The Future of Education in a World Turned Sideways
"This community is capable of amazing things."

Bridget Long, Dean

See Page 11
There was no playbook. No case study to tell us how to virtually change an entire way of teaching and learning and building friendships overnight. But the Ed School, like schools around the world, had no choice but to change. And we did. Going from a fully in-person experience to one fully online, with everyone from our community — students, faculty, staff, and alumni — at home, wherever home was. Starting in mid-March, we began studying at the kitchen table and lecturing from backyards. We Zoomed with our slippers on and joined study groups with our kids doing their own lessons in the next room. We adjusted. We adapted. And we changed. We also did something quickly that is usually slow going in academia: We pivoted. It’s this word, this action, that inspired us here at the magazine to reach out to people in the Ed School community to find out how they had pivoted since COVID-19 forever changed what it means to be a student, an educator, and a parent. Their essays, written this summer, follow. (A few others are virtual.) In a special podcast project on the Ed. website, you can also listen to six of the writers read aloud their essays and answer follow-up questions.
I teach and run the dance program at a public high school in Los Angeles. I have dance classes and a dance team. In a typical year, the dance team performs in the fall at football games, assemblies, and pep rallies. We also hold a winter concert in December that includes all dance classes and cheer (which I also teach). All of these events and performances are canceled. Our school, like much of California and the nation, is starting remotely. I have little hope of us opening for in-person instruction before there is a vaccine. I have been holding summer practices for my dance team via Zoom. I thought it was important for the kids to have exercise and also a connection to their team in order to give them some sense of normality. However, Zoom practices bring a plethora of challenges that I expect to continue in the fall. First of all, in a typical dance studio, the instructor can stand in the front and demonstrate and watch in the mirror as the students follow along behind them. We can give feedback quickly and correct mistakes. In Zoom, I have to back up about 8 feet from the camera in order for the students to see my entire body. This puts me too far from the computer to be able to see the students to give corrections. If I face back so the students don’t have to reverse the movement, I cannot see them at all. I have to approach the camera to watch them, but then they no longer have me to follow. My device also limits me to seeing only nine at a time; I cannot really give great feedback, as I have to scroll to see other students. Finally, the speed of Internet relay means that the students hear the music at different times, so when I go to watch them perform choreography, they are so unsynchronized that it is difficult to my trained eye to watch multiple students at once. My brain is so distracted by the differences in timing that it is hard to override that to see corrections. Maybe I will get better at this as time goes on. I also cannot accurately assess students in this format unless I watch them individually, which is unrealistic in a class of more than 30. In the spring I had them each record themselves doing the choreography and post videos so I could score them. It took four hours a week to grade per class. This amount of grading is unsustainable. I was on the computer so much that I was getting headaches and not enjoying the job that I usually love.

As any good teacher does, I have been brainstorming ways to fix some of the technology issues. I am purchasing a large mirror to use at home, along with a tripod for my iPad so students can follow me from behind while also seeing the front in the mirror (similar to in-person learning). I am trying to see if I can set up additional devices so that I have one filming and one that I can keep closer to watch students. I still have to figure out how to create sustainable grading practices though.

In addition to my challenges, the students also are challenged. Most have very little space at home. Some are dancing in bathrooms. Some have to move their bed or coffee table to get a few feet to dance in. They often cannot set the camera back far enough for me to see their entire body, which means I can’t tell if they are doing it correctly. This is especially a burden for students new to dance who have not yet developed the body awareness of more advanced dancers. Students are also lacking motiva-
I have been in education for 30 years, and I continue to marvel at the opportunities that I get to learn and grow, provided I am in a mental and emotional space to do so. Such was the case on Saturday, May 15, as I awoke to do my daily Devotions, overlooking Fresh Pond in Cambridge.

My daily devotional time is an opportunity for me to show gratitude as well as center myself in who God is in my life, and what I am being called to do that day, as well as days to come. Over the years I have disciplined myself to use this time as a filter through which the rest of the day must pass. My thinking? If I start the day with a faith filter, I am more inclined to experience the day in the way that I am called to, as opposed to simply how “I” want to experience it.

In retrospect, I marvel at the power of that centering because, that Saturday in May, I read something on social media that — in the delicate world of academia — “triggered” me.

After doing my devotion, my attention was drawn to a Facebook post by one of my former Ed School doctoral students, CHERYL CAMACHO, ED.L.D.’19. (She welcomes the attention here.) Cheryl is a system-level leader in South Bend, Indiana, where she oversees five schools, 2,100 students, and hundreds of faculty and staff. In her Facebook post, Cheryl was expressing her personal and professional concern.

“I am trying to somehow create a digital concert that can be streamed for the end of the semester. I am hoping this will give them some motivation. However, I still have to worry about the liability of streaming this, including copyright music issues and parent release forms. We also need to figure out how best to film students separately and bring them together in a video. We may have to just use Zoom to record. It is far from ideal, especially if the timing is still off, but I feel like they need to have some opportunity to perform. This is crucial for their learning.

If we do resume school at some point before the vaccine, I hope to hold classes outdoors. My classroom has no windows to allow for fresh air, and with the heavy breathing of exercise, 6 feet apart is not enough. This will mean holding classes in 90-degree heat, on concrete. I still think that is safer than holding class indoors.

Additionally, until there is a vaccine, I do not see a resumption of our normal concerts, pep rallies, or assemblies that put an audience close together. We may be able to perform on the football field, but with the performers and fans so spaced out, it will be different, to say the least.

Despite all the challenges, there are so many things I am grateful for. I am happy that our district has made sure that arts are included in the reopening plan. Even at the elementary level, all arts instruction will be programmed into the distance learning. I am thankful that I still have my job teaching dance, and that students are still interested in taking my class remotely. I am grateful that we have the technology to do performance arts classes distantly, which could not have happened 30 years ago.

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“COVID-19 had arrested the world, and nothing — including my May term course — would get away without being impacted. But this was a good thing.”
about the recent spate of “returning to school” blueprints that were being published by various think tanks, for- mers on the front lines in our schools and their communities.

Each of these individuals has strong feelings about reopening schools.

What I learned was invaluable and it reminded me of how critical it is to engage and listen to those who are most proximate to the work of teaching and leading in our schools and in our school systems.

But this was not the only pivot that I made because of covid-19. The other came when I was preparing to teach this fall — for the first time — my Faith, Education, and Leadership course.

This course has always been something that I felt called to do. As I have shared in other online forums, my faith has always played a pivotal role in my life.

While I had been thinking about ways to elevate my faith identity in my work at Harvard, my colleague, Senior Lecturer Judith McLaughlin, was the first person to mention the idea of teaching a course about the intersection of faith and education.

She and I had the fortune of sitting beside one another at the 2018 most: community. In a brief conversation during the revelry, I mentioned to her my desires to explore the role of faith in education. “You should consider teaching a course on the topic,” she said. I never forgot that conversation.

Two years later, I would plan to do just that. However, I never anticipated that the world would be very different as I started planning, and there were several things on my mind.

First, I wanted the course to be one where students felt safe to explore their personal faith journeys, as well as hear and understand the journey of others. Second, I wanted students to learn about efforts that are happening already, where faith and edu-
cation leaders are working together to address student and community challenges.

Finally, I wanted the course to be one where students explored and designed strategies to improve outcomes for students and communities.

On March 17, that last goal changed dramatically.

On that day, the most: community hit out that we would not be returning to campus after spring break. covid-19 had arrested the world, and nothing — including my May term course — would get away without being impacted. But this was a good thing.

What became increasingly clear by mid-April — weeks before the course — is that covid-19 was having a devastating impact on America’s most vulnerable communities, specifically Black and Brown communities.

So, the final goal of the class pivoted to one that was laser focused one seeing how faith and education organizations might work together to address the immediate needs in response to covid-19. During the weeklong class, students learned of the work being done in Boston and Baton Rouge, as well as other communities.

By the end of the class, students were designing other possible interventions, based on their learning in class.

