



Alliance of  
Girls' Schools  
Australasia

2020

# inAlliance

**Volume no. 62**

The official magazine  
Alliance of Girls'  
Schools Australasia





Alliance of  
Girls' Schools  
Australasia

# inAlliance

# 2020

Volume no. 62

The official magazine  
Alliance of Girls'  
Schools Australasia

# Foreword:

LOREN BRIDGE, EXECUTIVE OFFICER

**W**hat a remarkable year we're living through. In January the overwhelming image of 2020 for most Australians, and much of the world, was of bushfires and our cities shrouded in smoke. Media stories centred on climate change and energy policy and at the Alliance we assessed the risk of air quality on a daily basis in preparation for our upcoming student leadership conference.

---

It wasn't until early February that we first began to think the novel coronavirus from China might impact on our program for 2020 and particularly our Asia Pacific Summit on Girls' Education, scheduled for May in Hobart. As schools were preparing for the start of the academic year there was concern about students returning from overseas. And then the situation heated up — travel bans on international arrivals from China were announced, WHO declared a pandemic, schools began closing, events were cancelled, we were working from home and lockdowns were imposed. It began to dawn on us just how significant the impact was going to be.

By July organisations were already asking what lessons were being learned from COVID-19. Clearly those with strong digital propositions that dealt directly with their customers online pre-COVID-19 were able to adapt quickly, with some successful organisations leveraging the crisis. But sectors like hospitality, tourism and retail, along with education, were hit hard.

Schools have shown extraordinary creativity in managing the crisis through taking immediate and strategic steps. COVID-19 forced the redesign of the 'how' and 'where' of education. From online learning opportunities, relationships with parents, and flexible working to digital dance parties and amazing student-led initiatives — teaching and learning has been transformed and it seems there's no going back.

Even with the wave of appreciation for the work of educators it was a complicated time for schools. School leaders were forced to make swift changes while managing the needs and anxieties of students, colleagues, staff, and parents — all the while synthesising the often-conflicting advice and directives coming from varying government sources.

The speed with which schools transitioned to online teaching and learning was incredible to watch. However the capacity to work quickly and effectively when in crisis is one thing: the difficulty is what happens when the crisis abates. Speed is not always the best way to make decisions. How we

return from an effective crisis response mode back to a business-as-usual mode that is leaner, quicker and more effective — and perhaps not quite as directed as crisis leadership appropriately is, but rather more collaborative and considered — this will be the challenge.

During crises organisations focus on a set single of objectives — their core mission. For schools it is delivering teaching and learning objectives online. But of course schools are complex social institutions of which there are extraordinary expectations — in the last two decades, expectations of the wrap-around services that schools provide have increased dramatically, and the kind of classroom experience expected has changed, as have the available technology and value schools deliver. Post-COVID-19 it will not be enough for schools to stay focused solely on their core mission of teaching and learning. Returning to a full-service model and doing this better than in the past will be the the new expectation.

Having the conversation about what post-COVID-19 schools might look like will be an important part of the recovery as we ask: What did we leave behind that we want left behind, and what is it that we really want to bring with us and focus on in the future?

All the challenges of pre-COVID-19 are still with us. Issues like gender inequality, the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, and growing levels of anxiety and mental health issues in young people. We are already hearing that young people will be the real losers of COVID-19.

It will be a particularly hard journey for those leaving university, entering the workforce and starting their careers. Early evidence suggests that COVID-19 will have a disproportionate impact on women too.



I wonder, if we had equal representation of women in Australia's National Cabinet, would we see policies and decision-making that are more favourable to women?

So what have we learnt and how do we apply it to those issues we still have to resolve? Schools have been dabbling with online learning for some time but we all believed so strongly in the face-to-face experience that we could never truly commit to digital. We now know schools have the ability to deliver lessons online and we have the opportunity for mixed mode teaching to become the norm. We have seen technology embraced by students and teachers, and know that students are capable of more independent and self-directed learning than we previously gave them credit for. Our perspective on travel and attending international conferences has changed — perhaps irrevocably. Again we were wedded to the face-to-face experience, believing digital was no substitute. Now the convenience of participating in online profession development and virtual conferences with international colleagues make lower travel targets and access to high-quality PD seem mutually possible. How very easy, and cost effective, it is to be at home in your pyjamas attending a keynote by an internationally renowned presenter while chatting online with 1,000 peers from around the globe.

There has also been a value shift. Many of us have enjoyed the slowing down of life and the engagement with our local neighbourhoods and communities that lockdown inevitably involved.

We've enjoyed the flexibility of working and learning from home — which has gifted us a break from our daily commutes to school/work and the myriad sports, activities, functions and social events we all attend — and we don't want to lose it.

We've seen some amazing leadership and initiatives across our schools — from students, teachers and principals. This edition of *In Alliance* reveals the broad creativity and agility evident in our members' responses to COVID-19. The common themes of optimism and positive expectations for the future, communication and connection, vulnerability and authenticity (and exhaustion) are strong. They demonstrate just how well schools can rapidly adjust in a pressing situation and, equally as vital, that we have the strength and the capacity to continue responding and adapting to the difficult issues that will remain with us for some time.

I know that I've learnt more about my colleagues' families, their pets and favourite recipes this year than in any previous year. It has been a fascinating, albeit at times frightening, year as we have shown our capacity to work together, bringing decisive leadership and thoughtfulness to solutions with an openness to different perspectives and nuancing in our responses. But most of all we have learnt just how brave and capable we can be. ▲

# Contents

---

## 8. Schools interrupted, have learnt valuable lessons

Marise McConaghy



We've all heard of businesses having to pivot to survive the catastrophic effects of COVID-19, but I'd suggest that schools have had to execute an even more complex acrobatic feat.

## 10. Building resilience in challenging times

Dr Steve Bagi

## 16. Year of wonders: finding the revelations in the revolution

Kate Wiedemann

## 20. The autumn of our reconnect

Daisy Turnbull Brown

## 22. Higher education sector: a demographic perspective

Simon Kuestenmacher

## 24. How we created connection when physically disconnected

Kath Woolcock

## 26. Reimagining learning

Jane Ward

## 30. The positive impact of 'more time' on school life and students

Jacinda Euler

## 33. Best practice for performance management in the online space for educators

Karen Prinsloo



The essence of performance management stays the same — so what is different and what do we need to be aware of in the new remote work environment that the COVID-19 crisis has put us in?

## 39. Online support for collaborative learning: getting beyond homework overload

Erica McWilliam and Peter Taylor

## 41. The learner at the centre: remote learning and COVID-19

Ashley Keith Pratt

## 44. The next normal

Clarissa Wright

## 47. Sport promotes healthy mindset

Kath Sambel Oly

## 49. Innovation and creativity during COVID-19 times

Tina Neate

## 51. Cyborgs, samurais, pineapple sorbet and a pandemic

Belinda Bath and Lisette Rooney

## 55. COVID-19: unexpected opportunities for promoting staff wellbeing

Amber Sowden



2020 was going to be a year that Strathcona invested in supporting and creating stronger connections in our community and commit consciously to the wellbeing of our people. Little did we know what 2020 had in store for us.

## 57. Uncharted territory

Shantelle Janek

**60.**  
**Remote learning...by design**  
Dr Charlotte Forwood, Kate Manners, Emma Hinchliffe and Micah Wilkins

**64.**  
**Keeping the spirit alive**  
Hope Barr



When you bid your child farewell at the boarding house, you don't expect to see them back home a month later. But this is exactly what happened as COVID-19 changed the way we educated our children this year.

**65.**  
**Going 'Agile' in a crisis**  
Elizabeth Green

**69.**  
**Brigidine pivots to embrace the new technological revolution**  
Allison Johansen

**72.**  
**A remote learning story**  
Inge Doig

**74.**  
**Extraordinary times**  
Sally Ruston

**77.**  
**REAL Character Program: learning and living the science of character**  
Katrina Alvir

**80.**  
**Leadership in a time of need**  
Belinda Yorston

**82.**  
**Our practice Illuminated**  
Janelle O'Neill

**86.**  
**#RuytonTogetherApart**  
Linda Douglas, Cathryn Furey, Trish Hatzis and Dr Bernadette Nicholls

**91.**  
**Somerville@HOME: from Mindful Monday to Fit Friday**  
Kim Kiepe, Louise McGuire, Tim Smetham and Julie Brunckhorst



Education during the COVID-19 pandemic has been an altered experience for both the learner and educator. Many teachers would agree that the pandemic has been a positive catalyst for change.

**95.**  
**Fundraising and alumnae relations in challenging times**  
Rachel Jefferies

**98.**  
**What COVID-19 teaches us about education**  
Sandhya Das Thuraisingham

**102.**  
**Passion, purpose and pathways in a pandemic: helping girls find their shine**  
Kristy Kendall



The people of Japan believe that everyone has an *ikigai* — a reason to jump out of bed each morning and the key to living a fulfilled life.

**104.**  
**Lessons from COVID-19: from the "old grammar of schooling" to the new normal of learning**  
Sheri Upasiri

**106.**  
**Schooling in the time of COVID: an opportunity to liberate learning**  
Alison Bedford and Deirdre Geddert

**112.**  
**The exigency of student wellbeing**  
Dr Joe Thurbon and Nabil Shaheen

# Schools interrupted, have learnt valuable lessons

MARISE MCCONAGHY, PRESIDENT OF THE ALLIANCE OF GIRLS' SCHOOLS AUSTRALASIA AND PRINCIPAL, STRATHCONA GIRLS GRAMMAR, VICTORIA

**The last 12 weeks have seen the most significant disruption to our education system in living memory. We've all heard of businesses having to pivot to survive the catastrophic effects of COVID-19, but I'd suggest that schools have had to execute an even more complex acrobatic feat.**

---

Not only did children and their parents become colleagues in working and learning from home overnight, but the embedded model of face-to-face classroom teaching and learning in like-age groups was turned on its head. New technologies were tested, different teaching styles embraced, and a whole new concept of "school" emerged.

Despite the many great hurdles encountered, education professionals, students and their families have proven to be adaptable, agile, and innovative in a crisis. This has provided us with a rare opportunity to rethink how we organise

education and systems within schools; while shedding light on ways we can forever improve the learning experience.

While I know teachers, principals and education staff everywhere are exhausted, we can't waste this opportunity to analyse and discuss which systems and practices embraced during this period actually enhanced the teaching and learning experience, and simply revert to the ways we've always done things.



One key observation has been that students are clearly able to be more independent in their learning. While we tend to assume that teenagers can't be trusted to self-direct their learning, they've overwhelmingly proven to us that they can. They've discovered their self-agency and understandably want to continue to harness this through greater independence going ahead. In giving them this, we will be better able develop our young people for life beyond school rather than infantilising them.

For some students, the online setting has minimised the distractions of a classroom and promoted greater engagement. In fact, many families have reported that the online learning model offers a more efficient learning program for their child and removes some of the stresses associated with a crowded curriculum in the busyness of the school day.

---

**“We can't just revert to doing things as we've always done them.”**

How the school day is structured and timetabled is something to be examined to see if we can better leverage the flexibility and independence many students have enjoyed. By the same token, it's been abundantly clear that students have missed each other and are social creatures (even if introverted), and that this part of school life is valuable, as is a sense of community.

The uncertainty wrought by the pandemic has highlighted that educating students with the skills to manage their own learning throughout life is paramount, and we need structures and frameworks that support this aim. We have moved beyond the industrial model of schooling and we are now in what the World Economic Forum calls the Fourth Industrial Revolution. To thrive in this new world, encouraging entrepreneurialism and using skills such as problem-solving, critical, creative and agile thinking, independent learning, along with the use of relevant information and digital technologies, will be crucial.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is tracking how digital technologies are changing 'face-to-face' teaching and is one of many organisations conducting important research into the effects of this forced period of remote learning. Once more research is available, we will need to critically evaluate the pedagogical responses and strategies in order to implement those that combine the best elements of both online and face-to-face teaching.

Digital technologies and e-learning will certainly continue to play a bigger role in schools of the future, with teachers now more familiar with the technology needed to enhance both teaching and learning.

Take the use of video conferencing as an example, which was used only minimally in schools before lockdown. Teachers and students are now competent and confident in this medium, opening the door for more collaborative work with individuals across an infinite number of locations in the future.

Remote and online delivery has empowered teachers to rethink what the essential learnings are and take ownership of what they teach and how they teach it. As such, teachers are no longer seen simply as “knowledge delivery systems”. It has reinforced the teacher as facilitator, guide, and mentor in helping students to manage knowledge.

Teachers' creativity online has also allowed them the space to explore and see the potential for differentiation to meet all learners' needs and challenged them to rethink their priorities around assessment—in particular to include more formative assessment with targeted feedback to engage and foster learning.

The COVID-19 experience should encourage us to think more broadly outside traditional disciplines and to start our curriculum design from the attributes we are seeking to develop, rather than how much content to teach. At Strathcona, we are looking at this and how we foster strong character, a moral compass and a sense of social responsibility – along with the skills and core knowledge we want our graduates to leave with. It is a life skill for students to learn how to take risks with their thinking and learning, and when they fail, to bounce back and try again. In the long run, such skills will better serve students in their future pathways than high pressure, standardised test results.

While this extraordinary event has presented significant challenges for all of us and its impact will be felt long into the future, it has also fuelled a much-needed conversation and review of the way we think about and deliver education in this country. We can't just revert to doing things as we've always done them when we've so clearly demonstrated that alternatives are not only possible, but beneficial. What's at stake is simply too important. ▲

*This article was first published in The Age, 3 July 2020*

# Building resilience in challenging times

DR STEVE BAGI, CONSULTING PSYCHOLOGIST, ACTUATE LEADERSHIP AND ADJUNCT LECTURER, BOND UNIVERSITY

## 2020. What a year!

**I began writing this article on resilience in January as I followed the unfolding dramas and devastation brought about by the bush fires here in Australia. Over the summer months I am sure that we all felt a great sense of concern for those affected by the long drought and devastating bush fires. This concern was buoyed by the many references to the 'resilient spirit' of those affected.**

---

Resilience is a word that is very much a part of the Australian narrative. At the time, I wrote about seven characteristics of resilience that could help educators and their students to grow in this area. I was quite happy with the draft and felt confident for the year ahead.

Then floods, hail, locusts and a worldwide pandemic happened. Since the COVID-19 pandemic intensified and spread throughout the world, many of us have been on a roller coaster ride of emotions, energy and confidence. We have moved from being concerned spectators of an emerging global problem to being participants in a pandemic which has impacted our lives in ways that we could not have expected or were prepared for. As the months roll on, many principals and school staff are feeling increasingly exhausted and experiencing significantly more stress than usual. As I look over the seven characteristics of resilience that I wrote about, the concepts are still valid, but they have taken on a new significance as we have endeavoured to be resilient and help our families and school communities to stay well in the midst of challenges times.

In this article I would like to share these concepts and relate them to how we, as educators, can help our students to grow in these areas. I would suggest that there are seven major concepts associated with resilience. These areas:

- a hopeful attitude
- determined action
- emotional authenticity
- utilising inner resources
- harnessing the power of us
- having time to recharge, and
- celebrating progress.

### What is resilience?

The most accepted meaning of resilience contains the important concept of 'bouncing back' in the context of living through stressful events and adversity (Ginsberg & Jablow 2015). "The noun resilience, meaning 'the act of rebounding', was first used in the 1620s and

was derived from 'resiliens', the present participle of Latin 'resilire', 'to recoil or rebound'" (Macmillan Dictionary Blog, n.d.). More than simply surviving, resilience also implies personal growth and health in the midst of difficult times (McEwan, 2011). It is from this definition of resilience that we can see why this current situation is so difficult. The challenges that we have faced have been unremitting with an uncertain hope for our lives returning to some form of 'normal' in the foreseeable future. There have been few and short-lived opportunities for bouncing back as we work with the ongoing pressures that this pandemic has placed on us. Resilience then, needs to be understood as the continued ability to endure long-term and open-ended challenges. It is the ability to keep going in the face of continued adversity.

In the past decade schools have increasingly aspired to help their students to become more resilient (Aldridge et al., 2016). Research conducted in Australia showed that 46 per cent of Australian females in grades three to twelve had excellent or good levels of resilience, while 18 per cent demonstrated a low level of resilience (Resilient Youth Australia, 2015). This result, although somewhat encouraging, does highlight that there is scope to do much more in helping students to grow stronger in this area. It will be interesting to see how this current pandemic has affected students' experience of resilience as they have had to face not only their own struggles but also the struggles of their parents, schools, communities and the world.

## A hopeful attitude

Hope is at the heart of resilience and without it, people can succumb to the challenges that they are facing. Resilient thinking is characterised by an accurate awareness of the situation while possessing a positive outlook for the future and a growth mindset (Patterson and Kelleher 2005, Duckworth 2017). Having a hopeful or positive mindset doesn't mean that there is an unrealistic dream of the future or that someone who is hopeful won't have their setbacks or days of despair; it simply means that the person or community chooses to believe that things will be better in the future. Showing my age, I am reminded of the very Aussie band from the 1980s, Redgum, and their classic hit song 'It'll be alright in the long run'. This expression of hope gives individuals the strength to go on.

---

**“Those feeling strong can bolster those feeling weak and often when circumstances change the tables can turn...”**

For many, a deep sense of hope for their imagined future has been tested during the past months. Although it is still possible to have the same hopes for the future as we did last year, the current uncertainties have led to many of us recalibrating what we are hoping for, especially in the short-term. Even if our hopes for the future have changed or are in question, the power of hope is still a driving energy that can help us to persevere and strive to reach our goals for life. Optimism is a mindset that, in the midst of the challenges we face, still hopes for good outcomes and goals being reached.

### **How can schools help students to develop a hopeful attitude?**

It is often said that schools are there to teach students how to think and not what to think. This thought is especially valid for helping students to develop hope. Hope is not something that can be taught but the thinking patterns required to produce hope can be. By teaching and modelling proactive problem-solving methods, students can be helped to evaluate stressful situations accurately and to proactively create ways forward. Hope can come from optimistic thinking and spiritual beliefs that engender optimism for the future. Inspiring hope is a vital part of healthy schooling, especially in times where the hope of students is being challenged on a day-to-day basis.

Teachers can help students to find hope in the midst of the ongoing angst about the future shared in the media. Today's students are exposed to a plethora of concerning messages on a broad range of issues that are likely to impact them in the future such as the long-term effects

of climate change, housing affordability and more recently economic health, a changing job market and the future impact of health challenges. Teachers and school leaders have a great opportunity to model and inspire hope. Teachers are uniquely placed to have open and honest discussions about challenges faced by students and how these can be overcome. As Napoleon Bonaparte said, “A leader is a dealer in hope”. By modelling and encouraging positivity, realistic optimism and gratefulness, teachers can help to build resilience in their students.

## Determined action

I am sure that all the individuals impacted by the bush fires who spoke of 'bouncing back' or rebuilding were aware of the enormous effort and cost that would be required to make this happen. Although resilience starts in the mind, it can only come to fruition through determination and action. There are two main ideas here that are important to consider. One is the identification of the practical steps that will be needed to move forward in challenging times and the other is the dogged commitment to following through with these steps that will be required to make it happen. Whereas hope provides the foundation for resilience, determined action makes it happen.

The challenge that we face with the pandemic is that it is difficult to know what actions to take to move ahead. We have all experienced, to some extent, a sense of powerlessness as we passively wait for the latest news. All we can do is keep working to the best of our abilities and take the health precautions that can hopefully lessen the spread and impact of the COVID-19 virus. It is heartening to see the public awareness of the efforts of teachers and school leaders in engineering major changes in educational delivery and supporting students on this journey. Teachers have been stepping up and working tirelessly to ensure not only continuity in education but also embracing the benefits of the new virtual frontier. Resilience is shown by us turning up and doing what we need to do for ourselves, our families and our schools.

