


Collective resilience to global challenge: a collective wellbeing agenda to transform towards sustained equitable education

Resiliência coletiva ao desafio global: transformar uma agenda coletiva de bem-estar rumo a uma educação equitativa sustentada

Resiliencia colectiva al desafío global: transformar una agenda colectiva de bienestar rumbo hacia una educación equitativa sostenible

Liesel Ebersohn*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2616-4973>

Abstract: COVID-19 is a large scale and unpredictable global challenge. It predicts extreme negative outcomes for development – including education. Those with privilege will benefit and those living on the margins will be additionally side-lined. Responses to equalise the unevenness of opportunities to learn is often perceived as goodwill attempts to help ‘a few in distress’ to thrive – with the norm that a majority has well-established resourced pathways towards wellbeing. COVID-19 constitutes a time and space of collective distress. COVID-19 calls for strategies to enable collective wellbeing – not as a luxury but as a necessity. Adversity responses that absorb or adapt to shock continue to maintain, rather than transform, the unequal essence of existing structures. What is needed for equity, also in education, is a *transformative* response. Social support responses to the global challenge of COVID-19 may offer insight into transformative pathways. Instances of social innovations because of a social contract to privilege collective wellbeing abound in the COVID-19 realm. In Africa, where large-scale adversity is normative, this is not unprecedented. Everyday interdependent resilience mechanisms of this calibre exist, termed flocking responses. Flocking denotes targeted joint resource distribution to counter extreme adversity. In this social response self-protection becomes secondary to collective wellbeing. In this position paper I argue that transformation to that which constitutes ‘new education’ post-COVID-19 may be the result (unintended and possibly sustained) of prolific non-structural flocking responses to equalise pathways that support education across systems. Examples of spontaneous systemic social interventions that resulted from ‘freedom to make choices (for all) with what is available’ could provide transformative insights to intentionally strive for collective wellbeing education agendas and deliberately create pathways for participatory engagement - rather than persisting with structurally engineered strategies maintaining inequality.

Keywords: Collective resilience. Transformative sustainability. Equity and education. COVID-19.

* Centre for the Study of Resilience and Department of Educational Psychology - University of Pretoria. E-mail: <liesel.ebersohn@up.ac.za>.

Resumo: A COVID-19 é um desafio global imprevisível e de grande escala. Ela prevê resultados negativos extremos para o desenvolvimento - incluindo a educação. Aqueles com privilégio serão beneficiados e aqueles que vivem nas margens serão ainda mais marginalizados. As respostas para igualar a desigualdade de oportunidades de aprendizado são, muitas vezes, percebidas como tentativas de boa vontade para ajudar “alguns em perigo” a prosperar - com a norma de que a maioria possui caminhos bem estabelecidos para o bem-estar. A COVID-19 constitui um tempo e espaço de sofrimento coletivo. A COVID-19 pede estratégias para possibilitar o bem-estar coletivo - não como um luxo, mas como uma necessidade. Respostas adversas que absorvem ou se adaptam ao choque continuam a manter, em vez de transformar, a essência desigual das estruturas existentes. O que é necessário para a equidade, também na educação, é uma resposta transformadora. As respostas de apoio social ao desafio global da COVID-19 podem oferecer informações sobre caminhos transformadores. Instâncias de inovações sociais por causa de um contrato social para privilegiar o bem-estar coletivo abundam no reino da COVID-19. Na África, onde a adversidade em larga escala é normativa, isso não é inédito. Todos os dias existem mecanismos de resiliência interdependentes desse calibre, denominados de respostas afluídas (*flocking responses*). Afluir denota distribuição conjunta de recursos direcionada a combater adversidades extremas. Nessa resposta social, a autoproteção torna-se secundária ao bem-estar coletivo. Neste ensaio, argumento que a transformação naquilo que constitui a “nova educação” pós-COVID-19 pode ser o resultado (não intencional e possivelmente sustentado) de respostas afluídas prolíficas e não estruturais para equalizar caminhos que apoiam a educação entre sistemas. Exemplos de intervenções sociais sistêmicas espontâneas que resultaram da “liberdade de fazer escolhas (para todos) com o que está disponível” poderiam fornecer *insights* transformadores para buscar intencionalmente as agendas coletivas de educação para o bem-estar e criar deliberadamente caminhos para o engajamento participativo - em vez de persistir com estratégias de engenharia estrutural mantendo a desigualdade.

Palavras-chave: Resiliência coletiva. Sustentabilidade transformadora. Equidade e educação. COVID-19.

