MY EXPERIENCE RELATED TO COVID-19, AS A TEACHER

1) Since 11th March 2020 when WHO declared a global COVID-19 pandemic, many countries have taken steps to mitigate the spread of the Coronavirus across the world and in Africa, including **closing of schools**.

2) Prolonged closures negatively impact all students and disproportionately affect the most deprived and vulnerable students. Also, their time out of school present economic burdens for busy parents who face challenges finding prolonged childcare, or even adequate food in the absence of school meals. Many of the families must work in order put food on the table. This further makes them vulnerable to easily contract the virus. Many children view their parents as caretakers but not teachers. This makes it hard for parents to facilitate learning at home. This is made even worse when some children believe that learning can only take place at school but not at home.

3) COVID has forced parents to be teachers and forcing everyone - students, parents, and teachers - to adapt to online learning tools.

Challenges raised by the parents include:

- ❑ intermittent power supply,
- ❑ poor internet connectivity,
- ❑ limited learning resources,
- ❑ social distancing has isolated them from their fellow students which has restricted them to stick to study individually as opposed to interactive group discussions, no guided schedule,
- ❑ unconducive learning environment due to different activities within the immediate surrounding,
- ❑ inadequate parenting and pedagogical skills to guide their children at home, has made them highly vulnerable to drug abuse, teenage pregnancies and young marriages.

4) Safety online and offline: As more children use the internet for learning, they become increasingly vulnerable to online sexual exploitation and abuse.

5) At home, children lack proper time management skills as they are expected to maintain their own schedules and develop good study habits.

6) Academic gaps driven by inequality and the digital divide has been experienced.

7) Bringing the students together even through remote learning has been hard since majority do not have mobile phones or computers (they must borrow them from their parents). Some phones cannot support online learning programs. Furthermore, purchasing internet data bundles is quite expensive.

8) Low level of computer literacy, adaptability struggle, and self-motivation.

9) Children of the current generation will grow up remembering and associating the year 2020 with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

HOW COVID-19 HAS AFFECTED ME AS A TEACHER

1. As a teacher, I feel physically separated from my students, educators, and colleague teachers. Thus, denied me an opportunity to listen to their nonverbal communication.

2. My usual daily schedule (going to school every day to teach) has been affected. All the activities that were due to take place have been paralyzed such as classroom teaching, Pastoral care, STEM and Peace club activities, and guidance and counselling program.

3. Unlike at school, there is a lot of freedom and less restrictions to manage personal schedule. This has made me to be self-driven in terms of time management and finding meaningful ways to cope with the pandemic

4) During this pandemic, my role as a teacher has changed. I now focus on facilitating learning for my students:

❑ Guiding them how learn instead of just acting as a source of knowledge.

❑ linking them to other students / resource materials.

❑ Wall less Classrooms

❑ Borderless classroom.

❑ Educating citizens in an interconnected world

HOW I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO ADJUST TO THIS CONTEXT

1) Tried to reach out to my students through remote teaching such as WhatsApp (sharing educational contents and sending assignments)

2) Attempting to teach my students to be resilient and to have hope be aware about what a virus is and how its spreads.

3) Participating in online forums and discussions (such as on podcasts, radio, and TV programs) on how to manage and deal with COVID-19 and to guide, engage and motivate learners to continue learning.

4) Considering COVID-19 pandemic, as a great opportunity to reflect, learn and plan on how best to make this world a better and peaceful place for us all. Lessons learnt from the previous global crises and emergencies (caused by violence, draught, floods and diseases such as Cholera, Ebola and SARS) should be useful towards dealing with the current pandemic. Social-economic gaps and inequities existing have apparently been exposed. it is a great opportunity to address them once for all in readiness for any possible future crises.

5) It is an opportunity for learning: I have learnt a lot about different options that can be used to facilitate learning such as ZOOM for webinars and interactive learning.

6) Collaborating with parents with an objective of addressing (educational) challenges facing students when they must stay at home.

7) All the STEM club activities with my students are now being conducted online through organizations such as Innovate Kenya (our STEM club has partnered with them). Students can now participate in STEM fairs and make their presentations to online STEM judges. This has motivated many of my students to continue studying science subjects, including girls.

