

Power Needed for Good Not Evil: Covid-19's Exposure of Global Power Differentials and Educational Disruption

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ABSTRACT

Psychologists and sociologists have considered the types of leadership and organizational power used to manage and even control employees, communities, and institutions (Raven, 1958). When such dynamics emerge in the comics read across the globe, even those authors caution their protagonists and superheroes to “use power for good not evil...;” yet after reading the articles for this edition, I recognize that the Covid-19 pandemic has re-exposed global power structures and differentials. These power structures have either been used for the good of the people, or for evil to exacerbate the harmful experiences felt by disenfranchised populations.

Keywords: Covid-19, educational disruption, power differentials

“A general theme in this volume is that people from across the globe, from different sectors of employment, are grappling with Covid-19 and the power differentials in their respective communities, which are either helping or hindering people. Those with power, access, and privilege have choices about who will receive charity, what small businesses receive loans, and how teachers are treated. Further, several essays have called upon leadership to recognize the hurtful divisiveness and the emotional stress precipitated by their actions. The world has not engaged in a coordinated effort to blunt the

ravages of the Covid-19 pandemic manifesting throughout international populations. Unfortunately, some governments have exploited the situation leaving hospitals and health care workers competing to purchase personal protective equipment (PPE) instead of communities uniting to share resources, thus dissipating stressful market competition for essential supplies.

We have all heard the term “go-viral,” when a bystander captures images and video then disseminates the recording instantly to hundreds of thousands of viewers. Quite literally in this pandemic, intercontinental also means interconnectivity through communication, travel, economics, the environment, and other large-scale occurrences. Considering this interconnectivity, this volume includes articles speaking to the mental health issues that arise during a pandemic. Cheung et al., (2008) noted that the suicide rate increased in Hong Kong after the 2003 SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) pandemic. In this current pandemic, fears and xenophobia have driven some to ingest bleach or other harmful substances that led to their death (Golgowski, 2020). For others, the fear and criticism from their community led to suicide, as was the case of a 36-year-old Bangladeshi man in March 2020 (Somoy News, 2020). Similarly, in another incident of suicide in India, a man took his life to avoid hanging because his village thought he had contracted Covid (Goyal et al., 2020; Mamun & Griffiths, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic reconstructs the fact that those with intersecting positions in society given gender, race, and class are more likely to endure the deficit end of power differentials (Collins, 2017; Hollis, 2018).

As noted by this issue of the journal, the pandemic has created interruption to education with China, South Korea, Italy, and Iran being the hardest hit countries (Global Agenda, 2020). These interruptions have led to creative innovations. For example, children in Hong Kong started using apps to keep up with their schooling. In China, 120 million children received education through television broadcasts (Global Agenda, 2020). Public libraries in Australia and Finland are using drones to deliver reading materials to youngsters engaging their summer reading lists. Reports estimate that 87% of the world’s learners of 1.5 million students are online during the pandemic (Jacob et al 2020); in contrast, those communities and families who do not have reliable Internet access or the proper devices to utilize digital services are left behind and more vulnerable. Unesco states that children in rural areas of Africa, Nepal, and Pakistan are particularly isolated and falling behind on their respective educational tracks (UNESCO, 2020).

Resultantly, children in these situations may experience deficient achievement. The Brookings Institute which tracks student achievement over an academic year forecasts that children will only have 70% of the pre-Covid

projected achievement in reading and only 50% of the pre-Covid project achievement of math. Internationally, students will be behind, specifically in math, a skill critical to learning and sustaining achievement in a digital world (Brookings, 2020). In a recent study of Ghanaian international students attending school away from their home country, Demuyakor (2020) found that developing an online community could be a key factor in keeping students engaged and satisfied with the virtual learning options required of Covid-19. Not only do courses need to be modified to adapt to online learning, the lectures and professors also need to model an appreciation for online learning and have proper training.

For example, I have been teaching online for over 15 years, and have benefitted from a community of educators also teaching online. During that time, I have taught students in the Philippines, Uganda, Italy, and Afghanistan. Some students have been in forward areas serving in the military. Therefore, standard assignments, which might include students visiting a classroom or interviewing colleagues, needed to be modified to include Vimeo and YouTube. In a traditional classroom, professors often assign group work or other service-learning activities. During the Covid-19 lockdown, professors need to rethink such projects and assign teams perhaps by time zone. Further, just as students benefit from an online community, professors abruptly transitioning to online delivery also would feel more supported in a community of online educators who discuss their concerns and successes with online education. To this point, Manthalkar et al., (2020) of India have indicated some key elements for students and faculty working online. See Table 1.

Table 1. *Four Elements of Lifelong Learning*

Flexibility: Education at the learner’s pace and real needs (UN sustainable development goals) of the present-day world

Cognitive, Emotional Spiritual: Engaging humanely and (respecting life over mere economic gain)

Resilience: Emphasis on bouncing back despite failures (learning from nature to flourish in the presence of adversities)

Creative Thinking and Design Thinking: Developing abilities of problem solving by creating new knowledge keeping in mind the end-product.

Source: Manthalkar et al., (2020).

Regardless of the type of interruption, to business, education, mental health treatment, or agriculture, community members should use their own collective power for good, not evil. Government intervention and solid leadership would certainly serve as a suave to soothe the anxieties that their respective constituents feel in these unprecedented times. However, these essays also expose an opportunity beyond reliance on government intervention. The opportunity is for the citizens to generate solutions whilst we wait for a vaccine. Community collaboration in which small groups of people purchase groceries, seek Internet service, and care for the most vulnerable can solve some immediate problems. Shelter in place can extend slightly to a few sheltering together to share resources.

Citizens should share credible science-based information instead of believing the World Health Organization (WHO) or the Center for Disease Control (CDC) are manufacturing hoaxes through “fake news.” The interconnectivity in this world problem is undeniable. Nonetheless, citizens, organizations, and societies may forge a path to institute change (Hollis, 2017). Global citizens can subscribe to their collective influence to use their power for good, not evil, by avoiding behaviors that challenge the authenticity of this deadly virus, and instead subscribing to locally driven innovations to help us all withstand this lethal pandemic and the undeniable interruption to educational systems.

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