

2020-2021: THE YEAR OF THE PANDEMIC

Invited Editorial: 2020 CSOTTE Conference Chair

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My term as CSOTTE President neatly paralleled the COVID-19 crisis. A year of turmoil, upheaval, and chaos infiltrated every element of our lives as our country grappled with life-and-death decisions and raced to find a vaccine for the virus. A marketing theme from Raise Your Hand, Texas—*Teacher Educators Can*—(rolled out right before the pandemic brought our country to a standstill) was modified to *Teacher Educators CAN and Have!*, served as the theme for the CSOTTE Conference, and it also served as a Call to Action for our entire profession to come together to continue the business of educating children.

And come together, we did! Teachers pivoted to online and remote instruction; school administrators set about finding ways to fund laptop devices for children to use; TEA stepped up and met with TACTE Deans regularly as we navigated interpreting and implementing the Texas Administrative Code (TAC) in this virtual arena. The CSOTTE Conference, an annual event upon which this publication neatly dovetails, shattered any remaining beliefs that a conference had to be delivered in a face-to-face format. Educator preparation programs stretched beyond capacity to accommodate students and faculty who grappled with the same issues as their PK-12 partners to produce another year’s worth of new teachers, principals, and other professionals amid the chaos. Our *techno wizards* produced a conference that was enviably well-managed and well-attended by educators from all over Texas.

Watching our educators rise to these challenges prompted me to wonder: How have educators handled other crises in our past? A quick but trusty Google search revealed some interesting facts in no time. Three pivotal events stood out: the 1918 Pandemic, World War II, and the September 11 Terrorist Attack. In all three events—just as with COVID-19—educators rose above the crisis, attended to students’ needs, and learned from the process.

During the 1918 Pandemic, when one-third of the world’s population became infected with the virus and at least 50 million died in the United States, children’s lack of health and well-being was exacerbated. Educators—on the front lines of the crisis—fueled reformers of the Progressive Era to advocate for programs that would increase school nurses, establish school lunch programs, build playgrounds, and promote outdoor education. Battenfeld (2020, June 18) reports, “They attacked societal barriers to child health and welfare by enacting labor laws, making school attendance compulsory, and improving the tenement housing where millions of children lived.” (3, para. 3)

Similarly, educators witnessed the long-term results that World War II had on the education of our citizenry. Carr and Mallam (1943) outline six areas of impact that the war had on schools: student attitudes, curriculum adjustments, special war services, acceleration of educational programs, special educational services, school enrolments, school finances, and teacher supply in wartime. One of the most striking, of course, was the increased number of mothers in the workplace as a result of the war when more than one-third of the children enrolled in nursery schools and kindergartens had working mothers. In England, Jonathan Boff (March 23, 2020) outlined that “by the end of World War II, many seven-year-olds were unable to read and write as a result of the poor standard education they received. One of the consequences of that was the 1944 Education Act, the famous act which extended secondary education for free to every pupil in the country, up to the age of 15.” (para.7)

Finally, during the insanity that ensued after the planes bombed into the Twin Towers in New York, Secretary of Education Rod Paige referred to the teachers and principals as the “quiet heroes.” In a speech given to the National Press Club, he mentioned that “Millions of moms and dads looked up from their work, and their very first thought was

about the safety of their children. And who was there to protect the children? Thousands of teachers and principals nationwide.” (Davis, 2002, para.3). That’s what we do.

Clearly, educators have stepped up to deliver for generations, and this pandemic proved to be no exception to that response. Below is an excerpt of the speech I gave at the opening of the virtual conference. In this, I wanted to recapture that moment when our lives changed forever, and from that moment, to show the resilience of the educator’s spirit.

An Excerpt from the 2020 CSOTTE Conference:
 “Teacher Educators CAN and HAVE!”

Outside my condo in—almost—downtown Austin, we can hear the train as it passes over Town Lake. On some occasional mornings, I am awakened by the train as it drags along at an agonizing snail’s pace, the incessant screech and whine of the rail cars on the metal tracks making me cover my head with the pillow—this doesn’t happen often, but I think it must be the combination of the speed of the train, the weight of the rail cars, the weather on a particular morning, and the direction of the wind that causes me to hear it so loudly. When it does, I note with a word of thanks that it doesn’t happen often.

Likewise, I was awakened—equally unwelcomed, I might add—early on Friday, March the 13th (yes, you heard me), with the sound of my text alert going off. As I rolled over, I thought, “Who on earth could this be?” The text was from my Provost and read, “Deans, alert your faculty that we are suspending classes a day early for Spring Break. Because of COVID-19, students and faculty are to secure what they need from their rooms and offices when they leave for the day and be prepared to be away for a short time. We will convene today at 10:00 am via Zoom to discuss next steps.” Boom—or should I say, Zoom☺ Now what?

Like most of you, it was not long until we were all in a flurry of “What’s next?” As the days passed, we settled into our new normal. We hastily setup workstations at home, secured technology that would make our jobs, if not easier, at least doable while we listened to government

officials, physicians, and news reporters provide us with the most recent ideas.

Through all that chaos, do you know what did NOT change? Educators. Despite the insanity that ensued after March 13, our profession quickly adapted and engaged. The same spirit that drove these individuals to become educators in the first place, served as a driving force to quickly pivot and assess the circumstances, and they began to plan. Truly, we saw our educators—those in the pipeline to become educators and those in the trenches already honing their craft—step up and deliver. That spirit, we dubbed this year, Teachers CAN! That same spirit is why we are here today—our annual CSOTTE Conference. For the next day and a half, we will meet, listen, discuss, question, brainstorm, envision, and focus on how we navigate the future of educators. Though we come to this conference with different pieces of the elephant—field experience directors, certification officers, alternative-certification directors, program specialists, faculty, and administrators—we all have one common goal: to celebrate the teacher! To say to the public, Teachers CAN!

Just as with every crisis in American history, educators continue to meet the challenges of the day. They have emerged from this crisis with new ideas, new technologies, and the same indomitable spirit to teach! With continued resolve, they will go about the business of educating students and continue to be MY “quiet heroes.” Teachers CAN!

References

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