In closing, covid-19 has had a devastating impact on all parts of our lives. What I learned from these pivots is twofold. First, I was reminded of how important it is to look for opportunities to hear and understand the needs of those educators who are on the front lines in our schools and communities.

The work I do as a faculty member in a higher education institution is service of them. Second, the nimmer my teaching is, the better chance of not only creating powerful teaching and learning experiences, but also making contributions to prac-
tice leaders and their communities.

Having your screen off to the side, instead of straight ahead, could also help your concentration, particularly in group meetings.

Gianpiero Petriglieri

Associate Professor of Organizational Behavior

Harvard Business School

AFTER FIVE YEARS WORKING AS THE DEPUTY


“Having your screen off to the side, instead of straight ahead, could also help your concentration, particularly in group meetings.”

Kyrin Scott joined the faculty in 2016, after five years working as the deputy accountant to the senior director of the Bel and Melinda Gates Foundation, as well as a teacher, principal, assistant superintendent and chief academic officer.
page news, including misinformation spread by people in the White House, often using social media. However, the nscc does not prioritize teaching students how to find reliable sources of information outside a textbook, let alone how to evaluate the many ques-
tionable science-related claims every-
one encounters in media. (One of my favorite absurd “scientific” claims, found on Facebook, is that wearing a raw onion in your socks overnight drains harmful toxins.)

As a physician, Penny had been concerned about anti-vaxxer misin-
formation for years. I became interest-
ed in misinformation after blogging about psychology and climate change and learning how misinformation spreads. Together, collaborating with nscc staff at cns, Penny and I developed free instructional materials for grades 6-12 science classes called Resisting Scientific Misinformation. This then led us to investigate, write, and blog about science education standards and scientific literacy, re-
sulting in the Kappan article.

Scientific literacy begins with knowing some basic science content and practices but extends beyond that to include the relationship of science to personal and societal concerns. Sci-
entifically literate people make bet-
ter decisions in their personal lives, such as: Should I wear a mask during the pandemic? If so, when and why? Should my child be vaccinated? Scien-
tific literacy is always open to debate. The precise meaning of scientif-
cial literacy; that is a task for everyone. Educators have some first-rate ideas, but no one does not need to be an expert to
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tific literacy; that is a task for everyone. Educators have some first-rate ideas, but no one needs to think broadly, beyond their ar-
cs of specialization. Although science educators have some first-rate ideas, one does not need to be an expert to iden-
tify many key elements of scientif-
cial literacy; that is a task for everyone.

One aspect of scientific literacy that helps me in the pandemic is ap-
propriate education goals. But whatever the strengths and weaknesses of national science edu-
cation standards may be, states and localities are primarily responsible for education under the U.S. constituti-
on. Each state publishes its own ed-
ucation standards. Some states sim-
ply copy the nscc word for word, but many states, including Massachu-
setts, developed their own standards.

Like the National Science Teaching Association, Penny and I believe that connecting science to personal and societal issues should be a prominent goal in science education, as is true in some states and localities, but not oth-
ers. In contrast, the main priority of the nscc is preparing students for col-
lege and careers, a very different goal. What do your state science education standards suggest is the primary goal for K-12 science education?

In an era when more people get news online than from any other source, teaching media literacy is essential. Do your state science education standards prioritize students learning to judge what they see, hear, or read in media?

After they leave school, most people continue to learn about scientific top-
ics, including the pandemic, by read-
ing about them. That is one reason that the Common Core State Standards emphasize the importance of having students read more nonfiction, includ-
ing science. But 2015 naep data show that 54% of twelfth-grade students re-
ported never using library resources for science class. Do your state science education standards prioritize the “lit-acy” aspect of scientific literacy?

Professor Fletcher Watson, who taught at nscc for more than 30 years, wrote that he made some science edu-
cation colleagues uncomfortable by prioritizing the word “education” over “science.” His point was that experts

need to think broadly, beyond their ar-
cs of specialization. Although science educators have some first-rate ideas, one does not need to be an expert to iden-
tify many key elements of scientif-
cial literacy; that is a task for everyone.

ANDY ZUCKER, AFTER TEACHING STEM SUBJECTS IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS, WORKED FOR THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDU-
CATION AND THEN FOR SEVERAL NONPROFIT EDUCATION AND ORGANIZATIONS.
I would prioritize most. “What I realize now — what I would tell a first-year teacher this fall — is that my priorities were finite all along.”

Ashish Jha
Physician and Dean of the Brown University School of Public Health, Giving Advice to Schools for the New Academic Year, in an Education Now Session with Dean Bridget Long

“None of this is easy, but masks and ventilation are the two things I would prioritize most.”

Kenton Shimozaki
Middle School Teacher, HTF Cohort 4 Alum, a Public Charter School

Harvard Ed
Fall 2020

There is a distinct narrative about the first year of teaching: It is notoriously difficult. It’s known to be hard because novice teachers tend to have poor classroom management skills, some lack support structures, and many enter the teaching profession unprepared for the context and demands of the discipline.

So, when I stood at the front of the classroom last August, I fully embraced that my first year would be exacting and the results imperfect. Those first few months, I focused on small victories like maintaining some semblance of order throughout my lessons. I watched veteran educators, took ample observation notes, and tried to replicate their demeanor and approach to the task. My priority was not on being an excellent educator, merely an above-average one.

Still, even first-year teachers have dreams. I imagined that maybe one day in my first year I would have a “perfect class”; every student would be on task and engaged. I envisioned a perfect week where I was ahead on lesson planning (instead of hastily drafting the night before) and giving detailed feedback on assignments every day. But, as the fall progressed and the leaves lost their vibrancy, I also shedded some of my loftier goals.

By early March, in the last weeks of the before times, my desire of sending a positive text to every student’s family had never occurred. My intention to design a meaningful reading intervention unit had never gotten off the ground. My hope of rebuilding the relationship with the student I sent out of class a half dozen times had never come to fruition. Even in the pre-COVID era, the demands of licensure coursework, lesson planning, and grading always pushed these other
er priorities lower on the to-do list to the point they remained unfulfilled.

Then, on March 13, I said farewell to my students. They packed up Chromebooks, I cleaned out the snacks in my desk, and we transitioned to remote learning. Not only was I naïve to believe that we would return in person after spring break, but I gave little thought to how my professional priorities would shift.

Initially, it felt as though the year might as well have started over. I had to figure out how to run virtual office hours via Zoom, record engaging lessons at the kitchen table through Loom, and give feedback through the side-panel “private comments” feature of Google Classroom. Adapting to new technology platforms for remote learning was jarring to the point that I put off thinking about what the priority should be as a teacher, novice or veteran, in this novel situation.

Now, however, nearly five months on, I have had abundant time to consider my priorities as a teacher. What I realize now—what I would tell a first-year teacher this fall—is that my priorities were flipped all along. Strong classroom management, planning ahead for lessons, and frequent feedback are all well and good, but they are no substitute for the relationships you build with students and families.

I wish I had sent those text messages home last September to build connections with families early. I wish I had spent that extra weekend creating relevant lessons that bridged academic content with my students’ lives. I wish I had figured out how to reach that one struggling seventh-grader so he could have been successful before and engaged in remote learning later.

The first year of teaching was bound to be challenging with a class of 30 12-year-olds. I could not have imagined how drastically my core beliefs about what it means to teach would have shifted this far in one year. As I think ahead to the first year of starting online, I have reconsidered what the priorities of a teacher should be. Stay connected. Keep engaging. Be concerned.

