TE|SF

Transforming Education
for Sustainable Futures

The Case for Transformative Public Education

Responding to COVID-19 now while addressing long-term
underlying inequalities

Rationale

Educating the public is central to governmental and NGO responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Arising from a sense of urgency, this education tends to focus on providing instructions and guidance on things such as handwashing, physical distancing, proper quarantining and recognising physical symptoms of the disease. Such imperatives are echoed by social and broadcast media and by local institutions, reflecting the immediate need to 'get the message across' to large publics in a short time. Increasingly, these messages are also backed-up with the threat of police, judicial and military power and continuous surveillance; non-compliance with prescribed behaviours can lead to sanctions, and in some countries to detention.

It is our contention in this report that **while the provision of clear, accurate and trustworthy information is essential during a pandemic, public education should not be limited to this approach alone. Instead, dialogic and situated community-based forms of public education are needed, premised on two-way communication with communities. We call this Transformative Public Education**.

Transformative Public Education is necessary under these conditions for two reasons: first, because such approaches are better at addressing the immediate risks of COVID-19 than the 'inform and enforce' model described above; and second, because such approaches are better able to successfully address the interrelated and underlying structural problems of massive wealth inequalities, gender inequality, infrastructure inequalities , ecological damage and climate change that feed into and interact with the pandemic.

While instrumental forms of information sharing, education and training are useful in dealing with the immediate health risks of the pandemic, applied alone and with no sensitivity to the underlying issues faced by each community, their impact is likely to be limited. Instead, more interactive and emancipatory forms of education are required to build the understanding,

knowledge and competences that citizens need to respond situationally, culturally and with solidarity to the pandemic. Such collective learning and solidarity, even in times of physical distancing, is possible.

Foundations for the paper

This briefing paper reflects the collective wisdom of participants in the _Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures_ Network, a UK Research Council Global Challenges network that brings together researchers and educators from the fields of education for sustainable development, educational change, and community-led education across South Africa, Rwanda, the UK, the Netherlands, India and Somalia/Somaliland. This is not a formal review of the evidence (for links to relevant reviews and further references, see below) but constitutes a rapid response to the current crisis in the light of our collective practical and research experience.

Overview

The briefing paper addresses the following topics:

- What is Transformative Public Education?
- Why Transformative Public Education matters to the COVID-19 response
- Why Transformative Public Education matters for addressing long-term underlying risks to communities
- Examples of Transformative Public Education responses to COVID-19
- Suggestions for governments and state welfare actors seeking to work with Transformative Public Education
- Suggestions for community leaders working with Transformative Public Education
- Transformative Public Education in times of physical distancing
- Key readings and resources

What is Transformative Public Education?

Transformative Public Education involves community-based learning processes which combine both community-based and western scientific forms of knowledge and action as a basis for short- or longer-term changes in communities. It is usually directed towards complex, wicked challenges for which there is no single response or solution.

A starting point for this is understanding the 'lived' context in which people daily confront challenges. This involves respectfully surfacing existing capacities and activities, and identifying gaps and opportunities that may exist. The departure point is not one of deficit, but of sensitively working to understand the lived context and how this can be transformed. Using sense making approaches and other tools, this can strengthen relationships and mobilise capacities to address individual and collective challenges, and create spaces to address underlying problems and obstacles. Transformative Public Education takes many different forms (see examples, below) but is characterised by a recognition that:

- diverse forms of knowledge have value in addressing community health, educational and economic challenges, including local community expertise, traditional and tacit knowledge, and scientific evidence. It is important to create space for dialogue across these different forms of knowledge
- not all knowledge is valid or reliable in all situations, so Transformative Public Education creates conditions in which all sources of knowledge and information can be assessed collectively and critically examined
- not all learning need rest on high levels of literacy or numeracy, other modes of communication are privileged
- language matters – centralised messages tend to be conveyed in official (often colonial) languages which in many cases are not nuanced enough to carry meaning to people whose lives are shaped by and through their local languages. Education in multiple, local languages is therefore a priority

- all communities have expertise regarding their own lives, values and practices as well as assets and resources that are essential to understanding and addressing any given situation, often embodied in people, cultures and social relations. Understanding and mapping these assets and expertise is an important starting point
- power inequalities exist within all households and communities. Dialogue and reflection on power inequalities is therefore required to enable all members of a community to contribute knowledge equitably and openly and to address discrimination
- building trust and mutual understanding is essential to learning. This may take time, and slow conversations are as important to Transformative Public Education as quick and possibly more transgressive solutions
- pedagogy matters – moving away from a transmission model of learning to forms of critical pedagogy (based on dialogue, shared analysis of problems, critical reflection) allows learners to link issues of health and well-being to wider processes of development and social change
- solutions that 'land' on communities from outside, irrespective of context, are of limited value (and sometimes worse). In Transformative Public Education, communities are central to adapting these, and/or developing successful and workable solutions to problems in their specific contexts
- the immediate challenge may make visible or be exacerbated by underlying issues. Emphasis is given to building a shared analysis of the history and foundational causes of current problems to create deep understanding and long term (re)generative action
- long-term change emerges from community leadership and ownership in partnership with supportive organisations and structures.