Resumen: La COVID-19 es un desafío global imprevisible y de gran escala. Ella prevé resultados negativos extremos para el desarrollo -incluyendo la educación. Aquellos con privilegio serán beneficiados y aquellos que viven en los márgenes serán aún más marginados. Las respuestas para igualar la desigualdad de oportunidades de aprendizaje son, muchas veces, percibidas como intentos de buena voluntad para ayudar a "algunos en peligro" a prosperar -con la norma de que la mayoría posee caminos bien establecidos para el bienestar. La COVID-19 constituye un tiempo y espacio de sufrimiento colectivo. La COVID-19 exige estrategias para posibilitar el bienestar colectivo -no como un lujo, sino como una necesidad. Las respuestas adversas que absorben o se adaptan al choque continúan manteniendo, en vez de transformar, la esencia desigual de las estructuras existentes. Lo que es necesario para la equidad, también en la educación, es una respuesta transformadora. Las respuestas de apoyo social al desafío global de la COVID-19 pueden ofrecer informaciones sobre caminos transformadores. Instancias de innovaciones sociales a causa de un contrato social para privilegiar el bienestar colectivo abundan en el reino de la COVID-19. En África, donde la adversidad a gran escala es normativa, esto es inédito. Todos los días existen mecanismos de resiliencia interdependientes de este calibre, denominados respuestas afluentes (*flocking responses*). Afluir denota distribución conjunta de recursos dirigida a combatir adversidades extremas. En esta respuesta social, la autoprotección se vuelve secundaria al bienestar colectivo. En este ensayo, argumento que la transformación en aquello que constituye la “nueva educación” post-COVID-19 puede ser el resultado (no intencional y posiblemente sostenido) de respuestas afluentes prolíficas y no estructurales para equalizar caminos que apoyan la educación entre sistemas. Ejemplos de intervenciones sociales sistémicas espontáneas que resultaron de la “libertad de tomar decisiones (para todos) con lo que está disponible” podrían proporcionar *insights* transformadores para buscar intencionalmente las agendas colectivas de educación para el bienestar y crear deliberadamente caminos para el compromiso participativo -en vez de persistir con estrategias de ingeniería estructural manteniendo la desigualdad.

Palabras clave: Resiliencia colectiva. Sostenibilidad. transformadora Equidad y educación. COVID-19.

Introduction

The reach of the COVID-19 pandemic is vast. Individuals, families, community and faith-based organisations, schools, government and multi-country structures alike do not have tried-and-tested structures in place to mobilise in evidenced ways to buffer against the collective effect of the concurrent risks of the pandemic simultaneously in multiple countries. Yet, the intensity of immediate change to how people live, work, learn and relax requires responses earmarked with equal immediacy and intensity. Unlike the rigour with which vaccines are being trialled and tested for use to enable positive health outcomes, the social responses to drive outcomes for positive learning and sociocultural wellbeing are ad hoc.

The distress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is *global*. Whether in the Global South or Global North people with indigenous and Eurocentric worldviews alike in average neighbourhoods, affluent homes, ramshackle inner-city dwellings or peri-urban neighbourhoods are living with the shock of social distancing, the anxiety of infection and the fear of job insecurity. The distress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is *collective*. Distress impacts on individuals, families and households, neighbourhoods and communities, towns and cities, provinces and states, countries and continents. From a Bronfenbrenner (1979) perspective, no system - be it micro, meso, exo, macro or chrono - is untouched by distress. The distress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is *simultaneous*. People across the world are experiencing the distress *at the same time*. The time-lapse between experiences of infection, protection and response between different places and spaces in the world is infinitesimal. The distress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is *cumulative*. The pandemic has an effect on multiple sectors. Quality of life is severely strained as people worry. They have socioeconomic worries about job security and household income. They take strain over the education of children and young people. They have health concerns, worrying about being infected, ill and accessing health care or maintaining physical health given limitations to leisure practices. Social restrictions preventing physical time with friends and families have a negative effect on mental health. The absence of familiar sociocultural rituals and practices to comfort causes distress. The distress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is *chronic*. The pandemic does not appear to be an acute, short-term stressor. The proverbial 'light at the end of the tunnel' is not there to buoy resilience. Because the global, collective, simultaneous, and chronic distress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is unfamiliar, it is also *unpredictable*. Citizens turn to scientists to predict processes and outcomes.

What have been done to support quality education outcomes given vast disruptions to 'education as usual'? How have systems been responding to buffer against the risks of no school attendance, home-based classrooms, unprepared parents needing to teach children, limited access to teaching and learning materials, the absence of playgrounds for physical activity and physical social proximity to friends? What are everyday people doing to support positive education outcomes? How are neighbourhoods acting? What are schools doing? What are governments doing? What are multi-country strategies to curtail the negative education effects that appear to be unavoidable given the global challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic?

In the absence of trialled structures to support education in such an unfamiliar milieu, there have been numerous spontaneous responses to share resources. Social support thus appears to be a spur-of-the-moment reaction to the many education adversities synonymous with COVID-19 as a large-scale disaster. These impromptu social support responses intend to both buffer against the risk of education going askew, protect against impending vulnerability to students and teachers, and even potentially enable positive education outcomes.

