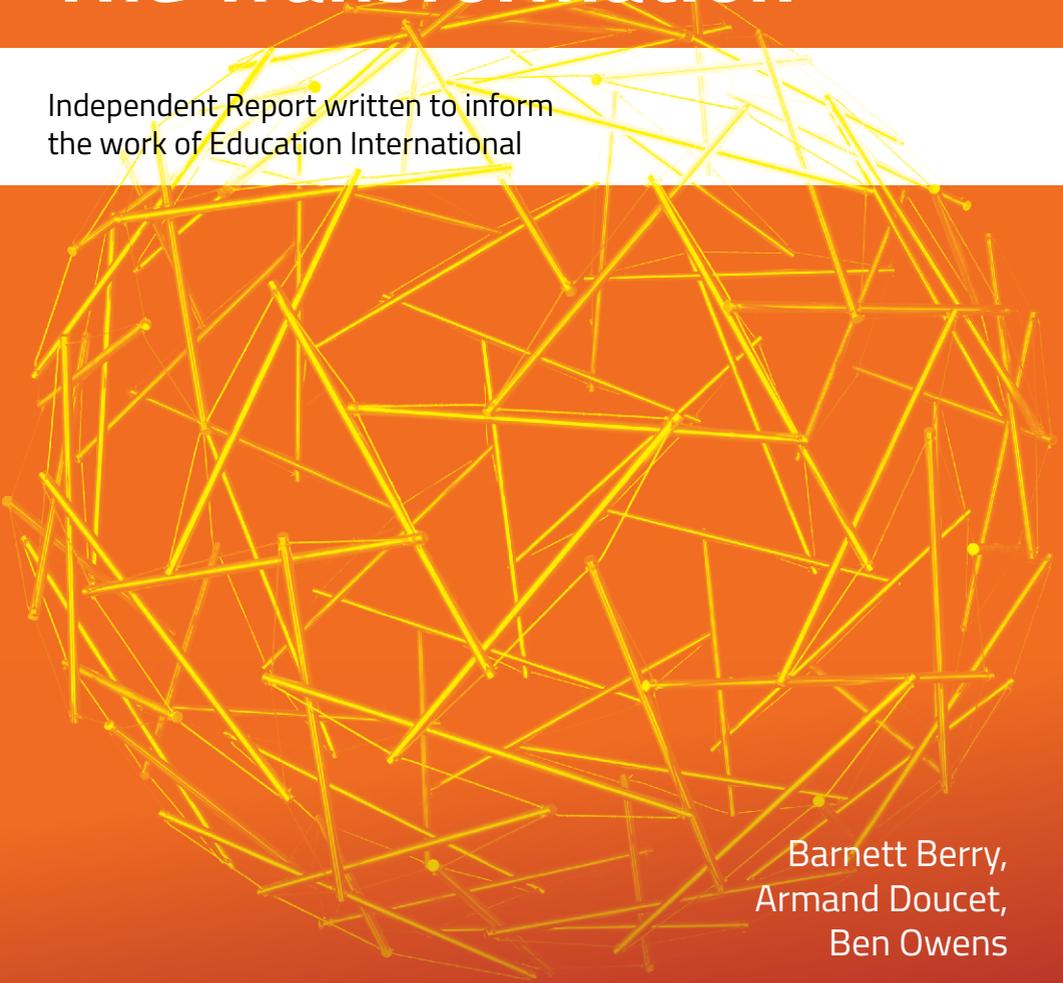


Teacher Leadership
in the Aftermath
of a Pandemic

The Now, The Dance, The Transformation

Independent Report written to inform
the work of Education International



Barnett Berry,
Armand Doucet,
Ben Owens

May 2020

About the authors:

Barnett Berry

is a research professor at the University of South Carolina where he lead [ALL4SC](#)—where the assets of the entire university are marshalled to serve the needs of high need public school communities. He was founder of the Center for Teaching Quality, a non-profit incubator of teacher leadership, working with 1000s of teachers from across the globe. For over 40 years Barnett has supported, as researcher and advocate, the professionalization of teaching to advance a more equitable public education system and improved outcomes for every student. He has published widely in both peer-review and trade journals and is author of *Teaching 2030* as well as *Teacherpreneurs: Innovative Teachers Who Lead Without Leaving*. Contact: Berrybw@mailbox.sc.edu

Armand Doucet M.S.M., M.Ed.

is one of the world's foremost pracademics and teachers in education for this Digital Age. He is a sought-after leader, inspirational speaker, coach, columnist, author of *Teaching Life: Our Calling, Our Choices, Our Challenges* in Routledge's Best-selling *Leading Change Series* with Pak Tee Ng, Andy Hargreaves, Michael Fullan etc. He is also the lead author of the best-selling book *Teaching in the Fourth Industrial Revolution: Standing at the Precipice* (Routledge 2018). He has spoken to tens of thousands of teachers on every continent and key international organizations such as UNESCO, WEF and OECD. He has received the Governor General Award for Teaching Excellence in History (2017), Canadian Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence (2015), is a Meritorious Service Medal Recipient Governor General of Canada, is an Apple Distinguished Educator, Teach SDGs Ambassador, and has recently been nominated in the Top 50 for the Global Teacher Prize.

Contact: armand.c.doucet@gmail.com

Ben Owens

worked as an engineer for 20 years before becoming a math and physics teacher for 11 years at a Teacher Powered and wall-to-wall Project-Based Learning school in rural Appalachia. After co-authoring the book "Open Up, Education!" in 2018, Ben founded the nonprofit, Open Way Learning, and now helps schools create the cultural conditions for localized, learner-centered innovation. Ben was the 2017 Bridging the Gap Distinguished Teacher in STEM Education; the 2016 North Carolina Center for Science, Mathematics, & Technology Outstanding 9-16 Educator; a member of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Teacher Advisory Council; and a Hope Street Group National Teaching Fellow. He is on the National Faculty for PBLWorks, a member of Transcend's Yellow Hats League, and is an Open Organization Ambassador.