Why Transformative Public Education matters in the COVID-19 pandemic

The failure to engage with local knowledge and the application of public health measures developed in high-income countries has had adverse effects in many low-income contexts (see SSHAP, 2020). Transformative Public Education practices create conditions for such engagement.

Evidence from previous pandemics provides clear guidance that working in partnership with trusted community leaders and with the knowledge and expertise of local communities, is essential to understanding how to develop effective contextually-appropriate solutions to health crises. This partnership and mutual learning is precisely what is created through Transformative Public Education.

Wider structural dynamics (such as poverty, health, gender relations and social inequities) intersect in pandemics such as COVID-19. These cannot easily be conveyed or addressed via centralised messages or instrumental approaches to education. Transformative Public Education practices create opportunities to explore how specific communities with different underlying structural challenges are experiencing and can respond to the pandemic.

In many low- and middle-income countries, the public health infrastructure is relatively weak in towns, cities and rural areas. As such, there are important roles for individuals, families and organised civil society groups in creating community-led health care systems and other related responses, such as food distribution systems. These community-led systems can learn from and build on the experiences of others if supported by resources from government, donors and local organisations. Transformative Public Education practices create opportunities for co-learning between the different actors involved in developing pandemic responses.

Encouraging and recognising practices of Transformative Public Education is a key tool in developing empathetic and culturally-situated responses to critical issues in ways that are not exclusionary or discriminatory. This enables the co-generation of locally
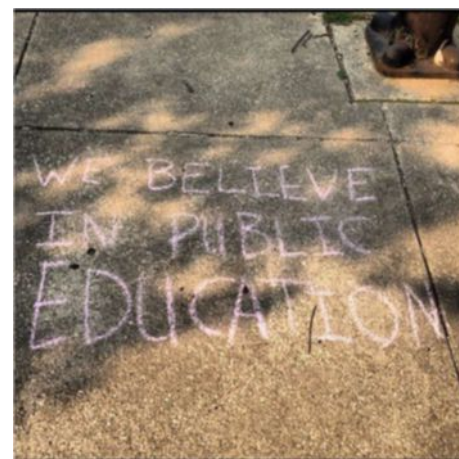

Image Credit: micronova CC-BY

applicable solutions that may work (differently in different contexts).

Why Transformative Public Education matters for addressing underlying and long-term risks to communities

The COVID-19 pandemic is not the only life-threatening disease or situation that communities in low-income countries are experiencing. Nor are pandemics the only threat to wellbeing and livelihoods. Rather, the pandemic makes visible the radical economic, health and educational inequalities that are already facing the urban poor, those in informal settlements, as well as migrants, refugees and the homeless. Addressing the immediate challenge of the pandemic will not resolve and may exacerbate underlying and sometimes more pressing needs.

Transformative Public Education provides a much-needed holistic and long-term alternative approach to education for health and wellbeing. It proceeds from a recognition that creating sustainable and safe futures for all will require: first, holding states accountable for practices that sustain inequities that are merely exposed as 'vulnerabilities' during crises such as COVID-19; second, recognising the capacity of households and communities to define and address their own problems and develop their own leadership and solidarity systems; third, attention to the fundamental underlying causes of economic inequality, conflict, health risks and environmental degradation in communities; and fourth, the development of new social, educational,

political and economic strategies at local, national and international levels which may also include cultural changes of various kinds.

Many communities in low- and middle-income countries, who are already surviving significant challenges on a daily basis, have hard-won life experience, expertise and knowledge that can shape and lead significant change and work *with* government and other external parties to effect improvements in their lives. Transformative Public Education involves explicit (self)-inclusion of poor and marginalised communities and the building of partnerships that augment and resource existing efforts and priorities, supporting long-lasting transformation.

What is at stake in Transformative Public Education is the possibility of constructing 'communities of solidarity' that are premised on communicative openness, the recognition of plurality, incompleteness and a sense of a shared collective purpose and/or a shared matter of concern that requires attention. Such attention takes the form of ethical action and explicit engagement with the intentions and desires of all concerned. This work takes place within complex and often discontinuous and fragmented processes of building collective movement for change. Transformative Public Education and associated pedagogies are relational processes that are constituted via incomplete and often contested networks of historical, political, socio-cultural, knowledge and action relations. Approaching Transformative Public Education in this way involves not only advancing common purposes but also engaging in critique, learning and unlearning, as well as disruption and transgression, as situations demand. Such processes are needed for new forms of solidarity to emerge that are foundational for the transgressive cultural and structural movements and change that can 'push' against existing conditions.