### **How can schools help students to be committed to determined action?**

Teachers and school leaders have unique opportunities to speak into the lives of students as they face difficult times. When people are going through tough times they can benefit from some patient and specific guidance on what actions they could take to move forward. Here, teachers can use some examples from their own lives if they have faced similar circumstances or help students chart an action course for the days ahead. It is important for teachers to encourage students to take proactive actions to head towards

their education, career and personal goals. In a time of accelerated change, students can be encouraged to see new opportunities in the face of adversity. Teachers can be a cheer squad for students, encouraging them to keep going even if, at times, they may feel like giving up.

### **Emotional authenticity**

Resilience is not the same as stoicism as the expression of emotions is an important part of the process. As we saw from the reports of individuals and families impacted by the bushfires and more recently the pandemic, optimism is expressed in the context of intense emotion and grief. These raw emotions reflect a healthy response to challenging circumstances and form an important part of the road to recovery. Through the expression of true feelings people can see that what they are going through is similar to the emotional journey of others. 'Bottling up' or repressing emotions does not deal with or help people process how they are responding to what has happened.

Resulting from the pressures created by the pandemic, many of us have experienced an emotional roller coaster ride of feelings ranging from joy to despair, peace to fearful anxiety, contentment to anger. The challenge for educators has been twofold. In the midst of experiencing a depletion in their own emotional reserves, they have had to continue to teach or lead with enthusiasm and positivity. The term 'emotional labour' refers to work that "requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others." (Hochschild, 2012, p.7). Every time a teacher smiles when they are feeling down, portrays peace when they are feeling anxious or shows patience with a parent who is acting irrationally, their emotional reserves are being further depleted. Although it is important for educators to portray hope, peace and confidence, it is also important for them to be real and authentic. It is okay to feel flat and appropriately share your emotions with colleagues and students.

### **How can schools help students to be emotionally authentic?**

Having been in situations where there has been a critical incident in a school, I have seen the healing quality of allowing students to express their emotions in a safe space. Sometimes these incidents also trigger old memories for students and they too need to process the emotions that they are re-experiencing. Sadness, anxiety and anger are natural parts of the grief process. Resilience is being open to experience our emotions and then also helping others to work through theirs.

Emotional authenticity can be modelled to students. If teachers and school leaders share glimpses of their own vulnerabilities and imperfections, this can inspire the same from students. Although it is not appropriate

to share certain personal issues with students, teachers can find a healthy balance between professionalism and simply being human. Schools can create safe spaces for students to share their journeys and not feel judged for their struggles.

### **Utilising inner resources**

Although in challenging times the help of others is invaluable, at the end of the day resilience stems from an individual's own abilities to overcome and persevere in difficult times. Resilience comes from the development and utilisation of our spiritual, emotional, cognitive and health sources of strength. As the effects of the pandemic have touched all these aspects of human life we have had to dig deep and look for ways of bolstering our strength in these areas.

### **How can schools help students to develop their inner resources?**

There are many ways that schools can help students to understand and utilise their inner resources. Both in a group setting and individually, teachers are well positioned to teach students about developing self-confidence, healthy thinking habits and to be aware of the pitfalls of unhealthy thinking patterns. Students can be encouraged to develop an internal locus of control in which, instead of seeing themselves as passive victims of circumstance, they can proactively take steps to shape their responses to create a brighter future (Buddelmeyera & Powdthaveeb, 2016). As healthy self-talk plays a pivotal role in resilience, students can be helped to see how their own patterns of self-talk can be healthy or destructive (Choate, 2016). Stress management skills and mindfulness can also become a part of the student learning and experience at school as these skills can be very helpful in times of stress and adversity (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015).

Students can also be made aware of unhealthy thinking patterns such as ruminating and catastrophising. Rumination involves spending time and emotional energy replaying past negative experiences repeatedly and worrying about the future (Petrie, 2014). This is an easy thinking trap to fall into as the challenges being faced by the student can be extremely distressing. Virtual education, although still demanding, has also created more time away for people to live in their own thought worlds. More time thinking means more time for the possibility of ruminating and catastrophising. Catastrophising is also an unhelpful thinking pattern in which the person imagines an outcome that is far worse than will probably be the case. With the 24/7 reports of the spread and possible worldwide impact of the pandemic, it is easy to do a little catastrophising. Resilience involves putting a brake on these unhelpful thought patterns and instead choosing to spend time in healthy, hopeful and wise thinking. By helping students

to develop habits of healthy thinking “they can use their cognitive abilities to rethink the situation, reframe it, and de-catastrophise it” (Ginsberg & Jablow 2015, p71).

Waters (2019) draws attention to some of the positive psychology initiatives that have begun to be utilised by schools to increase student wellbeing such as helping students understand their strengths and better manage their emotions and relationships. It is encouraging to see an increasing number of schools proactively investing in the wellbeing of their students. In my consulting work with schools I find it valuable to help staff and students to understand their personal strengths and how these strengths can help them to thrive in their studies or work, and in the challenges they face. With all the uncertainties around us it is important to know and utilise our strengths and resources.

Physical fitness also helps students to be resilient (Ginsberg & Jablow 2015). This physical component to fitness involves exercise, a healthy diet and is already a part of the message that schools are sending to their students. The team aspect of sports and activities is also helpful for the building of resilience as it combines the benefits from exercise as well as the support of others (VicHealth, 2015). This fundamental aspect of wellbeing has also been challenged in recent months as sport has been impacted, opportunities to exercise are restricted and the temptation to eat comfort food has become a daily reality. Once again flexibility is the order of the day as we encourage educators and students alike to create ways to maintain their physical fitness.

### **Harnessing the power of us**

While the onus of resilience is on the individual, it is not necessarily meant to be something that we do on our own. The consistent theme that came through from those impacted by the bushfires was that it was through the community working together that they could see a way forward. This sense of community and of a shared journey was one of the most heart-warming aspects that emerged from the disaster. This hope in the power of community was validated with the overwhelming response for help that came from the local and broader communities. Resilience is not an individual sprint but a team cross country race. Friends, families and the community all have an important part to play in fostering resilience.

As well as the camaraderie often experienced by people going through a similar experience, there is also the help that can come from those not as effected by the challenges. Those feeling strong can bolster those feeling weak and often when circumstances change the tables can turn and this help can be reciprocated. At the moment we can take some comfort in, and sense solidarity from, the fact that we are all impacted in some way and are journeying together through the

uncertainties and challenges. This is a rare phenomenon in which we all find ourselves in the same boat. As we are all in the same boat this means that we may all equally feel drained and overwhelmed at times. The support that we could usually rely on from others may wain at times as they too are navigating through difficult times.

### **How can schools help students to harness the power of us?**

As a community itself, a school can play a huge role in helping to create and maintain positive, supportive relationships. A caring and supportive school climate can help students to be more resilient (Aldridge et al., 2016)..It is also important to help students know how to build and maintain quality relationships as resilience is closely linked to having support from others (VicHealth, 2015). Research has shown that among least resilient girls there is a sense of disconnection and little support from others at home and at school (Resilient Youth Australia, 2015, Evans-Whip & Gasser, 2018).

Schools can also supplement the natural care that comes from a healthy school community with the presence of counselling and support staff. This extra specialised help reassures students that, when facing larger challenges, there are trained professionals who are there to help them. These specialised services are also important as students will exhibit different levels of resilience. Some will struggle with being resilient and will need acceptance, care and help to cope as best they can.

The pandemic has presented challenges to some of the core human relationship activities that foster friendship and a sense of community. Especially in lockdown conditions many adults and students have felt a sense of isolation. Although contact through social media and platforms like Zoom have enabled students and teachers to keep in touch, for many this has been a poor substitute for real time face-to-face contact. Teachers have often gone above and beyond to ensure that their relationships with students stay real and supportive. Schools have needed to create ways of maintaining and developing a sense of community and care.

### **Having time to recharge**

One of the most terrifying aspects of the bushfires at their peak was the ongoing relentless nature of the event. With the drought, at that time unbroken, it seemed that the situation could continue to escalate without abate. To be resilient and to bounce back requires a break in the pressure. If the intense pressure continues, emotional and physical exhaustion will make it increasingly difficult to bounce back. We were all thankful to see some rain and change in weather conditions which allowed affected residents and support service personnel to rest and recharge. After all the suffering and stress, life needed to get back to some semblance of normality. This leads on

to our present challenges. Coupled with the high levels of uncertainty, one of the most debilitating challenges of the pandemic has been its ongoing nature. Although there have been temporary breaks these have been short lived. This incessant nature of the pandemic, along with the long hours worked by school staff, has paved the way for an increased level of physical and emotional exhaustion. The best way to recharge is to be away from the challenges. Although this break seems distant at the moment it is vital for teachers and school leaders to create space for rest. Rejuvenation is required for us to experience some form of bounce back and to prepare for the challenges ahead.

### **How can schools help students to have time to recharge?**

In this fast-paced, busy world it is a challenge for educators to create space for rest and recovery. Over the past decades it seems that for teachers and students more has been added with very little being taken away. This is often referred to as the intensification of education (MacBeath, 2006). There is ongoing debate as to how schools and parents can reduce the pressure they put on students. Downtime plays an important part of the resilience process (Ginsberg & Jablow 2015) as “research suggests that the human brain needs moments of quiet and rest to process and consolidate ideas, memories and experiences” (Honore, 2009 p 117).

As well as the challenges posed by the pandemic there have also been a number of important learning experiences and time spent on insightful reflection into school life and pedagogical practice. Some activities have needed to be paused as workloads and expectations have been required to fit the circumstances. Many adults have discovered the benefits of working from home and in the future will be evaluating their work practices. Hopefully, this will lead to some new ways of working that support both productivity and wellbeing. Similarly, when it is

time to set the course for future pedagogical planning, hopefully some lessons learnt from the pandemic will lead to a more sustainable workload and practice for educators and students alike.

### **Celebrating progress**

It is important to appreciate and celebrate resilience. The emphasis is usually on the process and mechanisms for bouncing back and perhaps more should be done to intentionally celebrate and reflect when individuals or communities have bounced back. Although it may be some time before we see it, I hope that the media will show us the stories of resilience once people affected by the bush fires have rebuilt their homes and have grown personally through their travails. It is good to celebrate wins and recognise those who have helped on the journey. This pause for celebration can give an opportunity for reflection on lessons learnt and thanks for those who have helped. The celebration of the bounce back can also increase people’s confidence in tackling whatever challenges may befall them in the future. Although it may not yet be time for celebrating our passage through the challenging times of the pandemic, it is still important to celebrate small wins. For educators there have been incredible wins in terms of student support, re-engineering pedagogy, adaptability and maintaining a strong sense of hope for the future. These are in no way small things. They are big ticket wins and we should do all that we can to encourage each other with our progress. One day we will tell stories of these times and have a common sense of achievement in the face of adversity. We have come so far and done so much already. Well done everyone!

### **How can schools help students to celebrate progress?**

When students and school communities face major challenges the stories of support, endurance and growth can be told and celebrated in the context of memorial events. For personal struggles that students face,



perhaps teachers can pause to encourage them on how they have demonstrated resilience and be mindful of the lessons learnt. Remembrance, whether individual or communal, can encourage students to have hope for the future.

### Concluding comments

Resilience is a topic of interest for educators and students alike. In the context of the current challenges the topic has taken on a more universal and deeper significance as people of all ages attempt to work through challenges that are impacting every facet of life. It is good to explore ways of increasing our level of resilience so that we can face the future with a confidence in ourselves and our society. Sometimes, when resilience is talked about, there is a subtle pressure that we should not just be surviving but thriving in the midst of adversity. Maybe in the current circumstances we can settle for a sense of surviving. It is okay to be stressed and disheartened. It is okay to be up and then down. It is okay to mourn the people who have been lost and some of our dreams and plans that may have needed to be modified. I am confident that if we keep going there will be better times, stories to tell and celebrate. There will be times to thrive. For now, let us keep going with the best that we can give to our own endeavours and our community. This is resilience in action.

As life will continue to throw difficulties in our paths, let us pause to consider these questions:

What lessons have you learnt about resilience this year?

How can you become more resilient in the face of ongoing challenges?

What can you and your school do to intentionally help students develop a greater level of resilience?

Whatever your answers, I am sure that it will be a fruitful investment. ▲

---

### REFERENCES

- Aldridge, J.M., Fraser, B.J., Fozdar, F, Ala'i, K., Earnest, J., & Afari, E., (2016). Students' perceptions of school climate as determinants of wellbeing, resilience and identity. *Improving Schools*, Vol. 19(1) 5-26.
- Buddelmeyera, H, & Powdthaveeb, N. (2016). Can having internal locus of control insure against negativeshocks? Psychological evidence from panel data, *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 122, 88-109.
- Choate, L. H. (2016). *Swimming Upstream Parenting Girls for Resilience in a Toxic Culture*. Oxford University Press New York
- Duckworth, A. Grit. (2017.) *Why passion and resilience are the secrets to success* , Vermillion, London.
- Evans-Whipp, T, & Gasser, C. (2018). Adolescents' resilience, SAC Annual Statistical Report p 109-120 Australian Institute of Family Studies
- Ginsburg, K.R, & Jablow, M.M, (2015) *Building Resilience in Children and Teens*, 3rd Edition, American Academy of Pediatrics, Grove Village IL.

- Hochschild, A. R. (2012). *The Managed Heart Commercialization of Human Feeling* Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Homore, C, (2009). *Under Pressure; Putting the child back in childhood*. Orion Books, London.
- MacBeath, J. (2006). The talent enigma. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 9(3), 183-204.
- Macmillan Dictionary Blog. (n.d.). Resilient. In Macmillan Dictionary Blog. Retrieved from <http://www.macmillandictionaryblog.com/resilient>
- McEwan, K. (2011). *Building Resilience at Work*. Bowen Hills, Australia: Australian Academic Press.
- Patterson, J. L., & Kelleher, P. (2005). *Resilient school leaders : strategies for turning adversity into achievement*, Alexandria, USA, ASCD.
- Petrie, N. (2014). *The Surprising Truth about What Drives Stress and How Leaders Build Resilience: Centre for Creative leadership*
- Resilient Youth Australia, (2015), *Resilience and Girls*, retrieved from <https://www.generationnext.com.au/2015/09/resilience-and-girls/>
- Schonert-Reichl, K. A., Oberle, E., Lawlor, M. S., Abbott, D., Thomson, K., Oberlander, T. F., & Diamond, A. (2015). Enhancing cognitive and social-emotional development through a simple-to-administer mindfulness-based school program for elementary school children: a randomized controlled trial. *Developmental psychology*, 51(1), 52-66.
- Vichealth. (2015). *Young Victorians' resilience and mental wellbeing survey: Summary*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, retrieved from [https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au//media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/Research/Youthresilience\\_mentalwellbeing\\_Survey\\_Summary\\_df?la=en&hash=639762F5CE7831C3A19A6391CC9EAC18362B1C55](https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au//media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/Research/Youthresilience_mentalwellbeing_Survey_Summary_df?la=en&hash=639762F5CE7831C3A19A6391CC9EAC18362B1C55)
- Waters, L. (2019). Searching for Wellbeing in Schools: A New Framework to Guide the Science of Positive Education, *Journal of Educational and Psychological Research* Vol 1(2), p 1-8.

# Year of wonders: finding the revelations in the revolution

KATE WIEDEMANN, SECONDARY TEACHER, ST MARGARET'S ANGLICAN GIRLS SCHOOL, QUEENSLAND

**In the 'cracks' caused by this worldwide crisis, teachers are reflecting on what can be valued most in learning.**

About a week ago, a member post on my Facebook reading group reminded me of the odd synchronicities between fiction and fact. Pulitzer Prize-winning author Geraldine Brooks' (2001) novel *The Year of Wonders* is set in the plague-ridden England of the 1600s; we are set amidst our own version of the pest that has caused disruption and devastation of a global scale.

Similarly, just as the heroine in Brooks' fabula finds a sense of personal revelation in the revolutionary shifts to community, society, life itself, the disruptive shifts to learning communities and education practices are a paradox: a curse and a blessing for educators.

On the one hand, it has resulted in a seismic shift to school learning — catastrophically so, in the world's unluckier quarters — at the expense of all in the school community. And yet, on the other, it has opened a crack that allows educators to explore and reframe the central tenets of what learning communities should and could be.

## **Vulnerability is the new normal**

Almost immediately as the pandemic changed education delivery, educators began chronicling their own reflections: their reactions to the disaster and their predictions for the role and relationships of teaching.

Appropriate to the global nature of this shift, the initial angst of change was felt globally by teachers. In the United States — struck, at the point of writing, with the world's grimmest mortality statistics — the reverberations of change were palpable. Professor of Education at Pennsylvania State University Anne Whitney (2020) wrote on the National Council of Teachers of English official blog of the exhaustion of teachers who had reflexively jumped to 'offer something': solutions, extra care, extra resources, extra tutoring. She highlighted the reluctance of teachers — so inured to serve and to solve problems — to admit to their grief of change. Vulnerability, for some, has become socially anathema; vulnerability becomes associated with 'helplessness', which is anything but true.

Yet teachers' reflexive and automatic responses to 'do more' — borne certainly out of a vocational desire to help and support our student community — are also driven by other personal, systemic and environmental factors, not the least of which is the performative culture in which teaching as a global profession increasingly operates.

## **New names, new identities?**

As an English teacher, it is my job and interest to understand language in all its shape-shifting uses in public discourse. Decades-old terms such as 'service delivery' and 'performativity' are now a well-worn part of the verbal terrain of education (Ball 2003), but teachers generally resist implications that their practice — influential academic Stephen J Ball (2003) extends this further to their 'soul' — can be redesignated as merely transactional. Yet through this crisis and teacher responses of professionalism, some clear public appellations are emerging: the language of the heroic, the stoic, and the 'high performer' is now waxing. The monikers can be both a boon and a bane.

For example, Griffith University Professor Donna Prendergast's (2020) comment on 25 May upon Queensland students' return to school sites on the "newfound respect many members of the community have for teachers not only for the amazing job they do teaching the next generation but for the enabling role they play keeping the economy flowing" is both affirming for teachers and a reminder that education is often perceived by society a high value cog in the service economy.

Ironically, the praises and odes for educators' alacrity and diligence that have sprung forth in the past months on Facebook feeds, celebrity shout-outs to 'awesome' teachers and educator leaders and advocates may themselves serve to perpetuate a mythology of the teacher 'model performer'. In lieu of a hyperawareness of performance, academics such as Aisha Ahmad, Professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto, have reflected that teachers in the immediacy of the COVID-19 crisis "must...now more than ever...abandon the performative and embrace the authentic" (Ahmad 2020).

“Our essential mental shifts require humility and patience ... And they will be slower than keener academics are used to. Be slow ... Let it change how you think and how you see the world. Because the world is our work,” Ahmad said.

### **Relocating the conduit?**

Arguably the most obvious implication of the school shutdown was the transfer to the home as the site of learning and the radical domestic rearrangements this necessitated. On top of the costs in teacher and parent time, mental effort, and the emotional load of trying to jointly find and apply solutions in what is essentially a constantly changing game, it has opened questions about the role of the home in learning.

Professor Julian Sefton-Green (2020) foreshadows as much in his article for Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) website EduResearch Matters in April when he remarks:

“ ... now the home will simply be the new conduit for the school thus enabling all children to exist in an entirely individualised relationship with the state. That is a very particular and culturally specific definition of what we want education to do and certainly we need to ask whether that is an appropriate model for a post-pandemic society,” (Sefton-Green 2020).

As a teacher *and* a parent of two high-schoolers, I have asked myself the same question.

---

### **“Teachers’ expertise and commitment will triumph, in whatever shape post-pandemic education assumes.”**

It is warm testament and a vote of confidence from a wider learning community to think learning and instruction have been ‘seamless’, but the seams are there nonetheless. As both a teacher and a parent to school-aged children, I have seen first-hand where the points of strain can arise for students, parents and teachers over the past months. They come in the little missed deadlines; overlooked emails or instructions; small misunderstandings that threaten to grow larger; unreliable or intermittent access to technology; difficulties navigating new information platforms; corresponding shifts to the teacher’s pedagogy; and the inevitable reduction of the collaborative opportunities that arise naturally from in-class social learning. These have been undeniably significant realities to resolve for our learners.