To make sense of and potentially leverage these social responses to COVID-19 it seems appropriate to turn to a theoretical lens often used in disaster and shock studies, namely that of

collective resilience. Collective resilience highlights the penchant of people to clamour together to deal with a country-wide disruption, be that supporting refugees (Fielding & Anderson, 2008), or after a bombing (Drury, Cocking, & Reicher, 2009; Freedman, 2004). An assumption underpinning collective resilience is that community structures will buffer against a blow. The focus is on 'collective' as combined action, given the nature of a joint disturbance – rather than on 'collective' denoting interdependent worldview. Indicators of collective resilience include engaging local people to moderate the effect of adversity, establishing organisational links, reducing unevenness in risk and resource presence, augmenting social supports, and drawing on responses characterised by flexibility, decision-making skills, and trustworthy knowledge sources (Norri, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, & Pfefferbaum, 2008).

In Africa, where large-scale adversity is normative (United Nations, 2020), social responses for collective resilience are not unprecedented. Age-old knowledge continues to be used, namely that citizen-led, collective social support buffers against common challenges. It is lived experience that social support initiatives are low threshold pathways to use existing resources to enable communal wellbeing. COVID-19 global responses mirror these age-old fonts of wisdom from Africa. In this article, I argue that global responses to the collective distress of the COVID-19 challenge mirror an Afrocentric collective resilience response, namely flocking (Ebersöhn, 2019). Flocking is a collective response to collective distress aimed at enabling collective wellbeing – as opposed to self-protective responses to challenge. Flocking implies social support to distribute available social resources as a buffer against challenge. These social resources include collective resources, economic resources, cultural resources and social resources.

Social support pathways that reflect flocking tenets responds to the question: In order to thwart disaster, how can people collaborate to support access to opportunities to thrive? This is not generally a question at the forefront of development. Rather than being focused on collective wellbeing, self-protection (or even self-promotion) often drive responses to challenge. Yet, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, across the world there have been examples of social support to enable education and wellbeing.

From a sustainability science perspective (Marchese *et al.*, 2018; Fiksel, 2006), the absence of entrenched structures to react to challenges that are life changing may hold promise for transformation that is sustainable and can accomplish towards thriving lives for all. For in many spaces around the world, the echelons of power maintain inequality – especially in postcolonial and Global South spaces. Equally, in affluent societies, structures provide less opportunities to those who look, speak, value and originate from elsewhere than those in the centre of power. Responses to the incredible disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic may therefore show glimmers of insight into alternative ways in which to structure support to equalise opportunity for human development.

In this position paper I use a resilience lens to argue that collective social support responses to collective distress that aim towards collective wellbeing may be transformative for education. This transformation stands in contrast to resilience responses that may merely result in either absorbing the shock of COVID-19 disruption or adapting current (unequal) education structures that may perpetuate inequity.

Resilience, global challenges and the collective distress of COVID-19

A resilience lens to respond to, or mitigate the impact of a challenge, is useful when considering the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing from a range of definitions (Marchese *et al.*, 2018; Southwick, Bonanno, Masten, Panter-Brick, & Yehuda, 2014), for the purpose of this article I broadly define resilience as systemic processes and capacities to accommodate change.

Resilience only comes into play when there is disturbance. A challenge usually predicts negative outcomes. A disturbance in a system constitutes risks that stymies developmental pathways. Challenges cause stress (and for people distress). Vulnerability emphasises susceptibility or exposure to a disturbance (Boyce, 2019; Moret, 2014) and assumes the presence of intrinsic or inherent weaknesses. A vulnerable system is one without protection against inherent or intrinsic weaknesses. When relevant resources are not mobilised to buffer against disturbance, the exposed system remains vulnerable to challenge. In this article vulnerability denotes the way in which the education system could mal-function due to COVID-19 challenge. Managing vulnerability through resource mobilisation is part of enabling resilience. Challenges increase vulnerability to succumb to risk and not achieve sought after outcomes. Challenges therefore prompt responses to manage shocks.

Resilience implies curtailing the predicted trajectory towards doom. Rather than the expected negative outcome because of a disaster, an ‘ingredient’ is added to the recipe that enables a better-than-expected, positive outcome. From a socio-cultural perspective (Ungar, 2011), people draw on protective resources in their environments to respond to challenges. In the process of response, they make use of a variety of pathways to navigate towards such available resources and negotiate access to resources (Ungar *et al.*, 2007). Pathways are resilience-enabling when they provide opportunities to attain unpredicted, positive outcomes – despite the challenge.

From a sustainability paradigm (Marchese *et al.*, 2018; Fiksel, 2006) resilience phases are seen as absorptive (i.e., absorb, recover, restore), adaptive, and transformative. Absorptive resilience is indicated by system capacity absorbing the effects of an acute change, recovering from effects of the acute change, and restoring normative behaviour and performance following the aftermath of the acute change. Adaptive resilience is indicated by system capacity to adapt given chronic change so that networks restructure in ways that sustain positive, acceptable behaviour and performance. Transformative resilience is indicated by system capacity to transform given severe challenge as networks chronically restructure in evolutionary and sustainable ways to enable positive, acceptable behaviour and performance.

In the next section I describe an Afrocentric, indigenous knowledge system. I argue that the tenets of flocking are inherent to instances of spontaneous collaboration for resource distribution evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. I describe examples of authentic, spur-of-the-moment supply chain management systems that occurred across systems as a response to collective distress when many are unable to access education.