Examples of Transformative Public Education of relevance to COVID-19 responses

The following examples of Transformative Public Education in action during the COVID-19 pandemic build on traditions of public education, social learning and activism around the world. Space does not allow a full account here, but these include for example,

the pioneering work of Paulo Freire and colleagues on transformative adult education in South America in the 1960s and 1970s. Freire's ideas about critical pedagogy and the emancipatory potential of education were taken up by the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa during the 1970s as well as elsewhere on the African continent. In Tanzania, adult literacy programmes in the 1960s and 1970s focused on actively engaging adult learners in the development process including in areas such as public health and hygiene and in sustainable agricultural practices. In South Africa, the trade union movement combined forms of workers' education with political mobilisation, and people's movements in the 1980s undertook forms of mass education linked to the struggle to end apartheid. In India the Barefoot Colleges movement and participatory research networks drew upon Gandhian principles to learn from and build community expertise and leadership in creating autonomous, viable communities (see Case Study in Appendix).

Collected below are examples of Transformative Public Education that exist in TESF partner countries and beyond

Illima practices and Community Action Networks (CANs) in South Africa.

South Africa has a long history of activism, social learning and solidarity mobilisation at community level. With the advent of COVID-19 in the two major ports of international entry in South Africa, Cape Town and Johannesburg, the Cape Town activist community established a system of COVID-19 Response Community Action Networks early in March. They focus on co-learning how to build solidarity networks and practices under new conditions of risk and social distancing. The CAN network system has generated a range of practices such as information sharing, food security systems, and legal action and representation of people to address exclusions and anomalies such as the evacuation of poor households in some areas. Street-level community organising uses easy to access social networking and online meeting platforms and door-to-door solidarity actions with social distancing observed. The CANs have expanded to the Eastern Cape, and there is much interest in them in other activist movements and contexts as the virus

spreads. The Eastern Cape CANs are operating differently to those in Cape Town due to the vast geographical distances. One of the critical issues being worked on is the cultural accessibility of information in local languages in the context of cultural practices such as funerals and farming. CAN Champions share information of issues that need addressing, and those with capacity for various types of action and mobilisation share expertise, resources and practices within and between networks. In the Eastern Cape these build on a tradition of *illima*, or 'working together' that has recently emerged as a strong practice in local farming and water learning networks that arose in the province in response to drought crises. The practice of *illima* in learning networks is the bases for the Eastern Cape CAN network as it is emerging and spreading, illustrating how these community assets can be mobilised in new contexts. These practice-centred processes feed into wider advocacy actions focussing on, for example, unlocking the food commons and addressing food security.

Community Health Workers are at the public frontline in the fight against COVID-19 in South Africa following a recent announcement by the President that 10,000 community health workers would be deployed in a 'Covid Home Visits Programme' that will include no-contact mass community-based screening, referral for clinic testing, quarantine of suspected cases and appropriate care for COVID-19 patients. As such, South Africa is in the process of re-deploying public health care workers who have prior experience of HIV and tuberculosis public education and care. This brings recognition to the existing experience and expertise of a substantive network of community health workers that have been active in supporting community public education in the fight against HIV and tuberculosis in the past 30 and more years, but also recognition that these two epidemics of long durée have potential to intersect dangerously with the COVID-19. This is a good example of public educators drawing on previous knowledge and experience under new conditions. Since the infection control measures for COVID-19 and TB are similar, public healthcare workers are familiar with the protective gear and some of the core health-related concepts. However, COVID-19 also creates new and

different risks, it comes with a range of new and unfamiliar concepts and challenges, and new forms of information and practice that need to be integrated with previous forms of knowledge and experience. As a result, Community Health Workers have rightly been requesting new forms of training, information and personal protective equipment to prepare them for somewhat familiar, yet novel conditions and practice.

Home-Grown Solutions

Rwanda's trademark 'home-grown solutions' are a means of addressing local development challenges and opportunities, based on Rwanda's cultural values and heritage. Home-grown solutions draw on traditional practices in Rwanda which have been modified to suit contemporary times. In view of the outbreak of COVID-19 and its effects, home-grown solutions have gained renewed relevancy and are informing the framing of public education and the re-alignment of social support systems for COVID-19 victims. Historically, some of the key home-grown solutions have included *Umuganda*, *Gacaca* (community courts), *Itorero* and *Girinka*.