Contact: Ben.openwaypbl@gmail.com

The views, recommendations and conclusions in this document are those of the author/s, unless explicitly stated otherwise, and are not necessarily endorsed by Education International. All reasonable precautions have been taken to verify the information contained in this publication. However, the published material is being distributed without warranty of any kind, either expressed or implied. Neither Education International nor any person acting on its behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Teacher Leadership
in the Aftermath
of a Pandemic

The Now, The Dance, The Transformation

Independent Report written to inform
the work of Education International

Barnett Berry, Armand Doucet, Ben Owens

May 2020



*This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).
(CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)*

Cover image:

Tensegrity sphere model, based on a geodesic sphere. Geodesic spheres (structures of triangular components arranged to make a sphere) become stronger as they become bigger, due to how they distribute stress over their surfaces. As a sphere gets bigger, the volume it encloses grows much faster than the mass of the enclosing structure itself.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Executive Summary | 1 |
| Education Turned upside-down | 4 |
| Online Learning No Panacea | 6 |
| Teacher Leadership and a Reason for Hope | 13 |
| The Teacher Leadership That is Now Needed | 18 |
| Re-imagining the Education Profession for Teacher Leadership | 22 |
| Recommendations | 25 |

Executive Summary

Across the globe the COVID-19 pandemic has turned everyone's life upside-down. This includes anyone involved in public schooling — students, parents, or educators. The pandemic has exposed gross inequities in public education system, and the power of teacher networks and leadership from, by, and for teachers. Teachers, as they physically distance from their students and each other, they have double-down on their social networks to spread innovations in teaching and learning as well as family engagement. It is time for school systems, worldwide, to capitalize on and serve the kind of teacher leadership needed to place students at the center of their learning.

Our recommendations are grounded in science of learning, the research on how teachers spread their expertise and lead, and evidence of how classroom experts are collaborating as well as how the world's medical expertise is foreshadowing the future. We call for three waves of action – **The Now**, **The Dance** (part past/part future) and **The Transformation**.

The Now: We must begin by strengthening existing systems of teacher leadership — identifying how teachers are leading and recognizing them in any number of ways. School system leaders will serve a very important role in helping teachers spread their expertise and have their evidence-based stories inform colleagues as well as parents and policy leaders.

1. Administrators conduct online surveys to document how teachers innovated in the time of school closures.
2. Schools offer teachers opportunities to create new programs to address social-emotional as well as academic needs of students as they return to school.

3. Government improves internet access and ensures every child and family has access to hardware, software, and broadband needed to participate fully with educators.

The Dance: Educators will rethink people and programs and accelerate the development of learning teams that are inquiry-driven and spurred by the spread of affinity networks.

4. School systems create and operationalize teacher leadership standards and formally recognize how classroom practitioners spread their expertise to each other.
5. School system reallocate time and teaching schedules and calendars in order to increase teacher-led inquiry- up to 10 hours a week to drive action and innovations.
6. School systems use teacher leadership to reinvent assessment, and transcend current standardized testing for sorting and grading to pivot toward more useful, improvement-oriented accountability system.

The Transformation: A pre-primary-to-higher education system is unified with other community-based organizations, offering physical and social-emotional health supports, afterschool programs, and workforce development training as school schedules and calendars are overhauled so teachers can teach as well as lead.

7. Government offers incentives to harness cross-sector learning teams to build networks of pre-primary, primary, secondary school, university, community and technical college, and other professionals that center brick and mortar schools as hubs of their communities;
8. School systems recognize teacher leadership, through compensation and workplace conditions, as central to creating a coherent system of teaching, learning, and caring.

9. Government support alignment of resources for cross-sectoral partnerships that use data, evidence, and technology to support a seamless Birth to School to Career strategy.

COVID-19 has made painfully clear: Public schools everywhere face a future of rapid change, intensifying complexity, and growing uncertainty. It is time for us to connect, learn, and lead together with teachers at the forefront of the transformation.

Education Turned upside-down

Across the globe the COVID-19 pandemic has turned everyone's life upside-down. This includes anyone involved in public schooling — students, parents, or educators. Most governments have temporarily closed schools, now (as of 19 April) affecting over 1.5 billion students in 191 countries. The pandemic has laid bare the difficulties of distance learning and reaching and teaching students in a crisis.

Let's be clear: The first order of business for educators, in the midst of massive school closures, has been to make sure their students are safe, fed and have access to as many social programs as possible. The second priority has been to find a way to continue a plan of learning. In both cases the pandemic is exposing and exacerbating the deep inequities that have long shaped public education across the globe.

Teaching and learning during a pandemic are of importance, but health, safety and wellbeing must come first at all times. Schools and teachers must operate with an understanding of the complexities of home lives and the mental, emotional and physical strain their communities are facing. Basic needs before higher order ones. It is Maslow before Bloom.

— Armand Doucet

In many countries, Herculean efforts have been made to get essential meals delivered or made accessible to students daily, mental health services up and running and to getting bandwidth access for all students. Countless blogs and YouTube videos make starkly visible how very different schools are in their readiness to engage, teach, and serve the needs of students — from toddlers in pre-primary education to teenagers in high school. Across the globe many non-educators, policymakers and business leaders

have been alerted to the important non-academic roles public schools play and the services they provide.

The school closures have elevated the importance of brick-and-mortar schools as important social hubs for students and their families. For many students schools are often the only place where they feel safe. The COVID-19 lock-down has served as a prism to see the rainbow of colours public education offers to young people and their communities.

We're still in the thick of the COVID-19 crisis and we see children struggling with an ever-growing list of needs — food, housing, medical care, physical safety, emotional support, mental health services, tutoring, and much more. We know that many students already come to school from difficult, trauma-inducing home circumstances, and the time away from school has been catastrophic for them. At the same time [*integrating innovations like Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) into the classroom*](#) will be essential for the long-term success of students who must live and work in the midst of the [*Fourth Industrial Revolution*](#) — *but only if risks for students and educators are considered and addressed*. For AI to work for students in their best interests then teachers need to have the time and place for incorporating the tools into teaching, learning, and schooling.