KENTON SHIMOZAKI IS A HARVARD TEACHER FELLOWS ALUM AND WRITER.
1. A ‘to do’ list. Into the empty box, a carefully crafted to-do list. Written in mom’s handwriting. It always began with a list of chores. Then school assignments. Followed by recommended hobbies and lunchtime plans. Finally, a note for us to wash and clean our socks or other mundane daily tasks. We’d leave it behind like a valuable treasure. Covid mocked us. Kids and graders, attending a tsunami of Zoom team, advising heartbroken 12th-shifts in class and meeting schedules, working with or taught. We just continued doing homework. Doing homework didn’t mean it had to be done perfectly. Convinced to do list. Written in black, white, and red. We wrote notes to read in our morning pajamas. A plea to review email inboxes filled with teachers’ Zoom directions, assignments, and follow-up to tell-you-so’s. A gentle nudge to eat, put dishes away, and make beds. A plea that they juggled a soccer ball or a fishing pole to keep the distance between the neighborhoods, or even co-walk the dogs around the neighborhood.

2. Moment four: Our 13-year-old son paints a “No Justice No Peace” cardboard sign. He said it was the same way anyway. There was now a do-no-harm school grading policy. It was a spirit that we carried with us. We just continued doing our homework. He signed his head above for a busy intersection near our home. His first job. We didn’t know that goods homework that night. But plenty of “work to be done.”


4. Cookbooks, and board game boxes. Depending on the room you’d walk through, you’d see books on every shelf. In the family room, also see forgotten puzzles boxes. Board games from various closers. ShopRites.

5. And you’d undoubtedly see a laptop or iPad situated on top of any of these stacks. Where you took it for your face to be level with the screen. It didn’t matter how you were sitting, standing, or lying. Just needed to be eye-level. Screens filled with Zoom grids, Google Meet video faces, and FaceTime laughter. Awkward beginnings- of-class waves. Customary “can ev- eryone hear me?” questions. Ponder- ing which classmates had bad wi-fi or no Zoom. School had made sure to enable the video link the night before. Breakout rooms of kids teaching and learning, co-working, 360-degrees, no ma- nifest Instagram page. Instead of duti- fully understanding history notes or typ- ing into boxes. Pre-adolescent days wanting to start his first business at 13. Making money and keeping the mailman re- ally busy.

6. A DVD of NBC’s The Good Place. Sprawled across the couch, we’d laugh at the liminally comical reasons Ted made. Janet the robot, and Danson, Janet the robot, making real life seem like an inescapable soci- ety. Weeks and weeks of remote teach- ing and learning and mask-wearing and academic and community awards. And none of that seemed important. George Floyd mattered more. He held the power grid going down. Living off the land. An empty checkbox, a “do something by recommended hobbies and lunch- boxes.”

7. Photos of all types. There were hundreds. Blank, racist postcards, filled with black and white and color images. A photo of our daughter in tears on the first day of remote learning. A photo of Karla dressed to the nines at a podium on the school stage. A photo of two TVs in video middle school award ceremonies. Monochrome, black and white. A photo of Karla lounging on their beds, attending from home, including our son on the same call. A photo that was something.

And the new normal.

A photo of George Floyd marching in a silent protest. His name was mentioned in every class. A photo of two students walking arm in arm, looking up at Konstantine the Great on the outside of the school. A photo of Karla dressed to the nines at a podium on the school stage. A photo of two TVs in video middle school award ceremonies. Monochrome, black and white. A photo of Karla lounging on their beds, attending from home, including our son on the same call.
“Anyone remember the ads printed on matchbook covers and in magazines like *Reader’s Digest* and *TV Guide*, urging aspiring artists to “draw me”? Sponsored by the Art Instruction Schools, the ads showed a pen-and-ink example to duplicate — Tippy the Turtle or a cowboy in silhouette, even Bob Hope’s head — and asked readers to send in their sketch for a professional critique and the possibility of winning a free scholarship to the Minnesota-based correspondence school. (Apparently this is how *Peanuts* creator Charles Schulz got his start when he was in high school.) We asked a dozen well-known illustrators to try their hand at our version of the “draw me” exercise. However, instead of simply copying our student (drawn by David Cowles, who got his big break at *The Village Voice* and has been a regular contributor to *Entertainment Weekly*, *Rolling Stone*, and more), we asked the illustrators to put their own spin on Cowles’ student for a new covid/Zoom/racial division/who-knows-what’s-next world.
Every time I look at my 2020 vision board, I roll my eyes, laugh, and think “what a joke.” Smack in the center of my board are big letters spelling Harvard and a trail of dots underneath leading me to Massachusetts. My plan was simple: apply, get accepted, have the best year in Cambridge, and be set up for my next steps in life; however, 2020 had other plans.

Upon acceptance, I was excited as anyone else and instantly went into planning mode for my summer transition and life in the fall. I started connecting with my colleagues and sought out housing. How lucky I thought I was when I secured housing with a family friend and cut my costs down by thousands. I researched hangout spots, knew what restaurants I wanted to try, and talked to alumni about the best gear to help me endure a Boston winter. (Thank God I didn’t buy anything!)

As quickly as I began to solidify my plans, things began to change. Once the welcome events were canceled and current students were asked to vacate the school, I realized my plans and what I imagined my experience to be like would radically change. I said goodbye to walking through Gutman Library, tailgating for the Harvard v. Yale football game, and the thoughts of giving tours to my sisters or my aunt who already had plans to visit and explore the campus. I began to question if I would receive everything I wished for when I made my vision board. I worried myself into early gray hairs and questioned, “Will I get the world-renowned Harvard education and experience if Harvard opts to move online?”

Waiting for fall plans to officially be announced led to the most intense anxiety and hours of uncertainty I’ve ever experienced. March turned to April, which turned into May, then into June and still — I knew nothing. It felt like I was frozen. Things were happening, people were moving, the world was changing, but I had to remain still … and wait.

Finally hearing that the program would be completely virtual, I had a small sense of relief and thought I could go back into planning mode and reimagine my experience. But, with so many unknowns and nowhere to get solid answers, I remained still. There is no one to ask if paying full tuition without the in-person experience is worth the value. I have no way of knowing the quality of classes, or the strain of a year’s worth of “Zoom-ing” on my body. Who can I ask if meaningful and lasting relationships could solely be made virtu-

“IT’S EXHAUSTING. I’M EXHAUSTED. I FEEL LIKE A MACHINE HAVING TO RECALIBRATE TO STAY ON TRACK EVERY TIME SOMETHING NEW POPS UP.”
It’s the final week of March. We are doing our best to get a rhythm with “remote learning.” The city has promised wi-fi enabled iPads that will alleviate the opportunity gap, and some students have received them, but many are still communicating with teachers via cell phone.

I have called all 110 of my eighth-graders at least once. The 27 families in my homeroom are now frequently used contacts in my phone. We have a rapport, via phone. Some families like to chat about the kids’ sadness, others about their own disappointment for canceled events and sources of income.

The phone being my primary mode of contact doesn’t feel great for my work-life balance, but this is an emergency. By now my roles as literacy instructor and history educator are null. My job is to stay in contact with my kids. To make sure they are safe and healthy. That was always part of the job, but now I’m dependent on all of our cell phones working.

It’s the last week of March, and after weeks of calling dozens of families every day, there is a glaring gap in my work: Haleema still hasn’t logged on. I fear this is the first. One month after hearing the decision, I think I’m still reimagining. What do I want out of my new experience? Will it look like for me? It’s hard to ground myself and plant my feet in an answer, when it feels like the ground is still being built. I’m making decisions on leaps of faith and hope, and it’s scary.

Every decision I have to make right now feels like opening a war field in my brain. I’ll have a question, nowhere to get an answer, so both sides battle it out, and at the end of it all, I still have no answer.

“Should I move to Boston?” “Will proximity to the campus lead to more opportunities or possible in-person meetups?” “Most of the jobs posted on the Hub are in Boston.” “Plenty of people are still making the move. The wait, it’s a global pandemic. Moving isn’t safe.” “Why risk being quarantined in a city without your family?” “Full time or part time?” “Divide one head first, go all-in, and be a full-time online Ed.M. student. Why not? That was the original plan and you can make the most out of that.” “But I could also be a part-time student, continue to have income, and at least hope for the possibility of a real graduation in 2022.”

It’s exhausting.

I feel like a machine having to recalibrate to stay on track every time something new pops up.