Flocking: collective resilience

The relationship-resourced resilience theory (Ebersöhn, 2019) describes flocking as one collective resilience pathway evident in Southern Africa. Flocking denotes social support for resource distribution by using available social resources. Flocking both buffers a collective against challenge and is resilience-enabling in promoting better-than-expected positive outcomes despite predictions to the contrary based on severe challenges. Flocking is thus a collective response to collective distress aimed at enabling collective wellbeing.

Flocking is a response to high collective need where the majority of people have limited access to much-needed services. In this social response self-protection becomes secondary to collective wellbeing. Besides structural roots, flocking also has cultural roots. Flocking behaviour is the result of culturally salient values espoused in an interdependent worldview, such as Afrocentric Ubuntu values, beliefs and practices (Bujo, 2009; Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013; Letseka, 2013). Interconnectedness values and beliefs commonly characterise interdependent, collectivist

cultures (Kim, Sherman, & Taylor, 2008; Smith, 2010; Yeh, Inman, Kim, & Okubo, 2006). As social support is premised on connectedness to others, mutual assistance and obligation (Taylor & Stanton, 2007), it follows that people with interdependent worldviews may opt for social support as a ‘resilience decision of choice’.

Flocking social support unfolds in the following phases to withstand everyday challenges such as hunger, unemployment and illness by means of simple, everyday acts of connectedness. People mobilise established social networks to identify need, source resources, distribute resources, as well as monitor and evaluate resource use. Support is low threshold as available social resources are accessed. Flocking networks make use of practices of consultation and consensus to include multiple perspectives and reach mutual agreement. The flocking social system thus enables collective action for supply chain management – social support to distribute social resources.

Flocking mirrors tenets of instrumental social support (Taylor, 2011; Ebersöhn & Loots, 2017) with both explicit and implicit social support being evident. *Explicit social support* signifies people explicitly leveraging established social networks to provide tangible support services to others faced with challenges. *Implicit social support* indicate how emotional comfort as a result of established social networks is significant as support during times of hardship.

Examples of flocking explicit and implicit social support abound. It includes taking acquaintances without means of transportation to clinics for check-ups or to collect medicine. It may mean being part of networks that are vigilant to spot people in need. It could be keeping ears on the ground for opportunities that can be used to access sources of support for others. It may be as simple as visiting sick friends to listen to and talk with or helping with household chores where grief, illness or migrant working may result in such a need in a home.

These examples show the range of social capital (collective, economic, social and cultural) (Kuku, Omonona, Oluwatayo, & Ogunleye 2013) used during flocking. *Collective resources* are structures or networks organised to provide assistance. These collective networks are crucial to flocking. Examples are self-help groups, credit unions and community safety schemes, parent groups, church-groups, home-based care groups, youth groups. *Economic resources* include opportunities for income generation, employment and livelihood strategies. Economic resources do not mean giving money. Rather it is about including neighbours, friends and families in ventures that generate income. *Social resources* are informal agreements between family, friends and neighbours. Emotional support is an example of an *implicit social resource*: listening to each other, counselling each other, comforting and advising each other. *Explicit social resources* include bartering, borrowing and lending practices, donations, as well as shared savings.

Cultural resources include shared values, beliefs and concomitant practices of a group: what ‘we’ value and what ‘we’ do by default. Sociocultural values synonymous with flocking practices include interdependence, collectivism, connectedness, communality, conforming and reciprocity. *Interdependence* (not dependence) is rewarded. Chronic dependence on the collective for support without demonstrated attempts to use shared resources in innovative ways to decrease need is frowned upon. *Collectivism* beliefs imply being other-focused (rather than self-focused). It is unthinkable that a person can live, experience challenge or seek solutions in isolation from others. The mantra is: we are in this together. The need of one is the need of all. To help others is to help oneself. *Connectedness* is respected with strong social networks, rituals and practices embedded into daily life. *Communality* standards hold that that which is good for one is good for all – aspirations, resources, needs and benefits are shared. *Conforming* is the norm with expectations to obey in-group standards and harmony seeking being the end-point of adaptation. *Reciprocity* norms imply that those who conform to expectations of common need and support will be included in benefits that follow from the joint coffers of social connectedness to expectations to live in connection. Those

who do not belong to the in-group, or do not conform to expectations to share the responsibility of care can expect to be excluded from collective benefits.

Flocking shows how collective resilience manifests in a space of characterised by cumulative, chronic, collective distress.

Flocking during COVID-19 for collective wellbeing

Flocking entails gaining traction from available social resources (social-, cultural-, collective-, and economic resources) to buffer a collective against extreme challenge. Table 1 shows examples of flocking social support actions during COVID-19 across systems to mobilise a range of social resources.