To accelerate our education and economic recovery and address gross health disparities in the wake of the pandemic, the profession of teaching must be reinvented. A *bold brand of teacher leadership* must be finally put into place to address the inequities that COVID-19 has made more visible and visceral. Every day we learn of teachers creating acts of kindness as well as exceptional teaching and learning. They are drawing on their own informal networks, professional associations, teacher unions to both learn from each other and share their expertise. They are showing us how if online learning is going to work well it will be led by teachers.

Online Learning No Panacea

In the midst of the crisis, almost every educator (and parent) is quickly finding out that distance learning is not as straightforward as repositioning a course or class on a Learning Management System or Video conferencing website — especially as the expectations shift from rote learning of the basics to more personalized, competency-based, student-led learning and critical thinking.

This should come at no surprise.

Rachel Meyen, an elementary school teacher in the U.S. told Ben about her colleague, Brianne Starin who create a powerful pedagogical innovation, designed for teaching in the midst of the school closures.

Brianne taught herself how to create a virtual escape room for her students as a way to review math in a new fun way. The students absolutely loved it and she had a high number of students participate in the escape room activity... even getting videos from some students afterwards telling her how fun the assignment was and how much they loved it (and want to do it again). Taking it a step further and sharing her success with others, she created & organized a professional development session to teach other educators at our school. She had a really great turn-out, with even had instructional assistants signing up to learn how to do use her strategy.

— Ben Owens

The 2018 *Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS)* found that only 56% of teachers (across the 38 nations participating) received training in the use of technology for teaching as part of their formal education. In addition, the OECD survey found that only 43% of teachers felt well or very well prepared when they completed their initial education or training.

Since the mass closures, teachers and administrators have turned to a wide array of platforms to connect with and continue to educate their students via Learning Management Systems, video conferencing, emails, tele-classes, and radio. Government agencies, universities, and non-profits have produced a plethora of reports and resources for teachers (and parents) to use during the COVID-19-forced school closures.

As recently [reported](#), in China over 120 million students have sat in front of their televisions; and in Lebanon, physical education went online, where students took and edited videos of how they were learning to use technology through exercise and sports activities.

Our internet searches quickly taught us how across the globe educators have been engaged in a massive, and often not well planned, experiment in online learning. In the midst of the anxiety and pain the virus has caused, we found a smile in the [viral video](#) of an Israeli mother as she railed against distance learning after schools were shuttered. While only anecdotal, it seemed that only a few nations, such as Finland, Uruguay and Singapore, have proven to be well prepared to effectively meet the social and academic needs of their students. A powerful *Education Week* [story](#) recently reported on U.S. teachers who are both “exhausted and grieving” from a “tangle of dynamics” as they are pressed to use unfamiliar technologies and retrofit classroom lessons into online ones while being “inundated” with emails, texts, and calls from principals, parents, and students.

Many recent school reforms of late offered the promise of technology to disrupt and revolutionize schooling. The school shut-downs have laid bare that online learning is no panacea. Now school reformers of late are taking a harder look at [studies of virtual schooling](#), which have uncovered poor academic results and serious challenges in maintaining student engagement. Yes, [extensive resources](#) for personalized, 24/7 teaching and learning abound – but schools and educators as are not well organized to use them effectively. Many schools have copied and pasted their in-school curriculum into an outer-school one. A U.S. teacher,

sequestered at home by COVID-19 with his own children while teaching his students, *said it best*:

A few days ago I experienced a mini-Covid-19 educator meltdown. NPR was blaring news about the frightening virus surge and lack of ventilators in New York City, and President Trump was talking about opening the country up by Easter. My fourth-grade daughter was on Google Classroom and the application was crashing. My son was trying to do his second-grade German lesson, didn't understand the directions and was frustrated that his dad couldn't help him. I was late for my fourth Zoom meeting of the day, and my recently cleared inboxes were all full again. Then I opened an email from a colleague containing the latest draft teaching schedule which momentarily gave me the impression that I would be expected to be at my laptop physically teaching live classes via video conference from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. every day, including office hours during lunch.

We have learned of many ill-suited decisions made without the input of teachers, those who work most closely with students. A Canadian teacher told us:

The levels of stress for families is something else, plus the fact that the pressure they are putting on teachers to complete all the work on a schedule is ridiculous. And, I haven't even started on the fact that half my class don't have any technology at home and I need to phone every student and figure out a way to get their work to me.

The digital divide is even deeper. COVID-19 has exposed the hard, cold fact of the digital divide and gross inequities across and within nations. Over half of the world's population still has no access to the internet. We have seen how the Allan Gray Orbis Foundation has worked with local partners and educators in South Africa to take care of food, bandwidth and hardware needs of young people and their families. Even before the pandemic, about 12 million (or 1 in 5) students across the United States had no broadband

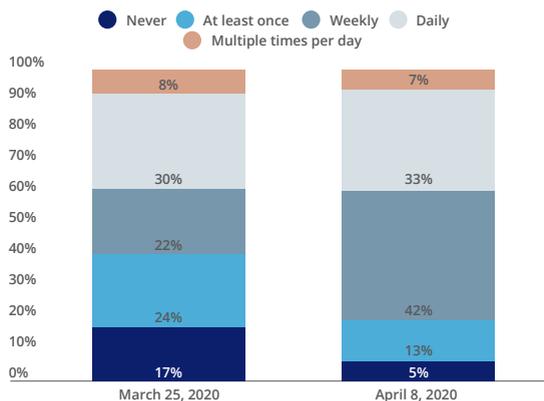
access at home, a necessity to participate in meaningful online learning. Kevin Huffman, former State Commissioner of Education in Louisiana (U.S.), painfully told the story of how “erratic” virtual learning can be. He also [pointed to](#) how little the U.S. has invested in its most vulnerable students, and the inequities COVID-19 has made more evident

The mother next door has seven kids and no computers. The family up the street has no Internet. I’m afraid some families aren’t going to do anything because some families simply can’t do anything.

A recent U.S. survey found when teachers interact with students, it’s most likely to occur via email. The quantity of the communication is quite uneven, and as of April 8th, only 39% of teachers reported they were able to connect (not necessarily teach) with their students on a daily basis (see graph to right). Even as teachers ramp up their efforts and draw on new tools, they report that over 1 in 5 students are essentially “truant” during the online lessons (not logging in, not making contact, etc.). Inequities abound. The percentages are highest among districts in which more than three-quarters of students are from low-income families. Nearly 1 in 3 students in those communities are not participating in remote learning, compared with 12 percent in districts in which a quarter or fewer students live in poverty.