I would love to say I have a final decision, but I don’t. I’m practicing grace and adding the word flexibility to my vision board. As I continue to reimage, I know I’ll keep the promise to myself to be a Harvard graduate student. Whether full time or part time, in Boston or not, I’ll get the degree. It’s my hope that even remotely, I’ll have a great year, and I’ll be set up for my next steps in life as I initially planned.

McKenzie Parke served as a special educator, youth advocate, and community organizer in New Orleans for five years and found joy in empowering youth to use their voices through civic engagement. She decided to stay in Georgia after all and attend the Ed School as a full-time student. She plans to study in Atlanta until December, and then move to the DMV area in January to meet and study with her newborn nephew.

Svati Mariam Lelyveld, Ed.M.’12
Eighth-grade social studies teacher
Bronx School of Young Leaders, MS 331
New York City

“My job is to stay in contact with my kids. To make sure they are safe and healthy. That was always part of the job, but now I’m dependent on all of our cell phones working.”
What We're Reading From the Wildly Distant


to my Google classroom. The office administrator has sent me all of the phone numbers listed on Haleema’s emergency card, and after calling all of them, I am becoming increasingly worried about the child. Haleema is slipping through the cracks that occur when an over-emphasized emergency card and after-care plan are further beyond capacity. With no tuition, no WiFi, no guardian at home for dinner time, an overwhelming number of children are relying on our New York City public schools.

Towering at five-feet four inches above me, Haleema has a personality that can captivate any audience. Since the first day of school in September, I have had quick conversations with her every morning. Brief reminders that she is beautiful, and can lead her whole crew in their tech-savvy emojis and GIFs. The children continue to learn about and advocate for Black Americans. This book analyzes the 2014 murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, through the lens of racial policy decisions over decades, which led to long-standing neighbor- hood insecurity and separation. The book’s synopsis states that Haleema’s mother and I texted every day to confirm what assignments had been completed, or to commu- nicate gentle reminders to get them done. In the months of May and June, Haleema was celebrated at our monthly academic awards ceremo- nies as a student who had perfect attendance, and near perfect scores on all of her work. Those last few months of middle school are not lost, nor proved, as most jobs and community resources are still closed.

It’s now the end of July, and I’m still in regular contact with half a dozen of Haleema’s family members, sharing income and education opportuni- ties as text messages, and admiring their tech savvy emojis and GIFs. The resilience of systemically under- resourced communities is not magic, or even luck – it is the product of organi- zed collective care. And cell phone continues to be our primary mode of communication and connection.

SVATI MARIAM LEVLIELO BELIEVES THAT BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS, FOOD, CLOTHING, SHELTER, AND MEDICAL CARE ARE ESSENTIAL RIGHTS. SHE IS A VERY FIERCE PROTECTOR OF THE STUDENTS WHO HAVE WORKED AS ARTISTS AND THEY CONTINUE TO LEARN ABOUT AND ADVOCATE FOR BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS.

Okay. Finally, I send a text message back and revision. Her focus starts to improve, and she is getting in trouble. She is volunteered her drafts for extra feed- back. Her reading and writing continue to captivate any audience. She is beautiful, and can lead her whole crew in their tech-savvy emojis and GIFs. The children continue to learn about and advocate for Black Americans.

What We're Reading From the Wildly Distant

Make a helper. Children need to see the extent of time from now to when school starts and after time. Have children draw pictures about their memories of school. Older children might even draw a map... this will help them talk through the where/whowhat/whoschool.

Melissa Butler

FORMER TEACHER AND FOUNDER OF THE CHILDREN’S INNOVATION PROJECT. DURING AN EDUCATION NOW WEBINAR ON HOW TO HELP KIDS TRANSITION TO A NEW AND VERY DIFFERENT SCHOOL YEAR.

What We’re Reading From the Wildly Distant

This book analyzes the 2014 murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, through the lens of racial policy decisions over decades, which led to long-standing neighbor- hood insecurity and separation. The book’s synopsis states that Haleema’s mother and I texted every day to confirm what assignments had been completed, or to commu- nicate gentle reminders to get them done. In the months of May and June, Haleema was celebrated at our monthly academic awards ceremo- nies as a student who had perfect attendance, and near perfect scores on all of her work. Those last few months of middle school are not lost, nor proved, as most jobs and community resources are still closed.

It’s now the end of July, and I’m still in regular contact with half a dozen of Haleema’s family members, sharing income and education opportuni- ties as text messages, and admiring their tech savvy emojis and GIFs. The resilience of systemically under- resourced communities is not magic, or even luck – it is the product of organi- zed collective care. And cell phone continues to be our primary mode of communication and connection.

SVATI MARIAM LEVLIELO BELIEVES THAT BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS, FOOD, CLOTHING, SHELTER, AND MEDICAL CARE ARE ESSENTIAL RIGHTS. SHE IS A VERY FIERCE PROTECTOR OF THE STUDENTS WHO HAVE WORKED AS ARTISTS AND THEY CONTINUE TO LEARN ABOUT AND ADVOCATE FOR BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS.

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“Why is it hard to trust an atom? Because they make up everything.”

Laughter brings joy to a learning environment. Humor increases engagement and encourages the brain to retain information. As an education consultant specializing in social and emotional learning (SEL), I have found that even the corniest joke can improve participants’ learning.

When the pandemic hit, my clients needed support and strategies—not jokes. So I started using more trauma-sensitive strategies like deep breathing and body awareness in SEL trainings and meetings with school district staff. For example, a deep breath calms the nervous system and allows us to stay in our “thinking brains.”

This worked well until Memorial Day 2020 when George Floyd was murdered by Minneapolis police. A week later, I co-lead a video call with a small rural school district in the South. I began the session with a moment of silence for Floyd. We continued with an activity where participants acknowledged and named their feelings after looking at an array of emoticons. I have done this activity dozens of times on Zoom since March, typically resulting in a wide distribution of emotions. But this time, participants identified with the sad face over and over again. One participant simply drew a broken heart on the screen.

Later, I learned that many members of the district staff had spent the morning waiting for someone to acknowledge their pain, their despair, their need to grieve, and the need to cosign their resolve. Instead, they were faced with a grave omission—district meetings reflected business as usual. Several staff members later told me that the shared moment of silence had been particularly meaningful with tension running high as confederate statues began to topple nearby. This brief moment of silence, in fact, broke a silence on issues of race and racism. Since then, the district has started to call on their collective commitment to SEL to enter into courageous and necessary conversations—to really listen to each other talk about their own experiences and perspectives. While they haven’t made any lasting changes yet, they have begun the challenging work of unpacking the inequities baked into their system. I admire the district staff for the courageous way they are leaning into not as a tool for adults to confront the proverbial “elephant in the room” that is systemic racism in education.

This contrast between a moment of silence and systems of silence urged me to reflect on the different ways silence can engage and disengage us. Silence can be respectful and contemplative. Silence can be afraid. Silence can be spiteful or even deafening. When people in power stay silent, they dismiss and inhibit the kind of meaningful conversation that leads to growth. In contrast, silence can provide space for looking inward to better understand our emotions, reflect on our behavior, and examine the impact we have on others. The absence of noise allows us to hit pause on external inputs and go within ourselves to listen. Understanding our own thoughts and feelings precedes individual as well as collective change. And sometimes silence is needed for constructive dialogue to begin.

Mara Schanfield, Ed.M’08, C.A.S. ’09
SENIOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE COORDINATOR
AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH
ST. PAUL, MINN.
A brisk breeze blustered into the back seat as I cranked the mechanical window down vociferously. The two-day journey I had just concluded from Minnesota to Kenya’s Kisumu International Airport was forgotten. My father, in the front seat, muttered something about heavy rains and the crop that was bound to be bountiful this year. Children splashed in puddles outside the Nyawita slums we were driving past on our left. The vaguely visible train tracks that ran along the road, in disrepair, were the only vestige of a seemingly prosperous past. Piles of garbage were strewn around from the slum dwellers that had nowhere to dispose of their waste.