### **Revelations**

Yet this unprecedented phenomenon — our own ‘Year of Wonders’ — is a strange blessing in that it has

pushed educational matters to the forefront of public consciousness, has highlighted the great strengths of educators, and is an opportunity to reassert that which is most central and valuable in a learning community.

For educators, the difference between a future that will see us successfully negotiating — rather than being controlled by — constant change is arguably in our professional commitment, our adaptability and agility for education design, and the continued fostering of cooperation and collaboration across all stakeholders.

### **Commitment to professional goals**

Even as they urged educators and learning communities to resist performative pressures, academics such as Ahmad (2020) believe teachers’ expertise and commitment will triumph, in whatever shape post-pandemic education assumes.

“On the other side of this journey...are hope and resilience. We will know that we can do this, even if our struggles continue for years. We will be creative and responsive, and will find light in all the nooks and crannies,” (Ahmad 2020).

More locally, Prendergast (2020) of Griffith University alludes to the ability of committed vocationalists to withstand the vagaries of global fortune when she observed that “they [teachers] have displayed courage, commitment and capability...they have shown us why they became teachers”.

In my own school, this same professional dedication and conscientiousness characterised the immediate responses and hard work of colleagues. It was often a case of ‘don’t sweat the small stuff’ as our work was stripped back to our purest goals. In the face of a crisis, the ‘why’ of teaching assumes its rightful place again; the ‘how’ becomes a problem that can be solved with ingenuity.

### **Adaptability and agility**

Teachers’ ability to adapt to challenge and change has been well recognised as a high value professional and personal attribute (Collie & Martin 2016). Yet the more important word in 2020 may be ‘agility’, implying a nimbleness of mindset to find *opportunities* in change, rather than simply *endure* change. More and more experts assert that education needs to develop new approaches towards what is called the ‘age of agility’ (Gaulden & Gottlieb 2017).

The Agility movement, first arising in the *Agile Manifesto* 2001 in the world of software design, has been re-purposed over the past two decades across other domains, from business, leadership and more recently, education design. What makes this mindset

so appropriate for the pandemic age is its core learner-centred values of *individuals* and *interactions* over processes and tools; *meaningful* learning over measurement of learning; stakeholder *collaboration* over complex negotiation; and responsiveness to change over following a set plan (Briggs 2014).

This nimbleness is praised in Prendergast's (2020) statement that: "Teachers have been absolute champions as they have created learning in a way never before anticipated, at a pace never before imagined."

I observed this mindset as the collegiate community in my school embraced the new or the unfamiliar into their own teaching practices. Teachers' information technology skills were broadened, but more excitingly, those capabilities were hybridised, adapted uniquely to the teacher's pedagogy. The end game — quality interactions with students — informed the selection of tools and processes, not the other way around. This is the heart of 'design thinking' and problem-based learning, achieved with equal measures of intuition and critical thinking.

It was a heartening reminder of our ability to innovate, even under duress — indeed, perhaps because of duress — when aimed at the common good (Marope et al. 2018).

### Cooperative communities

If the COVID-crisis has shown us anything, it is that connection and cooperation is the centre of learning. As school buildings and playgrounds fell silent for months, we looked for this connection online. But the agile-minded school reaffirms the primacy of the face-to-face, the social dimension of citizenship and physical spatial interaction with shared place.

Andreas Schleicher (2020), Director for Education and Skills at the OECD, highlights this in his post to TeacherMagazine.com, citing the potential 'fracturing' of the 'social fabric created in and by schools' as perhaps the greatest risk in this crisis.

"Learning is not a transactional process, where students are passive consumers of content, where schools are service providers and where parents are clients.

"Learning always happens through interaction and in an environment of wellbeing and self-efficacy for both learners and teachers."

On a personal level, the collegial connection within my own school faculty and staff became a thread that wove throughout my days online, a cord that allowed me to debrief or consult in ways that were more spontaneous because our interactions were driven by genuine need: need for sociability, for relief, for encouragement, for problem solving, or for advice. I learned how my sensory faculties of listening were just as important — if not more so — as my faculty for talking. There were many moments of teamwork and the engagement in the art of concession in my own household as we negotiated a new timetable, and physically transformed our home into high school.

But the isolation from my students, and my observation of my own children isolated from their school environments confirmed for me that learning together — learner-teacher-home — is a natural extension of the basic human need for others.

### Natural wonders

This experience has caused me to go back to literature and history — my teaching specialities and my passions — to think of the way that events both real and fictionalised reflect so much about our experiences. I have realised that the books and the historical events most meaningful to me are often organised around twin themes of devastation and regeneration. The fall of one empire brought another, hopefully more enlightened, reign. The end of a world war resulted in a new consciousness against mass warfare. And the temporary shutdown of our scheduled lives made us more mindful of how we restock our days.



In the same way, the tremors from this natural disaster have opened some space, some questions about what we value in learning and schools, that — far from making us disquiet — are opportunity to reaffirm and redesign that which does most good for all. ▲

---

## REFERENCES

- Ahmad, A. (2020). 'Why You Should Ignore All That Coronavirus-Inspired Productivity Pressure', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 27 March, viewed 27 May 2020, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Why-You-Should-Ignore-All-That/248366/>
- Briggs, S. (2014). 'Agile based learning: What is it and how can it change education?' *Open Colleges*, Viewed 25 May 2020, <https://www.opencolleges.edu.au/informed/features/agile-based-learning-what-is-it-and-how-can-it-change-education/>
- Brooks, G. (2001). *Year of Wonders : A Novel of the Plague*, Fourth Estate, London.
- Collie, R.J. & Martin, A.J. (2016). 'Adaptability: An important capacity for effective teachers', *Educational Practice and Theory*, vol. 38, no. 1, pp. 27-39.
- Sefton-Green, J. (2020). 'Will Mass Schooling-at-home lead to the death of schools?' *EduResearch Matters*, 13 April, viewed 24 May 2020, <https://www.aare.edu.au/blog/?p=5378>
- Prendergast, D. (2020). 'Easing the Transition Back to School', *Griffith University News*, 25 May 2020, viewed 28 May 2020, <https://news.griffith.edu.au/2020/05/25/easing-the-transition-back-to-school/>
- Ball, S.J. & Olmedo, A. (2013). 'Care of the self, resistance and subjectivity under neoliberal governmentalities', *Critical Studies in Education*, vol. 54, no. 1.
- Marope, M., Griffin, P. & Gallagher, C. (2018). 'Future Competencies and the Future of Curriculum – A Global Reference for Curricula Transformation', *International Bureau of Education – UNESCO*, viewed 25 May 2020, <https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=international+bureau+of+education&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>
- Schleicher, A. (2020). 'International education and Covid-19 – Insights from TALIS', *Teacher Magazine*, 25 March, viewed 26 May 2020, <https://www.teachermagazine.com.au/columnists/andreas-schleicher/international-education-and-covid-19-insights-from-talis>
- Whitney, A.E. (2020). 'The gift of offering nothing', *National Council of Teachers of English*, 9 April, viewed 29 April 2020, <https://ncte.org/blog/2020/04/gift-offering-nothing/>



IMAGE: YEAR 12 STUDENTS HAPPY TO BE RETURNING TO SCHOOL IN TERM 2

# The autumn of our reconnect

DAISY TURNBULL BROWN, DIRECTOR OF WELLBEING, ST CATHERINE'S SCHOOL, NSW

**S**ometimes, working in wellbeing in schools could seem a bit like being the Little Red Hen, trying to get her friends to help turn wheat into bread. You can ask people to join you on a journey of promoting protective factors for student mental health, but they're not always super interested. But as we all learned over the last few months, everybody loves a warm loaf of sourdough bread.

For many years, handfuls of teachers across independent, systemic and public schools have been going on about wellbeing. We've been a growing army, nodding at conferences, shaking hands (but probably won't be in the future), liking each other's tweets and sharing the same articles around. We've been jabbering on about gratitude, optimism, resilience, VIA, growth mindsets, grit, and relationships. But this autumn, the scaffold of our social structure — the bells to start the day and break for recess, to attend assembly, to sit in the sun at lunch and to get the bus home stopped ringing. And we realised that wellbeing was not the passion project of a few, but needed by all.

## **COVID's distance actually brought communities together**

The COVID-19 crisis sent students into their homes and onto their screens for online learning, and in doing

so cemented the importance of the student-parent-teacher relationship. At St Catherine's we turned our twice weekly wellbeing program into a daily check-in so students could see their homeroom classmates and teacher. This allowed for authentic conversations and

also included activities focused on gratitude, gaining perspective, and a lot of fun dancing, pilates, yoga, and showing off pets and indoor plants.

Year mentors oversaw student wellbeing across year groups and were in direct communication with the parents, and parents sought advice with managing children who may not have been proactively focusing on their wellbeing. The weekly e-news became integral to ensuring parents understood how to talk to their children about the stress and anxiety of lockdown. Schools were seen as the experts in student wellbeing that we have always been. Parent gratitude increased (and presented itself in the form of coffees and cupcakes, thank you!).

Our prefects took to their social media accounts to stay in touch with the student body, inspiring them with study spaces, exercise videos, baking tips, and even some unicycle skills. Hundreds of students participated in

weekly trivia competitions that were delivered via email to the parents and staff, and via Instagram for students.

The next challenge will be keeping this community connection as we all return to normal.

### **Wellbeing went from the 'self-help' genre to the 'top non-fiction' shelf**

I think we all have Julia Baird to thank for this, in great measure. Her book *Phosphorescence* was released just as lock downs started, and was timed perfectly with its focus on resilience, on finding the light on the darkest days, and hope in the lowest of moments. But beyond Julia's book, which I used in the online wellbeing program, the government and media became concerned about student wellbeing in a way they usually only are when the Mission Australia survey is released each year. The federal government released over \$1billion towards mental health funding, and more counselling services are available to students.

We still do not know what the long-term impact will be on our wellbeing as a society, and a lot of these responses are focused on curative psychology to respond to mental health problems. However, there is a silver lining to the almost certain dark cloud of future mental health statistics, and that is the consensus that we all understand to varying degrees loneliness, isolation, anxiety and stress. Because we have all experienced the pressures of COVID-19, we should (emphasis on 'should') be able to treat anyone who comes to us with mental health issues with respect for their strength in coming forward.

### **We learnt the difference between a group chat and a phone call**

One of the most fascinating revelations for me during the COVID-19 pandemic was learning how much teenagers rely on the social structure of the school day. When it was removed, their wellbeing was impacted faster and more dramatically than anyone had expected. Why were Year 12s saying they felt isolated when they'd seen their wellbeing groups in period 1? Well, they weren't proactively organising conversations with friends. When the playground routine had been removed, they didn't realise that group chats and TikToks wouldn't replace them as a psychologically protective factor. So we told them. We explained why they needed to have Zoom lunch dates, and talk to friends on Facetime. They downloaded Houseparty. And the keel started to righten.

But after this pandemic, we will continue to talk to the students about the importance of connection and socialisation beyond a group chat, that the dangers of exclusion in a group chat are ever present, and that the best thing we can all do when interacting with each other either via Zoom or in person, is to practise kindness and compassion.

### **We know we need to track wellbeing**

The chance for students to 'fall between the cracks' was heightened when they were working from home, so we introduced new software for students to track their wellbeing on a daily basis that their mentors could observe. Ripple is a daily check in of six questions for students based on their sleep, exercise, confidence, and general mood. It did not replace authentic conversations, or insights from classroom teachers, or even attendance records, but it added to all of them. We noted some students were feeling less confident on days they had not exercised — so we responded by adding pilates classes some lunchtimes. We saw that some students had lower responses to friendship-based metrics on Mondays, because the weekends had been long and lonely, so we increased the prefect Instagram account to promote calling friends and having chats.

We will continue to use wellbeing trackers on a weekly to daily basis depending on the year group or student, and it adds to the mosaic of information we have around each individual student's wellbeing. For students in the boarding school we will use it more regularly, and students where we want to keep a closer eye on their mental health. The program allows us to see a 'heatmap' of student responses and pick up trends in individual students.

The Ripple team suggests using a 'naive enquiry' approach when talking to students about their ripple responses: "I noticed your ripple was a bit lower the other day, is everything ok?" and the students have on every single occasion opened up about stresses around friendship, school reports, exams or anything else.

I don't think we will be talking about whether or not schools should be using wellbeing trackers, but which one we will use.

### **We have to be ready for the walls to fall again**

When we returned to the classroom and Zoom became a lesser part of our daily lives (with the exception of staff meetings), we remain ready if we need to go back home. We have policies in place for online learning, we have the systems and the expertise to start again, and we know how to measure wellbeing regardless of where students are. But most importantly, we have all grown to appreciate the huge protective factor of school community. ▲

# Higher education sector: a demographic perspective

SIMON KUESTENMACHER, CO-FOUNDER OF THE DEMOGRAPHICS GROUP

**The funding reforms of the university sector have been hotly debated. Rightly so, higher education is a vital sector for the Australian economy, has only gotten more important over the last decades and deserves to be scrutinised by the wider public.**

---

In 1982 only eight per cent of women aged 25 to 34 and 13 per cent of their male counterparts had earned a university level degree. Since 1994 more women than men hold university degrees. Today one in two women and one in three men will earn a bachelor's degree.

The reason for this boom in higher education is simple. A growing share of jobs simply requires academic credentials. Between the 2011 and 2016 censuses almost half of the net new jobs added to the economy required university level education.

This can be viewed as the inflation of university education. Back in the 1980s and 1990s a degree made you stand out. Not so much today. Yet more high-school graduates than ever before will want to go to university. Bachelor's degrees are the new normal. A degree just became another must-have. It remains to be seen if a pricing incentive will be enough to channel students into specific degrees.

A complete overhaul of the financing model of higher education is necessary anyway. The sector relies heavily on high international student fees to subsidise the degrees of local students. Booming international enrolment figures allowed the government to cut back on uni funding. With fewer government dollars the unis must attract more international students. Circular logic at its best.

Can this funding model survive a few years with lower international student enrolments? How bad will the COVID-19 related decline in enrolments be?

In the short-term the outlook for the international enrolments is indeed bleak. Australia won't accommodate anywhere near the same number of international students in the next few years. This means universities miss out on a lot of money, student housing providers will face very low occupancy rates and the national economy

is weakened. Does that mean international education in Australia is doomed?

Absolutely not. Demand for high-quality English-speaking education will eventually surpass

pre-corona numbers. Global economies will continue to transition towards more knowledge-heavy jobs. University education, especially from top tier English-speaking universities will continue to function as the entry ticket to the best paying jobs. Australia is home to several such universities.

On top of this we are seeing the US, the biggest provider of English-speaking education, disgruntling its international students. Hong Kong, for a long time the most democratic and progressive corner of the Chinese Empire, will see many young and educated people looking to emigrate. These groups could be reinvigorating our education sector.

We don't know how long the recovery of the sector will take. Maybe there will be a vaccine by mid-2021 and enrolments will be up to pre-corona levels for the spring semester. Maybe recovery takes longer and will be more gradual. During the Global Financial Crisis international enrolments also suffered. We saw three years of falling enrolment figures, followed by a three-year recovery. Following this logic, international student numbers won't return to pre-corona levels before 2026.

The next generation of students belongs to Gen Z (born 2000 to 2017). Compared to the large millennial generation (born 1982 to 1999) that visited universities during the last decade Gen Z is a small generation. A small generation following a big generation in times of lower international enrolments is terrible news for universities. There simply won't be as many undergraduate students available.

Adjusting official 2030 population forecasts by the Australian Bureau of Statistics for COVID-19, we see that relative to 2019 fewer people aged 22 to 28 will live in Australia. This age cohort makes up half of all university enrolments.

Regardless of US-China trade wars, pandemics, or other calamities the trend towards more knowledge intense jobs requiring university education will continue in the long-run. A positive long-term outlook doesn't of course solve any short-term problems for Australian universities.

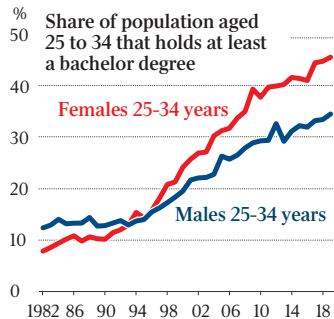
With significantly lower international student enrolments universities must fill big budget holes. Universities will react by doubling down on traditional postgraduate education (especially MBAs) and introduce more executive short courses; considering the importance of life-long learning and a relatively small generation (Gen Z) of undergraduates this is a smart move. As a result, the student profile in Australian universities will shift in favour of older students. More fancy lattes and less cheap beer on campus.

International students tend to move into purpose-built student accommodation for their initial housing when arriving in Australia. Students and their parents prefer this housing option as it can be booked comfortably over the internet while still being abroad. Having your 18-year-old baby fly the nest is scary enough, so parents are glad to know that housing is secured before arrival in Australia. Purpose-built student housing and residential colleges are the only housing options for international students that can be booked remotely.

It's hard to imagine that all student accommodation providers will come out of the lockdown unharmed. At least some providers will have to sell assets. Since most of our universities are centrally located within our largest cities this point to a further temporary weakening of the inner-city suburbs in the near future.

## HIGHER LEARNING

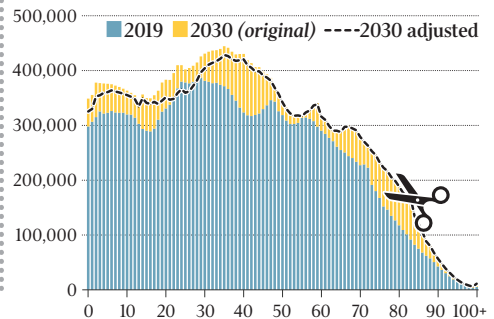
University education is the new normal



International education took five years to recover from GFC



Australian population projections for 2030 will need to be adjusted in light of COVID19



Source: ABS, [Internationaleducation.gov.au](http://Internationaleducation.gov.au)

If the total number of university students in Australia falls, the smallest and least prestigious institutions are most at risk. Students seek out the university with the best reputation as this will be most attractive to future employers. This means the biggest unis will see (in relative terms) the least impact while some small institutions will be impacted heavily.

The overhaul of the higher education sector also reaches the property sector. Many of the small institutions that might go bust own well-positioned property that has long been eyed by the big universities. The next few years provide plenty of opportunities for the biggest universities to increase their footprint with relatively cheap assets entering the market. The big players will become even bigger and even more important.

There is no structural problem with the higher education industry. As millions of people in Asia push themselves out of poverty into the global middle-class every year, the demand for higher education will continue to grow. Australian universities will have a few lean years ahead, but the sheer force of global demographic trends will lead to further growth in the future. Betting against the university sector would be a big mistake. ▲

*This article was first published in The Weekend Australian, 11-12 July 2020*



# How we created connection when physically disconnected

KATH WOOLCOCK, DEPUTY HEAD OF SENIOR SCHOOL, CAMBERWELL GIRLS GRAMMAR SCHOOL, VICTORIA

**In recognising the challenges that the COVID-19 situation presents for young people, expert Danielle Miller designed the bite-sized wellbeing course, *Creating Connection when Physically Disconnected*.**

All parents, carers and teachers had the opportunity to engage with the course and to gain an understanding of the ways in which we could support connection, socialisation and belonging during this period of isolation.

The course discussed the need to facilitate very real, positive and meaningful connections, while also encouraging our young people to think altruistically, that is, thinking of others and looking beyond self with kindness, compassion and gratitude.

Perhaps one of the most useful aspects of the course, was the focus on the art of conversation, an essential component of genuine exchange whether it be on virtual platforms or face-to-face. Here Danielle discussed the notion of asking questions, showing empathy and expressing real emotions — including joy, hope, fear, uncertainty and happiness — all very valid feelings during this time. Later in the course, Danielle discussed the inevitable conflict that may result from social interactions either during social isolation, upon return, or indeed later in life and she provided a very useful and practical ten step plan to help girls resolve conflict respectfully.