Umuganda, or communal work, is a traditional practice that embraces values of hard work, self-help, self-reliance and mutual support among families during bad and good times. Recently, this practice has been modified and community members meet to construct and rehabilitate public infrastructure like schools, public roads, community clinics or construct a house for an identified widow of a vulnerable person. On the last Saturday of every month, citizens convene for communal work. Further, *Umuganda* serves as platform for public education on any topical issues in society, such as safety, hygiene, education, parenting, civic responsibility, etc. This is an example of an inclusive and people-centered approach rooted in the country's tradition that addresses community issues. For more than a decade, public education has embraced this concept and it has proved relevant as a community support system to mitigate the effects of COVID-19. For example, at present, communities are sharing money through WhatsApp groups to purchase food and essentials for the most vulnerable. Rwanda also announced that Ministers, members of Cabinet and head of

Government institutions will sacrifice their April Salary to support COVID-19 Victims.

The *Gacaca* courts were traditional Rwandan courts in which conflicts between communities or individual were resolved. During the aftermath of the Tutsi Genocide, the *Gacaca* courts were adapted as a means of transitional justice designed to promote communal healing and rebuilding. The unique feature of *Gacaca* courts is the emphasis on reconciliation and community building. As a home-grown solution, *Gacaca* courts have been able to solve more than two million cases using community members when compared to the Roman Legal system that was used by the International Criminal Court of Arusha. The latter spent millions of dollars, and according to estimates, it would have taken 20 years to resolve all the cases that have been resolved by *Gacaca* Courts[1]. There are lessons to be learned from these processes, concerning how to ensure equity and care for the vulnerable in the community, and the potential of home-grown solutions is clear.

The **Kerala Sasthra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP**) is a people's science movement which started about 60 years ago in the state of Kerala, India. It has played an exemplary role in the education of people on the Corona pandemic. KSSP has a vast network of WhatsApp groups, at least one each in every panchayat, titled '*Coveto – veto to Covid*'. These are used to disseminate accurate information on COVID-19 from doctors and public health experts. Videos, audio, posters and short articles on government directions, simplified scientific information on the virus, precautions to be taken, the importance of the lockdown, and related issues are disseminated from the district to the local levels. Local-level groups include representatives from various political parties, Kudumbashree, Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers and others who regularly interact with citizens. KSSP has been at the forefront of providing relief to the large number of migrant workers as well. Messages are sent to them in six different languages through WhatsApp groups, and relief is provided directly at their shelters.[2]

The **Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) Network** has many examples of how local communities are organising and taking the lead in developing COVID-19 responses[3]. The Engaged Citizens Responsive Cities project, saw PRIA set up Settlement Improvement Committees (SICs) in the cities of Ajmer, Jhansi and Muzaffarpur. Members of these committees are now taking a lead on addressing COVID-19 in these cities. The Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action network is providing hygiene kits to urban poor communities across Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, Vasai-Virar, and Panvel. The kits contain basic household items including food and sanitary products. They also provide daily cooked meal boxes for police personnel and government hospital staff and meals for 5500 stranded migrant workers. Safety kits containing masks, gloves, and sanitiser are provided to the volunteers.

Fab Labs Recent years have seen the emergence of an international movement around the provision of small-scale digital manufacturing workshops, or fabrication laboratories ('fab labs'), that enable local communities to design and produce materials that are relevant at a local level. Fab labs typically have 3D printing, circuit board and cutting equipment, and are linked to a global community based on open source principles and the free sharing of learning. As of April 2020, Fab Labs had been established in 3 of the 4 hub countries in the TESF network. 38 are currently active in India; 3 in Rwanda; and 8 in South Africa. In response to COVID-19, the Fab Foundation is centrally cataloguing and coordinating efforts around the world[4]. Priority is being given to the development of protective equipment for health workers, such as masks, and low-cost medical equipment such as CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) machines. Importantly, such processes are associated with building capacity and analysis of underlying

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[1] https://www.hrw.org/report/2011/05/31/justice-compromised/legacy-rwandas-community-based-gacaca-courts
[2] For further details on Kerela's response to the pandemic, see:
https://www.technologyreview.com/2020/04/13/999313/kerala-fight-COVID-19-india-coronavirus/ ,
http://www.ipsnews.net/2020/04/kerala-COVID-19-response-model-emulation/
[3] https://pria.org/
[4] https://gitlab.fabcloud.org/pub/project/coronavirus/tracking

weaknesses in healthcare provision, not simply responding to immediate needs.

The **Deep Adaptation** forum and **Transition Town** movements in the UK are self-organised networks, enabling place-based and organisationally-based responses to climate change[5]. Although slightly different in principles and objectives, both initiatives focus on developing local communities, resilient systems and processes, and personal resilience and skills which respond to the risk of societal collapse caused by climate change. They focus on reimagining social, ecological and economic structures and beginning to implement and experiment with the processes that are needed to build such transformations.