As [reported in Education Week](#), even teachers who are well-prepared to teach in a blended-learning environment, and their school districts can offer 1-to-1 computing, are “haunted by the no-shows” and inability to authentically connect with their students. Theresa Bruce, who teaches 8th grade social studies in a U.S. school, said:

Since your school closed due to Coronavirus, how often have you interacted with the majority of your students?



When I'm (physically) with them, I can see what's really going on with them....But digitally, they can hide it: Their joy. Their depression. Anybody can put their game face on for an hour on Zoom.

Granted many teachers are unprepared for adopting new technologies. Administrators and teachers worry their training—including programs that offer degrees—have not sufficiently equipped them with the skills to incorporate digital technologies into classrooms and curricula. However, we also have seen how teachers, who have already moved to more student-centered, technologically fueled (not driven) teaching and learning are leading the way. (See sidebar.)

Teacher leadership is emerging. COVID-19 has exposed the need for not just more broadband and hardware for so many students but also the importance of teachers in leading the way in creating more student-centered strategies from the existing curricula. No complete global inventory of teacher leadership programs or their effects exist — at least to our knowledge. However, we have

“A university colleague recently shared how a traditional elementary school in the U.S. suburbs he is working with reported that around 40% of their students are not completing the at home/online assignments during the COVID-19 crisis. Contrast that to a middle school teacher in a nearby city, who is steeped in how to facilitate, project-based lessons that give students a high degree of flexibility to direct their learning for things they care about. She and her colleagues are consistently at or near 100% participation. Her online student-centered classes are like her in-school ones, where open ended problems drive the curriculum, students have lots of voice and choice in what they work on, and her school invests considerable time in the schedule on teacher-student relationships through their advisory program. These examples highlight what we should already know: relationships matter and students will naturally find a way to engage in what has meaning to them.”

— Ben Owens

learned anecdotally of how teachers have turned to each other in the time of school closures:

- Offering simple technical assistance in using new technologies;
- Curating resources for each other,
- Developing new innovative pedagogies in the face of the shared ordeal of the pandemic, and
- Using social media platforms to share resources from around the world.

Teacher leaders are finding ways to incubate novel pedagogical and policy ideas, test them for effectiveness, pivot when needed, and spread them to their colleagues.

Teachers are all over social media, the internet, and libraries in a massive drive to lead their own professional learning. Yes, and many non-profits are drawing on teacher experts to help each other in the 24/7 professional learning platforms. However, we also are seeing teachers collaborate with each other as they navigate through the noise created by education entrepreneurs who are elbowing their way into the system in order to fix schools. *In the midst of this crisis we have seen the real stuff of teacher leadership.*

Over the last several weeks we have participated in dozen of webinars with English, American, and Australian teachers. In each of them, teachers reported struggling with student engagement due to the cancellation of standardized

Many of these school systems have double down on what has proven to be costly mistakes in approaches to delivering education.

I can't say I'm too impressed with our school board. We are expected to do report cards based on the homework students are sending in, only put comments of course. They are not listening to teachers, parents or students. They are taking a dictatorial approach without any empathy, trying to show they are in control of the situation without understanding what's happening at all with students.

I feel like I'm on the Titanic and the parents are very stressed out as there is a lot of pressure put on them and the kids to make sure all of their work is done on time. We even have to check in when it's not done, regardless of situation.

— Canadian teacher

tests and administrators still pressing them to get students ready for the test.

And we have seen, over the last two decades, how this test-based approach to education has *not moved the needle* on student achievement. In the U.S., where the *“fix the teacher” approach to education reforms* have been in place for at least two decades, student achievement has not improved, but flatlined. Even *Forbes Magazine* has seen the “fallacy of top-down education reform.”

We keep reading and hearing more about how teacher leaders are innovating with the spectre of high stakes accountability tests hovering over them. We also have learned of powerful examples of *pedagogy in an unfolding pandemic* (authored by Armand and colleagues). At the Beijing City International School for elementary students, which *showcases innovative teaching and learning* in the midst of COVID-19, administrators and teachers work together shifting an ethos of family from school to online learning. Teacher discretion and leadership has been at the core of the pivot from face-to-face to online learning. We have many reasons for hope.

Teacher Leadership and a Reason for Hope

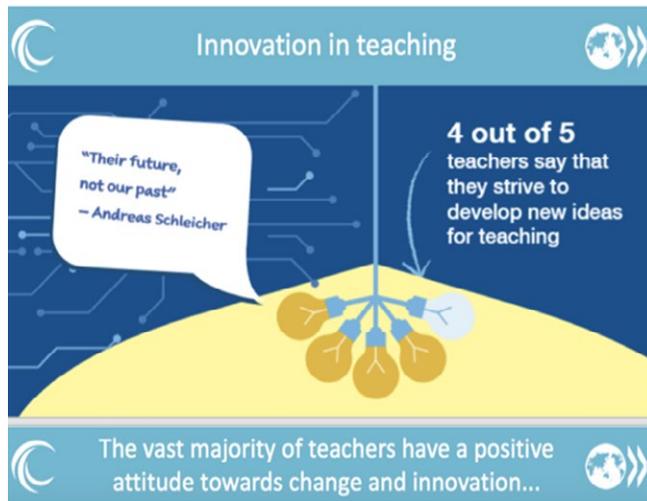
Teachers around the world are leading the charge in finding new ways to try and reach each and every child. We do know from the recent TALIS results that 4 of 5 teachers worldwide report that they strive to develop new ideas for teaching.

However, teacher-led innovations can be stifled with the wrong leadership approach from school, district or department leadership. They can be undermined by ill-advised policy managerial decisions that don't take into account the individual context of schools.

