

## **GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT, PERSPECTIVE-SHARING, & FUTURE-SEEING IN & BEYOND A GLOBAL CRISIS**

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COVID-19 is nothing if not globally competent. At ease beyond any borders, understood in all languages, able to make deep, personal connections with everyone it meets, the pandemic it's engendered has had the unintended consequence of bringing humanity both figuratively closer together (in terms of a shared threat to our existence) and literally farther apart (by at least six feet). What it's also made abundantly clear to us as educational leaders is that the world-spanning skill-set that's allowed COVID-19 to profoundly disrupt, dismantle, and, in some cases, destroy so much of our daily lives is the very same tool-kit we need to be sharpening in order to rebuild our learning communities, damaged as they are from a pandemic that not only shut down their operations but glaringly exposed the structural flaws in their foundations. We've long advocated for a more global perspective within the education space, one that acknowledges the interdependence of our modern societies and strives to collaborate across the differences it celebrates (Reimers, et al., 2016). What this pandemic has illuminated for our field is how inextricably connected our planet is politically, socially, and economically, even if there's been considerable rhetoric expended attempting to claim otherwise and break the bonds of cooperation that are needed most (Appiah, 2006).

The confluence of these human operating systems demands a level of international collaboration that we, as educational leaders, have grown accustomed to in our personal and professional practices, shaped over the years by the perspectives and relationships that our transnational experiences have accessed. In our considering the future of our field in light of recent events - the disruption of an entire generation's system of formal education by a global pandemic, the dawning of a new era in space exploration fueled by private capital instead of public funding (and the ramifications of this shift), and the murder of George Floyd having catalyzed a social movement that demands equity and justice - the sense we make of this moment is lensed through our transnational gaze. Because of the immigration and migration stories of our families, because of the educational and work opportunities we pursued, and because of the professional and personal communities we have cultivated, we have sharpened our ability to understand multiple perspectives and adapt in changing and ambiguous situations. We possess, embrace, and hone what are sometimes referred to as global competencies or global literacy. (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2013)

What we want to emphasize in this chapter is that the development of these much-needed global and intercultural competencies isn't done by increasing the number of stamps in one's passport, but through the acknowledgment, appreciation, and sharing of the various funds of knowledge brought to bear by the individuals and communities one encounters (Reimers, et al., 2016). In our experience, so many within our educational communities - students, parents, faculty, staff, leaders - come fully equipped with transnational identities that access the very intercultural competencies and global relationships that are true assets in times of global crises. That these funds of knowledge have often not been tapped for the wealth of resources, including the learned skill sets that often accompany transnational lives, they can provide in their respective educational communities mirrors the all-too-frequent marginalization of immigrants in political rhetoric in many nations. (Reimers, et al., 2016; Skerrett, 2015)

In this chapter, we wrestle with how our experiences have shaped our view of educational leadership at this incredibly complex time in the world. We also identify and share patterns from our interviews with other educational leaders with global partnerships and identities about how their leadership and view of education have been impacted by perspective- and knowledge-sharing across national borders during the COVID-19 global pandemic and the consequent disruption to education.

Considering this confluence of era-defining harbingers of change - a pandemic that's tested the bonds of international cooperation as certain nations question if isolationism isn't the better strategy after all, this commercialized push into outer space that was once a source of inspiration in our quest for understanding now dominated by the highest bidder and controlled by shareholders, and the long-overdue challenges to systemic racism and oppression that this most recent murder spree of Black Americans has prompted--we're compelled to work tenaciously towards a future for education that acknowledges the interdependence of our societies and strives to collaborate across differences it celebrates, both for the students and families we seek to impact and for our fellow educators who seek to build these learning communities. As we discuss, debate, and decide what our students need from us now in order to be prepared for their futures in this interconnected and complex world, we draw from the work on global competencies for students (OECD, 2018) as well as Kwame Anthony Appiah's (2006) cosmopolitanism, which emphasizes the universality of our interconnection while embracing our cultural differences. We want our students to both understand and value human interdependence and also to be prepared for a changing and challenging

world. We are also intensely aware that one potential for this moment is a turn toward the familiar, to seek the comfort of the known (Reimers, et al., 2016; Ravitch, 2020).

Even a cursory awareness of our daily news cycle yields multiple stories about national desires trending towards disentangling global alliances, limiting opportunities for relationships across borders and marginalizing those whose identities or experiences embody these relationships. What happens if, as with the recent SpaceX launch, the innovations that are meant to benefit humanity's understanding of the world and beyond are now only available to that select segment of our species that can pay to access them? Issues of access are also central to the Black Lives Matters movement that's illuminated the horrific system of oppression that has intentionally been designed to deny Black Americans and people of color not only their rights, but their very existence. To say this concerns us deeply is an understatement. While this dialogue is a critical first step, action is required to fulfill the potential of what this moment could mean for the future of education. In fact, we must embrace the unfamiliar and recognize our true interdependence so that we can communicate and collaborate across borders to tackle the impact of this global pandemic on our students' lives, so that our field can address the compounding effects of over 400 years of systemic racism by truly internalizing that Black Lives Matter; and so that we can help begin the world over again by placing at the core of all we do the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and supports our children need to all thrive (OECD, 2018).

