

Conversation with Valerie Hannon

Thought leader, expert adviser, author & keynote speaker on education

Part 1: Immediate observations about the responses to the emergency across the world

- We can readily see the huge inequities, the variations, not just the global north & global south; but within rich nations.
- Learning is happening in some very difficult circumstances & teachers are doing an amazing job. We're seeing a continuum – we're all into emergency remote teaching (which is not online learning), but within this continuum again huge variations. Some have enabled high levels of learner agency & are utilising many resources, but many are well away from this position. In some schools, very little is happening; some have homework writ large – keeping up the set curriculum; some are focused on the replication of classrooms, with teachers in transmission mode. At the other end of continuum there are some interesting developments, especially with those that had already flipped & enabled learner agency.
- There are some systems or microsystems where there is some level of system coordination & collaborative practice. Some districts can offer additional resources immediately, providing great support.
- This continuum & the obvious variations will lead to a huge increase in inequity: the gap that existed will become a chasm. The availability of resources at the family level & the qualities of teachers have both become very significant. The functionality of families is another challenge – and this can obviously lead to inequity in assessments. The notion of fairness in standardised testing is a joke.
- The core values of a school or institution are being exposed.

Part 2: What is the kind of world that schools are going back into when they re-open?

- We need to be alert of the big picture, the macro view, the wider ecosystem. Schools have already been plunged into this bigger picture.
- We cannot overstate the level of the economic crisis that we are in. It is very significant. Mass employment. Overall levels of poverty will increase, as will uncertainty & instability - this is the context for families & schools. Schools will need to argue for their share.
- Our suburbs, towns, cities – will be different. Some of the businesses that have provided the 'vivacity', the restaurants and cafes, will not all come back. It is going to be a process.
- There will be accelerated levels of automation. Automation drives down costs for businesses & this will have an impact on education & what is needed from an education.
- Trust in government won't be particularly enhanced of all of this.
- There have been some incredible positives. The planet has been given a breather. People are suddenly appreciating nature – wherever they are. This has led to a shift in our value frame.
- Different roles are valued in ways not seen before. No longer do professional jobs remain the dominant narrative. Society has recognised the key roles of different roles e.g. care workers. There is a whole revaluing around this.
- People are understanding how important the quality of relationships is to a community.

Part 3: What does this suggest we should have in mind when resuming life in the institutions?

(during this part of the interview, Valerie refers to **Doughnut Economics**, by Oxford academic Kate Raworth.)

When it comes to institutions, regional systems, there are some huge questions: how do they come out of this shut down phase? As well, at the micro level, how does every class bring kids out of this phase?

- There will be a strong impulse to get back to where we were. It won't all be different. However, we can take the opportunity to reconsider what is important.
- The role schools play in caring for children, enabling parents to work, needs to be restored. Many parents don't see themselves as the co-education partners. They need to work.
- It is very important that kids get out of their family context & experience a different kind of community & come together with others from different circumstances & grow community with them. This is fundamentally important.

The great pause.

Many refer to what is happening as 'the great pause'. A time when there can be a reassessment of some of our objectives – a shift from classical economics to what is economically valuable. *Donut Economics* puts forward some interesting propositions – seeking to ensure that everyone in society has their needs met without overstepping the 'outer ring' of the donut, the resources of the planet. We have the opportunity to reconsider many aspects of education:

1. As schools re-take up the caring role for children & we place value on coming together physically, what is the huge value that we need to optimise in the use of time? We ought to be thinking about time in ways that are imaginative & really zone in on what is distinctive & precious about the school as a physical environment & as an institution.
2. 'Build back better' movement – the education system won't reform as such. Politicians will be focused elsewhere, so system level leaders & school leaders need to make the gains.
3. We are noticing that the whole world doesn't come to a grinding halt when tests/exams don't happen. How do we develop that narrative? The savings would be enormous.
4. The last thing is to go back & 'make up for lost time'. We need to be smart how we handle this.
5. We are learning how much can be achieved online & seeing the richness of many online resources. What can be done online should still be done online. But there are valuable things about person to person contact, coming together in groupings, e.g. arts performances, physical education (fitness/wellness/team sports). How do you optimise the preciousness of being together in the same room? The transition is going to be difficult.
6. As we consider debates around screens, we need to recognise that screens have won. Do we seriously think we can reverse that? And why would you?
7. We need to find identity in the day to day interplay between people; experiencing collective entrepreneurialism.

Conversations

How do we encourage schools to hold these conversations, think through at a deep level what it is that they do with the time? We need extended enquiries about what kids have missed. What was it that was important? What was valued over this time when the kids weren't at school? What was good about that? How can we make a joint experience now that brings together the best of both worlds? If communities can place the notion of thriving as the outcome, then we can encourage them to ask the right questions. We need to enable schools as complete communities to come up with a different design for themselves.