Nevertheless, we also know of growing numbers of teachers working with and learning from each other in increasing numbers of affinity networks — like the [*global educator network of the National Geographic Society*](#). Teachers all over

the world are connecting with their students to check-in on them emotionally, first and foremost, and then gauging what they can handle in terms of academic learning. They are using every tool at their disposal — text, phone, television, radio, and learning management or video conferencing systems as well as virtual reality (VR). Many are experimenting with other previously unimaginable forms of pedagogies.

We have learned that many more teachers are engaged in rapid prototyping and agile innovation. Teachers are shifting the



emphasis away from abstract tasks and arbitrary time constraints by finding ways to co-design individualized learning activities and challenges that provide more agency and flexibility for topics and problems students care about.

Teachers who may have spent a career in relative isolation are now building virtual networks with peers from around the world to share and adapt crowdsourced ideas that better prepare students with the skills to thrive in a rapidly changing world instead of just on a test. Moreover, the fact that there has been no rulebook for how to deal with this crisis has helped scale a concept in the education space that other professions have known for some time: authentic leadership emerges from collective action and good ideas, not just positional authority.

Shannon Hardy is one of many a U.S. teachers working with Ben Owens and [OpenWay Learning](#). She has prototyped a number of innovative lessons, including her NC [Endangered unit](#) that is now featured for [PBLWorks](#) – a non-profit advancing student-centered, project-based learning. Shannon and teaching colleagues are collaborating to create a webinar for NC Service Learning and now working with [Design for Change](#) (helping children across the globe to become creative, proactive, empathetic and responsible citizens) and their current campaign [#DoGoodFromHome](#).



Teachers know all too well the students they are teaching must be prepared to work in this Digital Age with global disrupting events. Teacher leaders are needed more than ever — and there must be a system to cultivate them. As Andreas Schleicher, director of education for OECD, made clear in a powerful, new report from [Hundred.org](#):

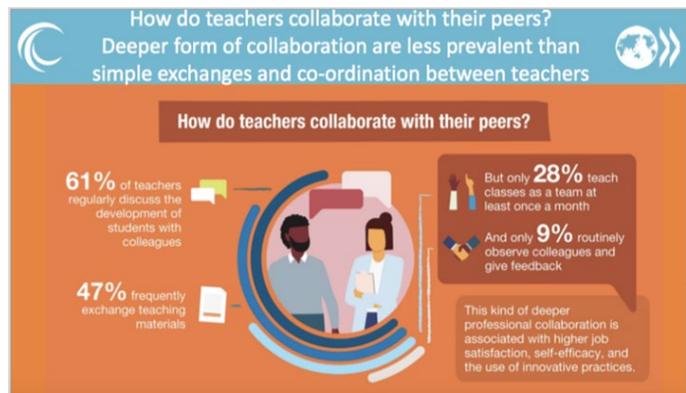
The challenge (with COVID-19) is to build on the expertise of our teachers and school leaders and enlist them in the design of superior policies and practices. This is not accomplished just by letting a thousand flowers bloom; it requires a carefully crafted enabling environment that can unleash teachers' and schools' ingenuity and build capacity for change.

Granted teacher leadership is still a work in progress — in part because most teachers have too little voice in teaching and learning policies as well as limited time and space to learn from each other. As the recent [TALIS report](#) surfaced, only 42% of principals report that teachers have significant involvement in deciding school policies, curriculum and instruction.

With the survey, the two most commonly reported types of teacher collaboration are “discussing the learning development of specific students” (61% of teachers) and “exchanging teaching materials with colleagues” (47%).

However, more extensive forms of professional collaboration — involving team teaching and peer observations — is less common. For example, only 28% of the teachers reported they team teach once a month. And only 9% of teachers noted that they provided observation-based feedback to colleagues at least once a month.

The international survey also pointed to some nations where more powerful forms of authentic collaboration — which is key to the cultivation of teacher leadership — are in place. Singapore, Shanghai, and Finland are powerful examples, demonstrating how both formal and informal approaches can have a powerful impact on student achievement.



Learn from Top-performers. Over the last several years the National Center for Education and the Economy, in partnership with Linda Darling-Hammond and colleagues, [*documented*](#) how top performing nations rose to the top of PISA (Programme for International Student Achievement) rankings by a commitment to empowering educators and professionalizing teaching.

Singapore's system of education is premised on teach less, learn more. Teachers' work is organized along the premise that teaching is "difficult, time- and labor-consuming, and conceptually intricate work." Their weekly work can generally be parsed into four categories: (a) classroom teaching, (b) other direct contact with students such as CCAs and morning assembly, (c) professional learning and community partnerships, and (d) assessing students' work and revising curriculum. Teachers teach students directly no more than 14 hours a week – and they also have access to a career lattice where they can serve in a variety of professional roles while remaining partially in the classroom.

In Singapore, teachers are in front of students teaching only about 12-17 hours a week —and when they aren't teaching, they often form their own research groups to solve problems of practice. They deconstruct one another's lessons. They publish their findings. In Shanghai and Singapore, teachers are prepared in externships and are expected to develop inquiry skills in their preservice preparation programs, which readies them to take on action research as practicing teachers.

In Shanghai, each class of students is assigned a teacher leader called a *banzhuren* who serves as an advisor, consulting with the families, keeping track of the academic progress, and providing counseling to students on social and emotional issues they are facing.

In Finland, teacher leadership is more informal, and not even labeled. Every teacher leads. Teachers are trained as researchers

in model schools connected to the university in master's programs. Each jurisdiction has formal or informal opportunities for teachers to develop pedagogical innovations and participate in school decision making.

In penning *Teacherpreneurs* several years ago, Barnett interviewed two Finnish teachers. Marianna Sydanmaanlakka and Leena Semi, both veterans of classroom teaching. They explained a great deal to him about teacher leadership how and its relationship to Finland's rapid rise as one of the world's top-performing nations.

Leena: *All teachers see themselves as leaders, in one way or another.*

Marianna: *The principal does not really have the highest status in the school....When teachers challenge a principal's ideas, and this happens a lot, he or she will rethink the decision.*

Marianna: *As you may know, they teach as well.... principals are teachers too.*

Leena: *What I get from teachers in the United States is that they are in a hurry all the time—and they are frustrated with what they have to do.*

Marianna: *Teacher leadership is built into our day in Finland....and we are educated to lead and have influence outside of our schools.*

High performing systems focus on the professional learning practices that “the evidence has consistently shown appreciably lifts teacher and student learning” — which in turn uplifts teacher leadership as central to its efforts to both improve and transform teaching and learning.