The **Ecolise** network of **Ecovillages** connects community-led initiatives addressing climate change and sustainability challenges[6]. These networks are rapidly mobilising to address COVID-19, in particular through ensuring localisation of supply networks such as food supply[7]. The **Open Food Network** for example, which arises from the Ecovillages movement, is building new connections between farmers and local communities to avoid food waste and address local food shortages[8].

In the UK the **adult education** movement (which formally dates to the end of World War One) has been recognised as essential to enabling all members of society to tackle significant problems, and has been characterised by a range of activities including: 'reading groups, community groups, faith groups, activist projects'[9]. Many of these are mobilising to respond to the current pandemic. In another response to COVID-19 crisis, the UK has seen a significant growth in **Mutual Aid** projects, with guidance and advice available on how to communities can self-organise to respond to the pandemic[10]. These networks are building on the work of long term Transformative Public Education practices,

Tippy taps at a rural school in Sierra Leone. The tap is foot-operated, by applying pressure to the lever. The smaller bottle contains a disinfectant solution. Photo Credit: Rafael Mitchell

including, for example, the work of Migrants Organise and Queer Care[11].

We can also learn lessons from:

Sierra Leone, the country most-severely affected by the Ebola virus. Here, schools and other educational institutions were closed in 2014 as part of efforts to curb transmission. Assessments at the time revealed unsanitary conditions and a lack of adequate water, soap and toilet facilities in many schools, and the government ruled that minimum standards for sanitation must be met before they could re-open. Through guidance from NGOs such as FAWE (Forum for African Women Educationalists) communities were able to construct 'tippy taps', hands-free wash stations built from locally-available materials, which allowed schools to re-open[12].

The **Lifelong Learning Cafes in Gulu**, Uganda are informal learning forums where community members interested in a specific theme or issue come together to discuss it

for a day. The cafés are organised and facilitated by a group of youth in the Gulu UNESCO Chair for Lifelong Learning Youth and Work Network. The group comes from various backgrounds, bringing diverse perspectives that are negotiated carefully. The learning is purposefully informal but carefully planned. The key outcomes are threefold: i) learning the general field and conditions around a particular theme which is affecting youth involved in the café (e.g. understanding key barriers and challenges and potential pathways/opportunities); ii) strengthening the networks for youth support and capacity development; and iii) opening up spaces for people to dream and aspire for realistic futures. Participants include university and secondary students, out-of-school youth (either working or not), professionals from the field, and NGOs or CBOs who offer opportunities. The café facilitates dialogue among these stakeholders, usually with arts-based methods such as storytelling, painting and theatre, to share experiences and learn from each other. To contextualise the topic, cafés are hosted 'in situ', for example when a learning cafe on agriculture is hosted at a local dairy farm. Everyone is recognised as a teacher, and the café builds on the diversity in the room to learn collaboratively and

[5] http://www.deepadaptation.info/ , https://transitionnetwork.org/
[6] https://www.ecolise.eu/about-ecolise/
[7] https://jembendell.com/2019/11/02/deep-adaptation-relocalisation/
[8] https://www.openfoodnetwork.org/food-enterprises-and-COVID-19/
[9] https://www.centenarycommission.org/
[10] https://Covidmutualaid.org/

[11] https://www.migrantsorganise.org/ and , https://queercare.network/our-work/resources/COVID-19/
[12] https://www.techxlab.org/projects/tippy-tap-sierra-leone/

catalyse strategies for decent futures for all. In response to COVID-19, Zoom-based learning cafes have been taken online to become 'listening circles'. A particular focus has been the impact of coronavirus measures on women, with an emphasis on how to address violence and sexual violence against women. There are some concerns, however, about how this will work given the strength of internet connection in Uganda.

Working with Transformative Public Education

Learning from the experiences and histories of Transformative Public Education (some of which are briefly outlined above), we propose some suggestions below for those wanting to develop Transformative Public Education approaches in the time of COVID-19 and beyond.

Suggestions for governments and state-led welfare initiatives wanting to work with Transformative Public Education for the pandemic and in longer-term development

- Be respectful and supportive of self-organisation and community-care networks that already exist in communities.
- Map and engage pro-actively with these networks.
- Keep an eye out for the emergence of less formally-organised creative and self-organising practices happening in your community.
- Proceed from the assumption that local communities and their leaders have credible and grounded experience and understandings about how their communities work, and may have useful ideas about how to protect them.
- Recognise that different actions are appropriate in different settings, and that communities' long- term as well as short-term aspirations need to be considered.
- Create (and/or support) opportunities to put local knowledge and scientific knowledge in dialogue,
- Work with partners to ensure non-discriminatory practices and equality.