Danielle also recognised that in recent times there has been an increase in mental health issues for young people, as a result of both greater awareness but also a greater willingness to seek help. She pointed out that it is likely that these issues and experiences may be exacerbated during the COVID-19 situation, and with this, she provided some strategies and suggestions for parents on how to best support their daughters. As part of this, Danielle explored how and when to refer young people onto health care professionals and how to support those who have

friends or peers with mental health concerns.

In finishing the course, Danielle offered some suggestions about how parents could regularly conduct wellbeing checks for their daughters, and it is this message that I think is most valuable for parents moving forward. Wellbeing check-ins are a valuable tool for parents and educators not only during difficult times, but also on an ongoing basis. These conversations help us to connect, to make conversations around wellbeing the norm and help to establish life-long behaviours of self-care, which should form part of our daily routine.

Danielle suggested a number of questions that we can ask young people daily, including:

- Who am I connecting with today?
- What positive affirmation am I practicing using today?
- How am I moving my body today?
- What acts of kindness am I choosing to do for others today?

Fast forward a few weeks, and the question for Camberwell Girls Grammar School (CGGS) very quickly became one about how we could translate the lessons learnt from this course and from the silver linings of remote learning, into meaningful action that would support students in their return to face-to-face learning amid the continuing uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic. This situation was not unique to our school and in fact, was one that helped unite the education sector and networks across schools within Australia and internationally.

As a school, CGGS felt it was very important to be purposeful and intentional in our plans as we welcomed students back on site. As a result, we developed and

considered a three-stage coordinated approach that would continue well beyond the first days back. This included gathering data, clear language and messaging and lastly, a purposefully designed wellbeing program that met the dynamic needs of our students.

Each stage of our approach required collaboration and a shared understanding across all members of our school community, including working in partnership with students, staff and parents.

### **Gathering data**

As we prepared to welcome our community back, we sought feedback from our students, staff and parents on returning to school. In particular, we provided avenues for reflection and commentary on the following key areas: What were they looking forward to? What were their concerns? What support was needed? What were the silver linings that we wanted to hold onto? What required further consideration? And these opportunities for feedback continued well beyond the return to school.

This initial data enabled us to very intentionally create strategies, programs and actions that we could put in place to support both students and staff, including professional learning, policies, processes, infographics and other recommendations. Furthermore, we used this information to develop a clear set of priorities including:

- Meeting the wellbeing needs of our community, including opportunities for self-care
- Prioritising relationships
- Managing fatigue and cognitive load
- Validating the range of emotions experienced by all
- Being strategic with assessment, homework and managing workload.

Ultimately, this led to a focus on the idea of 'less is more', a mantra that our staff committed to both in our return towards the end of Term 2 and continuing into Term 3.

### **Language and messaging**

As part of our approach, we felt it important to acknowledge that the re-orientation process was a significant event for all, and one that was multifaceted and presented new challenges and opportunities for CGGS. We worked with our staff, students and parents around how we could best support all members of our community during this time, and most importantly, what the students needed to help them re-establish an effective and healthy school routine. We were purposeful in refraining from the term 'transitioning back', as we wanted our community to feel that we had moved forward during remote learning and as such, we used 're-orientation' in our communication with the community and in our programs for the students.

We asked our staff to model positivity and normalise the challenge, recognising that positive emotions such as

hope and joy can help students to think and act creatively, and with flexibility. Furthermore, these emotions can help to build social and psychological resources, especially resilience and grit, essential components to managing times of challenge such as COVID-19. We also wanted our staff to let students know and communicate that it was okay to feel vulnerable, confused or concerned during this time, and that these emotions were appropriate responses to have. As part of this, we were very clear and intentional in encouraging and reinforcing the notion of 'less is more' and giving teachers permission to prioritise essential curriculum and learning. This was coupled with ensuring our students and parents felt confident that they were in an excellent learning position now and going forward.

### **Purposefully designed wellbeing programs**

In recognising the varying needs of our students, we redesigned our Years 7-12 wellbeing program and curriculum to include a focus on hope, gratitude, connectedness and self-efficacy. These themes were purposefully chosen as research indicates that hope significantly and positively correlates with psychological wellbeing and coping in the face of adversity; gratitude can lead to a greater sense of happiness and can help to shift the focus from the challenges we have been experiencing; self-efficacy skills can enable us to draw on our strengths during difficult times; and connectedness is essential in helping students to feel known, valued and understood — moreover, social support networks are key in overcoming stress and bouncing back from adversity. During Tutor and Form time, as well as through our House Program, these ideas were explored across 16 different games, activities and initiative tasks. One of the challenges we faced was how do we provide opportunities for our students to connect and build relationships, through collaborative and group tasks, while maintaining the health and safety measures required. As a wellbeing team, we were able to devise a number of creative solutions to this, some technology-based such as Padlet, Yammer, Microsoft Teams, Flipgrid and others offline and offscreen. Finally, we regularly communicated to both our staff and students wellbeing support options, while providing individualised and personalised re-orientation programs for those who needed them.

As we continue to navigate the ever-changing educational and social environment that we find ourselves in, CGGS will evaluate, modify and build on the strategies and approaches we have used to help support our students, staff, parents and families in managing their health and wellbeing during this difficult time. ▲



IMAGE: L TO R, JANE WARD, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL: LEARNING AND TEACHING, STEPHANIE SMYTH, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL: WELLBEING AND ENGAGEMENT, NICOLE MANGELSDORF, PRINCIPAL AND TANYA KOLB, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL: STAFF

# Reimagining learning

JANE WARD, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL: LEARNING AND TEACHING, KILBREDA COLLEGE, VICTORIA

**C**hallenge. Purpose. Courage. These three words have defined the 2020 school year for Kilbreda College, and indeed for educational communities around the world. This year will forever be remembered as one like no other, a year when we were forced to think on our feet and rely on our hearts in order to determine the way forward. The year in which plans were crushed and, paradoxically, the year in which visions were realised.

What part did ‘Challenge’, ‘Purpose’ and ‘Courage’ play in the first six months of 2020 and how will they speak into the months and years that follow? What defines these words and how did they breathe life into Kilbreda’s response to the global pandemic and the resulting school closures and re-openings?

## Challenge

“The situation of being faced with something that needs great mental or physical effort in order to be done successfully and therefore tests a person’s ability” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

The word ‘Challenge’ conjures up a myriad of thoughts, with visions of obstacle courses and seemingly impossible tasks to overcome. As with most challenges we face in our lives, we often experience more success when we have support and can rely on others to help us through. When teams come together in true collaboration there is

a real strength that surpasses the project they are working on and transcends into a deeper connection and sense of purpose for the journey that lies ahead. Support of each other through a process of intense change provides opportunities to build authentic relationships and the sense of a common vision. “It is during times of uncertainty and

change that great opportunities come about to build the foundations for something even better” (Munby, 2019, p. 117). Knowing that we were all in this together, supporting each other, brought comfort and a sense of calm to an intense situation.

The concept of challenge is not new for schools. Every day school leaders and educators face numerous demands on their time, their skills and their ability to solve complex problems. However, a global pandemic was an unexpected challenge, something that we did not have a plan for, indeed had never imagined that we would ever need to have a plan for. We were starting from scratch. The pace at which decisions were required to be made at the onset of this crisis could have been the impetus for confusion and chaos, but when time was given to research, sit, think, share and question we found ourselves in a much better position to meet the demands of the road we were about to travel.

The timing of the term break was an opportunity to consider how the college would meet the challenge that was before us and best cater for the needs of the community. An opportunity to rethink and reimagine how education might look when operating remotely. Discussions were lively, collegial and long! After much deliberation and consideration, we boldly concurred that as a college we were willing to unlock the traditional schooling structures and look at education through a new lens. We weren't afraid to imagine ourselves teaching, learning and leading differently. We were driven by a united and focused goal, 'to do what was best for our community'.

The challenge had been accepted, we were ready to begin our adventure into remote learning. Bringing together our research and varying skills we were able to build our capacity to reframe our immediate future and look forward to the opportunity to consider how our community might be influenced by this experience when we returned to a new normal. "By embodying trust, establishing a shared view of the future, focusing on the common good and cultivating a sense of belonging" (University of Minnesota, n.d.) we were supporting one another and setting our sights on building upon our current successes once the immediate crisis passed.

These were challenging, but inspiring times.

### Purpose

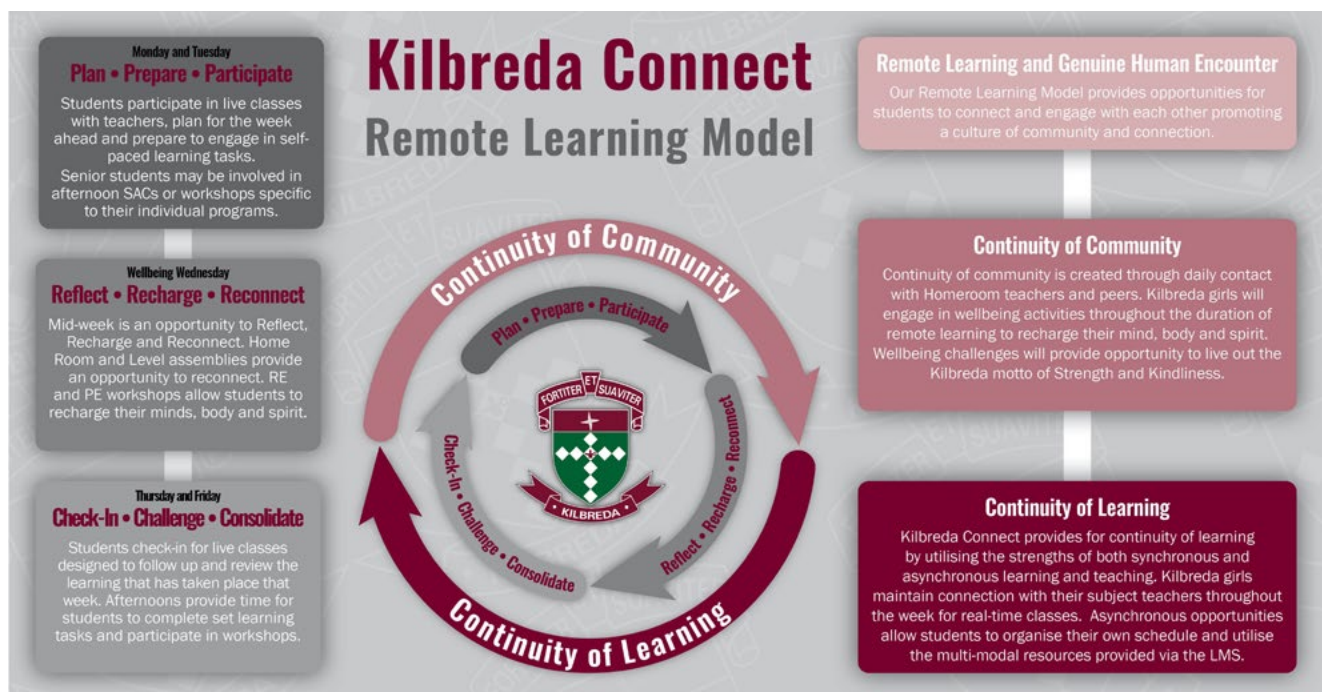
"Your life purpose consists of the central motivating aims of your life—the reasons you get up in the morning. Purpose can guide life decisions, influence behaviour,

shape goals, offer a sense of direction, and create meaning." (University of Minnesota, n.d.).

Kilbreda College has a solid reputation for providing wonderful and varied learning opportunities for girls that allow them to thrive and contribute to the growth of their faith and their sense of self, while developing a commitment to the values of the college. It is a place where the community is built on Brigidine traditions, where all are welcomed and people feel a strong sense of connection and belonging. It was important that these factors were at the heart of our remote learning model, Kilbreda Connect. We recognised that remote learning could not replicate the on-campus learning community and so we set about our task of designing, developing and implementing a model for remote learning that kept students at the core of all discussions and decisions.

Central to our planning was the wellbeing of students and staff, with the underpinning concepts of 'continuity of learning' and 'continuity of community'. We needed to get the combination right in order to best serve our students, families and teachers. Kilbreda Connect was designed to optimise student connectivity and participation during a period of isolation and physical disconnection.

The Kilbreda College remote learning model embraced the opportunity to reimagine learning and had at its core the considerations of student wellbeing and the provision for opportunities to continue learning in a sustainable manner. The model was based on research from around the world, taking into account information from schools that moved to online learning, due to COVID-19, long before Australia, and other accounts of remote learning



due to natural disasters or the provision of education in remote communities. “Evidence suggests that online/ distance education operates best as a system of dynamic, interrelated components...[The combination of]...these components foster a learning community that is driven by pedagogy and incorporates a range of activities, which enables flexible delivery” (AITSL, 2020).

Kilbreda Connect offered both synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities. Research indicated that the nature of remote learning was best suited to asynchronous learning, with short and regular bursts of synchronous learning facilitated by teachers. It was with this understanding that the Kilbreda Connect timetable provided for these learning and teaching methodologies and allowed opportunities for students to continue to connect with their teachers and their peers so that they could retain a sense of community and belonging in what was potentially a period of isolation and uncertainty.

This combination of learning and teaching strategies represented a massive shift in our education model, structure and mindset. It was important that in communicating this message to our community that we were able to articulate the rationale of the model and demonstrate how it complemented our core purpose as a college to cater for the academic, emotional, social, spiritual and physical needs of all community members.

The strength of the Kilbreda College community has been built over many years on strong enduring relationships. We were conscious of adopting routines and structures that promoted genuine human encounter during remote learning. Our purpose: to ensure that our

---

**“Too often in education we don’t want to try something new until we see examples of other schools or teachers who have already done it.”**

students and staff didn’t feel a sense of isolation and dislocation during the period of school closures. As a college we demonstrated that we were prepared to walk in solidarity with students and staff as we continued our shared journey and discovered new ways of connecting. At a time when we were unable to be together physically, we were determined to do all that we could to remain connected.

The goal of cultivating wellbeing in the school community and creating supportive environments and resources to promote student and staff wellbeing, is a fundamental tenet of the Kilbreda College Strategic Plan and was a key determinant of the inclusion of purposeful wellbeing time and activities for students and staff. ‘Wellbeing Wednesdays’ at Kilbreda College were about student agency and autonomy. The day was created to

encourage our students and staff to reflect, recharge and reconnect. The program each week was designed to kindle curiosity and provide opportunities for students to explore the elements of their personal wellbeing and discover the science of positive psychology. Each Wednesday students had access to a wellbeing workbook that consisted of a series of self-directed learning tasks, focusing on building the strengths of the individual to develop resilience to overcome challenges and enhance personal wellbeing. Staff, meanwhile, had the opportunity to engage in small discussion groups designed to provide support and connection during a period of remote working.

At the heart of what we do as passionate educators is our “moral purpose: a commitment to ensure that we improve the learning and the lives of the children and young people we serve. It is at the core of what drives us” (Munby, 2019, p. 55). While remote learning did not provide us with our normal opportunities to connect as a community, it did provide us with the time to contemplate the core values that are at the centre of our vision as a college, and challenged us to consider our purpose in shaping our remote learning model to ensure that these core values were reflected in all of our planning and decision making.

### **Courage**

“Evolution and incremental change is important and we need it, but we’re desperate for real revolution that requires a different type of courage and creativity.” (Brown, 2012, p. 186)

As contemporary educators we often find ourselves imagining how things could be different, but lack the courage or the impetus to take the first step towards the change we want to see in the world, in our professions and in our communities.

The fear of being different and challenging the norm often holds us back and stops us from realising the true potential of our teams and our schools, and as a result, our students.

When faced with sudden and unexpected disruption to our lives, and the forced necessity to do things differently we realise that the fear is not that hard to overcome. It just takes a spark of an idea and a team of bold educators who can fan the flame and see it come to life. “Too often in education we don’t want to try something new until we see examples of other schools or teachers who have already done it. Advances in education don’t come from imitation; they come from innovation” (Guskey, 2017).

Kilbreda College has a proud history of leaders who have followed their hearts and implemented curriculum design and programs that have demonstrated innovation

and the desire to do what is right for their community. We found ourselves once again at that moment in time, when we were required to step up and to face the challenge that was before us.

When the need is great and our purpose, to make a positive difference in the lives of our students, is threatened, we possess the fortitude to change how we do what we do in order to continue to support our community. We made the massive shift to online learning in the space of a few weeks, and we did it well. We didn't simply change the way in which we 'delivered' our lessons, but we dared to reimagine the norms of the day to day, and created a purpose built remote learning program in order to provide for the changed circumstances in which students and teachers found themselves.

We have been encouraged by the support of our parents and community. They have blessed us with kind words, and messages of affirmation that brightened the day and lifted the spirits of tired educators. We have been motivated by the engagement of our students and their ability to adapt and accept their changed circumstances with strength and kindness. Our students have reached out to each other, to their teachers and to the wider community and demonstrated hope, courage and compassion.

We mustered the courage to challenge the way things have always been done. We provided time for students to take responsibility for their individual learning journeys and develop learning disposition that will serve them well into the future. "If we want learners who can thrive in turbulent, complex time, apply thinking to new situations and change the world, we must reimagine learning: what's important to be learned, how learning is fostered, where learning happens, and how we measure success. This means creating environments that challenge, provoke, stimulate, and celebrate learning" (Fullan, Quinn & McEachen, 2018, p. 13). As educators we need to create opportunities for students to 'uncover' and 'discover' the world around them. We have a responsibility to our community to create a school for tomorrow, today.

Do we possess the courage, as a college, as a community of educators to accept the challenge and work towards the creation of a new model of schooling that serves the needs of our students today and for the lives they will lead tomorrow? "Like the early pioneers of our school system a century or more ago, our role is to lead change within the context that we now find ourselves. To believe that things can be even better for children and then lead in such a way as to turn that vision into a reality" (Munby, 2019, p. 118).

As we move towards a new tomorrow and reimagine learning environments that cater for the diverse needs of students and provide opportunities that allow them to flourish and thrive, we need to consider ways to move

from our traditional and classical structures of schooling to an educational paradigm that is more contemporary and befitting of students living in a rapidly changing and global world. "Such a reimagining of education is something we desperately need [in order] to address the lives that today's learners are likely to live" (Perkins, 2014, p. 5).

By harnessing the lessons from our period of remote learning and the positive community response to our preparation, communication and implementation of Kilbreda Connect, we are well placed to take bold steps towards imagining how a Kilbreda education might look and feel different in the near future.