The Teacher Leadership That is Now Needed

Granted, outside of a few top-performing nations and jurisdictions, teacher leadership is more of an exception than the norm. In the U.S., Barnett has documented how most teacher leadership programs have been designed for a few classroom experts to lead pedagogical reforms defined by others; [*teacherpreneurism*](#) — whereby any practitioner can incubate and execute their own ideas — are all too rare. In too many cases frontline teacher innovation has been disregarded, shunned and disapproved.

There are powerful examples of concerted efforts to recognize and elevate teacher leaders, such as *The Global Teacher Prize*, an annual US \$1 million awarded since 2015 by the [*Varkey Foundation*](#) to elevate the leadership of those who teach students every day. (For its inaugural award, the Foundation received over 5,000 nominations from 127 countries.) The [*Inter-American Teacher Education Network*](#) (ITEN), an initiative of the Organization of American States, networks teacher leaders who are interested in sharing knowledge, experiences and good practices in the teaching profession.

COVID-19 has ripped off the band-aid of top-down reforms of the past, and made more clear about the kind of teacher leadership that is needed, now and in the future. Teacher leadership can no longer be about a few classroom experts who can climb up a few rungs on yet another hierarchical career ladder. All teachers need to lead one way or another. For years non-profits like [*EdCamp*](#) have supported informal teacher leadership and so have the unions. [*Education International*](#) has advanced non-positional teacher leadership that cultivates opportunities to lead without leaving the classroom. It has worked closely with a network of teachers in Hertfordshire in the UK called [*HertsCam*](#) who have created the world's first teacher-moderated Master's Degree. The National Education Association has created its [*Teacher Leadership Institute*](#)

to have those who teach every day to lead a transformed teaching profession. Teacher leadership must be about classroom practitioners that are encouraged, supported, and recognized in a system of distributed or collective leadership that values their deep insights into the needs of their students and families.

As Armand wrote in his book, *Teaching Life: Our Calling, Our Choices, Our Challenges*, “if you build an educational system on an occupational workforce and not a professional one, don’t be surprised when they will not be able to innovate and lead when necessary.” However, in the immediate aftermath of COVID-19, every school system will need more teachers leading by:

- Learning from and with their students, families and colleagues to decide what can truly be delivered during these times based on the individual contexts and realities;
- Communicating with school leadership, collaborating together to design a communication plan and schedule that is flexible based on continuing feedback from their students and their families;
- Collaborating with schools across grade levels in their communities to deliver a teaching and learning curriculum and structure that doesn’t overwhelm parents with multiple kids in multiple schools;
- Testing and building much stronger connections with parents and students as COVID-19 has fueled shared experiences;

Francis Jim Tuscano, a teacher from the Philippines, immediately began working with three colleagues from around the globe when COVID-19 forced the first wave of school closures. Jim began to crowdsource best practice for distance learning around the world to write an independent report for Education International and UNESCO. He did so having to quarantine himself three days into his work due to own coronavirus symptoms. He launched Global Voices: Pondering Over Education and COVID-19 Pandemic. to share best practices with peers globally and create a webinars for professional development on technology and distance learning.

— Armand Doucet

- Designing blended learning experiences that put the student at the centre of their learning based on what they have access to in their homes;
- Developing creative strategies (e.g. play-based collaborative learning, experiential based learning, project based learning, problem based learning and many more) to overcome the severe pedagogical limitations of being physically separated from students;
- Initiating their own informal learning with colleagues and teacher-led professional development;
- Researching and implementing best practices in addressing many of their students' social-emotional needs as well as the grief they are experiencing;
- Capitalizing on increasingly free resources made available by education companies; and
- Experimenting with new strategies to support students in taking charge of their own personalized learning

Over the last month COVID-19 has made us aware of the need to:

- Prepare and recognize teachers as leaders — and many of them; not just a few;
- Demarcate the proper role of online learning environments, not to replace schooling but to spur *innovations* for a more accessible, equitable, and personalized system of education from preK to career and college;
- Organize teachers, administrators, and other professionals outside of public education, with integrated student support systems (that draw on academic, social, emotional, and physical health data) to serve the whole child;
- Reorganize people and programs in school districts, universities, and community organizations to more effectively teach, heal, and mentor young people;
- Imagine how teachers, with more opportunities to learn from each other in growing numbers of affinity networks,

can lead the transformation of teaching and learning; and

- Create more time for teachers to work to contribute to the design and development of digital technologies that matches needs of students and school as defined by communities and the professional educators who serve them.

We are just beginning the third decade of the 21st century, and (even pre-pandemic) teaching is too complicated for one teacher to do it all. The work of schooling demands a larger array of experts, specialists, and generalists working as a team.

Unfortunately, the ability for teachers to engage in such improvement is often inhibited by the legacy model that values isolation over collaboration and where failure is still viewed as a bad thing. With new school designs, teachers of various stripes will need much more room to move in and out of different roles, take on more or less responsibility, focus on more or fewer students, and serve in and out of cyberspace, as well as in and out of their school buildings.

The healthcare industry has increasingly configured its services as team activities rather than individual ones. For some time medical professionals, across the globe, have been breaking down past territorialities, and instead, acting on shared values. For example, the United States has 7 million medical professionals, but only 700,000 physicians — who practice in 130 different specialties. These doctors are supported by many talented professionals, such as nurses, physical therapists, and biomedical engineers. In the future we imagine the same for education, where 3 million teachers collaborate with a wide variety of experts and other professionals from outside of education agencies who support young people. (Tony Bryk, et al, describe how educators can learn from such practices in the healthcare industry in the book, [*Learning to Improve*](#))

Re-imagining the Education Profession for Teacher Leadership

COVID-19 poses enormous challenges, and many educators understandably are more focused on triage not transformation. But the routines have been disrupted — many teachers and administrators are searching for new ways of conducting education, recognizing the need for a coherent system of teaching, learning, and caring. And as Kara Swisher pointed out in a recent [*op-ed in the NY Times*](#), “Tech-driven online schools do not work for the mass of people in any way that inspires learning; and there is a real opportunity to come up with truly creative solutions to allow more students to thrive.”