- Create (and/or support) tools and processes that enable communities to self-organise and coordinate mutual aid, and to mobilise support from government and other structures in time of urgent need.
- Create (and/or support) mechanisms to enable information sharing and solidarity building across and between local communities.
- Create (and/or support) mechanisms to enable communities to share information and data with each other, and to coordinate such data with officials responsible for public health.
- Support communities by making investments in infrastructure that will offer long-term benefits, not just short-term health protection.
- Allow COVID-19 to be understood, much like other complex disasters (e.g. climate challenges such as droughts, floods), as intersecting with a range of other concerns which are visible at grassroots level (e.g. poverty, health, social discrimination, gender-based violence). Some circumstances may make taken-for-granted measures such as physical distancing unachievable, and require the development of workable, contextually-appropriate strategies.

Suggestions for community leaders wanting to work with Transformative Public Education during the pandemic and for longer-term development

- Recognise and mobilise your existing resources – your community networks, trusted leaders, self and community-care practices.
- Recognise the potential of all your community members to become experts – and address inequalities in power and voice.
- Remember that 'each one can teach one' and 'each one can reach one'; in other words all people have power to support others to learn new practices and to build solidarity with others via meaningful responses and care.
- Create opportunities for dialogue between your networks and external

experts and support networks (including government) to localise information, support services and responses as appropriate within the community.
- Involve all members of the community in responding to the pandemic, and allow diverse perspectives and approaches to be deliberated and discussed; children also need to be involved in the process, as do elders, women and young people.
- Try to decentralise responses (with appropriate support in place) and develop co-engaged platforms for community dialogue and sharing of examples of practices that work.
- Identify and use the most effective communication and collaborative learning channels in your communities (e.g. use of WhatsApp groups, or other solidarity platforms).
- Recognise discontinuities, challenges, tensions and contradictions as powerful potential sources of transformative learning and solidarity building.
- Create opportunities for communities to identify and explore the underlying challenges that the pandemic has deepened or opened up – recognise that it may be important to talk not just about immediate problems, but about the longer-term issues that are of concern.
- Explore how these intersecting issues might form the basis for more substantial, long-term co-development of responses to address underlying health, economic, social and environmental challenges in these communities.
- Explore how these intersecting issues might form the basis for more substantial, long-term co-operation between governments and communities to create structural responses underlying health, economic, social and environmental challenges in these communities.

Transformative Public Education in conditions of social distancing - looking for other practices

The requirement for physical distancing is likely to be disruptive to face-to-face traditions of Transformative Public Education. There are, however, a wide range of online materials and resources that are beginning to be made available to support collective learning that are accessible via mobile technology.

Some of the **digital resources** oriented towards developing community-engaged dialogue and interactions are available here:

- Developing Stakeholder engagement in a time of social distancing: https://www.ibigroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Stakeholder-Engagement-in-the-Time-of-Social-Distancing-Infographic.pdf
- Precautions to take when working with zoom: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1zUV_z0XkuN2rQ5bDYFx9BBWM4rpYpO5Ker5ZWDnPr9M/edit
- Webinars to support participatory action research initiatives to respond to the pandemic: https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_zA173cP7RteyvhC2PMeXTw
- Online facilitation tools: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1rmRSMklCKrPcq7BXfKkVrH5v3aixsYOoDI_hm8WOVrA/mobilebasic
- A set of educational and community learning resources specifically focused on COVID-19: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1QyewPU810qZiWLs2PXxmcCGXzopS0aR0NyBw-dKlbAE/edit?mc_cid=bee0e33a31&mc_eid=deeac437f3
- Advice on hosting online discussions: http://www.conversationcafe.org/resources-for-hosting-online-cafes-in-the-time-of-pandemic/
- Advice on creating successful virtual events: https://virtualevents.lpages.co/webinar/
- Online resources for building system change:

http://municipalitiesintransition.org/hot-topics-discussions-inspiration-tools-and-resources/
- A summary list of digital tools that may be useful to support community learning, knowledge exchange and information gathering during the pandemic: https://kerifacer.wordpress.com/2020/04/10/digital-tools-COVID-19/

Access to and use of digital technologies is, however, affected by structural inequalities. To address this, a community-based approach to digital messaging and communication might be developed, for example by encouraging and developing community digital access points rather than relying on or orienting all efforts towards individual access[13]. It is possible to create materials which can be shared between those with access and those without. Where possible, the use of local languages should be encouraged (crowdsourcing translation efforts under these conditions is also another way of engaging communities), as should the use of offline and mobile-based platforms[14].

Non-digital responses also have potential to support Transformative Public Education.