As we make our way back to the classrooms and students and teachers are once again together onsite, we need to ensure that we do not wipe our hands clean of this experience and put our remote learning models on a shelf to gather dust. We find ourselves on the cusp of great change and we need to see this "as an opportunity to shape something to be even better. This is our time to really make a difference" (Munby, 2019, p. 130). Just as our predecessors had courage to challenge the status quo now is the time to once again follow our hearts and design a school for tomorrow, where the needs of students are placed at the centre of all that we do. To take the time to look beyond the horizon and consider how our future might be different from our past. ▲

---

## REFERENCES

- Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL] (2020) *What works in online/distance teaching and learning?* Retrieved from <https://www.aitsl.edu.au>
- Brown, B., (2012) *Daring Greatly - How the courage to be vulnerable transforms the way we live, love, parent and lead*. Great Britain: Penguin Random House
- Cambridge Dictionary. (n.d.). Challenge. Retrieved from: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/challenge>
- Cummins, P., & Di Prato, A. (2020) *Continuous Learning Toolkit Volume I*. Sydney, NSW: CIRCLE
- Fullan, M., Quinn, J., & McEachen, J. (2018) *Deep Learning - Engage the world change the world*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin
- Guskey, T. R., (2017) [@tguskey] (Retweeted on December 1, 2019) [Tweet] Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/tguskey/status/1200814499684638720>
- Kleweno, P., & Gerend, P. (2020, March) How to make your teams stronger in a crisis. Retrieved from <https://www.bain.com>
- Munby, S., (2019) *Imperfect Leadership - A book for leaders who know they don't know it all*. Bancyfelin, Carmarthen, wales: Crown House Publishing
- Perkins, D., (2014) *Future wise - Educating our children for a changing world*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass
- University of Minnesota. (n.d.). Taking charge of your health and wellbeing. Retrieved from: <https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/what-life-purpose>

# The positive impact of ‘more time’ on school life and students

JACINDA EULER, PRINCIPAL, BRISBANE GIRLS GRAMMAR SCHOOL, QUEENSLAND

**This year has seemed a decade and, while superlatives abounded, for once they were apt. Unprecedented. Uncharted. Uncertain. It was all these things and more, but the challenge now for Brisbane Girls Grammar School and, I would imagine, any school is thinking through what we have learned at speed, what to keep and how to resist a “return to the old dispensation”, as *New York Times* columnist Roger Cohen wrote recently, simply because “there is no easy or obvious alternative”.**

---

At Girls Grammar, we have been committed to deeply analysing what we have learned through our recent experiences, in order to work vigorously to preserve certain things. For example, a more creative use of technology in teaching and learning, a new convenience and informality in some of our parent information forums, more regular and agile use of parent and student surveys, and an empowering flexibility in our expectations of staff.

Remote learning tested us all — teachers, students, parents — but once past the initial shock of having to adapt to technologies which, for some, presented an enormous challenge, many came to see the benefits of some new ways of teaching and learning. Of course nothing can, in my opinion, replace the efficacy and sheer joy of person-to-person interaction in the classroom and this was what our students and our staff missed most. However, what we gained was something too good to relinquish with the return to ‘normal’: time, that most precious of commodities.

Recent experience (and of course this crisis still has a long way to run) allowed us to examine the concept of time within the context of school life. In reflecting on some of the observations from staff, students and parents about how a seeming ‘increase’ in time — or sense of time elongated, free from long-established restraints and routines — led to greater connection, wellbeing and general happiness for many, despite the challenges for others. The wrestle for us as educators in girls’ schools is how to hold on to the gift of time for our often very busy and overcommitted students, born of an unwanted crisis, before it slips away again.

## Time for students

Throughout the remote learning period, Girls Grammar surveyed students, parents and staff to gauge how they were coping, and adapted strategies and processes in response to their feedback. Short ‘pulse’ surveys focused particularly on wellbeing within the context of unexpected and rapid change

to routines, learning methods and family dynamics. Although some students struggled with remote learning, citing difficulty in concentration and missing face-to-face interactions with friends and teachers, other students thrived. Many reported improved wellbeing and a more positive mindset, attributable to increased sleep, a more relaxed daily schedule and time to pursue different interests, purely for their inherent pleasure.

Creativity blossomed for many students, who found ways to make the most of isolation by connecting, albeit remotely, with each other and with society more broadly. A number of students used their extra free time to compose songs, or to deepen involvement in service projects such as the ‘Notes of Hope’ program. Girls also enjoyed spending more time with family (and their pets) and reported deeper and improved relationships with siblings. The weight of positive comments and experiences led the school to consider how best to retain some of the ‘space’ granted our students during lockdown, evident as it was that a less frenetic pace of life, and less cluttered schedules, benefitted many students — and was revelatory to some, most particularly those with the typically busiest days.

Both staff and students are interested in exploring the idea of a remote learning day, whereby all students and staff might spend a day, perhaps once a fortnight, learning from home. More broadly, ‘time’ is under scrutiny in the form of a specific project to assess how we schedule it more cleverly within the reality of a school and in the context of modern families — the dynamics of which are already being dramatically reconfigured in response to

the pandemic, with more flexible work routines and a re-appreciation of the importance of home life for family happiness.

For a school that distinguishes itself on the range of co-curricular activities it provides and encourages girls to make the very most of all that is offered, supporting girls to also maintain a healthy balance will continue to be essential. Many girls love being able to explore many different pursuits and become deeply involved in sport, music and service activities — often seemingly all at once. The period of remote learning gave these girls, in particular, a powerful experience of something different and the possibility of understanding for themselves that there can be a different pace of life and that they have the power to choose just how they spend their time. The reality of life is that we are always required to balance competing demands on our time, and that is part of the girls' learning at school. Schools play such an important role in helping girls to make the right choices and to keep things in balance — recent times may have supported that learning in new and very practical ways.

A burgeoning independence in our students and a sense of autonomy — particularly with regard to how they managed and spent their time within lessons and throughout their day — developed confidence in many of our students. And for most there has been a philosophical realisation that while the experience so far this year, for our Year 12 girls in particular, may not have been what we hoped for, there have been fresh learnings, deepening friendships, and a hard-won gratitude for their school, teachers and friends.

### **Time for staff**

Although the corporate world has been practising flexibility for some time, the structures and demands of a school mean that flexibility, at least for academic staff, is necessarily curtailed. During the remote learning phase most teachers found their working days expand, and the once finite boundaries between campus and home blurred. Some teachers experienced the extreme challenge of teaching a full load, while also home-schooling their own children. However, despite the novel and



demanding circumstances, teachers responded extremely well to the school's acknowledgement of individual circumstances. The importance of granting teachers more time — to prepare, to mark and to think — against the backdrop of ever-increasing complexity in their work is being examined anew. Even something as simple as inviting professional (non-teaching) staff to do playground duty while many teachers were off-campus and educating remotely, provided an opportunity to free up time for teachers, allow professional staff to be more involved in student life, and bring the entire staff closer together as a collective.

---

**“Before COVID-19, flexible work was often, perhaps unduly, perceived as difficult to implement in a school environment.”**

Professional staff also demonstrated the benefit and ease of remote working, when before COVID-19, flexible work was often, perhaps unduly, perceived as difficult to implement in a school environment. Assisted by the rapid and necessary on-boarding of technologies such as MS Teams and Zoom, staff comfortably maintained connection during the remote phase, and the school is working to make more flexible work options available to all staff in the longer term.

### **Time for families**

Parents also benefitted from changes forced upon us during the lockdown with many reporting a gentler pace of life, freeing up more time: for families to be together, for deeper sleep, and more pause. Unable to gather in large groups, our school (like all others) had to migrate a variety of events — from parent-teacher interviews through to orientation activities for the incoming 2021 Year 7 cohort of 250 girls — to remote platforms. For example, instead of a series of interviews with incoming girls and their parents, usually held over three days, the school hosted an interactive webinar. Although a break from tradition, and lacking the ‘sense of occasion’ girls experience when entering our beautiful historic Main Building, benefits included broader family participation and, of course, the convenience of families logging on from their breakfast table on a Saturday morning. I was still able to answer discreetly submitted questions like, ‘can I decorate my locker’ and ‘how will I make friends’, but with the entire cohort and their parents able to listen to the response. It was intimate and friendly, hopefully calming some of the inevitable nerves girls feel about commencing secondary school.

Many parents appreciated the time saved through remote parent information seminars, subject selection evenings and parent-teacher interviews. As an inner-

city campus, traffic and parking can be a challenge and we found that engagement levels actually increased in some respects through providing a remote option — these options will certainly continue to be offered even as restrictions ease. The task now becomes striking a balance between the importance of physical community events where parents meet, make friends and show their support for the school and the girls, and those more information-based events that can be delivered online for greater convenience and efficiency. In Term 2, parent-teacher interviews were managed via individual phone calls with teachers and, although some staff found this exercise challenging, parents spoke very positively of the change saying that the information they received was often more direct, personal and authentic via this new mode.

When asked to list their top three ‘silver linings’ from the remote teaching period, parents cited ‘more time with family’ as highly as webinars and remote teacher interviews. Many also felt the intensity of social activity and FOMO had disappeared, social media activity had decreased, and their daughters had been ‘delivered back to’ the family. This was also evident in reports from the girls who, overwhelmingly, appreciated more time to be with family. It would be a great shame not to preserve at least some of this precious time as it is clear that less rush and a more even pace of life is particularly beneficial for teenaged girls.

### **Summary**

Of course, the vast majority of girls (and their parents) were overjoyed to see the return to campus learning. They missed their friends and their teachers dearly and their relief at a return to ‘some kind of normal’ was palpable. However, too much good came out of lockdown to ignore the ‘gems’ — the girls’ abundant creativity, their hunger to make something positive out of a very difficult situation, the relief felt by staff and parents at the opportunity to reset and re-assess.

And yet as Roger Cohen wisely writes “attempts at wholesale reinvention” like utopias “tend to end badly”. So, rather, we seek a judicious ‘rebalancing’ in the way we deliver education at Brisbane Girls Grammar School and perhaps in our broader lives. If time is our most precious resource, then the challenge is to do all in our power to preserve it and not lose the benefits of what we have learned through adversity. ▲

# Best practice for performance management in the online space for educators

KAREN PRINSLOO, DEPUTY PRINCIPAL, ST STITHIANS COLLEGE, SOUTH AFRICA

**The essence of performance management stays the same — so what is different and what do we need to be aware of in the new remote work environment that the COVID-19 crisis has put us in?**

---

In times of crisis it is not possible to adequately prepare for working remotely and to gain training for this new space that we find ourselves in. In the handful of days before the lockdown, most schools engaged in crash courses on video conferencing, Google Classroom, OneNote, OneDrive and a multitude of other digital platforms that the digital coaches in schools have been striving to encourage us to adopt for a number of years. This was overwhelming for everyone, even for the digital natives in our staffrooms.

There are very real distractions at home that are far worse than the ordinary remote worker usually experiences. Staff needed to set up their homes to create spaces for working from home for themselves, their partners and possibly their own children too. There might not be childcare either and they may also have to share resources such as the home computer. “Managers must expect distractions to be much worse during unplanned work from home situations.” (Larson et al., 2020)

The essence of performance management, however, remains the same whether employees are working remotely or not. “It is up to the manager to help employees review their work and make sure they continue to add value to the team and the organisation.” (HR Zone, 2018). Performance management reviews held once or twice a year with the employee, was rejected years ago. The culture of ongoing communication and feedback to employees about their work, and feedback from the employees about any organisational constraints or management styles that may get in the way is now the norm. In this time of crisis ongoing communication and feedback has never been more important than it is now. We cannot assume that no news is good news and that all is well, nor can we afford to misinterpret that the silence implies that no work is being done! (HR Zone, 2018).

**How do remote workers feel and what are their challenges?**

Not everyone responds to change and a crisis in the same way. Some need more time to adjust to the new normal. Staff who are parents, we acknowledge, have the hardest time and need the greatest flexibility. Everyone is impacted differently (Brownlee, 2020).

Feelings can range from anxiety to imposter syndrome; it is extremely important for any leader to look out for signs of staff behaving differently. Loneliness is one of the top three challenges for remote workers and this prolonged isolation can lead to anxiety and depression (Get Lighthouse Blog, 2020).

Staff also feel left out and disengaged, they feel that the leadership is not noticing or acknowledging their stress or appreciating the value that they add to the organisation. The lack of face-to-face supervision can lead to a belief that the leader is out of touch with their needs and is not being supportive. They can also feel that they don't belong to the organisation anymore and some feel that they may want to leave due to the feeling of social isolation. (Larson et al., 2020) “Out of sight is an issue — they don't want to be overlooked.” (Altman, 2020).

Duvall (2019) states that staff who work remotely find it so awkward in the first few days that they often spend time wondering if they are doing it right. Some even feel like they are a fraud (imposter syndrome) and not worthy of the position. Many educators experience guilt for not being at their desk or online and available during core hours and feel that their leader may be judging them if they are not available as they used to be when they were present at work.

The following points are listed as the biggest struggle for working remotely: unplugging after work, loneliness, collaboration and communication, distractions at home, staying motivated, taking vacation time and finding reliable wifi (Get Lighthouse Blog, 2020).

## Remote work is the way of the future

Remote work is the way of the future and being prepared as a leader and an educator is vital. One of the strongest themes that have come through in the readings is that remote workers need to feel connected. As the team leader, it is your primary role to keep staff happy by making them feel connected to the organisation. To foster a desire to work together in this new space and achieve goals as a team (ShieldGeo, 2020).

According to Get Lighthouse Blog (2020) remote workers are more willing to put in the extra hours and are more likely to stay with the company if they have a supervisor that is open to flexible partially remote work.

### Setting expectations

Altman (2020) suggests that “the expectations must be set at the onset so that they can perform accordingly. Go over the top with regard the amount of information you give them. Find out what their daily schedule is, do they have flexibility?” “What is their preferred way to communicate with you?”

Establish the rules of engagement by setting the expectations on the frequency and the ideal time of communication. Let the staff member choose the best time and the way to connect during the workday (Larson et al., 2020). Be clear on responsiveness, how quickly should they be expected to respond to you (ESET, 2020). Respect public holidays and weekends and share with your staff that school holidays in a crisis require different boundaries.

Give your team dedicated blocks of time when they must be online and other times when they can be offline

and work free from disruptions. Set times for example from 10:00 – 12:00 or 14:00 –16:00 for being available online. If they can be offline and structure their days, they can attend to things like connecting with their family. “It can be chaotic to have kids and a spouse around” (Murphy, 2020).

Don’t assume that all employees can switch to remote working effectively with little assistance or guidance (ESET, 2020).

### Best practice to support the team

How can leaders support their staff? They need to start by looking after themselves and setting up their own boundaries in order to be of assistance to others.

Firstly, as a leader be aware of yourself and your own stresses and try not to let that trickle to the team (Larson et al., 2020) Make use of daily positive affirmations that you write for yourself.

One of the biggest struggles when working remotely is the inability to be able to unplug after work and give yourself time in a holiday period. The CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2020) suggest that one should “setup a designated workspace, get dressed, write out a daily to do list, know when to step away, stay in conversation, foster relationships, be clear in communication and ask for support. Show the big picture and be prepared to be flexible. Set expectations and trust your team. Have a virtual daily huddle. Keep the rhythm of regular one on ones and team meetings.” And most importantly “listen closely”.

Another thing to be aware of is to check your status on the various platforms that you use. If you have not set the status to ‘available’, staff will not know if your ‘door



is open' as it was before we moved into the online space (Get Lighthouse Blog, 2020).

Cornell University (2020) has five very good tips for leaders: “ Be patient and understanding with yourself and others; be clear on the expectations of availability; focus on the interpersonal when having virtual meetings, schedule lunch and breaks and ‘Go to Work — and Leave Work’ which is in inverted commas for obvious reasons.

In order to end the day so that life isn't a blur you need to end the day properly. The following tips have been provided by Liv McConnell (2020), on how to add powering down time to your daily schedule. This should be the time to work on your emails at the end of the day and to be disciplined to stop when the time is up. Take some time just before 'leaving' to check in with a colleague and strengthen a relationship. Be honest with what you have procrastinated or shoved to the end of the day and rather break it down into manageable bits so that it can be completed. Set out your [following] day so that you have at least three tasks to finish by the morning. Use some kind of colour code to set the urgency. Not everything has to be work related. Log off at the same time each day for consistency especially if you are using your device for social means too like watching Netflix.”

Logging off at the end of the day is also a protection for self — children have been known to send emails inadvertently off work computers when left unattended!

With all the time spent on one's device it is important to ensure that you have an ergonomically safe workspace or you will experience repetitive strain injuries and other health issues. Adequate lighting and ventilation are essential. Your chair should have good lumbar support, be levelled so that your feet are flat on the floor with your arms bent and resting on the desk at a 90-degree angle. Wrists should be flat on the keyboard. Unfortunately working on a laptop is not ideal as the monitor should always be positioned at eye level and cannot be raised away from the keyboard. The monitor should also be set an arm's length away. Regular breaks should be taken where the eyes are able to adjust to distance and close work. A good technique is to cover one's eyes for 10-15 seconds and to also take regular breaks — two minutes for every 30 minutes of work and five minutes for every hour. Switching tasks is also good for mental health. Fortunately, health devices often prompt us to take breaks when inactive periods are recorded. Always use a headset rather than cradling a phone in your neck while typing. You may have to consider loaning the school equipment to staff so that they have the tools to continue their jobs and keep safe. Ergonomic keyboards from the computer labs could save a few injuries at this time.

## Tips for leaders to manage their teams

### Attitude

Attitude is key when dealing with others who are struggling in this new online space. Be patient and understanding. Lead with empathy and open communication. Be mindful of their challenges. Working from home with children, spouses and possibly parents is not an easy situation to be in and be productive (Cornell University, 2020). Take time to connect more on a personal level with your staff, start conversations asking how people are feeling and what is distracting them. Find out what their hobbies are. Offer them help and make sure that they know where to access the employee assistance programs that your organisation has put in place. Make time for small talk and build a rapport with your staff. “A rapport doesn't come from doing and talking about work — it comes from getting to know the complete person.” (Get Lighthouse Blog, 2020). Time invested is really appreciated by people; it gives them a sense that you care, and it will make them like working for you. It is important to remember what you learned from them; much like the hairdresser who can pick up the conversation they had with you six weeks ago.

### Communication

One of the strongest themes that comes from the remote working environment and of course from performance management is the need to communicate. It is important to set up check-ins with staff sometimes individually and sometimes in teams. Meet individually with direct reports regularly and discuss how they are doing, discuss work related goals and remind them of self-care. Hold short water-cooler meetings with the team just to find out how they are doing. All effective team meetings should be 45 minutes or less so that there is time for a break between meetings (Cornell University, 2020).

### One-on-ones

One-on-ones are extremely important, just as they were in the previous normal working environment. Schedule one-on-one video calls so that they are like the coffee chats you used to have in the staffroom. The frequency of the chats will depend on the job role, the staff member's personality and your experience working with them. It is suggested that you over schedule and cut back later rather than try and increase the frequency of chats later, this may be perceived as micromanaging (ShieldGeo, 2020).

Give staff a full hour every week on your calendar if you can. Make sure you are ready for the initial one, just as you would have been in a normal performance meeting, by having questions ready to ask such as: “What is your favourite part of working remotely? What is your daily routine? Do you feel included in team discussions? What tools work for you? Who would you like to communicate

more with? What can I do to support you more? How is your workspace set up?” (Get Lighthouse Blog, 2020). Jack Altman also suggests that you prepare notes before the meeting and even encourage the staff member to set up an agenda from their perspective for the meeting. “Never cancel a one-on-one, that builds resentment, if you [must], rather reschedule.” (Get Lighthouse Blog, 2020).

### **Team meetings**

We don’t only work as individuals, we also collaborate and work in teams. As the leader it is also important to keep teams motivated and engaged. Putting aside time to hear from the team is a great way to make them feel motivated (HR Zone, 2018). Strong teams aren’t just good for morale, but they are also good for productivity. A lot of brainstorming and work was done in the staffroom and at tea breaks so in order not to lose this, it is important to have virtual team check-ins or virtual coffee breaks. In this new space, it is important to not only talk ‘shop’ but to also “give everyone a good mental break to increase productivity and promote social cohesion.” “Strong relationships are the key element to long term task effectiveness.” (Brownlee, 2020). Brownlee also suggests that during these positive bonding meetings that staff also show off their ‘new colleagues’ in their working environments, like their pets and kids and even their plants. As the team leader who is listening to your staff, it may be a good idea too to suggest small group connections across the staff especially for those who feel particularly isolated or lonely.

“File sharing and collaborating on documents” is also good practice (ShieldGeo, 2020). Brainstorming just shifts to happening online. The blog from Get Lighthouse (2020) suggests that tools like <https://mural.co/> are used to assist with white boarding and brainstorming.

### **Feedback**

Besides the ‘water cooler’ or staffroom chats and the building of rapport with staff, the performance management process also needs to have important time set aside for feedback and the growth of staff. Feedback should always be given often. The benefit of giving regular feedback is that everyone knows where they stand, and it will reduce the surprise or disappointment at the end of the cycle/year at the formal review. Provide continuous feedback and discuss what has gone well since the last check-in (Duvall, 2019).