Reinventing the education profession in the aftermath of COVID-19 must begin by transcending the stark divisions of labor between

administrators and teachers — and even the few teacher leaders who can take a step or 2 up on any number of traditional career ladder programs that have come and gone over the last several years. It also begins with moving beyond a simple idea: The vast majority of the 60 million teachers worldwide do not have to be responsible for almost every aspect of teaching and learning for just their own students and inside the four walls of their classroom in a lock-step hour by hour block of instruction.

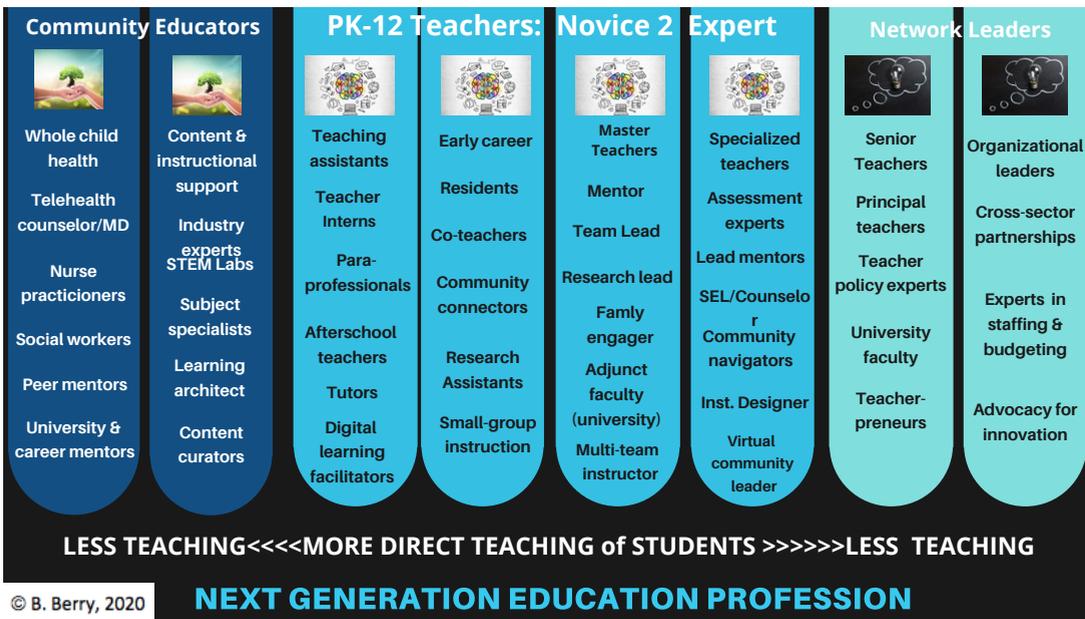
A decade ago Barnett and 12 teaching colleagues penned [*Teaching 2030*](#), where school systems would rethink people and programs as well as time,

The old adage, “never let a crisis go to waste,” seems apt at the moment. In unprecedented times like these, when things are perilous for so many, we need our policy makers, school reformers, and educators to seek solutions outside the usual places. Now is the time for a bold brand of teacher leadership and a re-commitment to our public education systems across the globe.

— Barnett Berry

talent, and treasure of school systems and social and health care agencies to make teaching a more possible job and to reach the whole child. We called for an array of apprentices, adjunct, and virtual teachers — whose work would be organized and supervised by career master teachers who would have recognition and reward (and time) to do so.

Now momentum is growing, even globally, as the [Education Commission](#) is now advancing new educator workforce designs that harness learning teams that use common evidence to transform teaching and learning. In the U.S., [Arizona State University](#) is demonstrating the role of teacher education in the redesign of the teaching profession that defines new roles for student teachers and creates team structures for in-service educators.



We see administrators and teachers together re-imagining staffing schools in more than 1.0 Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), like we see in Singapore’s system of education and what is prevalent in higher education. Then we begin to consider how school systems can draw on professionals from different sectors to serve the whole child — and how cross sector collaboration can free up time and

money and bring together once-siloed teachers. We see a core group of well-prepared, fully licensed teachers in the middle and at the heart of education delivery system. They meet the highest standards of practice, like our best trained and well-utilized medical doctors who work with a wide array of specialists, technicians, experts, volunteers, university faculty and students. Teachers from novice to expert work with a wide range of community educators and network (or system leaders). The Next Generation Education Profession can look, according to Barnett, very different than the one today.

We see school communities sharing expert teachers in online communities and with other people and programs from other sectors. We see government agencies encouraging and funding the kind of collaboration needed for the future of teaching, learning, and caring.

We see paraprofessionals as well as interns, student teachers, and resident grow in expertise in a more coherent system of professional preparation. We see our very best teachers become learning facilitators who serve in different roles based upon the needs of their students, schools, and communities. We see the re-thinking of lockstep teacher career and compensation systems that have ensured uniformity and predictability for teachers and the school boards in past — but also has stifled creativity and access for high quality teaching for every learner.

Recommendations

As Armand noted there is much work to do **now** to serve the basic needs of young people in the aftermath of COVID-19. Then there is **a dance** where educators begin to work in a system that is part past, and part future. Next comes **transformation**. This is when people and programs as well as time, talent, and treasure of many organizations come together in creating a system of teaching, learning, and caring. With transformation we see [community schooling](#) anchored by teacher leaders and a reimaged education profession.

The Now: Policymakers and educators must begin by strengthening existing systems of teacher leadership — identifying how teachers are leading and recognizing them in any number of ways. School system leaders will serve a very important role in helping teachers spread their expertise and have their evidence-based stories inform colleagues as well as parents and policy leaders. Teachers are offered both time and training to lead. Government offers incentive for districts to collaborate with universities and non-profits to prepare pre- and in-service teachers to lead in the aftermath of COVID-19.

