



Academi Genedlaethol ar gyfer
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Reflect, recharge.....and remember you're a new Head!



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Breathe!

As I take a well-earned sip of my Singapore sling locked away in a sunny resort in South China!

Why breathe? Well that was my first half term as a Headteacher and as reminded, a new Headteacher in a global pandemic! I had not really thought about this until now.

We all live in our own cocoons at times, and currently, it has been kind of nice to do so! I've read so much over the last few weeks about the stresses and strains of my colleagues and friends in the UK; my family who are back in local lockdown, yet for me, life goes on in the pandemic world! Masks are normal. Temperature checks are normal. Showing my health code is normal. Is this my new normal?

But I forget and perhaps have failed to realise the enormity of what I have done over the last few months! I have become a Headteacher during a global pandemic when life in education, let alone life in general, is far from normal!

Should I say, 'well done you?'. It is not really in my psyche to do so but as I reflect, definitely!

Despite being in China for the last 2 years, I have kept up to speed with the international world of education. You have to, don't you? I thought back to an article I'd read by Alma Harris and Michelle Jones, 'School leadership in disruptive times', and reflected on whether the findings resonated with me. They do. But perhaps not totally in the way the article was written. Becoming a Head was an ambition; I had worked at system level but had not been a Head which I always thought was not right! So here I am. There are certainly some of the seven propositions offered by Harris and Jones in my own reflections. With the COVID situation under control in China, I did not really think of myself as leading a school in a global pandemic. But again, here I am! Context is king or so the saying goes! For me, a foreigner experiencing all the normal things a person can in a country that is not their own, then you add in the pandemic and the fear this brings! A constant check of my passport for when I returned, a COVID test to travel anywhere and of course people moving out of your way as you pass. It is a lonely feeling at times.

But as Head, I am proud! My context; I moved across China to a new city, to a new role, to a brand new school building and site, to a new teaching team where 1/3 of staff were new, to a K-12 model which brought demands in itself!

Breathe!

When I reflect on the challenges, and I admit, I have not experienced the same COVID challenges as my UK colleagues, but challenge there have been! Where to start?

The biggest one to link to the pandemic is one of recruitment! It's been tough! With the borders closed to foreign passport holders, the pool for recruitment, particularly of expatriate staff dried up quickly! So a new building, a new site, a new K-12 model, new leaders to leadership, 1/3 new staff and 9 staff down to start the academic year!



How to ensure this did not impact on standards? A tough ask! But the teachers responded. The leaders responded and the 'new normal' of using online/distance learning, also prevailed! I found myself running a school and boarding at the same time! What did I know about boarding? What did I know about running a school? It is a good job I'm a fast learner! My experiences had served me well and my own stubbornness and resilience now came in very handy!

So many benefits but constant crisis management did prevail! I didn't know what to expect each time I opened my eyes! A cold shower? An upset child? An absent teacher? No electricity! Who knew? But many positives came out of such situations. I got to know the students in my house, we kept all students safe and all students taught! Did I always make the right decisions? I doubt it! Did I always go about things in the right way? I doubt that too. Would I change things? A tough question with no real answer! Why? Because I came out the other side! Exhausted! Dishevelled! Questioning myself! But smiling and on reflection, well done me!

What is that lovely proverb? 'It takes a village to raise a child' - it has! In many ways, I was very alone; I could not see my family or friends and I craved that, especially not knowing how safe they were or not! Guess the same applies for them! But as a school, we came together. Leaders were collaborative, creative, and responsive! My 'laoban' was in Hong Kong and could not come to the new site but 'connect to learn, learn to connect' describes our workings! We connected weekly, even more sometimes if I needed it! I did not get my visit to Malvern UK or Malvern Hong Kong, but that is ok for now! This is the new normal after all!

The social and emotional health of students was paramount, and we met many challenges; we still are meeting and dealing with them! Are they borne out of a pandemic? I am not sure! But all we can do is provide what we can to support their stability; and we do that in leaps and bounds! Our own health and wellbeing have certainly been put under pressure- late nights, early mornings, eating on the run, not eating, lack of exercise- self-care? What is that? I am catching up now! There were times I would sit in the HR office and put my head in my hands or on the desk; or I'd turn up to the Business Director and tell her to put the coffee on! There were times I'd walk past the Head of Primary and simply shake my head, then we'd

laugh! You couldn't write it and every day was simply different! Is that headship? Or just headship in a pandemic? Think someone else may need to answer that!

And for the students, we would smile! We would carry on! We would teach; they would learn! They still wanted more device time! They would still try and wear their trainers instead of their shoes! Grade 6 would still get lost in the corridors as they now moved between lessons! Somethings simply have not changed!

Perhaps my stress was not always hidden from staff, for this I regret a little, then again, I'm human. And even here, I still managed to support, give feedback, offer wellbeing and of course, ask questions and challenge, it's still my job to do so isn't it? we must still maintain and instil standards shouldn't we?

And our village extended beyond the walls of our lovely new school to our parents! Forging stronger links with this group was one of my priorities! Not being able to persuade in my own language is much harder but they've given me a chance! It's been a challenge to recruit with parents questioning whether to send their children to international universities or schools. I totally understand. But we must look beyond COVID and many of them are. And we have managed to recruit some great students. And whilst parents themselves pose many challenges; they have presented some solutions to the problems we have faced! For this, I am grateful! Their feedback is not always what you want to hear. But ultimately, it is what we need to hear. And after all they simply want the best for their child! My job is to ensure we have the best for all children!

So as I reflect and recharge I have learnt. I have learnt that there is no one way to lead. There are no rights or wrongs. But what there is, is resilience. There is drive. There is ambition. There is a passion to EXCEL, ENRICH and EMPOWER the lives of my students and enact the vision of MCC to nurture global citizens with a Chinese heart.