



Never Let a Crisis Go to Waste —

A DISCUSSION WITH DR. YONG ZHAO, APRIL 14, 2020

In times like these, it's easy for scarcity to set in. When schools closed last month, the internet and virtual learning presented a quick and sensible alternative. But despite Herculean efforts and many successes, new problems have emerged. Students lack internet connectivity and personal devices. Teachers face a huge challenge shifting to virtual instruction. School districts differ in the amount of resources they can supply; state and federal administrations battle over the best approach. Where do we go from here?

Dr. Yong Zhao, who studies the effects of globalization and technology on education, isn't fazed by such shifts. And on a webinar entitled "Never Let a Crisis Go to Waste," he shared with the STEM Learning Ecosystems Community of Practice how to leverage the pandemic to change education for the better. He cited many shortfalls in our present model of education, particularly its rigid, competitive environment. Instead, if students were allowed to learn their own skills and uniqueness, he suggested, they could more easily "create value for others," and in turn, "productive inquiries and elegant solutions" would flourish.

Zhao emphasized the rare opportunity that we have to think about unique opportunities for "creativity and entrepreneurship education" on a global scale. Students from around the world could conceivably take on the

COVID-19 pandemic as a "Grand Challenge" learning topic, Jeremy Shorr of TIES suggested. Zhao agreed, estimating that there might be as much as two years' worth of learning material just from pandemic alone. On a smaller scale, Zhao also emphasized the value of portfolios, because they generate an "authentic product."

This pandemic is a "common experience—but one that's experienced differently in different locations." One overarching policy cannot meet every need. Instead, Zhao encouraged listeners not to sit and wish for what we don't have (more connectivity, preparedness, or support), but to take advantage of what we do have. "[In China], we used to send books and packets, have students write letters, pen pals...We used TV broadcasting and phone calls...we still have those technologies available today."

When possible, prioritize project-based learning for students, with more hands-on creation and less instruction. Cultivate your students' self-efficacy, creativity, and value. Encourage

ongoing learning through assessment and feedback. Ask yourself and other educators why you've relied on summative grades and evaluations. Join in the global conversations that are taking place. "Each individual has enough room to change themselves."

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