If there is a negative situation that you need to deal with, never wait or it will fester. Deal with them as they occur so that they don’t become complicated. By holding regular conversations, it makes it a lot easier to identify problems or even prevent them. It is much easier to have a courageous conversation if you have regular meetings than to try and connect with someone that you haven’t chatted to for a long time and must raise the difficult topic. Difficult conversations always require a lot more

energy especially if you have not built up a relationship with the staff member first (HR Zone, 2018).

Keeping feedback clear and honest will prevent anyone over analysing what you have said. It is important to be specific about what is working and what is not working (Altman, 2020). Never deal with a negative issue in a group situation, always make that a personal one-on-one call.

Duvall (2019) says, “Share praise and own blame.” Hold performance-orientated discussions in private, not in public.

### **Encouragement and sharing**

A good practice is to keep employees up to date with celebrations and events in a regular weekly staff newsletter. Another suggestion is to encourage peer appreciation and recognition in the weekly newsletter as one would have done in the staffroom at the weekly meetings. Regular news from the team leader is very important. Share notes of meetings in the form of highlights, no one wants to sit and listen to the full recorded video conference.

Two fun suggestions that have been found to promoting social interaction in these times were put forward by Larson et al (2020). The first is pizza time — as the team leader you organise to have pizza delivered to each team member just before the video conference time, it is one way to create a sense of belonging and reduce feelings of isolation. Obviously only do this in times when hot food deliveries are permitted and not during lockdowns. The second suggestion is to send ‘swag’, as Americans say, to remote workers and their families. This will make them all feel connected to the company. Some schools do have that culture established and social media posts have snapped images of families all wearing the school supporter branding. This is something that could be organised for new members of the faculty who join the school during the lockdown and social distancing period.

### **Development**

A useful tool to use for development in the performance management process is to use the 3-2-1-oh method. Ask staff to list three things that they have done well, two skills or areas that need improvement, one way in which the team leader or organisation can support them and the ‘oh’ is two sentences on what they are most excited or grateful for in the organisation and how they would like to develop their career. This will help with condensing writing when reflecting on performance (HR Zone, 2018). In an online environment although there is no travelling time to get to work, time is a precious commodity because online school takes a lot longer to prepare for initially. It is like we are all first year teachers all over again.

Team leaders must not forget to be on the lookout for developing staff career paths and progression. Goals

are just as important now as they were at the beginning of the year and team leaders need to reflect with staff on their organisational and development 'sticky' goals.

This is another opportunity for staff to also be able to reflect on how they can be developed professionally beyond their current roles. Think of experts who can help the employee to learn a new skill if they are interested.

Develop a social buddy mentor scheme (ESET, 2020). Use your digital learning coaches to help staff who are struggling to navigate their new remote working environment; it is not possible to be everything to everyone as the team leader. A staff member on your team could also be responsible for the onboarding of any new staff and interns that join your organisation in this time.

Help team members who are experiencing workload reduction to focus on important work that often doesn't get done in normal circumstances, such as to update and review work processes, procedures and tools (Cornell

---

**“Email is the worst form for communication with remote workers and should only be used for neutral and objective content only.”**

University, 2020). Sports staff could work through their selection policies, workshop material for captains and leaders of clubs and sport etc. All staff who are in this situation need to realise that they may be redeployed to other areas of work in order to still add value and remain relevant to an organisation.

Those who have capacity can be encouraged to participate in online training and develop new skills and workplace practices that can be implemented later (Cornell University, 2020).

### **Digital platforms for keeping contact**

In a normal school environment, you can make eye contact, gauge the response and read body language. There are so many digital tools to use right now to keep in contact, but few of them suggest when to use a tool for the appropriate situation. This is a skill that managers need to learn.

If you consider Dr Albert Mehrabian's 7-38-55 rule of personal communication which states that 7 per cent is spoken word, 38 per cent is voice and tone and 55 per cent is body language, it is obvious that video conferencing is the best way to communicate with your staff. How does one make a decision based on seven per cent of the information you would get by just listening to a call or a voice note? Don't let technical connectivity be an excuse for not connecting face-to-face (Get Lighthouse Blog, 2020).

Video conferencing use has skyrocketed and is still the best form of communication for performance matters as it allows for tone of voice and facial expressions. It also reduces the sense of isolation. All sensitive conversations such as the feedback that was discussed early, should always be face-to-face.

Audio calls like telephone calls are next best as they can allow for long potentially complex issues that can be discussed quickly.

Communicating with non-verbal cues are dangerous because there is no sense of intent and employees are often likely to assume negative intent (Get Lighthouse Blog, 2020).

Instant messaging services such as Whatsapp should be reserved for a coffee chat and informal discussions only. If you do have to use this platform always populate it with animated gifs and emoticons to convey emotion. Words strangely do come across aggressively and are less impactful (Get Lighthouse Blog, 2020).

Email is the worst form for communication with remote workers and should only be used for neutral and objective content only. Misinterpretation with any form of text messaging is a danger and should be avoided

when dealing with remote employees (Larson, Vrman, & Makarius, 2020). Email is useful for conveying the highlights or action notes of the meeting.

### **Measuring performance**

Managing remotely is quite different to managing face-to-face although the principles of managing people remain the same. It is important to develop a remote work policy or culture so that everyone is aware of the expectations.

It is also important to measure output and not input. Whatever the role, it is important to find a metric to evaluate productivity and not count the hours spent (Duvall, 2019). Most HR organisations advocate that managers focus on work and results rather than when and where people are working from. Mark Murphy (2020) who writes for Forbes suggests that just because employees are 'bodies-in-their-seats' doesn't mean that they are being productive. He advocates that it is "better to spend more concentrated time on deep work without interruption – which is called time-chunking." At work, staff are constantly interrupted by the next lesson, the checking of email or social media, and remote working allows one to structure time and be far more productive. This will definitely be productive if schools offer asynchronous teaching and even "day 11" options where nothing is timetabled in that working day so that staff and students have catch up time. Time chunking, also called time-blocking is something that managers rarely achieve

in the old contact form of day-to-day schooling, but so badly need in order to be productive leaders.

Self-evaluations on their own have proved to be fraught as they can be inflated. One of the best tools to use is the 360-degree review where in the case of educators, four points of view are compared: Self, thoughts of co-workers, student evaluations and line managers are considered. A 360-degree view tries to understand how all the constituents perceive the person being appraised and how closely they are to being similar. These tools have already been created for the online environment with the exception in many schools of not incorporating student feedback.

Descriptors that would still be applicable for use in an online survey on staff by students could be: My teacher is respected; helpful; encouraging; caring; fair; makes learning fun; is always well-prepared; is knowledgeable; is motivated and passionate; marks my works and gives me feedback that improves my learning; I feel acknowledged and included in the online class. My teacher is also approachable, and I am not afraid to ask for assistance. These descriptors could easily be incorporated into a survey form.

“Have an online space or system where people can say what they are doing. Keep it visible with regular feedback conversations where the employee can review their work and performance” (HR Zone, 2018).

Staff can check-in by provide monthly or weekly reports on their work and activities.

Regular one-on-one meetings can be scheduled where this can also be shared. Those appraising staff can also join video classes with students to gauge how the interaction and learning is taking place, just as they used to do when they performed class visits.

Sharing of developed teaching material and videos and working to each other’s strengths are also very important in the process of performing in this new environment.

Weekly logs or updates of work will do two things, it will prevent the leader from overlooking the employee and it will keep the staff member accountable (Altman, 2020).

Staff who have more consolidation time could work through policy documents and processes and also revamp old teaching material to make it more accessible on various digital platforms. The adoption of technology into traditional teaching methods to promote learning has been a performance indicator for several years in many schools.

Jobs are so precious right now; it is important that employers are able to convey to their boards how staff are still relevant and adding value in the new environment. What is clear is that those who are not able to shift will be left behind.

## Conclusion

“Trust is the most important thread running deep across every method of managing a remote team. Managers need to trust that their employees are engaged and motivated. They must also ensure that they hire self-motivated people.” (Duvall, 2019).

Regular conversations and a transparent system will take away the guesswork about productivity and effective education in the new remote space we find ourselves.

There are so many positive experiences from this situation that will be adopted in the schooling environment once “normality” returns. ▲

---

## REFERENCES

- Altman, J. (2020, January 2). Performance Management for Remote Workers. Retrieved April 19, 2020, from <https://lattice.com/library/performance-management-for-remote-workers>
- Bamboo HR. (2018). Best Practices for Managing Remote Employees. Retrieved April 19, 2020, from <https://www.bamboohr.com/blog/remote-workers-best-practices/>
- Brownlee, D. (2020). Forbes. Retrieved April 14, 2020, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/danabrownlee/2020/04/08/use-these-4-daily-habits-to-promote-remote-team-bonding/#6b70a31d127f>
- Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. (2020). Getting the Most from Remote Working. Retrieved April 19, 2020, from <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/remote-working-top-tips>
- Cornell University. (2020, April 10). Remote Work Tips for Everyone. Retrieved April 19, 2020, from [https://hr.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/documents/for\\_everyone\\_final.pdf](https://hr.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/documents/for_everyone_final.pdf)
- Duvall, J. (2019, April 1). How Successful Remote Teams Evaluate Employees; A look inside Automattic, Github, and Help Scout. Retrieved April 19, 2020, from <https://zapier.com/learn/remote-work/remote-employee-evaluation/>
- ESET. (2020). Covid-19 and the shift to remote work. Retrieved April 19, 2020, from <https://www.welivesecurity.com/2020/03/16/covid19-forced-workplace-exodus/>
- Get Lighthouse Blog. (2020). 11 Essential Tips for Managing Remote Employees. Retrieved April 18, 2020, from <https://getlighthouse.com/blog/10-tips-manage-remote-employees/>
- HR Zone. (2018, February 22). Leading remote teams: the role of performance management. Retrieved April 19, 2020, from <https://www.hrzone.com/lead/change/leading-remote-teams-the-role-of-performance-management>
- Larson, B. Z., Vrman, S. R., & Makarius, E. E. (2020). Harvard Business Review. Retrieved April 18, 2020, from <https://hbr.org/2020/03/a-guide-to-managing-your-newly-remote-workers>
- McConnell, L. (2020). Ladders. Retrieved April 15, 2020, from <https://www.theladders.com/career-advice/9-things-the-most-productive-wfh-people-do-30-minutes-before-logging-off>
- Murphy, M. (2020, April 14). When Your Employees Are Remote, You Have To Stop The Body-In-Seat Mentality. Retrieved April 19, 2020, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/markmurphy/2020/04/14/when-your-employees-are-remote-you-have-to-stop-the-body-in-seat-mentality/#542ae1d62d33>
- ShieldGeo. (2020). Keeping Your Remote Worker Happy - A Guide for Employers. Retrieved April 18, 2020, from <https://shieldgeo.com/keeping-your-remote-worker-happy-a-guide-for-employers/>

# Online support for collaborative learning: getting beyond homework overload

ERICA MCWILLIAM, ADJUNCT PROFESSOR, QUT, AND PATRON OF THE ALLIANCE AND PETER TAYLOR, ADJUNCT PROFESSOR, GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY

## How do we ensure 'low threat, high challenge' learning still happens when school classrooms are empty and schools are closed?

---

### Conceptualising the task

We need to resist any temptation (a) to hand over to Google, YouTube or similar to 'deliver curriculum', and/or (b) overload home-work/assignments, while 'waiting' until students are back in the classroom again. Conceptualising the task as 'delivery' is sub-optimal because it presupposes one-way, teacher-centred pedagogical traffic. 'Keeping them busy' is unsustainable when the endpoint of the shutdown is unknown.

### Collaboration

From the outset, students should continue to experience their learning as a social process. Learning teams of 3-5 students should communicate with a teacher as one entity (C3B4ME online means that a teacher received just one email asking for support from the group, if and when a group cannot resolve a particular learning need or problem. Response/turnaround times should be negotiated in ways that are respectful of the whole school community, so that 'offline' living is protected. (All group members will have a role as with the C3B4ME classroom)

### The learning process

Engagement + awareness + thinking + repetition/ re-using > learning. So the focus must be on pedagogical design that engages students through simple, unpackable, unGoogle-able questions, and/or tasks that demand the *application* of ideas and strategies to real world issues/ events that students recognise as important to them.

### Provocations to learning

Scenarios are very useful as provocations to problem-posing and problem-solving. Design should include a limited set of relevant sources and an invitation to look beyond them. When responding to, or building, a scenario, students should be required to be explicit about their sources of information — what sources and why?

### Creativity

Creativity is not something from nothing, but *something from something else*. Small

interdisciplinary teams of teachers can contribute to the development of scenarios that require students to use a range of lenses to build complex thinking into creative solutions/possibilities. High challenge scenario planning should establish dimensions to a 'real world' problem by setting boundaries (for example, a town planning scenario should include precise population size, climatic conditions, topographic information etc).

### Media

Consideration needs to be given to engaging students through a judicious combination of sound, text and image. While it is in the nature of disciplines to give more weight to one or other of these modes, design for learning online will require planning a menu of resources, especially if there has been a tendency to rely heavily on the written word of the textbook/PowerPoint or the spoken word of the teacher. (Note: When students design school induction programs, for example, they prioritise three-dimensional visual images.)

### Learning options

To cater for students' learning preferences, the provision of a Learning Menu gives an individual student options from which to select one or more strategies:

- Build a diagram/flowchart/project management with two or three others OR
- Compile 'reverse notes' — topic-evidence-example-leading to — in reverse OR
- Watch two or three videos and identify the best and why — compare/contrast OR
- Build something or make a poster and take a photo for logbook OR
- Focus on two or three provocative questions — can apply to any topic anywhere
  - Why is it important to know this?
  - What's the history of this subject idea?

- What evidence is there?
- Do all cultures accept this? OR
- Act it out, make a photo series, make a video OR
- Teach it to someone in your household.

## Parents

Parents are even more important partners of their children's learning in the 'at home' learning context. They may need some extra tips for supporting that learning without taking responsibility for the quality of the outcome. This is another reason for designing tasks that are no easier for parents than for students. It means fewer tasks needing 'correct' answers or PowerPoint presentations, and more focus on quality of the thinking and the warranting of claims.

## Evaluation

Evaluation of the quality of the learning outcomes in whatever form (textual, video, diagrammatic) should involve students 'going sideways' to their peers before

---

**“Parents may need some extra tips for supporting that learning without taking responsibility for the quality of the outcome.”**

submitting their individual efforts to a teacher. (Many students already use social media to support their 'at home' work.) This maintains the C3B4ME principle of collaboration, with 4 students signing-off and commenting constructively (What I like about this is... What might make it even better could be...) A simple collaborative evaluative process should be built into each 'project' or significant piece of work before it is submitted to the teacher (for example, using editing and comment features in Word's 'track changes' tool, which allows proof-editors' contributions/ mark-ups in different colours.)

## Student self-regulation

Student self-regulation is the key capacity for successful online supported learning. The earlier suggestions to make learning more tasks more challenging and collaborative imply fewer tasks, and a more deliberate approach by students, one that requires

them to plan and monitor progress. Self-regulation requires that attention be given to self-issues such as:

- emotions
- examining motivation to engage with this task
- examining the learning space and resources to be used
- understanding own role in relation to this task
- monitoring engagement or commitment (did I meet my commitments?).

And attention to metacognitive processes, such as:

- understanding task/activity — its nature, purpose and context
- specifying own/team goals
- identifying strategies and/or resources
- establishing 'success criteria'
- developing a plan — perhaps milestones
- monitoring progress and refining the plan.

We learn through reflecting on experience, rather

than through experience. So encouraging our students to reflect on their experiences (orally, in writing or using images/diagrams) and to identify 'messages to self' and 'messages to team-mates' to improve engagement with following tasks

will be essential if online mode lasts for an extended period of time. Reflection is the essential book-end to planning, and a key strategy for minimising repeated mistakes. ▲

*Disclaimer: This brief paper addresses pedagogy. While there are now very helpful and relevant tools that support on-line collaboration, no advice is given about what software works best, nor how to use it.*

# The learner at the centre: remote learning and COVID-19

ASHLEY KEITH PRATT, DIRECTOR OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE, MELBOURNE GIRLS GRAMMAR, VICTORIA

**A**lways get over heavy ground as lightly as you can.  
- The Duke of Wellington

As a student and teacher of History I can say with a fair degree of confidence that never before has our profession had to reinvent itself in the manner that it had to in 2020. As the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the globe it became increasingly clear that Australia would not be able to escape its severe consequences and disruption to daily life.

The executive team at Melbourne Girls Grammar (MGG) worked tirelessly, often meeting daily as the term progressed, to plan and prepare for the impacts of COVID-19 on the education of the young women in our care. When the Victorian Premier, Daniel Andrews, announced that school students across our state would not make it to the end of Term One as planned, MGG enacted its Remote Learning Plan and switched the delivery of our teaching and learning programmes to an online format in roughly 36 hours.

The continuity of our students' education sat at the heart of our plans and drove the decisions and structures that we adopted to ensure that each Grammarian received a year's worth of learning for the year 2020, regardless of the format that learning occurred in. The delivery of curriculum on an online setting is not completely new for Melbourne Girls Grammar, with our Senior Years Program adopting a blended model of online and face-to-face instruction over the last few years.

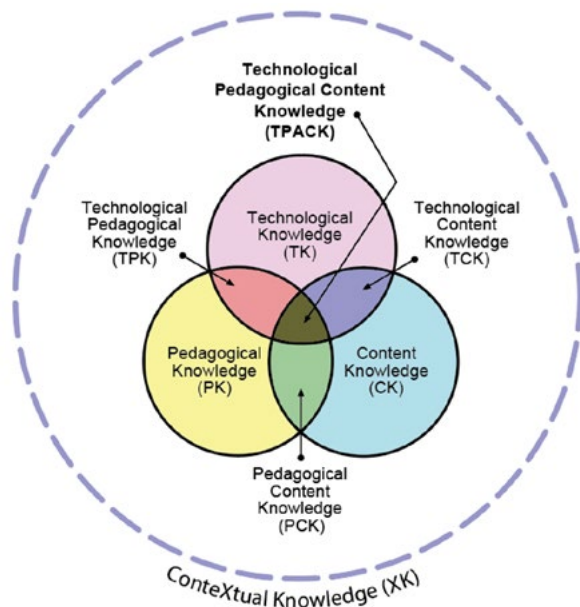
The knowledge and expertise of our teachers was crucial. Each of our teachers are experts in Schulman's 'Pedagogical Content Knowledge' (1986), the unique ways in which each discipline is most effectively taught. Technology was pivotal in ensuring that we were able to achieve a year's worth of growth in our Remote Learning environment. Matthew J. Koehler and Punya Mishra (2006) describe teachers use of technology in this way as 'Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge' (TPACK).

The teachers at MGG are amongst some of the most skilled in the teaching profession in leveraging technology in this manner.

In this environment, our Grammarians interacted with their learning in a number of ways:

- The engaged directly with the content (LMS, textbooks, videos, etc.)
- They engaged directly with their teachers (video conferencing, email, LMS Messaging, etc.)
- They engaged directly with each other (chat, phone calls, collaborative documents, etc.)

These encounters were mediated by technology in a variety of ways. It looked slightly different from subject to subject as teachers used their TPACK knowledge to determine the most effective ways to promote knowledge and understanding in their unique disciplines. This type of learning can be termed 'polysynchronous learning' (Salgarno, 2014), where students used a variety of methods in a variety of contexts to build their knowledge and understanding. This approach was adopted because it allowed us to keep the learner at the centre of the MGG Remote Learning Programme. We worked to establish a



REVISED VERSION OF THE TPACK IMAGE. © PUNYA MISHRA, 2018.  
REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION



IMAGE: YEAR 10 STUDENT, AHELEE RAHMAN, CONTINUED HER PIANO STUDIES THROUGHOUT REMOTE LEARNING

50/50 division between their face-to-face class time and ensuring they were given time away from such intense technology use to complete their work and maintain their overall wellbeing. Being on successive Zoom conference calls from 9:00 am until 3:00 pm would have been unsustainable and not provide a healthy environment for learning to occur in.