Table 1 - Systemic flocking responses during COVID-19

System-level	Social support example	Social support type	Social resources
Community	<p><i>Education support:</i> Dropping off printed schoolwork to others, share how-to manuals to assist use of on-line platforms for instructional.</p> <p><i>Health and wellbeing support:</i> Social media and digital platforms to connect, collaborate with established family, friends, employee networks, in order to provide support to conform to in-group norms and standards for health; food over fence to neighbours.</p> <p><i>Sociocultural support:</i> shared arts and culture experiences: singing, collective crafts & cooking initiatives, humoristic video-clips.</p>	<p>Explicit social support</p> <p>Implicit social support</p>	<p>Social, collective, economic, cultural.</p>
Institutional	<p><i>Education support:</i> teaching and learning materials on-line, teacher tutorials, free data and laptops.</p> <p><i>Health support:</i> Schools: 3D-printers to print masks.</p> <p><i>Sociocultural support (spirituality):</i> faith-based organisations on-line services, food.</p>	<p>Explicit social support</p> <p>Implicit social support</p>	<p>Economic, collective, social, cultural.</p>
National	<p><i>Education support:</i> television channels for teaching; adjusted curriculum; adapted academic calendar; revised assessment strategies.</p> <p><i>Economic support:</i> Solidarity fund, tax relief plans, financial relief/loans to small businesses, accelerated access to unemployment benefits.</p> <p><i>Welfare support:</i> shelters displaced people.</p> <p><i>Health support:</i> mobilise health-care worker networks for screening & testing.</p>	<p>Explicit social support</p>	<p>Economic, collective, social.</p>
Global	<p><i>Education support:</i> publishers' provision of free access to instructional material, models for open access to learning resources.</p> <p><i>Health support:</i> Data-sharing for vaccine, fast tracked medical trials.</p> <p><i>Economic support:</i> Donations of masks, test-kits, funds.</p>	<p>Explicit social support</p>	<p>Collective, economic.</p>

Source: The author.

Examples abound during COVID-19 of community systems using collective and social resources for explicit and implicit social support (be it neighbourhoods, schools, work-place relations, faith-based organisations). For *implicit social support at community-level* people used social media - WhatsApp groups, Facebook pages and Instagram posts - to provide implicit social support in the form of humoristic, optimistic, caring messages, as well as access to news and knowledge to assist one another. People nurtured each other virtually by using digital technologies to share socioculturally beliefs, values and practices: familiar recipes, photographs of families sharing meals, or engaged in arts and crafts. Friends gathered over virtual videoconferences to emulate known rituals used to celebrate birthdays or console during funerals.

To further buoy collective positive emotions people created networks to prompt and share therapeutic experiences be it as home-based exercises or arts and culture experiences: singing on balconies, collective crafts and cooking initiatives, humoristic video-clips. Other examples include DJs providing online entertainment, as well as people clapping and cheering on health care workers at the end of shifts. *Explicit social support on community-system level* include shopkeepers doing and dropping off shopping for the elderly, neighbours leaving prepared meals at the doors of others, families sharing toys to curb the boredom of children.

At *community-system level explicit educational social support*, parents telephoned and posted how-to manuals to assist one another to be able to use on-line platforms in order to access instructional activities sent from schools. The following vignette illustrates *community-system explicit social support to promote education outcomes*. A South African essential services worker in the armed forces became aware over social media that many of his neighbours and friends did not have printers to print schoolwork sent electronically to them and their children. Due to lockdown restrictions these acquaintances could not travel to shops or ask friends who usually helped with printing. He asked people to email him documents to print. Every evening he and his wife and children would print the documents, make little folders of each, spray each folder with disinfectant and the next day – en route to work – he would drop off the printed worksheets at the gates and doors of people in his social web.

At *institutional-system level existing structures were mobilised for implicit and explicit social support*. With regards to *explicit educational social support* schools provided teaching and learning materials on-line to parents and children. Teachers shared home-made teacher tutorials to assist parents to teach. Universities restructured budgets to buy and distribute laptops and negotiated access to free data for on-line learning. School leadership could continue to administer and manage schools by using on-line platforms and social media groups to meet with school leaders, teachers as well as parents and children. Experts in classrooms, schools, districts and universities shared models to record and share lessons in order to teach on-line, lead virtual meetings, and access and share open learning resources.

An example of cross-sector community-system level explicit social support is an affluent school in South Africa leveraging unused 3-D printers at their school to print masks for healthcare workers. To provide sociocultural implicit social support faith-based organisations created and distributed services on-line to congregations. Explicit social support from institutions (welfare organisations, non-governmental organisations, faith-based organisations, community-based organisations) mobilised networks to provide shelter, clothing and food to displaced people.

Structural support using social resources also presented at national-system level. Here instances of *explicit social support* leveraging economic and collective resources were dominant. An exception would be implicit social support in the words of encouragement from country-leaders broadcasted to uplift, motivate and provide hope to citizens.

With regards to *explicit educational social support* cross-sector participation collaboration is evident in national level television channels mobilised to air country-wide lessons to school and university students to scaffold home-learning. National policymakers and education officials adapted academic calendars in accordance with health models, adjusted curricula to accommodate a shortened academic year, developed policy for health and safety of teachers and students for return to school and revised assessment strategies.