"The train has not come to Kisumu for a long time," my father lamented, slightly discomfited. One of the children peeled away, pulled down his tattered shorts, and squatted to relieve himself on the tracks. He swiftly pulled them up and scuttled along to catch up to the rest who were keen to get away from their smelly friend; they disappeared into the shanties. Down the road, men were washing their bodaboda taxis in a large, muddy pool, ridding their scooters of the thick grime. Across them were cattle, necks stooped low, lapping while the herder whistled, frustrated, lashing their backs with a stick, hustling the straying heifers to rejoin the flock.

Soon, a uniformed guard pulled open the gates at Arise N Shine Community Academy. We were greeted by second graders, singing and dancing. The sun beat down on the backs of the dancers, jigging in a trance, sweat streaming down their brows, oblivious of the dust provoked by their pounding feet. Onlookers clapped, cheering them on. Tears flowed as I hugged the kids, teachers, staff, and Mama, sitting under a shady neem tree.

Fourteen years ago, with seven children, we turned one of Mama’s bedrooms into a daycare center. Today we run two schools in Kisumu town and in Nyamila Rural Township, an hour away. We have graduated 3,000 students, pre-K to fourth grade, 300 annually. They were largely from the surrounding slums. Thanks to donations from Hope for the Child (hftc), a Minnesota-based nonprofit I established in 2007, tuition was largely free. hftc’s mission was simple: provide access to quality education to marginalized children to alleviate poverty and promote advocacy. We remove barriers to access by feeding them, and providing basic health and sanitation, such as vaccines, running water, and toilets, to prevent disease spread. Secondly, we promote safety and wellness. Two teachers are sponsored annually to train in early childhood development. We were impacting lives.

This was October 2019, before covid-19. Paltry government assistance after schools shut down in March was sobering. Minnesota, where I lived, had already switched to distance learning and I was a kindergarten teacher to my 5-year-old at home. In Kenya, however, there is no infrastructure to effectively support this or any type of distance learning for the masses. Teachers lamented that government radio and television programs undermined feedback and exchange, critical rudiments for learning. Television needs electricity. Learning packets developed by the Ministry of Education were cost-prohibitive to print and disseminate. Teachers feared for their lives in the face of police brutality during the draconian lockdown and dreaded

"Someday, God will help us make sense of the mess, I thought. Yes. Everything was going to be all right."
The Pivot Issue

contracting the virus doing outreach programs.

And so we prioritized nutrition, then safety and wellness, and learning last. Basics such as maize, beans, avocados, or yams procured from the school farm incentivized caregivers to pick up free rations and learning packets at the school, three times a week; a bonus if they brought the child in. Completed packets were returned in exchange for new material and replenished rations. Unfortunately, we could not track the children who had been sent away by their caregivers to rural homes to live with surviving grandparents and alleviate hardship—at least until September, when schools would reopen.

Hopes turned dire when the Ministry of Education announced in early July that schools would remain closed until January 2021 and all students would be held back to restart their current grade.

Education was abandoned. Any future investment plans in infrastructure, cell phone towers, electricity, and subsidized data packages did nothing to assuage the burden of delivering the education and nutrition desperately needed today. This class war meant winners would be those in the upper echelons of the economic pyramid or persons with pure grit to prioritize learning for their children.

Mama Kambua, a 23-year-old single mother of four, all under the age of seven, lives in Nyawita. With schools closed, the lockdown, and being laid off, feeding the kids daily was a struggle. She accomplished by any means necessary. Pregnant at age 15, she dropped out of school herself. She did not know where her kids were most of the time and had no time to pick up packages. She felt alone, overwhelmed, and out of options. Wiping her sweaty, tear-stained face with shaky fingers, she sank into a chair of the mess, I thought, pulling into my garage. Yes. Everything was going to be all right.

The freshly mowed grass in the serene crabapple tree in front of my house. The road wound into a beautiful backdrop of trees, rich, chestnut trunks with deep, rustic red leaves that seemed ablaze at the tops, burning orange and yellow hues. I turned into my driveway and stopped the car. The garage door slowly opened, revealing no fanfare—no teachers, no drummers nor dancers, no porter a closed school? What about the dropouts? Those children sent out by reckless caregivers to earn a wage or sell moonshine, the ones who endure unchecked abusers or pedophilia; the disenfranchised boys driven to the streets where they smoke glue to escape. What about their pangs of insatiable hunger?

Shumped over the steering wheel, I said a prayer and wept—for a while. I pondered ways to keep everyone on payroll. Layoffs would cause hardship. Perhaps the staff could be farmhands; teachers could be evangelists, safely spreading COVID-19 education with Mama a missionary and the school an altruistic sanctuary for the whole neighborhood.

Irresolute, I felt a quiet knowing. Someday, God will help us make sense of the mess, I thought, pulling into my garage. Yes. Everything was going to be all right.

Akwiny Williams, Ed.M. ’16, founded AIM HIGH for the child to alleviate poverty and promote advocacy by providing education access to poor children starting in her home country, Kenya. She currently lives in Minnesota and travels frequently to Kenya to support two schools.

Alec Lee, Ed.M. ’85
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
AIM HIGH
SAN FRANCISCO

Aim High opened its doors in June 1986, one year after I graduated from the Ed School. Many of my memories of the early years of Aim High are hazy, but I vividly remember the first day. I stood on the sidewalk outside our inaugural school campus in San Francisco early in the morning. There was plenty of excitement and energy but also a high degree of nervousness and uncertainty. Would the kids show up? Would our teachers step up? Would the Morning Circle work? Would donors continue to support a closed school? What about the dropouts? Those children sent out by reckless caregivers to earn a wage or sell moonshine, the ones who endure unchecked abusers or pedophilia; the disenfranchised boys driven to the streets where they smoke glue to escape. What about their pangs of insatiable hunger?

The recovery for students who are disproportionately impacted by both the virus and racial injustice will be long and arduous. We are not going anywhere.

The Pivot Issue
We don’t have to replace every single hour, particularly when we’re giving one-on-one attention to our kids. It’s really encouraged time in academic learning that’s creating the learning, not necessarily the number of academic minutes in a school day.

Jennifer McCombs
Senior Policy Researcher, The RAND Corporation
In a Harvard Edcast on Lessons Learned from Summer Learning
On the foundation for the passage in 1975 of the federal Education for All Handicapped Children Act (now called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), which required access to a free, appropriate public education for all children with disabilities. Before 1975, about 1 million American children with disabilities were receiving no education from the public school system.

1954
Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954, considered one of the greatest Supreme Court decisions of the 20th century, stated that the racial segregation of children in public schools violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The ruling also laid the foundation for the passage in 1957 of the federal Education Act, which required access to a free, appropriate public education for all children with disabilities. Before 1957, about 1 million American children with disabilities were receiving no education from the public school system.

1957
The Soviet Union’s history-making launch of the satellite Sputnik sparked a revolution in scientific education as the United States faced the possibility of losing the technological, economic, and military race against the Soviet Union. This included pouring billions of dollars into the National Defense Education Act in 1958. The law dramatically increased federal funding in the areas of science, math, and modern foreign languages to encourage our universities and public schools to educate more scientists.

1972
The Title IX of the Education Act of 1972 prohibits federally funded educational institutions from discriminating against students on the basis of sex, including in sports. Prior, athletic scholarships for women were rare, pregnant female athletes were not legally protected, and sexual harassment was easily dismissed.
It was a few weeks after this pandemic took hold. Jason Grow, a photographer whose work has appeared in Ed. several times over the past few years, was feeling restless. Spring assignments had been canceled. The chance of getting new jobs, at least for the short term, was pretty slim. He was, as he says “struck in covid limbo.” But he had a plan. He knew that many families in the Cape Ann community on the north shore of Massachusetts where he lives were out of work and needed help. He also knew that many people were also feeling restless after being cooped up inside. So Grow, along with three other local photographers, started a family “porch-rait” project to benefit a local food pantry. Families gathered on their porches and stoops, in adirondack chairs and front yards, while the photographers stood a safe distance away on sidewalks and walkways, cameras in hand. Initially they thought they might get 50 or so families, but by the time they finished, they had photographed 250 families and organizations and raised about $30,000.