John Adams stated that every problem is an opportunity in disguise and during the period of remote learning we learnt a significant amount about how to deliver effective remote learning programmes to all our Grammarians. A look at the data demonstrates how busy learning was at MGG during the period of remote learning. At MGG we:

- Conducted 19,712 Zoom meetings
- Held 4,821,341 minutes of Zoom meetings
- Had 214,432 participants in Zoom meetings
- Hosted 15 community webinars via Zoom
- Submitted 10,655 pieces of student work on the LMS
- Uploaded 576 videos to the LMS
- Posted 8,204 LMS news updates
- Had 264,495 logins to the LMS via the website

- Added 41,143 posts to Seesaw
- Commented 34,382 times on student work on Seesaw
- Had 31,042 visits by family members to Seesaw
- Sent over 217,146 emails.

Success, however, is not measured in the amount of emails or Zoom meetings that occurred. Our aim was to ensure that the learner and their educational progress sat at the heart of the decisions that drove our programme. We ensured that we integrated high-level educational research into our approach, adapting it to be effective in the context of Remote Learning. Dylan Wiliam's (2011) five key strategies for effective formative assessment in the classroom provided a key structure to ensure that remote learning still contained the elements of high-quality and effective teaching and learning practices. This involved:

1. Clarifying, understanding, and sharing learning intentions — in order for students to have a clear understanding of the expectations we have of them, clear weekly plans are posted on the LMS to outline the learning goals for each week.

2. Engineering effective classroom discussions, tasks and activities that elicit evidence of learning — Zoom breakout rooms, FlipGrid, and OneNote are just some of the tools our teachers utilised to ensure that all students have opportunities to discuss and work with each other.
3. Providing feedback that moves learners forward — whether it be annotated student work on OneNote or the LMS, a short video or screencast explaining how to master a particularly tricky concept, or a Zoom conference to give personalised feedback, teaches worked hard to provide timely and actionable feedback to students to help them improve.
4. Activating students as learning resources for one another — collaborative learning can yield significant gains in educational attainment according to Robert Slavin (1980). Zoom breakout rooms, Padlet, and collaborative documents provided Grammarians with opportunities to learn from each other, despite being physically separated.
5. Activating students as owners of their own learning — the 50/50 split of synchronous and asynchronous learning allowed our Grammarians to develop their self-regulation skills and helped them to ‘own their own learning’ (Wiliam, 2011) in their own homes.

---

## REFERENCES

- Dalgarno, B. (2014). Polysynchronous learning: a model for student interaction and engagement. In B. Hegarty, J. McDonald, & S.-K. Loke (Eds.), *Rhetoric and Reality: Critical perspectives on educational technology*. Proceedings ascilite Dunedin 2014 (pp. 673-677).
- Mishra, P. & Koehler, M.J. (2006). Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge: A Framework for Teacher Knowledge. *Teachers College Record*, 108(6), 1017-1054. Retrieved April 6, 2020 from <https://www.learntechlib.org/p/99246/>
- Mishra, P., (2018). Revised version of TPACK image. Retrieved from <https://punyamishra.com/2018/09/10/the-tpack-diagram-gets-an-upgrade/>
- Shulman, L.S. (1986). Those who understand: Knowledge growth in teaching. *Educational Researcher*, 15(2), 4-14.
- Slavin, R. E. (1980). Cooperative Learning. *Review of Educational Research*, 50(2), 315-342
- Wiliam, D. (2011), *Embedded Formative Assessment*. Solution Tree Press.

---

**“It was good pedagogy, not digital tools, that drove the approach we took.”**

In the aftermath of Term 2 we had a chance to rest and reflect on the achievements of this disrupted period. The success of our Remote Learning Programme came down to a few key elements. Firstly, it was carefully planned for, enabling it to be implemented in a rapid fashion. Secondly, it was good pedagogy, not digital tools, that drove the approach we took. Finally, that the learner sat at the centre of every decision that was made, ensuring that learning was prioritised, and an environment of success was established for all our Grammarians. There will be much that we can bring back to ‘normal’ classes and as we progress into 2021 we will carefully examine how we can innovate and excel as a high-quality provider of education for young women in the 21st century that places the learner at the centre of our strategy and culture. ▲

# The next normal

CLARISSA WRIGHT, MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER,  
ST JOHN FISHER COLLEGE, QUEENSLAND

**2020 has been the year to test the way we cope as humans as few years in recent history have done. Throughout what can only be described as a once in a lifetime experience, the coronavirus pandemic has aired, sometimes very publicly, the different ways in which we cope with life stressors. Whether through personal experience or observation, it is evident that some coping styles are more helpful than others.**

---

To break it down quite simply, coping styles generally follow either an active or avoidance model (Semel Institute, 2020). Active coping, as defined by American Psychological Association (2020) is “a stress-management strategy in which a person directly works to control a stressor through appropriately targeted behavior, embracing responsibility for resolving the situation using one’s available internal resources. Active coping generally is considered adaptive, having been associated with fewer mood disturbances, enhanced self-efficacy and other favorable consequences”. On the contrary the avoidance model applies what psychologists call maladaptive coping behaviour. This method of coping involves a state of denial and adopts thinking and behaviour that is often problematic and counterproductive (Carroll, 2013).

## Active coping at its finest

The coping style that St John Fisher College embraced could only be defined as positively ‘active’ and this led to a united community with the health and wellbeing of its girls in the forefront of its mind. The college held the girls firmly in the centre of any decisions during this crisis. Students, staff and parents alike bound together to adapt to a very foreign and unreal situation with a unified attitude that reaffirmed the core principles that define the college. Principles of unity, resilience, strength, compassion, faith and gratitude shone brightly during this time, reaffirming the importance of a school community being so much more than its facilities and academic rigour.

What was most inspiring and heart-warming about this whole experience was the overwhelming need for meaningful human connection and how creative people can be to obtain that connection in the face of

adversity. Living in an age of technology has made this connectivity possible and the whole experience much more manageable. The college took to new digital platforms in addition to those already in use, with the advent of portals like ‘Fisher Fam’ on Microsoft Teams to allow for secure and private community conversation

and communication within the St John Fisher family. Fisher Fam saw staff and students share their gifts and talents at a time when resilience was sorely tested. A yoga demonstration in French by our French teachers is one example of the way this application was used by staff to connect with the girls, and the girls used it to connect with each other especially our seniors to the younger girls in their House groups. The absolute vitality of teaching departments, like Drama, Music, Art and Religion became apparent during this time, showcasing how important these outlets are for human expression. When traditionally Mathematics, Science and English are seen to be king in education, the arts became a way for students to express, reflect and explore ways to communicate and connect with each other. We saw amazing dance and music collaborations from our students and equally entertaining and humorous performances from staff with social media providing the perfect virtual soap box to uplift spirits.

## Teachers upskilled and rose to the challenge

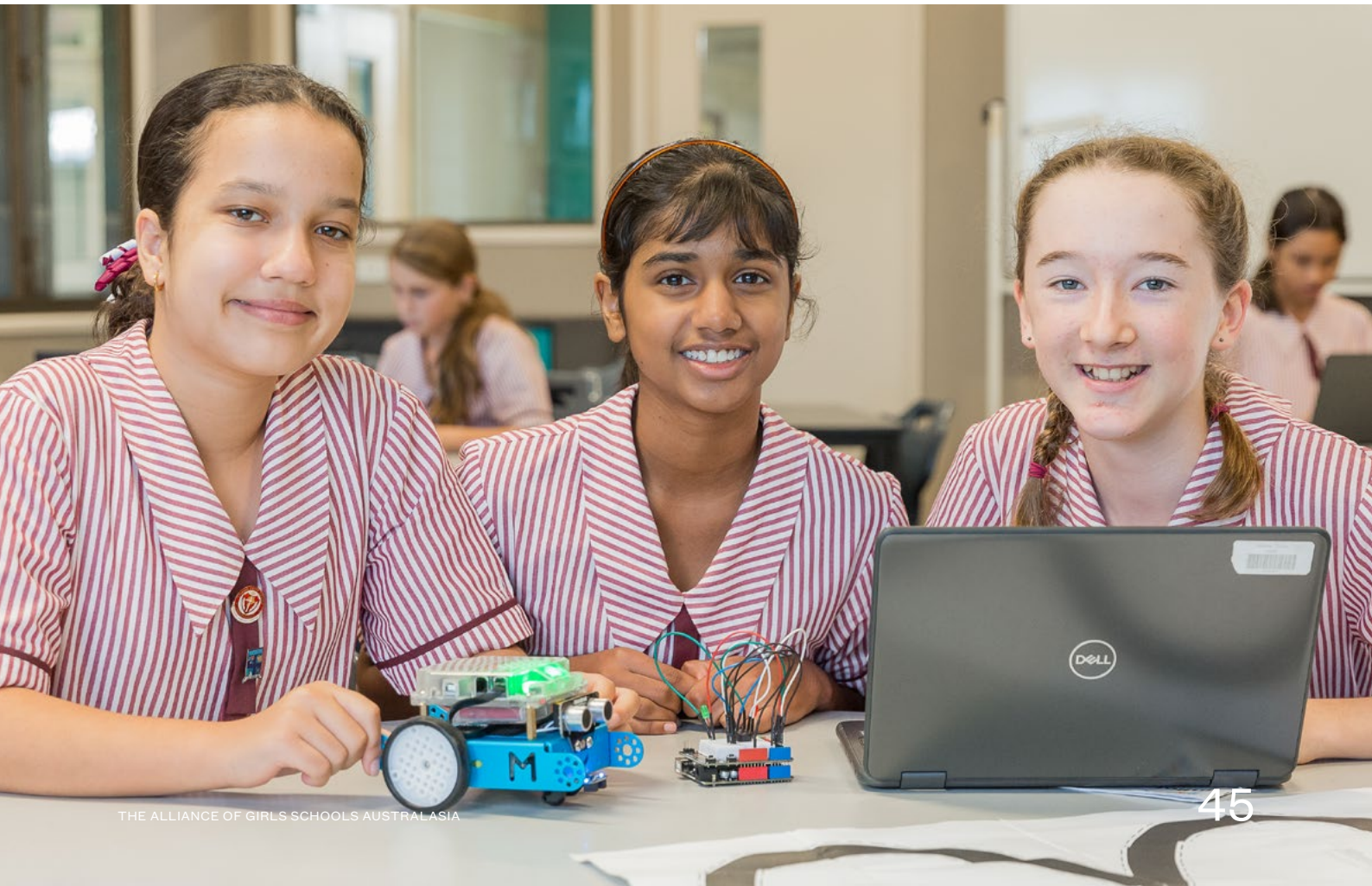
When faced with a challenge, some of us rise and others fall. Drawing on the different methods of coping, our teachers actively coped with this new and very foreign form of teaching by rising to the challenge, adapting, upskilling and collaborating with a common goal in mind. However, the reality of this meant teachers had to place significantly more effort and time into lesson planning to ensure students remained stimulated and motivated. According to Principal Cathy Galvin, “The long-term sustainability of this model of teaching is questionable, but the staff can only be commended for the way they undertook the task of great pedagogical change with such short notice. The usual planning time for such a big change was not available and the staff just got on with it.

Although there have been many aspects of off-campus learning that have made us better teachers (and humans for that matter), ones that are adaptable, compassionate and flexible, the threat of teacher 'burn out' would be quite real".

Music teacher Tiffany Rabbitt was one of many who stood out during this time, going the extra mile to ensure lessons were challenging and stimulating for her students. Orchestrating a rock band recording via Microsoft Teams was no easy feat but it was worth it for the sense of achievement felt by both students and teacher. Tiffany commented; "I took challenges with teaching music online instead of taking the easy route of teaching music theory. I made sure students had the same number of practical lessons taught at school. I had to be quite creative with my ideas but without taking the risk, I feel the girls would have lost interest in the subject." The feedback from the girls was also heart-warming for the teachers, as the girls consistently expressed their gratitude to staff who exceeded even their own expectations! It is fair to say that the pandemic brought out the best in the staff.

### **Students embrace independence when given the right tools**

An observation made by many teachers was that students learnt more effectively without the direct intervention or supervision that a traditional classroom provides. Using platforms like Microsoft Teams, many teachers formed small student cluster groups and observed the positive effects of student collaboration. It gave an enhanced appreciation of what the girls are actually capable of when given the opportunity. The college's Learning Enhancement and Acceleration Program teacher Susanne Perey reflected that, "girls can effectively self-motivate and be independent learners given the right tools." She learnt that in some respects, the role of the teacher became more of a supporter and facilitator. "It actually felt awkward but also fantastic to be a tad redundant in the learning process." This sentiment was echoed by staff during the weekly feedback surveys that the college conducted for both staff and students. The surveys allowed the college to keep tabs on staff and student wellbeing in order to manage any issues that may have arisen.



## The importance of faith and mission

With a vigilant approach to mental health and wellbeing, every effort was made to minimise the impact of the situation on students and staff. Part of this pastoral care was to reinforce the importance of faith and mission, crucial underpinning pillars of the college.

Assistant Principal — Mission and Identity, Geraldine Swindells collaborated with staff to deliver a weekly themed video streamed to various online platforms. The videos called for students to take on board a weekly theme by executing it in their daily lives, and to demonstrate this via shared video or photos. Touching acts of kindness, compassion, gratitude and resilience resulted in students reaching out to help more vulnerable members of the community as well as their own family. Perhaps as a learning, using these non-traditional platforms to communicate traditional messages is an effective way to reach young people and inspire them to put faith and mission into practice. The girls certainly responded to the weekly messages as evidenced by the comments made, and actions undertaken.

## The importance of good communication

Communication is the key to strong relationships and at St John Fisher this occurs from the top down initiated by Principal Cathy Galvin; this certainly rang true during the period of off-campus learning. The removal of physical interaction required regular, efficient and meaningful communication between teachers, students and their parents. Parents and families acknowledged the clear and regular communication from the college. Some staff were redeployed during this time and spent time contacting families for pastoral check-ins. This provided valuable insights into the girls who needed additional support with academic work, or their general wellbeing. Video calls and live-streamed lessons present certain communication challenges, and bad connections aside, this form of communication requires one to tune in, to listen more and talk less. Many teachers observed that by taking classrooms online, the less confident students found their voices and this in turn led to better learning outcomes for all. The girls who thrived in this environment included a number of our quieter girls who enjoyed the chance to have their say in this manner. Many of these communication platforms will be continued as we move back into on-campus learning while also preparing us for future situations should we need to transition back to off-campus learning, in the event of a second wave of coronavirus infections.

The last few months have been unlike anything we could have imagined, as teachers, students and parents. Not knowing the enormity of what lay ahead in late 2019, the college chose 'You are Welcome' for our 2020 theme. As fate had it, these three words could not have been more fitting for a community that has united during what has been a very challenging time.

Having staff and students reunite on campus in Term 2 was certainly a cause for celebration with everyone showing a new appreciation for school life. Although we are not yet able to go back to everything as it was before, this current period is what we are calling the 'next normal'. We have all learnt a great deal during the period of off-campus learning including being more adaptable and flexible to change. The legacies of this period for the college will undoubtedly unfold over time, and we are keen to retain the benefits of this time that for many girls included a more independent approach to their learning and greater self-reliance — such crucial 'soft' skills as they prepare for tertiary education and the future. ▲

---

## REFERENCES

- American Psychological Association. (2020). APA Dictionary of Psychology. Retrieved from <https://dictionary.apa.org/active-coping>
- Carroll, L. (2013). Active Coping. In: Gellman M.D., Turner J.R. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Behavioral Medicine*. Springer, New York, NY
- Jane and Terry Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior. (2020). How do you cope? Retrieved from [https://www.semel.ucla.edu/dual-diagnosis-program/News\\_and\\_Resources/How\\_Do\\_You\\_Cope](https://www.semel.ucla.edu/dual-diagnosis-program/News_and_Resources/How_Do_You_Cope)



## Sport promotes healthy mindset

KATH SAMBEL OLY, DIRECTOR OF SPORT, KAMBALA, NSW

**A**t Kambala, in Sydney's eastern suburbs, sport was one of the first subject areas to be affected by the coronavirus pandemic as sporting fixtures were gradually cancelled by the governing bodies in Term 1. Kambala's Sports Department quickly and proactively decided to see the situation as an opportunity to develop and instigate new fitness and sporting routines, programs and challenges that girls could access from home.

Working collaboratively to develop age appropriate activities for Junior and Senior School Sport, the Department researched which activities could be offered through the major sporting bodies. We also collaborated online with sports directors from other leading girls' schools to share ideas. Families were regularly updated via Kambala's online portal (Sundial) and class teachers

and tutors were asked to remind the girls of the sporting opportunities that were available.

During this time we received numerous responses from parents, including one which read, 'I just wanted to say thank you so much for the fitness programs you have been setting for the girls. You are doing an amazing job under such difficult circumstances.' This response is indicative of the vast positive feedback the Sports Department has received.

The Sports Department approached the challenge of online learning as a chance to explore new ideas. The aim being to engage as many girls as possible and keep them active. The cancellation of the Senior Athletics

Carnival was a milestone event the Year 12 cohort, in particular, was disappointed to miss. In lieu of this, a virtual Athletics Carnival with a Star Wars theme, 'May the fourth be with you', was organised in collaboration with the Year 12 Prefects and Sports Committee.

Student participation and enthusiasm for the remote event presented a key challenge to organisers, and holding the carnival on 4 May and adopting a Star Wars theme proved to be an effective tool. Staff and students dressed up and shot video footage of their athletic activities dressed in Star Wars attire. It was evident from the outset that the event would capture the Kambala spirit. The event results were tracked using a custom-made virtual athletics card and uploaded to a Google Doc. Over 450 students participated in up to 16 activities ranging from a 15-minute run to a toilet roll high jump.

The goal to make the carnival an inclusive event was aided by the students' ability to log-in and complete the activities regardless of ability level or location. Students participated from Sydney metro, remote farms across NSW and apartments in Hong Kong.

The main challenge of operating a sports program remotely was the lack of face-to-face time staff had with the girls to coach and mentor them. The girls were limited in what they could achieve, particularly in team sports when they were unable to train as a team. Kambala Sports Administrator, Brigitte Athas, explains: "It was challenging to come up with ideas and training sessions the girls could do from home, however, I have enjoyed the challenge."

Kambala students responded to undertaking their sport and training remotely with the same degree of positivity they demonstrated in other subject areas.

"Doing sport and fitness remotely has been an interesting and new experience! Some friends and I did a daily workout together which was fun and meant we could chat while we did our exercise. Something that proved challenging was a lack of equipment, so my routine was a bit bland, but otherwise we all tried to make the best of a challenging situation!" Shyla Gloster, Year 10.

"I managed to stay pretty active. I kept up with my Duke of Edinburgh Award, which involves a physical recreation segment. There is a park around the corner from where I live, which is where I have been going to complete this, as well as to get some fresh air and exercise. I bumped into quite a few Kambala girls up there. It was really refreshing to see familiar faces and have face-to-face conversations (while keeping our distance, of course!). I think the biggest challenge was finding motivation to get up and get moving. Waking up with nowhere to go or be, it can be a struggle to get out of bed and stay in a healthy mindset." Olivia Clyne, Year 11.

Another initiative the Sports Department developed to promote a healthy mindset during remote learning was the Mystery Step Challenge (MSC). Before remote learning commenced, the Sports Department distributed skipping ropes to the girls on the final day of school.

We posted skipping and fitness routines and began the MSC with the Senior girls. After a successful trial with the Seniors, a Junior School MSC was introduced. The MSC was a simple way to engage the girls in moving every day without the focus being on who completes the most steps, but who is closest to the Mystery Stepper.