Examples of national level *economic social support* include generating funds and structures for financial support at country-level including tax relief plans, financial relief and loans to small businesses, as well as accelerated access to unemployment benefits. With regards to national-level *health support* existing networks were mobilised healthcare and home-based care worker networks to assist with screening and testing people. In the same way recommissioned retired armed force personnel assisted with regulating compliance to safety regulations.

At the global level, existing structures were mobilised to distribute resources for *explicit social support*. Concerning *explicit educational social support* international publishers provided free access to instructional material. Researchers world-wide shared relevant findings for quality learning where parents are central to instruction, where on-line teaching is privileged and on how to access findings given diverse country and context perspectives. *Explicit global health support* includes data-sharing on models of infection, as well as fast-tracking capacity for medical trials to develop a much-needed vaccine. *Explicit global economic support* include ring-fencing funds from world-wide development agencies and donor organisations to supply funds to curb against the negative effects of large scale unemployment and decreased income generation, donations of masks and test-kits, and volunteering health-care workers.

Given the normativity of vulnerability, need and dependence in the eye of the COVID-19 storm, I argue that many responses world-wide mirror a counter-narrative of collective resilience (as opposed to self-protection). Conceivably COVID-19 response choices reflect beliefs and practices synonymous with that of Afrocentric interdependent norms and values. In COVID-19 challenge-responses, competitive independence motifs feature less. Beliefs that individual success is stymied by being vocal about vulnerability is not shameful nor met with disdain. It is less a case of valuing 'helping those in need' as a nice-to-have and much-admired act of those in power. With COVID-19 the playing field on the need-help continuum is evened out – much as is usually the case in Africa. Need is common. Giving help is not a nice-to-have act. It is a necessity. The social support practices used world-wide reflect flocking principles commonly used in Africa.

Discussion

COVID-19 is a large scale and unpredictable global challenge. It predicts extreme negative outcomes for development – including education. Pathways to respond to challenges is not equal. The context in which the resilience process of challenge-response-outcomes plays itself out matters. The range, volume and frequency of educational resources depends on the context, say Global South or Global North. The evenness of resource distribution to groups of people is vulnerable to the postcolonial history of a country. Intersectionality matters for access to available resources. Geopolitics continue to privilege Eurocentric worldviews and languages in educational advancement.

Structural responses to continue schooling in a global challenge such as COVID-19 leverage a plethora of alternatives and may *absorb* some of the disturbance to the system. Low hanging fruit changes include adjusting academic calendars and universities using existing networks to negotiate free data use for students and changed budgets to procure laptops for students not

privileged to have these. Similarly, another low threshold and effective response to disaster is schools using funds differently to follow health guidelines for temperature monitoring, supplying masks and sanitizers and cleaning spaces.

Likewise, accelerated education innovations show *adaptiveness* to buffer against pending disaster. Curricula were adapted to accommodate shortened academic years. Teachers used on-line platforms for instruction. To adapt to requirements for social distancing school leadership establish changed school attendance schedules.

COVID-19 responses also indicate *transformative* changes to education 'as usual'. Parents took on the role of teachers in home-based learning. Students experienced self-directed learning in intense and accelerated modes. Teachers took-up unfamiliar digital technologies with aplomb. School leadership reimagined practices to administer policy, manage diverse forms of attendance and absenteeism, and maintain positive and supportive school climates. Education policymakers skinned over-indulged curricula to the core of that which is needed to demonstrate knowledge in subject areas.

Absorptive and adaptive structural responses to global challenge are unable to circumvent harsh inequalities which are now, more than ever, prominent globally. The opportunity gap will increase despite structural innovations to protect against the COVID-19 risk to education. Those with more opportunities to learn will continue to have a softer landing with access to data, information technology, well-prepared teaching corps, strong household income and safe housing and health care. Whereas structural responses to change the course of expected education outcomes is required, is not enough.

A resilience lens to think about responses to a global challenge proffers the opportunity to consider transformative responses to challenges. Transformative responses can offer unintended alternatives to existing values, beliefs and education practices which may sustain equal and quality education. Transformative responses could affect discourses towards collective wellbeing as agenda – rather than isolated distress requiring 'special conditions' for marginalised groups and evenness in resource distribution. The social contract becomes one for social innovation that responds in collective resilience ways to large-scale collective distress.

It requires evidence and intent to turn the course of large policy-ships with entrenched approaches to wellbeing, equity, vulnerability, resource-use and participation in power. Debates on political *opportunity structures* are central to resilience discourses (Ebersöhn, 2019), with specific reference to Roemer's (1998) perspective on opportunity. People have a legal right to access resources to develop - irrespective of a society being more or less equal, being indigenous or displaced or living with disabilities, or having a home in an urban or rural space. Policy must be used intentionally to best make use of knowledge on how to create pathways to best use available resources to support collective wellbeing. This implies pro-wellbeing strategies to innovative equitable coverage, access and use of resources for health, welfare and education development. *Inequality paradigms* is not resilience-enabling across systems. It advocates for policy where the central role of the state is to reduce social and economic inequalities (Roemer *et al.*, 2003). The prominence of predominantly fiscal provision of resources by the state overshadows the role of individual agency and neglects capability thinking (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993). Freedom to innovate based on a pluralism of ideas is suppressed by top-down structures. An *egalitarian position* from the knowledge base on 'equality of opportunities' (Page & Roemer, 2001) has significance for resilience. 'Equal opportunities' advocates acknowledge capability and agency - whether individual, collective or structural. Egalitarians view joint citizen-level and structural-level support as instrumental to support development.

