tecnológico de Monterrey University supported academic continuity using the FDM and Education 4.0 concepts through a combination of ICT resources (e.g., Artificial Intelligence, data analytics and assistant robots) and innovative learning methods such as problem-based learning and the flipped classroom approach. Similarly, in Chapter 11, another university in Guadalajara, Mexico, found that the pandemic exacerbated the pressing challenges they faced even before the Covid-19 crisis. One pronounced need was that the institution had to work on improving learning outcomes and improve the coherence of the academic transition between higher education and preparatory schools.

Chapter 8 explains how collaborations and establishing initiatives to embrace digital technology before the pandemic were instrumental in the case of the Japanese government and Keio University's paving the way for K-12 education to embrace distance learning through the use of digital platforms. Keio University has been heavily involved in the revision of educational ICT policies in Japan for many years. In Japan, universities have been accumulating knowledge to develop ICT policies and practices and this greatly contributed to the operational readiness of the transition of public education to online platforms. It must be noted that implementation of these networks was greatly facilitated due to the availability of digital networks in Japan and its operational readiness to transit into online learning and teaching (Nae, 2020).

In chapter 12, a university in Morocco, Al-Akhawayn University, adopted several social roles during the pandemic to alleviate poverty and address exclusion especially in the education of K-12 students. One innovative project by the university was the distribution of 1,000,000 tablets to students in public schools across the country, all loaded with educational content to act as virtual schools during the pandemic. In addition, Al-Akhawayn University was also involved in the crowdsourced production of children's stories. This program was intended to encourage reading and education skills for children to promote research on Arabic language, literature and culture.

In Chapter 18, the case of the Faculty of Educational Science of Bahcesehir in Turkey also highlighted the support the institution provided to K-12 teachers in terms of digital literacy and integration of technology while providing psychology support for parents to develop their resilience. Chapter 19 similarly reports how Arizona State University successfully moved their classes online and disseminated elementary and secondary educational resources to create hybrid learning opportunities for students at the different levels. It is noteworthy that the intention here, similar to cases mentioned earlier, was to help local communities achieve continuity with access to education, improving student outcomes and also the quality of their lives.

Chapter 13 highlights how the Covid-19 pandemic created new ways of doing and being in education systems across the globe. The people in Aotearoa, New Zealand, focused on saving lives as opposed to sustaining an open economy during the pandemic. Massey University worked with the New Zealand Ministry of Education to support educators to learn how the teaching of Mathematics can help learners during the lockdown. This process led to a journey of discovery among teachers where there was a clear focus on wellbeing and not merely the provision of education due to the development and strengthening of the relationships with communities.

The wellbeing of the community was also highlighted as a mission of the National Research University Higher School of Economics in Russia presented in Chapter 16. The Institute of Education at the University of Lisbon also improved students' learning through innovative practices and teachers' capacity building in Chapter 14. It pointed out how awareness-raising and training activities for 90,000

teachers facilitated effective use of technologies to create more meaningful and engaging activities for the students. Doing this in turn has a reciprocal effect as students become more engaged and motivated to learn even during a crisis. Chapter 21 also highlighted the case of the University of Education in Vietnam which adopted a whole-school approach to provide mental health support for students all over the country. The efforts here were based on Eppler-Wolff et al.'s (2019) School-Based Mental Health Collaboration 'grounded in mentalization theory and practice' (p. 322). This effort highlighted the importance of the effective use of resources and distribution of education materials and also the role of long-term contingency planning.

The Qatar Foundation (QF) played a key role in the development of Qatar through education and community development. Chapter 15 examines how the QF created coordinated efforts between Higher Education and Pre-University Education to facilitate educational continuity during the pandemic across institutions within the foundation and beyond. QF also organized a series of virtual global conferences to discuss the impact of Covid-19 on education and inform policymakers on post-crisis education. Chapter 17 presents the case of how students in university Camilo Jose Cela, Spain, participated as teaching assistants to support primary and secondary school teachers. Learning and reflection took place in unexpected moments integrating the strengths of different members of the community and the success of this program hinged on three specific principles: (1) innovation and entrepreneurship, (2) digital transformation, and (3) social commitment.

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), a world class institution in the USA cemented its commitment to advancing knowledge and educating students in science, mathematics and technology to serve the world in the twenty-first century as explained in Chapter 20. MIT established the Full STEAM Ahead into Summer (FSAIS), an online summer program, with the aim of improving remote collaborative learning experiences through developing and sharing a curriculum that encourages 'a minds-on and hands-on approach' (p. 299) for K-12 students. This approach, leveraged on current structures and projects within MIT, and the development of collaborative partnerships with the local and international community.

The book concludes with a broad analysis across all the case-studies and this analysis revealed that universities play a core role in the education ecosystem working with schools and communities to ensure education continuity. One highlight in the concluding chapter is the summary of the innovations and evolutionary processes which have emerged from the universities' responses to the pandemic. Several pertinent areas of research such as the role of digital learning, the impact of inequality on education and also that of implementing wellbeing initiatives, particularly in a crisis, and the importance of acquiring a breath of different skillsets including digital literacy ought to be considered and looked into carefully. A better future could be shaped through a gradual transitioning of effective and practical solutions,

employing prudent economic policies, and encouraging sustainable development in core industries (Kolodko, 2020).

While dealing with and emerging out of this pandemic, what is going to remain is how these networks support, mentor, and evolve in the process. One quality that stood out in all the case studies in this book is the resilience and positive engagement of higher education institutions and the communities they are in. Most institutions focused on providing continuity through provisions of technological support and the transitioning of educational materials to online platforms. The support also included training for teachers and other stakeholders within the system such as parents and school administrators. It is clear that encouraging research and innovation and promoting synergies between research, teaching and outreach efforts are vital in advancing and sustaining support structures to deal with disruption and ensure continuity and sustainability during a crisis.

Additional references

Hodges, H., Moore, S., Lockee, B., Trust, T. and Bond, A. (2020, March 27). The difference between Emergency Remote Teaching and online learning. *Educause Reviews*. <https://er.educause.edu/>

Kołodko, G. W. (2020). After the Calamity: Economics and Politics in the Post-Pandemic World. *Polish Sociological Review*, 210(2), 137-156.

Mundial Banco. (2020). *La educación en América Latina enfrenta una crisis silenciosa que con el tiempo se volverá estridente*. <https://www.bancomundial.org/es/news/feature/2020/06/01/covid19-coronavirus-educacion-america-latina>

Nae, N. (2020). Online learning during the pandemic: where does Japan stand? *Euromentor Journal*, 11(2), 7-24. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342505298_online_learning_during_the_pandemic_where_does_japan_stan

Rudolph, J., Tan, S., & Aspland, T. (2021). Editorial 4(2): Black swan or grey rhino? Reflections on the macro-environment of higher education during the pandemic. *Journal of Applied Learning and Teaching*, 4(2), 6-12. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.37074/jalt.2021.4.2.1>

Saavedra, J. (2020, March 30). Covid-19 Educación: Algunos desafíos y oportunidades. *Banco Mundial Blogs*. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/es/education/educational-challenges-and-opportunities-covid-19-pandemic>

Tan, S., Rudolph, J., Crawford, J., & Butler-Henderson, K. (2022). Emergency remote teaching or andragogical innovation? Higher education in Singapore during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Applied Learning and Teaching*, 5(S1), 64-80. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.37074/jalt.2022.5.s1.8>