A first step in recognizing the value of learning from and with others around the world for our students, is for our field to take more seriously the tremendous benefit that global partnerships, connections, and experiences can bring to educators themselves, including placing a higher value on the identities and personal relationships that immigrant and transnational educational leaders bring to their leadership (Reimers, et al., 2016). Through our interviews and conversations with a range of educators, we were able to identify some patterns in relation to the impact of their own global relationships, global partnerships with peers, intercultural experiences, and/or transnational identities had on their thinking and leadership during this crisis. We spoke to a wide variety of educational leaders from numerous countries (primarily working in Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, France, United Kingdom, United States, and Vietnam) with one or more of the following: global partnerships; a global network of peers; personal or professional experiences living outside of their country of birth; immigrant or transnational identity. Through these interviews and conversations we have identified a number of skills, mindsets, and competencies which the educators self-reported to be beneficial and generative to their thinking, understanding, and leadership during the COVID-19 crisis:

**Global systems thinking.** Educators reported seeing how what was happening in one part of the world would inevitably impact other areas of the world, often well before their peers, demonstrating a strong understanding of how the movement of people and consequently viruses connect different parts of the globe.

**Future-seeing.** Educators who have strong global partnerships reported feeling more prepared for what might be coming because they were able to hear about and learn from the challenges of their partners and friends before they were faced with similar challenges in their own context. For example, American and European educators with strong partners or relationships in East Asia reported feeling better prepared for the early months of the COVID-19 impact locally because the impact of the virus on schools and communities had been on their mind through dialogue with their partners since January; Australian educators reported changes to Chinese international students' re-entry status to China before similar challenges were faced by institutions in Canada and the United States; school reopenings in Europe and Asia continue to provide insight and support to educators in North and South America.

**Perspective-seeking.** Educators with experience working and living in a multi-perspectival, multicultural, and/or multilingual ecosystem shared that when faced with a complex challenge, these previous experiences and their current global partners pushed them to seek out and understand perspectives in addition to the ones right in front of them - for example, one educator in Denmark reported seeking out insight and dialogue from various "thought partners" in various locations around the world because "different countries understood things differently about this virus at different times" which helped her bring more depth, nuance, and diversity of thought to leadership and decision-making at her institution.

**Adaptability.** Educators shared that they found their ability to be flexible and adaptable was of great value to them during this time of uncertainty and that they learned these skills, out of necessity, from living and working in multiple countries or distinct cultural contexts. One educator described this as being comfortable not knowing everything or having all the information but still feeling confident to make decisions in the best interest of students, something she learned from years of working in Tehran and Jakarta and now brings to the leadership team of her school in Miami. Another educational leader described his experiences as informing his ability to understand fear, especially fear that comes from the unknown, and his ability to persevere through that fear or uncertainty. These educators are identifying how their own global experiences and identities helped shape their leadership agility, an essential skill in times of crisis. (Ravitch, 2020)

Two essential factors necessary for global partnerships to be beneficial at the crucial moment emerged as a pattern from our interviews: the importance of a relational approach and the intercultural competence of the partners. We believe these patterns

are key to highlight as they reflect what we have seen in our own work with global partnerships. Aligned with humanizing leadership, educators shared that the nature and dynamic of each global partnership was the most important factor in determining whether or not it made a meaningful impact on their own thinking and leadership during this crisis. Global partnerships with the greatest impact were *relational and not transactional*, and some educators specifically described mutual trust and respect as being essential. This meant that educators connected with both the formal global partners of their institutions but also with their own personal or familial networks. The second factor we identified was that conversations with global partners only led to greater perspective and insights when there was *intercultural competency on the part of the educator* including critical and deep understanding of the partner's local cultural context (Deardorff, & Ararasatnam-Smith, 2017).

When both these factors were present, numerous educators shared inspiring examples of how their global partnerships improved learning outcomes for their students. For example, during the pandemic, a school in the United States and one in Denmark were both able to develop a multi-national virtual exchange embedded into one of their courses and educators in Vietnam were able to improve online learning and access for their students after learning from international partners. These are examples of how successful global partnerships, that involve relationships between interculturally competent educational leaders, made an impact not only on the educational leaders themselves but also on students at their schools.

There is an unusual convergence of awe-inspiring events happening today that make it impossible to believe that the world is not on the cusp of a significant paradigm shift. A change is coming in education. Part of our tremendous responsibility as leaders is to assist our constituencies in recognizing that a return to the way things used to be is a fruitless endeavor. As we consider the leadership demands of this moment and the necessity of making the "next" normal a better one, we are awestruck by the generosity of spirit exhibited in the conversations we've had, both with each other and our fellow educators from around the world. There's a kind of superpower that can be unleashed when you harness the collective imagination of global educators. The ideas, solutions, pitfalls, and inquiries that were revealed through our series of interviews contained multitudes that no single individual could have had the bandwidth to either come up with on their own or skillfully monitor and manage alone. Collaboration was the key, driven by a humility that recognizes that great ideas can come from anywhere, and that in order to access a brilliant idea, a leader needs a pipeline to sharp minds that are not their own.

This work *at this time* will undoubtedly shape how we approach our responsibilities as educators for the rest of our days. The crisis of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the exclusivity of the SpaceX launch, and the responsibility of the movement born of George Floyd's murder and the murders of so many other Black people - the first for its universal change of course, the second for the warning about accessibility it has to offer, and the third for its powerful and tragic reminder that any global mindset we seek to attain will undoubtedly be born out of our personal and national experiences - are driving us all into uncharted territory. It's time for our community of educational leaders to blaze a trail forward, together.

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