



COVID19 - implications for development education

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Photo: talking about the book '80:20 Development in an Unequal World'

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Colm wrote this article in the Times of Malta. He now lives and teaches there.

We asked how he saw the implications for development education. This is his response.



80:20 book

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The Elephant Times

Predictably, this is a huge topic. What follows are some initial notes. COVID-19 highlights 3 key patterns and trends of direct relevance to this issue.

One, the pandemic is a global health crisis which has impacted in one way or another on all countries worldwide. The pandemic has made a mockery of the idea that we can isolate or separate ourselves from each other. Geography, economics, politics and culture remain global.

Two, the brutal realities of COVID-19 graphically highlight the deep fault lines in our societies. It has stripped away the veneer of equality and has thrown into high relief radical inequality with all its consequences. **Three**, we have simultaneously witnessed an outpouring of our 'better selves' – mutual aid, community solidarity and the importance of civil society.

In the face of such realities, the relevance of development education is crystal clear to me; so too are the educational imperatives that follow. Teachers and educators need to redouble efforts to share and stimulate discussion and debate of key values and perspectives. For me, these include human dignity and universality; human rights without exception and human security (especially sustainability). While there are many more, the challenge is to re-assert our common humanity and our shared future. Again, this is at the core of development education.

Of particular relevance educationally in the face of the pandemic, is the urgent need to challenge bigotry, hate and racism which has been promoted by politicians, commentators, some media and, of course, many political creeds and agendas.

In short, we need to rediscover 'anew' and then 'teach' internationalism, care, tolerance, equality and sustainability and we need to challenge their opposites.

COVID 19 - deep fault lines evident

It is commonplace for celebrities, politicians and many columnists to assert that in the context of COVID-19, 'we're all in this together'. Really?

Consider this. In Malawi fewer than 50 people a day can be tested for the virus currently; there are less than 25 intensive care unit beds and precious few ventilators in a country with a population of more than 18 million. In 2018, Malawi had a GDP per capita of US\$517 equivalent to just 4% of the world average. Zambia currently has one doctor for every 10,000 people while Mali has a mere three ventilators per million people. Given our medical capacity across the countries of Europe, can we even begin to claim that we are 'in this together' with the citizens of Malawi, Mali or Zambia?

Consider this also. Two weeks ago, Prime Minister Modi of India declared the world's largest lockdown with just four hours notice. This, in a country where many millions live at absolutely extreme levels of poverty and homelessness. 'Staying at home' in such a context is utterly meaningless. The lockdown triggered a wave of mass migration across the country with many taking to the roads in an attempt to travel home hundreds and even thousands of miles. Normal food shortages, especially among the poorest have become catastrophic with little chance of immediate resolution.

"In this together". Really?

Consider. Applying the idea of physical distancing; the practising hand washing in clean water with sanitiser or soap; maintaining a healthy and balanced diet and choosing which exercise session to follow on social media is a frankly ridiculous proposition for slum dwellers across many developing countries. In the packed shacks of Khayelitsha (Cape Town, South Africa), Kibera (Nairobi, Kenya), Dharavi (Mumbai, India) or Ciudad Nega (Mexico City), COVID 19 has arrived as yet another dimension of existing inequality and oppression.

Consider also. In these last few days, the International Committee of the Red Cross has expressed its concern about the impact of the virus on refugees stranded in so many parts of the world in camps with limited or absent basics. The Committee's fear is that governments will not only seek to protect and support those they see as 'their own' but leave those in such camps to

fend for themselves often under military enforced lockdown. The situation was chillingly described by mother of seven Asho Abdullahi Hassan in a camp in Mogadishu as being like 'waiting for death to come'.

"Together in this" – insult upon insult. Here in Europe, we read of the discriminatory actions of our states with reference to the health or basic human security needs of migrants and refugees. Even in the richest nation on earth, the United States, we see emerging data that the virus has impacted hardest on the poorest (and frequently black) communities. And, even here in Malta, we hear of the dangers of increasing domestic violence against women as a result of 'stay at home' strategies.

While it may be true that the virus does not discriminate, we have built our societies on multiple layers of discrimination. This inevitably ensures that those often most vulnerable and marginalised pay the highest price in times of pandemic.

Once again this particular global crisis has revealed the deepest of fault lines upon which our world is built and sustained. Disturbingly, it also reveals the deep seated prejudices and bigotries needed to justify and, in turn sustain such fault lines.

Our latest line of chatter is about what the world might look like post-coronavirus. Many claim it will not/cannot be the same. Yes, it may indeed change but will it be change for the better particularly as regards inequality and injustice and their consequences? I, for one, am not exactly holding my breath.

There is, however a sting in the tail. The realisation may finally be dawning on many of us (even on our most resistant and self-obsessed 'leaders') that discriminations, barriers and walls of various kinds cannot now and will never ensure our individual or collective health and well-being. Despite their best efforts, we, the rich of the world cannot barricade ourselves from the poor – their health and well-being is intimately linked to ours.

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