- Creating space and opportunity for learning outdoors, whether through the repurposing of existing outdoor learning spaces from schools or using public spaces or natural environments, will be an increasingly important practice in the current conditions.
- In Nigeria, the traditional means of communication via town criers (a system used to pass on information as well as educate the public on important issues) is being adapted in some villages to respond to the present lockdown challenge. The town crier goes attracts attention

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[13] For example, the SOLE programme – https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self_Organised_Learning_Environment
[14] UNESCO has issued guidance for indicative systems – https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/solutions

through a traditional gong or drum before relaying his message. This system can be adapted to educate children in villages and settlements that lack access to the internet and are locked down in their homes. Might this one-way communication approach be creatively developed to support the two-way conversations that underpin Transformative Public Education?
- As a way to reach pupils in their homes, some State Governments in Nigeria are connecting teachers and students through the radio. Again, how might radio be used to support two-way conversations for transformative education? A combination of telephone and radio platforms has the potential to shift such communication from one-way information-giving to two-way engagement in understanding and addressing both immediate and long-term challenges.

Summary

Public education, organised around 'informing and enforcing' public health messages, provides some protection against the health risks of the pandemic. To strengthen the immediate public health response, however, a more robust and trustworthy partnership is needed between government/state welfare officials and citizens, communities and community leaders. Those closest to the community have real knowledge and expertise about how the pandemic is playing out in their community, and what social responses are appropriate in different conditions.

The pandemic, however, is only one of the risks that many communities are facing – from hunger to poverty to ecological degradation. Addressing the pandemic alone will not address the deeper-rooted, structural drivers of inequity and long-standing issues that are responsible for serious and ongoing harm to communities. Recognition of these existing challenges can allow communities and government bodies to collectively address these fundamental underlying issues that are exacerbating and

intensifying the risks of the pandemic. This is where Transformative Public Education – premised on dialogue, recognising expertise and knowledge, and oriented towards acknowledging and addressing underlying problems – is essential and achievable even in conditions of physical distancing.

The Barefoot College model is a unique example of integrating inclusive practices via an educational arrangement and process that is not only people-centred but that steers a community to cultivate a sense of agency and active citizenship.

Key readings and references

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SSHAP (2020) Key Considerations: COVID-19 in Informal Settlements,
https://www.socialscienceinaction.org/resources/key-considerations-COVID-19-informal-urban-settlements-march-2020/

A toolkit for community engaged development of sustainable places, using arts practices. This open access toolkit offers a collection of almost 30 methods, practical examples, workshop outlines and tips for creative facilitation, as well as resources and relevant academic references.
https://www.sustainableplaceshaping.net/arts-based-toolkit/

Practical Guide to setting up multi-stakeholder partnerships:
http://www.mspguide.org/

A set of tools for considering how to develop stakeholder engagement at a time of social distancing:
https://www.ibigroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Stakeholder-Engagement-in-the-Time-of-Social-Distancing-Infographic.pdf

The Emergent Learning Playbook is an open source and still evolving document pulling together a host of resources on the history and practice of what we are here calling Transformative Public Education:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/136t8rPWSSe8ykxA5ARax6FWVyPDAeCFy6O582k1iGoI/edit#

There are many different forms of transformative education, and we note emerging reports of new social learning and activism strategies that are emerging in response to COVID-19, which produces particularly challenging circumstances of human co-learning given the requirement for social distancing at a time when 4.5 billion people (more than half the world's people) are in various forms of 'lock down' and staying at home. Many of these examples rest on approaches that require various forms of media and access to data (e.g. on-line learning; using social networking platforms) and are therefore mainly used by those with ease of access to these means of communication and co-learning, but some are also focussed on making practices (e.g. groups making masks to share), while others involve news forms of public engagement (e.g. individuals on balconies singing out together into street communities). See for example, the

Guardian's recent article on new forms of social activism and mutual aid:
https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/20/the-global-pandemic-has-spawned-new-forms-of-activism-and-theyre-flourishing?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

For wider context, this website provides a very useful resource and archive of the history of informal education: www.Infed.org

This set of literature reviews – in particular the Reviews by Wakeford & Sanchez and Moore – available on this website, provide a summary of different traditions and histories of collaborative knowledge production within communities and between communities and universities :
https://connected-communities.org/index.php/connected-communities-foundation-series/

Registered as the Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC) in 1971, the Barefoot College started in Tilonia, a small village located 350 km from Delhi, in Rajasthan. The Barefoot College is a radical departure from the traditional concept of a 'college' as it encourages a hands-on learning-by-doing process of gaining practical knowledge and skills. It promotes and strengthens the kind of education one absorbs from family, community, and personal experience.