An egalitarian opportunity discourse calls for political action combined with civic agency. Flocking responses during COVID-19 shows what can happen when interdependent values and beliefs across systems push action. When people flocked during the COVID-19 pandemic they graft onto local (community) organisational ties to enact support practices. A common denominator was that ‘we’ are in need: collective distress. A common objective was that ‘we’ need to be okay: collective wellbeing. A golden thread of support (across systems) was to mobilise pathways to use available resources to enable positive outcomes and prevent predicted negative outcomes ‘for all’: collective resilience. Social gains (both implicit and explicit) accrued from a global citizen agenda to privilege collective wellbeing and global citizenship agency to use available resources per system to provide social support.

I propose that sustained transformation in ‘doing the business of education’ may come from flocking responses described in this article. This resonates with the ethical principle of cognitive justice by recognising the plurality of knowledges (Santos, 2016) and promoting recognition of paradigms (such as local knowledges) that are alternative to the dominant paradigm of modern science (Visvanathan, 2002; Veintie, 2013).

Firstly, such transformed education systems will *privilege an education agenda of collective wellbeing* rather than competitive wellbeing. In many spaces around the world inclusion policies run as concurrent agendas alongside big brother, broad-spectrum policies for all. Despite postcolonial structural disparity, education policy in many spaces assumes that the majority have access to quality education resources. Despite migration patterns, education policy assumes that the majority want to learn Eurocentric content in western-dominant languages. A competitive wellbeing agenda considers equity in terms of special dispensations required to accommodate a minority with limited access to education resources. In contrast, a collective wellbeing agenda flips the policy-approach. A collective wellbeing education agenda argues that the majority requires policy to consider how best to use what is available to support a thriving learning community - rather than focusing on equity in education as a ‘nice to have’ to ‘include the marginalised’ and not discriminate against ‘those who do not have’.

In the second instance, such transformed education systems will have policy and practices that *acknowledge and intentionally include multiple fonts of knowledge on enabling pathways to mobilise resources*. Transformation can graft onto evidence of how agency was demonstrated across systems to promote education outcomes during COVID-19. Mostly dominant discourses in education are top-down, paternalistic structures. The assumption is that those in power know what is needed and what to use to achieve outcomes. Others are viewed as recipients of instructions who need to comply and account to the omnipotent on progress and resource use. An alternative, with proof of concept during the pandemic response, could be to *intentionally integrate participatory pathways across systems* to engage multiple perspectives on resource needs, availability and accountable use. Such recognition of collective knowledge, collaborative agency and built in reciprocity to account for accessing, disbursing, monitoring, and evaluating resource use holds promise for innovative solutions to quality education, ownership and pride to drive education initiatives and relevance to context.

How have systems been responding to the global challenge of a COVID-19 pandemic? In this paper I described how experiences of collective distress (not only distress by those on the margins) during COVID-19 lead to collective wellbeing interventions. Collective wellbeing education support interventions indicated (i) social support to (ii) distribute social resources via (iii) social networks (iv) across systems. The collective wellbeing strategies transformed education responses to both enact equity in education as a majority rather than minority agenda, as well as

Collective resilience to global challenge: a collective wellbeing agenda to transform towards sustained...

co-opt capacity across systems for egalitarian opportunities to participate in education power and thereby disrupt structural disparity in education provision.

I argued that transformation to that which constitutes 'new education' post-COVID-19 may be the result (unintended and possibly sustained) of prolific non-structural flocking responses to equalise pathways that support education across systems. Examples of spontaneous systemic social interventions that resulted from 'freedom to make choices (for all) with what is available' could provide transformative insights to intentionally strive for collective wellbeing education agendas and deliberately create pathways for participatory engagement - rather than persisting with structurally engineered strategies maintaining inequality. Education systems that are unequal and view distress as the outlier package of only a few may benefit from transformative pathways that result from the question: How can people collaborate to support access to opportunities to thrive? Collective wellbeing in education need not only be on the agenda when there is collective distress.