As we were thinking about this issue of Ed., we knew it would be fun to do something similar—a series of porch-raits showing faculty members at home with their families. We gave Grow a list of six faculty members. We wanted a mix of people and family types, and ended up with one faculty member who has been affiliated with the Ed School for more than four decades (Pamela Mason), two who joined the community in the last few years (Junlei Li and Peter Blair), and another who has been here for about a dozen (Mandy Svetz-Romer). We also got a two-for-one porch-rait with one of our faculty couples (Heather Hill and Jon Star).

Incredibly, Grow shot all of the photos in one day in early September, just as the virtual fall semester was kicking off at Harvard, racing from two locations in Boston to two in Arlington, then back again to Boston. One of the upsides of having most K-12 schools also virtual (or partly virtual) is that the younger children of faculty members were able to take part in the photo shoots. (Pamela Mason’s adult children had, unfortunately, just left Boston.) We ended up with a great snapshot of another side of our faculty we rarely see, wearing jeans and shorts and standing in driveways with kids nearby.

This, of course, spurred another idea: Have alumni submit their own porch-raits. Nearly 100 did. You can find them online: gse.harvard.edu/ed.

At first working from home felt unfamiliar. A few weeks in, I mastered the art of switching between the dining room and living room throughout the course of the day to create variety in my workspace. Working from home I grew to enjoy long walks in the park and time of stillness and reflection in the Boston Harbor.
Junlei Li

“Working from home has been a daily reminder to reach out and connect with people intentionally, even if we cannot intuitively reach out and connect in person.”

Pamela Mason, M.A.T. ’70, Ed.D. ’75

“As a creature of habit, working from home has made me rethink what boundaries are necessary, nice, and just plain ridiculous. I still get dressed for work but more casually. I still separate my work emails from my personal emails. I still try not to work on Saturdays. Making time for family and friends remotely has been a priority for me. Just between us, I do miss Larsen Hall and Appian Way. HGSE is an important community to me.”
"We are lucky to have plenty of space in our home, kids who (mostly) get along, schools and teachers that stepped up, and understanding colleagues. All in all, not so bad. Jon did have to re-install ethernet cables, however. And when you’re trying to concentrate on work but hear voices in your head, you’ve got to remember that it’s just the four other people in your family on Zoom calls."

"My kids attend the Boston Public Schools, which are largely remote. As a result, I have gained three new work colleagues and we are together all day, every day. An unexpected benefit has been the ability to eavesdrop on my kids’ classes and witnessing up close the adaptability and creativity of Boston’s teachers and students. Don’t get me wrong, my new colleagues are a major distraction and I miss my real work colleagues A LOT. However, working alongside them has given me a wider window into how K-12 is adapting to new challenges brought on by the pandemic."

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Since graduating Wesleyan University in 2014, I have taught math within the Boston Public School system. Teaching math has been rewarding, not only because of the growth I have seen students achieve, but because of the ways I was able to shift how families saw math curriculum. What does it mean to have students be able to identify with a course they were often labeled a failure in? How do you get families engaged in the classroom to the point where they will engage beyond parent-teacher conferences? How do you make people feel affirmed and valued in your classroom?

These are questions I grappled with on a daily basis. I wanted to ensure my students had the mathematical literacy that would enable them to achieve social mobility.

During my time at Wesleyan, I thought of the ways in which my practice could extend beyond the classroom and took courses that would further develop my leadership and strategic planning skills.

As I am beginning my new chapter as a member of central office staff, I not only keep those same questions in mind but push leaders to think of them as well. We are in the midst of a pandemic and there are global protests to highlight the ways in which Black lives matter; it is important for leaders to ensure their actions match their words. When you identify as an anti-racist but feel uncomfortable talking about race, how many missed opportunities to build trusting relationships with families and community members go unexplored? How can you identify as anti-racist but feel as though your students are not progressing because they do not like school and no one in their home holds them accountable, rather than critically reflecting on your classroom practices? What are some meaningful ways you are engaging families in your virtual classroom? Human interaction has changed in this climate, and it is important for respect, care, and vulnerability to still be expressed.

Families were struggling before the pandemic and “a new normal” has not been established. As a Black man, it is my hope that the humanization of students, their families, and their communities will be more than a “best practice” and seen as common knowledge as we begin to rebuild and reshape our society post-covid.

Though I have shifted from classroom educator to managerial work, I am still invested in making sure educators see students as humans first, students second. Though students are in that building or video window for hours daily, that is not the most important part of their identities. You cannot safely explore the identities of others until you explore your own through critical reflection. This work is challenging for a number of reasons, considering the lack of human interaction, or the ways in which Google Hangouts, Zoom, and other apps do not allow for a transfer of energy between people. The ways in which we can hold people has shifted also, but we must remember that meaningful human engagement will not be lost.

“It is my hope that the humanization of students, their families, and their communities will be more than a ‘best practice’ and seen as common knowledge.”

Kwame Adams, Ed.M. ’20
PROGRAM MANAGER
OFFICE OF SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION, BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
BOSTON
It’s 9:06 a.m. My 5-year-old sits across from me in the kitchen, stuffing dry Cheerios in her mouth, twirling her finger in a cup of milk without a care in the world, especially that my morning staff meeting starts in less than 24 minutes.

“Let’s paaaaaayyyyyy,” she yells.

“I have to work. I have a meeting,” I say, deadpan.

“Arrrrggghhhhhhh,” she groans, disappointed.

I’m running late already, even though all I have to do is click a button now. I catch my breath, thinking, “Someday you’ll look back on this and remember it as a special time.” I’ve said those words to myself a lot over the past five months.

Most days I’ve lost track of how much time has really passed since the pandemic quarantined my daughter and me at home. Actually, I stopped counting around week 14, which surpassed the most time we’d ever spent together during maternity leave. Because my partner is considered an essential employee who still reports to the office every day, I’m now stay-at-home the same virtually or in person.

One of the tasks I do to challenge perceived power is I push educators to think of a student or family they had during the school year that they would label difficult. Then I ask them to think of the additional challenges that come with learning virtually. Would your bond be stronger or weaker given the lack of physical space? Most reflect and recognize that a lot of their relationships would falter and attendance would be low. Other teachers have built such strong relationships that family members say hi or check in with them during class meetings. The reasons why their relationships flourish is because of their consistency, high expectations, and desire to get to know students lived experience beyond the schoolhouse.

Educators and school leaders must recognize the ways in which families offer value to school climate and culture. They must recognize the ways in which they uphold and combat racist and/or white supremacist ideologies. If a teacher asks a student during a video call, “Why is your house so loud?” they are showing bias. They are trying to exude power in a space that is not their classroom. A number of students do not have a quiet place in their home, and quite frankly, some of my colleagues lack those spaces also but that does not lessen the quality of their work. It also does not permit anyone to question the conditions students are working under if they do not have an immediate solution to the problem. Rather than making a student feel ashamed of their home environment, educators should think of ways to gauge the conditions students are working under and adjust. We must also continue to push educators to understand how their need for power is rooted in bias, and how these power dynamics do not lead to establishing trust, expressing vulnerability and high expectations, or allowing students and families to have input on curriculum. These power dynamics seek to keep the teacher in control.

KWAME ADAMS CURRENTLY WORKS IN SUPPORTING SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION EFFORTS IN BOSTON TO ENSURE THAT STUDENTS HAVE ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION AND AFFIRMING CURRICULUM.

“I let the ‘academics’ go in favor of ‘play.’ Instantly our days became more relaxed.”

Jill Anderson
HOST, HARVARD EDCAST
HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
CAMBRIDGE

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Taking a Pivot Inventory
(But Who’s Counting?)