Barefoot College is the only college in India that follows the lifestyle and work style of Gandhi. It is the only college built by the poor, for the poor, and for the last 35 years, managed, controlled, and owned by the poor. Underlying the Barefoot approach is a firm belief in the knowledge, creativity, practical wisdom, and survival skills of the rural poor – possibly the only answer to making communities self-reliant and sustainable. This was knowledge that no formal educational system valued, but it was critical for developing a community with dignity and self-respect. For an unemployed and unemployable semi-literate rural youth to be providing vital services in a village, replacing an urban, paper-qualified doctor, teacher, or water engineer is a totally revolutionary idea.

Gandhi's philosophy plays a crucial role in Barefoot education and training approaches. At the College, people work for themselves, they learn for themselves in order to resolve community-based problems and whenever they need technical support, an external expert will be called to assist. The assistance would be first incorporated into the Barefoot knowledge and then practised by the rural communities, rather than simply adopting it as it is.

The use of traditional knowledge and skills, which are ignored in the developmental discourse, have been brought to the forefront in order to prepare the rural masses to use the latest technologies. This endeavour aims to place the technological advancements in the traditional knowledge outlook. So far, mainly technological inventories have been installed in villages or rural areas by experts from urban areas, and, if any problem arises while using those technologies, the villagers who do not have any knowledge of them are expected to depend on the urban experts to come and resolve the issue. Although the main purpose of the technology is to facilitate smoother social functioning, they made rural people depend on urban experts to deal with it. Barefoot Solar Engineers (BSEs) are those who come from communities with hardly any educational background. The college has trained local people as 'barefoot' educators, doctors, teachers, engineers, architects, designers, communicators, hand pump mechanics, and accountants.

It is the only college where paper degrees, diplomas, and doctorates are a disqualification because people are judged not according to their degree of literacy or academic distinction, but by their attributes: honesty, integrity, compassion, practical skills, creativity, adaptability, willingness to listen and learn, and ability to work with all sorts of people without discriminating. Learning opportunities have enhanced the self-confidence and competence of the poorest of the poor by providing them access to learning that enhances their ability to serve their own community, thus making them more confidently self-reliant. It opts for training and educating the rural poor as a means to promote their inclusion, which would not only bring, but also serve the needy in the rural areas.

The ideology of the Barefoot College has four key components: Alternative Education, Valuing Traditional Knowledge and Skills, Learning for Self-Reliance, and Dissemination. The college also prepares 'barefoot teachers' who are young people from the rural communities where the night schools are situated. Once selected 'barefoot teachers' participate in an 30-day residential training camp before teaching at the night schools. They participate in deciding the school curriculum, which is directed at practical learning that fits local circumstances, building on local knowledge. The curriculum includes information relating to common civic needs, such as how a post office functions, how to use a bank, a police station, and so on. Barefoot teachers are selected by the rural communities wherever the night schools are in operation. The main purpose is to adapt the education system according to the needs of the learners. The schools are reoriented, in terms of mutual learning, where the teacher also learns from the children.

Children help their parents during the day and attend the night schools. Night schools offer five years of primary schooling. After gaining basic education at night school, it is found that most of the children continue to attend high school. The children who studied at night school and later went on to pursue higher education got various government jobs such as police, army personal and some work as teachers and village secretaries as well.

To promote a political ethos among children, night schools regularly organise a 'Children's Parliament'. The democratic ethos imbibed by children influences their understanding about society and their place in the larger social order. For example, once, there was a debate on an issue where a child was not allowed to take water from the pot by another child as he was from a lower caste. The opportunity to engage with democratic processes permits children to question several social evils that exist in society.

The Barefoot College coordinates these night schools, which have been established in six states in India: Assam, Orissa, Uttranchal, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar, as well as Rajasthan.

As local people started to be a part of the collective decision-making process, the thinking within Barefoot College changed fundamentally. The college recognised that its dependence on urban expertise and paper credentials did damage to the mindset of the rural poor, in effect preventing them from coming out of poverty on their own. The college also participates in the panchayat (village) elections as 'independents'. Their presence in the political process altered the political environment when several of their candidates won the election.

Suggested Citation Facer, K., Lotz-Sisitka, H., Wals, A., Batra, P., McGrath, S., Mitchell, R., Ogbuigwe, A., Tikly, L., Tusiime, M., Vogel, C. (2020) The Case for Transformative Public Education: Responding to COVID-19 now while addressing long-term underlying inequalities. Bristol, TESF. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4327076

Version 2.0 Published 16 December 2020

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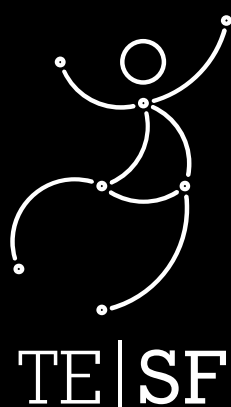
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