Reimagining educational leadership during times of crises

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The quick and prevalent spread of COVID-19 has been described as a crisis; a term defined by Coombs as “the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organisations’ performance and generate negative outcomes” (2007, pp. 2-3). Given the current circumstances it is important to view such conceptions in the context of educational settings where crisis within the schools has been described as an “unpredictable event that seriously disrupts the stability and welfare of a school community” (Brock, 2002 cited in Hemmer & Elliff, 2019, p. 2).

The aim of our ongoing research study is to explore educational leadership team members and teachers’ experiences of COVID-19 crisis through the following research question: How did leadership team members and teachers manage and respond to the COVID-19 crisis within their educational setting?

Our research project is an international one and we have been exploring education leadership during the Covid-19 pandemic in China, Australia, Bolivia. Our data collection methods included document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and cognitive mapping, timelining and visual images. The described methods helped us capture rich, in-depth insights on how school leadership team members and teachers employed leadership strategies and/or processes to manage and respond to the coronavirus crisis within their educational setting.

Our findings draw attention to a neglected but important aspect of educational leadership and develops current understandings of how school leaders have dealt with multiple crises of an on-going, multi-faceted nature. Given that COVID-19 is writing “a new chapter in educational leadership” (Harris, 2020, n.p.) our research is enhancing our understandings of how educational leadership is enacted during times of crises; how leadership roles change or adapt as a crisis evolves; how various contextual forces influence a leader’s actions and the critical issues and lessons learned after leading through multiple or on-going crises.