References

- Boyce, R. (2019). *Vulnerability assessments: The pro-active steps to secure your organisation*. SANS Institute.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Bujo, B. (2009). Is there a specific African ethic? Towards a discussion with Western thought. In M. F. Murove (ed.), *African ethics: An anthology of comparative and applied ethics* (pp. 113-128). Scottsville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Drury, J., Cocking, C., & Reicher, S. (2009). The nature of collective resilience: Survivor reactions to the 2005 London bombings. *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*, 27(1), 66-95.
- Ebersöhn, L. (2019). *Flocking Together: An Indigenous Psychology Theory of Resilience in Southern Africa*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-16435-5>
- Ebersöhn, L., & Loots, T. (2017). Teacher agency in challenging contexts as a consequence of social support and resource management. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 53, 80-91. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2016.11.005>
- Fielding, A., & Anderson, J. (2008). *Working with Refugee Communities to Build Collective Resilience*. Perth, Australia: ASeTTS Occasional Paper 2.
- Fiksel, J. (2006). Sustainability and resilience: toward a systems approach, *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy*, 2 (2), 14-21. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15487733.2006.11907980>
- Freedman, T. G. (2004). Voices of 9/11 first responders: Patterns of collective resilience. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 32 (4), 377-393. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-004-0538-z>
- Kim, H. S., Sherman, D. K., & Taylor, S. E. (2008). Culture and social support. *American Psychologist*, 63(6), 518-526. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x>

Kuku, A. A., Omonona, B. T., Oluwatayo, I. B., & Ogunleye, O. O. (2013). Social capital and welfare among farming households in Ekiti State. *Journal of Biology, Agriculture and Healthcare*, 3(5), 115-130.

Letseka, M. (2013). Education for Ubuntu/Botho: Lessons from Basotho indigenous education. *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 3(2), 337-344. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2013.32051>

Marchese, D., Reynolds, E., Bates, M. E., Morgan, H., Clark, S. S. & Linkov, I. (2018). Resilience and sustainability: similarities and differences in environmental management applications. *Science of the Total Environment*, v. 613-614, 1275-1283. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2017.09.086>

Moret, W. (2014). Vulnerability assessment methodologies: A review of the literature. A Report for USAID ASPIRES PEPFAR fhi360.

Norris, F. H., Stevens, S. P., Pfefferbaum, B., Wyche, K. F., & Pfefferbaum, R. L. (2008). Community resilience as a metaphor, theory, set of capacities, and strategy for disaster readiness. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 41, 127-150. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10464-007-9156-6>

Nussbaum, M., & Sen, A. (1993). *The Quality of Life*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press

Owusu-Ansah, F. E., & Mji, G. (2013). African indigenous knowledge and research. *African Journal of Disability*, 2(1). DOI: <http://doi.org/10.4102/jod.v2i1.30>

Page, M., & Roemer, J. (2001). The US fiscal system and an equal opportunity device. In K. Hasset and G. Hubbard (Eds.). *The role of inequality in tax policy* (pp. 134-69). Washington DC: The American Enterprise Institute Press.

Roemer, J. (1998). *Equality of Opportunity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Roemer, J., Aaberge, A., Colombino, U., Fritzell, J., Jenkins, S., Marx, I., & Zubiri, I. (2003). To what extent do fiscal regimes equalize opportunities for income acquisition among citizens? *Journal of Public Economics*, 87, 539-65. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0047-2727\(01\)00145-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0047-2727(01)00145-1)

Santos, B. S. (2016). Beyond Abyssal Thinking: From Global Lines to Ecologies of Knowledges. *Review*, XXX, 45-89.

Smith, P. B. (2010). Cross-cultural psychology: Some accomplishments and challenges. *Psychological Studies*, 55(2), 89-95. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12646-010-0023-4>

Southwick, S. M., Bonanno, G. A., Masten, A. S., Panter-Brick, C., & Yehuda, R. (2014). Resilience definitions, theory, and challenges: interdisciplinary perspectives. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 5(1), 1-14, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3402/ejpt.v5.25338>

Taylor, S. E. (2011). Affiliation and stress. In S. Folkman (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of stress, health, and coping* (pp. 86-100). New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc.

Taylor, S. E., & Stanton, A. L. (2007). Coping resources, coping processes, and mental health. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 3, 377-401.

Collective resilience to global challenge: a collective wellbeing agenda to transform towards sustained...

Ungar, M. (2011). The social ecology of resilience: Addressing contextual and cultural ambiguity of a nascent construct. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 81(1), 1–17. DOI: <http://doi:10.1111/j.1939-0025.2010.01067.x>

Ungar, M., Brown, M., Liebenberg, L., Othman, R., Kwong, W. M., Armstrong, M., & Gilgun, J. (2007). Unique pathways to resilience across cultures. *Adolescence*, 42(166), 287-310.

United Nations. (2020). *World social report 2020 inequality in a rapidly changing world*. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Retrieved from: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/01/World-Social-Report-2020-FullReport.pdf>.

Veintie, T. (2013). Coloniality and Cognitive Justice: Reinterpreting Formal Education for the Indigenous Peoples in Ecuador. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 15(3), 45-60. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18251/ijme.v15i3.708>

Visvanathan, S. (2002). The future of science studies. *Futures*, 34(1), 91-101. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-3287\(01\)00037-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-3287(01)00037-4)

Yeh, C. J., Inman, A. C., Kim, A. B., & Okubo, Y. (2006). Asian American families' collectivistic coping strategies in response to 9/11. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 12(1), 134-148. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1037/1099-9809.12.1.134>

Received: 10 July 2020

Accepted: 11 July 2020

Published online: 14 July 2020