How to turn challenges into opportunities for education transformation? – WS 10 2020

Janice Richardson

The coronavirus pandemic has completely disrupted education systems across the world, shining the spotlight on huge gaps in terms of infrastructure, content and pedagogical strategies. Data from a 2019 European Commission survey[1] show that, because students lack access to computers and broadband access in most EU schools today, few were prepared to leapfrog into remote learning. Moreover, a majority of teachers and parents lack the knowledge and training necessary to support their online activities. Whilst certain countries have grasped this opportunity to respond to logistical aspects including providing children with digital technology at home the delivery of online lessons[2], broadband access remains an issue for many. Reports from countries such as Finland, Germany and Russia underline the dearth of teachers able to adapt their pedagogical strategies to reach all children and make learning more flexible, customized and meaningful, taking advantage of the wealth of resources at their fingertips. Security, privacy and safety issues have been accentuated by the crisis too.

Empowering children through education calls for a multi-stakeholder approach. Families need to be equipped and informed, teachers require better knowledge-building and training opportunities, and updated curricula and evaluation criteria if they are to fulfil their role in enabling all children to exploit their full learning potential. Industry has an important role to play, safeguarding the tools and platforms young learners are using and ensuring that schools and families are sufficiently supported. Industry has a responsibility to work hand in hand with educators, families and government to build and maintain a solid, reliable technological infrastructure that prioritises rights and privacy over commercial-based interests. The voice of children, too, must be heard and heeded. They are key actors in the transformation that education needs to undergo to meet today's challenges. The digital citizenship education programme developed by the Council of Europe is one striking example of how this can be done.[3]

Janice Richardson is an international expert on digital literacy, children's rights and their online wellbeing. Over the past 3 decades, she has extensively advised governments, institutions (Council of Europe, UNESCO, UNICEF, ITU…) and industry (Facebook, Google, Twitter, Huawei…) on digital education across the world. She is author/co-author of a dozen books, and founding member/coordinator of several networks on literacy-related topics including the European Commission's 30-country Safer Internet network (Insafe) and ENABLE, a network to tackle bullying through social-emotional competency development. Achievements include the creation of Safer Internet Day (celebrated since 2004, now in more than 140 countries), winner of a Facebook Digital Citizenship Grant (2012) and a European Diversity Award (2013) for outstanding use of digital technology in education. She has been expert to the Council of Europe on various topics including digital citizenship and child protection since 2002, co-authoring a half dozen CoE publications. Janice sits on

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[1] https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/2nd-survey-schools-ict-education
[2] https://covid19-edu.eun.org/
[3] file:///Users/janicerichardson/Downloads/CoE-digital-citizenship-handbook.pdf

Facebook's Safety Advisory Board and Youth Advisory Board, Twitter's Trust and Security Council, and the *Power of Zero* steering committee on early childhood education, and is content creator/education expert in Huawei's ongoing SmartBus programme. Since 2017 she has been working with youth and teacher-mentors from 10 EU countries (the European Council for Digital Good) to create digital citizenship games and publications for children, an especially important area of work to support teachers and parents during the coronavirus lockdown.