The photo of the 100 largest school districts choosing remote learning only as their back-to-school instructional model, affecting more than 9 million students.

2,475
Number of new courses developed at the EdCast this summer, many about real issues facing the education profession today, including COVID-19 and in the context of continuing anti-Black racism.

3,279,535
Number of students nationwide who deferred their enrollment to next year, representing more than 20% of the freshman class. Between 80 and 120 students take a gap year under typical circumstances.

30
The number of Harvard freshmen who deferred their enrollment to next year, representing more than 20% of the freshman class. Between 80 and 120 students take a gap year under typical circumstances.

74
The percent of the 100 largest school districts choosing remote learning only as their back-to-school instructional model, affecting more than 9 million students.

619,028
Number of par¬tions of handmade, sanitized objects for districts by the state of Texas for back-to-school.

321,000
The number of masks the country’s largest school district, New York City, bought and distributed to students when schools went virtual last March.

346,000,000
• Number of schoolchildren worldwide who missed out on school means after COVID shut down schools in the spring.
"We live in a time of rapid change—change that is often unpredictable and not always positive. My experience with development, as an observer and a practitioner, has led me to the conclusion that the best way to manage change, whether positive or negative, is to prepare for it and that there is no greater form of preparation for change than investments in education."

This quote by His Highness The Aga Khan from 2003 is still relevant 17 years later. This pandemic has drastically changed our lives. From remotely facilitating workshops with new clients to wearing a mask every time I leave my home in Toronto, this pandemic has made me realize the many things we take for granted, including community gatherings, our health, and education.

When the various schools at Harvard announced that classes would be delivered online, I was initially shocked. I was confused. I was upset. "How am I going to make the most of my Harvard experience?" I asked myself. "Should I defer or should I continue? Is it worth it?"

After days of contemplating, speaking with my parents and mentors, and listening to words of inspiration from my role models, I took a step back and reflected on the reality. More than 1.2 billion students were impacted due to school closures. Teachers and school boards have faced multiple challenges delivering quality education remotely. I felt grateful to be part of an academic institution that is...
pushing the frontiers of education in research and innovation to combat the inequalities and hardships that come with the pandemic. Looking at the silver lining, I decided to pursue this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to educate myself in an ecosystem of education, research and innovation to improve experiences. Through my coursework and research projects, I look forward to collaborating with classmates and faculty from Harvard. Already, I have participated in a virtual hackathon where, with over 1,000 participants from around the world, came together to work on education, health, and economic solutions to combat current issues. My team and I developed a winning solution to analyze and improve student engagement and personalized learning through the use of machine learning. While at HGSE, I am excited to continue working on this idea.

This is not the year anyone had imagined. I had not imagined attending lectures from my room. I had not imagined talking to other students online using video, my cohort and I have also been bonding virtually. It is truly unique to have a global community of friends virtually bonding. It is truly unique to have a global community of friends, who are resilient, passionate, and learning to change the world.

3. New Problems – New Opportunities

I recently learned that Sir Isaac Newton also had to study remotely due to the great Plague, a major pandemic during that era. During this time, he continued to work on his mathematical theories and laid the foundations of modern science. Though it is not necessary for a pandemic to bring about a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, stories like these remind us that we can still make a positive impact, despite the circumstances. COVID-19 has not only created new problems but has also surfaced existing issues, such as lack of education equity. As an engineer and digital consultant, I am a huge advocate of leveraging technology to improve experiences. Through my coursework and research projects, I look forward to collaborating with classmates and faculty from Harvard. Already, I have participated in a virtual hackathon where, with over 1,000 participants from around the world, we came together to work on education, health, and economic solutions to combat current issues. My team and I developed a winning solution to analyze and improve student engagement and personalized learning through the use of machine learning. While at HGSE, I am excited to continue working on this idea.
“My students needed a more accessible learning experience far earlier than the onset of COVID-19. That I began to provide it for them began as a response to the pandemic, but cannot end with it.”

Melanie Shea, Ed.M.’20

HISTOR Y TEACHER
MADISON PARK TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL
BOSTON

“Trial by fire” was an understatement. Six months into student teaching and six weeks into my first U.S. history class, the mayor announced that Boston Public Schools would close to prevent the spread of COVID-19. It’s not how I would’ve chosen to complete my practicum, but I had still learned more than I could have ever imagined.

So when we divided into breakout groups at a staff meeting to share our favorite tip for remote learning, I proudly went first: relax submission standards for assignments and give students multiple ways to complete the work. I joked that I’d typically give students a hard time for texting me their answers, but at this point I’d take anything. How could I expect students to handle the onslaught of information and spend hours at a computer when I could hardly manage myself?

The Pivot Issue
Harvard Ed.
Fall 2020

We have to be gentle in this stressful time, I reasoned, and prioritize engagement over procedure.

“Yeah, I do that all year,” my colleague Gina said. That wasn’t the answer I was expecting. I assumed I’d have to defend my stance against a small tide of naysayers warning me that I was lowering expectations, and yet here I found I was actually behind.

As a special education teacher, Gina is constantly breaking down barriers to access for students, and this was no different. She challenged my reasoning for this being an emergency-only policy: Why did it matter how the work showed up if that wasn’t part of the assessment? Was I measuring their grasp of the content or was I assessing their ability to submit a Google Doc? In other words, she said, don’t set up barriers to completion and then be surprised when your grade book starts populating with zeroes. The kids are the ones who suffer for it.

I started taking stock of my shift to remote learning during COVID. What had I held on to and what purpose did it serve? What had I let go of and why was it so easy to lose? I realized that for the most part, I’d taken my original curriculum and just thrown everything online, worksheets and all. And as the crisis continued and students struggled, I left behind formatting requirements, hard deadlines, and even
Since March 13, the date that still remains on my classroom blackboard and the date when my ninth-grade English classes finished reading *Lord of the Flies*, there has been a huge shift in communication with students and their engagement in school. The relationships that I was able to build and foster over the course of the year with students no longer held the sway that they did when we saw each other every day. The struggle to get students to engage with me in any way, not to mention English class material, was consistent and constant. What I had relied upon, my relationships with the student who came into my classroom every day shouting “good afternoon Ms. Loewald,” or the student who sent me English memes every other day, was gone and there was a need to pivot, to change the way I was interacting with students, knowing that the things that they needed from me had drastically changed as well.

I transitioned away from teaching them how to write an essay on *Lord of the Flies*, knowing that my students really needed me to think of them as whole people instead of only students, and knowing that I (as a person and not just a teacher) also, at the moment, did not want to grade 80 of those essays.

In collaboration with other ninth-grade English teachers, I switched the curriculum and my “ask” for engagement from students. I had students writing, reading, reflecting, and creating certain assignments. Obviously, they weren’t as integral to learning as I’d originally thought if they could be discarded so easily.

This emergency required me to get down to the bone of what I felt was important for students to know and be able to do. The pandemic didn’t cause the inequities I was seeing in my classroom; it merely exposed the fault lines that were already there. My students needed a more accessible learning experience far earlier than the onset of COVID-19. That I began to provide it for them began as a response to the pandemic, but cannot end with it.

As I head into my first year of teaching, I need to ask myself: is this healing or harmful? Am I starting at the root level with my students’ needs in mind or am I leaning on last-minute adjustments to get through the year? With nothing but more uncertainty ahead and our children’s lives at stake, I need to critically reflect on these questions from the start, continuously, and not just in the face of disaster.
What is one way you’ve pivoted since covid started?

“As the fall semester was about to start, we had one question for our new students.