MY RECOMMENDATIONS:

(HOW EDUCATORS CAN PROMOTE LEARNING AND SOCIO-EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING OF LEARNERS IN THIS CONTEXT)

A. DURING THE PANDEMIC

1) **Solutions to keep children learning where there is no internet**: Where internet is not available in the current crisis, governments should provide guidelines and support to parents for home schooling. They should prioritise quality content focused on building basic literacy and numeracy and using the mass media broadly used by the general population (such as through educational podcast, radio, and TV programmes).

2) **Training to safeguard children online:** Teachers are not just educators: they provide vital pastoral care and in normal circumstances can be crucial in identifying problems children may be experiencing at home. Lockdowns in many countries can exacerbate domestic problems young people face including violence and abuse. Schools should be given the resources to provide guidance and train their teachers on how to continue to support their students with pastoral care when they are not in school. Governments should provide guidelines and tools for online safety.

3) Nutritious free meals: For many children from low income families, school is the only place they can rely on a nutritious meal. Funding for free school meals should be protected even where schools are not open, and this should be channelled into food support for those children at home who relied on free meals at school. The most deprived and vulnerable children (homeless children, those living in deep poverty and students with disabilities) should also be not be forgotten. For instance, there is a need to provide sanitary towels for girls.

B. AFTER THE PANDEMIC

1) **Reliable internet access for all:** The crisis has forced schools to rapidly move online with little preparation. In Africa, only 47% have access, leaving many behind. We must ensure our continent is ready for the next crisis and push for the roll out of reliable and stable internet connections as swiftly as possible. Advocate for schools and other learning institutions to be connected to the internet and to become hubs for providing internet access in deprived communities.

2) **No education cuts:** Once the crisis is over, many countries will find themselves in a deep recession with public funds drained in response to coronavirus. Governments will be looking to balance their budgets but rebuilding the economy and tackling the enormous challenges ahead, not least avoiding destructive political upheaval, will require a well-educated population. Education budgets must be protected and governments across the world should ensure education remains a top priority.

3) **A safe environment for teachers and pupils:** When and where schools reopen, with input from teachers, governments should provide a safe working and learning environment for teachers and pupils. Make school environments more hospitable. Also, governments should bring in social distancing and other protective measures within schools where necessary.

4) **Training to teach online:** Teachers in many schools where online learning is an option are rapidly having to learn to teach remotely. Comprehensive training should be provided to help these teachers adapt to teaching online including in both the use of technology and effective practices to keep students engaged in their learning.

5) **Fasttrack EdTech strategies**: There is a need for governments to have a comprehensive strategy to ensure technology assists teachers effectively and improves learning outcomes. In consultation with teachers, they should put in place EdTech strategies as soon as possible to assist learning inside and outside the classroom. It is particularly important to address this before the next crisis hits. Not all teachers are fully prepared to teach their lessons remotely or adequately integrate technology into their classwork

Therefore, all educators should appreciate the fact that:

❑ "Technology will not replace great teachers but technology in the hands of great teachers can be transformational," - George Couros.

❑ "Technology will not replace teachers, but teachers who do not use technology will be replaced," - Dr. Ray Clifford.

6) Generally, there is need to need to **reshape education** based on the 21st century skills and acquisition of global values – helping children to become global citizens so that we can bring humanity to education (Competence Based Learning) Learning is not confined in classrooms or laboratories; it is more effective and efficient when nurtured all the way from home, where learners together with their parents are able to identify activities within the environment that will encourage the children to think more deeply about daily activities.

SOME OF THE ACTIVITIES THAT CAN BE CONDUCTED INCLUDE:

- ❑ learning how to prepare meals,

- ❑ weeding flowers,

- ❑ growing vegetables,

- ❑ planting crops and trees,

- ❑ observing personal hygiene,

- ❑ feeding animals,

- ❑ keeping personal diary,

- ❑ how to construct a composite manure,

- ❑ about table manners,

- ❑ games (such as rope skipping, tug of war and bicycle riding)

- ❑ project work.

THERE IS A NEED TO PROMOTE:

❑ Resilience

❑ Flexibility and adaptability

❑ Creativity and critical thinking

❑ Social-emotional skills

❑ Entrepreneurial skills

❑ Continuous learning

SOLIDARITY/COLLABORATION:

We need to come up with integrated solutions to educational challenges brought by COVID-19 (sharing on the best practices that can be scaled and adopted elsewhere).

THANK YOU

Twitter: @petertabichi

Email: petertabichi@gmail.com