- 01.** Administrators conduct online surveys to document how teachers innovated in the time of school closures.
- 02.** Schools offer teachers opportunities to create new programs to address social-emotional as well as academic needs of students as they return to school.
- 03.** Government improves internet access and ensures every child and family has access to hardware, software, and broadband needed to participate fully with educators.

The Dance: Educators will rethink people and programs and accelerate the development of learning teams. Current school professional learning communities will become inquiry-driven.

Policymakers create new funding streams for more teachers to innovate. School systems will use teacher expertise developed and spread by affinity networks.

04. School systems create and operationalize teacher leadership standards and formally recognize how classroom practitioners spread their expertise to each other.
05. School system reallocate time and teaching schedules and calendars in order to increase teacher-led inquiry-up to 10 hours a week to drive action and innovations.
06. School systems use teacher leaders to reinvent assessment, and transcend current standardized testing for sorting and grading to pivot toward more useful, improvement oriented accountability system.

The Transformation: A pre-primary-to-higher education system is unified with other community-based organizations, offering physical and social-emotional health supports, afterschool programs, and workforce development training. School schedules and calendars are overhauled so teachers can teach as well as lead. Schools as community hubs, in collaboration with public libraries and nearby colleges and universities create a more seamless system of cradle to career, competency-based system of teaching and learning.

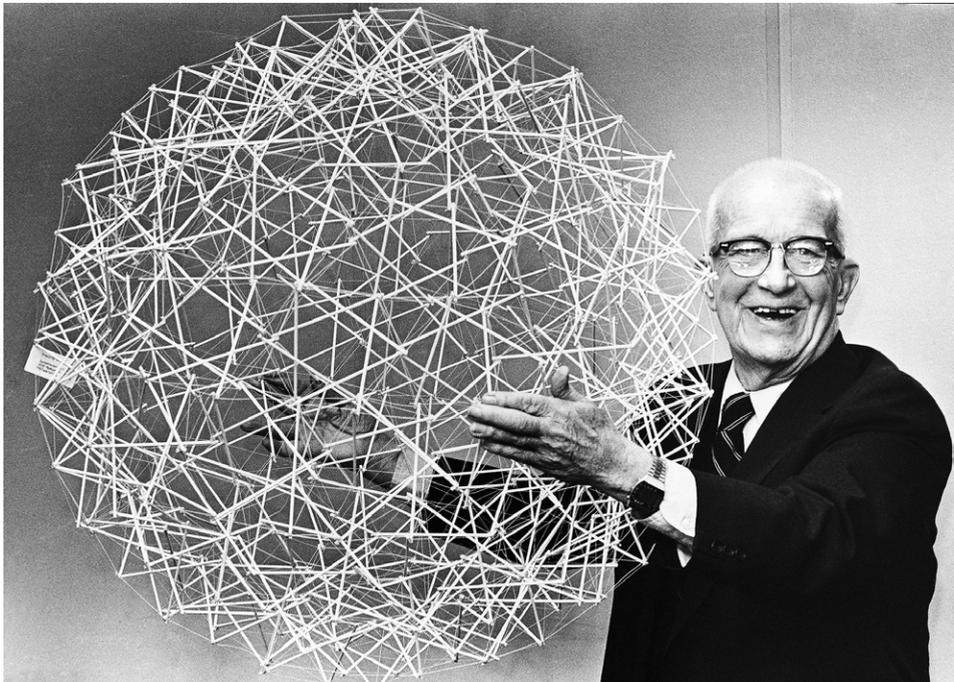
07. Government offers incentives to harness cross-sector learning teams to build networks of pre-primary, primary, secondary school, university, community and technical college, and other professionals that center brick and mortar schools as hubs of their communities;
08. School systems recognize teacher leadership, through compensation and workplace conditions, as central to creating a coherent system of teaching, learning, and caring.
09. Government support alignment of resources for cross-sectoral partnerships that use data, evidence, and technology to support a seamless Birth to School to Career strategy.

The reinvention of teaching and learning and the education profession that will prepare students for a world that is more connected than ever—cannot be fully realized by changes in one school, one district, or even one country. Public schools everywhere face a future of rapid change, intensifying complexity, and growing uncertainty. It is time for us to connect, learn, and lead together. Buckminster Fuller noted many years ago:

“You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.”

Let’s build those models now.

R. Buckminster Fuller holds up a Tensegrity sphere. 18th April, 1979.



Source: Buckminster Fuller ©POET ARCHITECTURE via Flickr Licence Public Domain Mark 1.0



[This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/)

(CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

You are free to:

Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format

Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material

Under the following terms:

Attribution — You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

NonCommercial — You may not use the material for commercial purposes.

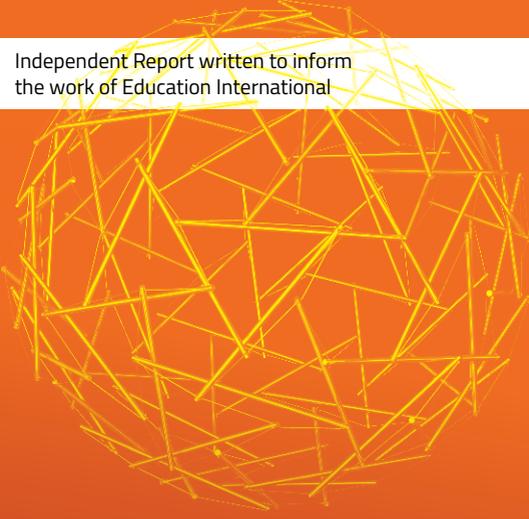
ShareAlike — If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original.

The views, recommendations and conclusions in this document are those of the author/s, unless explicitly stated otherwise, and are not necessarily endorsed by Education International. All reasonable precautions have been taken to verify the information contained in this publication. However, the published material is being distributed without warranty of any kind, either expressed or implied. Neither Education International nor any person acting on its behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Teacher Leadership
in the Aftermath
of a Pandemic

The Now, The Dance, The Transformation

Independent Report written to inform
the work of Education International



Barnett Berry,
Armand Doucet ,
Ben Owens

May 2020



*This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).
(CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)*