I have learned to be kind to myself.”
SIMA HADDADIN, ED.M. (TIE)

Because of covid, instead of just me moving to Cambridge, my mother and I came to British Columbia where she cooks for me as I complete my online program in a rented apartment. Of course, I help her in the kitchen whenever I am free.”
LI (JERRY) XIE, ED.M. (L&L)

I taught myself virtual reality software development, and started designing learning experiences in immersive virtual environments.”
AARON APPLETON, ED.M. (TIE)

Since the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic in January, I worked from home for four months as a chemistry teacher in China. I transferred all of the teaching and coaching work to a completely virtual environment through videoconferencing until everything went back to a new normal in May, when I began going to work in-person with a mask.”
ABBIE CHEN, ED.M. (L&T)

I essentially live in my bedroom now and I never imagined so many people would see my space! At least my new colleague, David, is pretty interesting and is always a talking point on Zoom calls.”
EMMA WARD, ED.M. (IEP)

I’ve poured more energy into building systems, routines, and curriculum that keeps all of my students engaged and part of the conversation.”
KELLY LEE, ED.M. (L&L)

Before the official memo to close our schools came in March, our schools prepared to take our classrooms outside of the four walls, making live videos of teaching available to everyone and preparing monthly SEL kits to ensure learning continuity.”
MAW MAW KHAING, ED.M. (IEP)
I can’t hear the word pivot without hearing echoes of Ross screaming at Rachel in a hallway, “Pivot, pivot, pivot!” Much like trying to drag a giant couch up a Brooklyn stairway, pivoting in a pandemic has proved every bit as stressful.

Okay, so we weren’t looking to bring home the perfect couch, but we were looking to bring home our perfect career. We’d diligently done our shopping at networking events throughout the semester. We’d scoured the catalogue and circled the positions that we most wanted. We thought about whether the job would be comfy. Would it be stylish? Would it fit with the growing vision of ourselves? Did it need to accommodate a growing family? Did we, like Ross, seek advice from our ex-partners? We had nailed down the precise job spec we wanted, and if we hadn’t, we at least had a pretty good sense of what we were aiming for.

Five months on from the moment we left Appian Way, many of us still find ourselves in a cramped metaphorical stairwell holding a couch that, despite our best efforts, won’t budge. We’ve pushed, pulled, sweated and stalled — yet we are no closer to landing that dream job (or any job!). The call to “revert” has attacked us loudly from all manner of well-meaning directions. Parents, professors, siblings, and careers counsellors have all been shoving “revert!” and this cacophony of advice, sometimes confusing, sometimes contradictory, has done little to lift the weight of the sofa.

Spoiler alert: At the end of the Friends episode, Ross unceremoniously returns his couch to the store. It’s ripped in half and, no, the store won’t do a refund.

My personal pivot has had its challenging moments. My applications to high schools in Oakland were left unanswered by this new form of career ghosting to which many of us are now well acquainted. (It’s worse than dating.) Staying in the United States began to feel increasingly complicated by the president’s sporadic visa tweets. What’s more, the difficulties of navigating health insurance without a stable job began to feel insurmountable. (As a Brit, my deep love for the NHS has never been greater.) I’ve subsequently pivoted to a school leadership role back in the UK, where I get to work for a phenomenal head teacher at a turnaround school in Enfield, North London. I won’t hear the waves of the West Coast, and I’ve had to say goodbye to Trader Joe’s cinnamon buns, but this pivot has brought me closer to family, which feels like the right choice for me, now, in this moment.

Felicity Burgess, Ed.M. ’20
DIRECTOR OF LITERACY
A SECONDARY SCHOOL
LONDON

“I won’t hear the waves of the West Coast, and I’ve had to say goodbye to Trader Joe’s cinnamon buns, but this pivot has brought me closer to family, which feels like the right choice for me, now, in this moment.”
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Over summer, I’ve picked up some consultancy projects, which I’ve been working on from my childhood bedroom in my parents’ house in the English countryside. Now I have to navigate two distinctly different identities on a daily basis. One: put-together millennial woman killing it on conference calls. The other: my sixteen-year-old angsty teenage self to whom I seem to revert whenever I visit my parents. On Day Two of working from home, my dad kindly asked if I needed a lift anywhere for my meetings. I politely declined while laughing at the idea that the Liberian education minister would arrive in my village mid-pandemic! On Day Three, my mum slipped a hand-drawn takeaway menu in front of me while I was on a Zoom call to ask what I fancied for dinner. Her beautiful act of kindness threatened my ability to maintain separation between my distinct identities of both professional and child. Throughout the summer, I’ve been wearing a shirt on top and yoga leggings on the bottom, a physical manifestation of the different identities I am holding during this weird time.

My life is now punctuated by long dog walks, no mobile phone signal, and the fish and chip van that comes to the village every Wednesday night. This is not the post-Harvard catalogue life I had dreamed for myself, but I must admit that, despite the “pivot!” I’m quietly content.

Note: I write from the ludicrously privileged position of being healthy and having no family directly affected by the virus.

FELICITY BURGESS IS A SCHOOL LEADER COMMITTED TO TRANSFORMING BRITAIN’S SCHOOLS. SHE THINKS ABOUT TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE 21ST CENTURY, SHE IS PASSIONATE ABOUT BUILDING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURES GROUNDED IN EQUITY AND SCALING PRACTICES AND SYSTEMS THAT ALLOW STUDENTS FROM ALL BACKGROUNDS TO THRIVE.

“IT MATTERS TO SHOW UP AND BE THERE FOR OUR YOUTH IN A REAL AND PERSONAL WAY.”

Jodi Rosenbaum, Ed.M’02
FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
MORE THAN WORDS
BOSTON

Photograph by Tony Luong

Jodi Rosenbaum, Ed.M.’02
Founder & Executive Director
More Than Words
Boston

“IT MATTERS TO SHOW UP AND BE THERE FOR OUR YOUTH IN A REAL AND PERSONAL WAY.”
The key idea is to focus just on the essential knowledge and skills that kids need to learn in a given year, and then let go of some of the rest.

Professor Jal Mehta

For the 16 years before COVID-19 hit Massachusetts, More Than Words was a beehive of activity, filled with young people working, learning, and engaging. We are a nonprofit social enterprise that employs youth who are in foster care, court-involved, homeless, or out of school to take challenging jobs by taking on challenging projects. We pay $7.2 million in youth wages. Our youth work part-time jobs in our retail and online used book-selling businesses while simultaneously working a second paid job focused on advancing personal growth and transition to other jobs and education. Youth went out on trucks to pick up books, put books in inventory and shipped our orders, and attended group seminars. All this job training and classroom learning was inherently in-person.

On March 13 we closed our stores and our entire enterprise changed overnight. Over the last 16 months, we have been completely shuttered. Youth hand out food from Costco, packing bags, doing home visits. What we learned: it matters to show up and be there for our youth in a real and personal way. When we hand out laptops, turn on cell service, help start up for emergency housing, or drive by in a “joy parade,” it shows our young people how important they are in this world. As the world opens up again, we’ll continue to be there in new ways.

Like so many other businesses and nonprofits, we transitioned our programming to Zoom. Individual case management and our entire program had left before and after. We innovated and knocked down walls and built an online learning platform, collaborated among personal interest. Our team gathers for cooking classes, meditation, health and wellness, creative expression, and makeovers. But also to knock down walls and build an even stronger More Than Words.

What we learned: relationships, community, and connection matter more than anything.

We had a hard look at our financials and our values. We rely on our youth-run business for 75% of our budget, and our highest margin business lines — events, parties, pop-up shops — were completely shuttered. We didn’t and still don’t know the future of our youth-run government-funded and emerging adults into the more developmentally appropriate juvenile system. We do know that was the matter when the bookstore speaks up.

These pivots and innovations have made us more innovative, while learning to “go back” to normal, we are building forward into a new, bold, and stronger model.

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We’re Wrapping Up Our Centennial in December!

Join us for a festive celebration where you’ll get a chance to virtually meet and mingle with a great lineup of Ed School alumni and faculty. During this multi-day event, you’ll hear the great stories of our school, reconnect with former professors, and reflect with your classmates on your own Harvard experience.

You’ve Zoomed for meetings. You’ve Zoomed for debates. Now Zoom for something that makes you happy.

hgse.me/celebrate100
“Weeks and weeks of remote teaching and learning and mask-wearing made real life seem like an inescapable sitcom. With a dark soundtrack.”