Keeping the challenges and activities fun and age appropriate assisted with student engagement. Running Bare, an activewear company born in Bondi, was so impressed with the Mystery Step Challenge it donated vouchers to the Junior School and Senior School winners each week.

While the change to remote learning for sport was difficult, the experience has encouraged staff to appreciate the little things. Personally I missed the daily collaboration with the Sports and PDHPE staff and the banter with the girls – the School is an empty place without them! But I have been inspired by the positivity of Kambala's Sports Prefect, Charlotte Hughes, and the Year 12 cohort, led by Kirsty Beattie.

Addressing the challenges faced in Term 2, as well as what is planned for Term 3, requires a measured approach to facilitating Sport for as many students as possible, in the safest means.

We were fortunate students could return to school earlier than expected in Term 2. As restrictions lifted, we immediately began an adjusted and carefully monitored on-site training schedule for select Senior School sports. We prepared at least one on-site pre-season training session per week for Basketball, Football, Hockey, Netball and Tennis. We also commenced fitness, speed and agility and athletics training with the same attention to hygiene and safety.

While we're eagerly awaiting the return to competitive, in-person sport, we remain reassured that should it be required, the School possesses the resources, skills and creativity to continue the Kambala Sport experience remotely. ▲



IMAGE: VIRTUAL RECONCILIATION LITURGY STREAMED ON YOUTUBE

## Innovation and creativity during COVID-19 times

TINA NEATE, PRINCIPAL, KILDARE COLLEGE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

**T**hroughout these unprecedented times, Kildare College has shown the courage, humour and resilience to change, while demonstrating great strength and gentleness as a community. Our initial plans for the year have been revised, and new innovative ways have been created to continue to support one another and stay connected.

These are some of the ways Kildare College stayed connected with its community.

### Virtual parent seminar

Kildare has always invited guest speakers with expertise in relevant areas to deliver face-to-face sessions to help support and guide our families. With social distancing restrictions in place, we instead held a

virtual and interactive parent seminar led by Joy Anasta. Joy is a highly regarded parent coach, psychotherapist, counsellor and mediator who has a long association with Kildare College.

Joy provided a range of strategies to assist families with girls in Years 7 to 12 to navigate the challenges and joys that young women bring to the family dynamics. The session covered parent expectations; getting the balance right; and managing social media. Joy's strategies included limiting social media use, setting boundaries that are negotiated, discovering what boundaries are non-negotiable, and understanding the frustrations of not having full control.

This was a successful event with high levels of engagement from the 70-plus families that participated. Families appreciated the content and the convenience of participating in the parent seminar from the comfort of their homes. One parent even said that she watched the seminar while with her daughter at netball training! We received excellent feedback which reflected that the seminar was useful, practical, honest and informative.

### **National Reconciliation Week**

National Reconciliation Week is a time for all of us to learn about our shared cultures, histories and achievements. It is also a time to explore how we can contribute to achieving reconciliation in not only our college community but society in general. 'In this together' was the Reconciliation Week theme for 2020. These words call on all Australians from all backgrounds to have the 'courage to walk together to foster positive relationships that contribute to a better future for all'.

With COVID-19 restrictions preventing whole school gatherings, a virtual Reconciliation Liturgy involving students, parents and staff was created by the college. The Liturgy took place at the college with the help of many staff, students and members of the community. We then hosted our virtual Reconciliation Liturgy on the social media platform, YouTube, for our community to view and participate in.

The response from the students, particularly Indigenous students, was remarkable, and demonstrated a strong sense of gratitude. The students were grateful that they were able to still recognise Reconciliation Week at the college.

The Indigenous Elders are always heavily involved in our Reconciliation Mass and have such a beautiful relationship with our students. Initially, there was some disappointment from students that the Indigenous Elders were unable to come into the college due to the restrictions, but this disappointment was overcome once the students understood that the elders would be able to participate in the liturgy from the safety of their homes.

The response from the community was delightful. Other Kildare Ministries schools were astounded by the high production quality of our virtual Reconciliation Liturgy and the input from students, staff and Indigenous Elders. We received many compliments from our Indigenous community, parents, staff, students and our wider community, expressing how reassuring it was to still feel involved during these difficult and complicated times.

Throughout this project everyone was so willing and determined to make this something special. "What started so small, became so big and within two weeks it was completed" said Angie Selga, Indigenous Focus Team Teacher.

The college would definitely consider holding virtual events again. The outcome was very positive, and we felt incredibly honoured to be able to connect with our community and acknowledge Reconciliation Week in this special way.

### **Virtual College tours**

College tours are an important way to introduce prospective families to Kildare College. A tour of the college's campus provides a real feel for life at Kildare, so it was vital that we were able to continue to connect with prospective families in this way. Our solution was to host virtual tours of our campus during Term 2, this allowed us to connect with prospective families while maintaining social distancing.

Through virtual platforms, we greeted our new families and their daughters and had the pleasure of taking them on a virtual college tour with our Principal, Tina Neate. Following the tour, our principal, along with our deputy principal and student leaders hosted an information session answering any questions that families had.

Virtual college tours proved very successful and overcame many of the problems often associated with organising face-to-face tours. We were able to accommodate busy families' diaries and families living interstate and overseas did not need to travel to the college. Hence moving forward, we will continue to offer both virtual and face-to-face tours.

### **Conclusion**

Our main priority during COVID-19 remained the wellbeing of our college community. While we adhered to physical distancing measures and restricted access to our College, we ensured that we retained our social interactions through digital platforms and we were able to continue to reach out beyond our community and maintain our Kildare traditions. We are so proud that our students, families and staff were able to adapt to these challenging times. ▲

# Cyborgs, samurais, pineapple sorbet and a pandemic

BELINDA BATH AND LISETTE ROONEY, EARLY CHILDHOOD PRACTITIONERS, METHODIST LADIES' COLLEGE, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

**A**t Methodist Ladies' College, Claremont (MLC) the early years teachers have a passion for inspiring young girls to blaze their own entrepreneurial trails as leaders, just like the long lineage of Collegians who came before them. We encourage our girls to push themselves beyond convenience and opportunism to develop courageous altruism, a compassion for humanity and to build a sustainable planet.

The cultural realm of Generation Z girls (Pre-Primary to Year 6) is undergoing a seismic swing. Generation Z is growing up in times of exponential digital connectivity, and technology enriched social networks, where assumptions and judgments about gender and learning are being contested.

The arrival of COVID-19 heralded a unique and uncharted challenge for many early years school settings. At MLC, meeting the pedagogical transition posed by the pandemic and retaining the integrity of the early years program for our youngest girls during off campus learning was paramount. We were able to mitigate many of the challenges presented by knowing our girls' dispositions for learning and being acutely cognisant of their strengths. We saw our young students not so much as 'at risk' but rather full of promise.

We engaged with a number of evidence-based practices within the early years setting and the following

is a rationed selection of strategies we found to have positive significance. They were approaches simpatico within our context and aligned with our pedagogy. It is important to keep in mind that each classroom is different, and each girl's needs is distinct from her peers.

The following initiatives were interwoven, and no single element stood alone. To explore one as separate to the other would deny the value of the whole. The first 48 hours of delivering online teacher directed learning were the most confronting. Few transformative feats in life are ever executed in isolation and as COVID-19 unfolded in Australia, the MLC leadership team planned effectively for both a continuum and variation in modes of communication. This enabled educators to stay integrally responsive to complex circumstances. Leadership members designed a plethora of professional development for Microsoft Teams, our cornerstone platform.

Both teachers and parents were privileged to be able to leverage the assimilation of technology and expertise of an astute and adaptable ICT department. ICT experts shared online discussion boards, streaming videos and tips on cyber safety. Mertala (2019) suggests that early years classrooms must promote technology integration to meet children's changing needs and lived experiences





in a digitalised society otherwise they risk failing to meet educational necessities.

Together we worked to solve the quandaries of providing online education so that our youngest girls could benefit from a personalised learning experience. In doing so we were able to model a positive mindset and grit. The MLC Inclusive Learning team were instrumental in providing support across a broad range of ages and stages of student development. Nestled within our all-girls learning environment, educators fluidly implemented research-based strategies tailored to elevate learning. This included being both conversant and cognisant in linguist cues that positively influence young girls' scholastic buoyancy in particular subject areas such science and mathematics (Rhodes et al., 2019; Klein et al., 2010). Helen Beaton K-2 Junior Years Pastoral Care Co-Ordinator asserts "Girls who are equipped for the future are flexible, they are able to imagine and reimagine

---

**"Girls who are equipped for the future are flexible, they are able to imagine and reimagine possibilities."**

possibilities. These individuals will have a transformative impact on their environment, use their emotional intelligence to inspire others to achieve and reflexively evaluate the credibility of the choices they intend to make."

We used the first days of remote learning to establish expectations in partnership with the girls. This was done in a way that allowed young students to develop basic functionality in our virtual neighbourhood. Negotiating with our girls to create a new learning space that felt inclusive, safe and fostered a sense of belonging was intentionally scaffolded. One 'software apprentice' made the analogy between 'changing channels' from one specialist class to another and the time "I tried to eat pineapple sorbet on a hot day and change gears on a go cart at the same time." While another confident student situated herself as a 'keyboard samurai' on the hardware and yet another compared the anticipation of waiting to join an online tutorial to "sculpting a cartoon cyborg from fast air-drying clay."

The influence of parents on young children's lives is compellingly documented and off campus learning afforded intimate glimpses into students' home lives. MLC staff were fortunate to work in an environment that invited candid parent conversation and collaboration. Through a palette of multimodal activities we were able to continue to support parents. In a survey designed to gain feedback and identify future needs regarding online learning, one parent stated: "A few days before the school was due to close, we were asked to collect the Online Learning packs. We were

all blown away by the extent of the not one but three separate packs. One for Integrated Learning, [one for] Literacy and one for Mathematics. They were full of activities and learning plans, a mini-whiteboard for the morning activity, learning booklets, photocopies of maths games, number cards, dice ... they had thought of everything. We even had seeds the girls could plant and write reports on — a wonderful activity to do in lockdown. Parents were given a list of logins not just for online classes but educational online apps that the girls could use for free during times when classes weren't on. Every day parents were kept up to date by the College on what was happening and how they were handling the situation. There were always amazing words of encouragement from the teachers."

Our College elicited direct instructional guidance as its preferred model for online learning. Kirschner et al., (2006) define direct instructional guidance as providing information that fully explains the concepts and procedures that students are required to learn as well as learning strategy support that is compatible with human cognitive architecture.

We took a holistic approach and recognised that learning occurs in a many different contexts. Michael Brown, Assistant Principal ELC-Year 6 further illuminates on this, "Our early years educators are responsive to the unexpected ways students reveal their conceptual thinking and emotional connections, these opportunities can be used to extend or redirect deep learning. Teachable moments are used extensively in K-2 and this is reflected in both our philosophy and pedagogy. Rich learning experiences for young girls include linguistic, kinaesthetic, quantitative, aural and spatial skills and these can be enhanced with augmented technology."

Our early years team are experienced practitioners who are well versed in supporting young girls to thrive. We continued this level of purposeful dialogue to advocate for the equality of girls' education online during the pandemic. Researchers such as Bian, et al., (2017) argue that many children as young as six years old believe high-level intellect to be a male quality. These stereotypes have long-term repercussions and discourage girls' pursuit of prestigious careers.

When the girls were able to return to campus it was such a delight to have our learning spaces filled again with their creative capacities and irrepressible curiosity. The context of their lived experiences and pop culture had been newly shaped by social distancing, facial masks and self-isolation. STEM is not an optional extra at MLC rather it is intrinsically incorporated into core and integrated areas of learning. But what had unexpectedly changed was the way in which these skills immediately resonated

with the girls' sense of agency. Murray (2019) reflects the view that given children's early experiences are highly influential for their lifetime outcomes, experiences that children have in their earliest years to feel included and empowered in STEM learning may be highly salient for economic, socio-emotional, health and environmental wellbeing. The following are just a small number of examples of child generated learning experiences.

In order to look forward often we need to look back. Our girls benefited from an incursion to the MLC historical chapel where we explored the archives. It was fascinating to overhear some of the girls perceptively comparing and finding similarities between the experiences of students at MLC during WWII and their own lived experiences during COVID-19!

MLC values the voices of their youngest students and so some girls were interviewed and video recorded as they articulated the nuances both positive and negative that were pertinent to them during off campus learning.

Girls delivered their own mini online lesson to their peers. They drafted and wrote a plan for their lesson using a procedural text framework and designed their own resources and props. Year 6 students acted as mentors helping their early years comrades with technology support, critical observation tips and encouragement. MLC has a significant proportion of high potential learners and uses mentoring as a strategy in the early years. Grassinger and Porath (2010) claim, mentoring is among if not the most effective pedagogical measure for supporting gifted children to reach their full potential.

Dobson and Beltman (2019) and others have found that young girls do show a strong personal emotional engagement with a variety of media. So, it was not surprising to observe the confidence of one class who hosted an international interview with a global educator in Azerbaijan. They found out about remote learning when your classmates are on different continents and also the reality of living in a country with very strict COVID-19 restrictions. Their curiosity and agency for this research was sparked by reading online blogs, listening to podcasts and streaming video footage with an age appropriate global perspective on the pandemic.

There were key shifts in the sense of social justice and critical thinking displayed by our girls when they returned to campus. This was observable in the way they valued a face-to-face community of learners or an awareness of a shared sense of humanity. We found the girls using their initiative in more complex ways to collaborate and work together using their social and interpersonal communication skills in their art projects, construction development, engineering designs and roleplaying stories. They appreciated each other's gifts of experience, demonstrating trust and respect. The benefits were

discovered as they built on their understandings by contributing to each other's funds of knowledge and through sharing insights. These interactive exchanges helped to broaden and deepen each girl's learning experience as they were exposed to different perceptions, ideas and opinions and further developed rich language and higher order thinking skills. Meagan King, Director of Innovation reflects: "As a result of introducing the MLC model of Teacher Directed Online Learning, we were surprised with how well the students adapted to the use of technology for curriculum delivery. We are now left to consider how could we use our Learning Management System (LMS) in the early years more effectively. Does our current LMS serve its purpose or should we investigate what else is available? We are now able to confidently use flipped experiences and a blended approach in the early years at MLC and this is something that is here to stay. To have observed how quickly our staff and students were able to pivot into something completely unknown only a few months ago has left us with a desire to deeply question what parts of the online experience have transformed practice in our setting. Which components are here to stay? This is an incredibly exciting time to be an early years educator."

The national and global educational terrain has undergone a reorientation for which there is no compass or known trajectory and as C.A. Woolf writes: 'What has been seen cannot be unseen, what has been learned cannot be unknown.' ▲

---

## REFERENCES

- Bian, L., Leslie S.-J., & Cimpian, A. (2017). Gender Stereotypes about Intellectual Ability Emerge Early and Influence Children's Interests in Science. *American Association for the Advancement of Science*, 355, 389-391.
- Dobson, M. & Beltman, S. (2019). Powerful and pervasive, or personal and positive? Views of young girls, parents and educators about media. *Issues in Educational Research*, 29(1), 38-54. <http://www.iier.org.au/iier29/dobson.pdf>.
- Grassinger, G., Porath, M. & Ziegler, A. (2010). *Mentoring the Gifted: A Conceptual Analysis*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/13598139.2010.488087>
- Kirschner, P. A., Sweller, J., & Clark, R. E. (2006). Why minimal guidance during instruction does not work: An analysis of the failure of constructivist, discovery, problem-based, experiential, and inquiry-based teaching. *Educational Psychologist*, 41, 75-86.
- Klein, P., Adi-Japha, E., & Hakak-Benizri, S. (2010). Mathematical thinking of kindergarten boys and girls: Similar achievement, different contributing processes. *Educational Studies in Mathematics*, 73(3), 233-246. Retrieved July 27, 2020, from [www.jstor.org/stable/40603169](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40603169)
- Mertala, P. (2019). Digital Technologies in Early Childhood Education: A Frame Analysis of Preservice Teachers' Perceptions. *Early Child Development and Care*, 189(8), 1228-1241, DOI: 10.1080/03004430.2017.1372756
- Murray, M. (2019). Routes to STEM: Nurturing Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics in Early Years Education, *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 27:3, 219-221.
- Rhodes, M., Leslie, S.-J., Yee, K. M., & Saunders, K. (2019). Subtle Linguistic Cues Increase Girls' Engagement in Science. *Psychological Science*, 30(3), 455-466. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797618823670>

# COVID-19: unexpected opportunities for promoting staff wellbeing

AMBER SOWDEN, HEAD OF STAFF AND STUDENT WELLBEING PROGRAMS,  
STRATHCONA GIRLS GRAMMAR, VICTORIA

**A**t the end of January, the staff community at Strathcona returned for another school year. As part of the welcome back from the School, all staff received a little gift. Among other things in this gift was a seedling packet and a card. The card read '2020! New Year! New Decade! New Opportunity for Growth!'. 2020 was going to be a year that Strathcona invested in supporting and creating stronger connections in our community and commit consciously to the wellbeing of our people. Little did we know what 2020 had in store for us.

---

What started with an unprecedented bushfire crisis rolled very quickly into a global pandemic. A global pandemic. I'm not sure if most of us in February could have accurately defined the word pandemic, yet now this word and others like social distancing, pivoting and remote learning have become part of our everyday conversation.

I can vividly remember packing my things in March after our school decided to close with 48 hours' notice. The surreal feeling of knowing that we were about to go through something so unprecedented was initially met with a rush of adrenalin. The wonderful leaders at Strathcona had preempted our closure and prepared us as well as possible. I remember going live into my first class from home and feeling elated that I could do it, the girls could do it and collectively we could easily navigate a few weeks at home. Fast forward to July, it's Term 3 in Melbourne and we are at home again. It is safe to say that the adrenalin has worn well and truly off, collectively we are fatigued and challenged again. Our staff have pivoted so many times we have whiplash!

All workplaces in 2020 have experienced challenges. Similar stress has been felt by all people trying to manage work from home, remote learning of their children and the worries surrounding the threat of COVID-19 to our health. Yet, few professions have had to invite whole communities into their homes. Schools have been unique in this way. Those of us who have livestreamed classes each day

have had to cross boundaries, merging our personal lives and classrooms in a way that we could never have anticipated. The virtual classroom doors are wide open, forcing not only a shift in pedagogy, but a change in relationship with our students and their families. Much of this has been positive for many of us and at Strathcona we have often found deeper connections and engagement with our students' parents. Yet it is a highly pressurised environment

to provide online lessons that are engaging to all, that are differentiated for those who need it and lessons that live up to the expectations of ourselves and the families who are listening. A national survey of teachers conducted by the Melbourne Graduate School of Education (Ziebel, et. al., 2020) at the height of the pandemic, reported significant increases in the hours teachers worked per week during remote learning. While all teachers are used to out of hours work, a staggering 50 per cent reported having worked an entire extra day per week during this time. The increased workload has been relatively visible; however, remote learning and working is a relentless state of being. It takes so much of our time; it tests our stamina and it chips away quietly at the connection we have to our schools and to each other.

The essence of school life revolves comprehensively around belonging to a community. Schools thrive on connection, not just for students but for staff as well. In Melbourne, where we seem to have been more off site than on this year, many staff are feeling the loss of being physically distant from school unexpectedly. The comforts of staffrooms and shared workspace are critical to the connection we have with each other. It is here where daily incidental conversation supports our teaching practice, where successes are celebrated and losses are commiserated. More importantly, these shared spaces are intrinsically linked to the way we look after each other. Without these, many of us have lost our anchor point and

this has impacted on staff wellbeing in a way none of us could have imagined.

At Strathcona, we realised early on that staff wellbeing needed to be prioritised and that the pandemic necessitated specific and targeted strategies of support for our community. There have been some key responses over the last six months that have been pivotal to the wellbeing of our staff. Honest and reassuring communication has been a feature of our school's proactive response to this crisis. Our leaders have been transparent and realistic in their handling of COVID-19, responding to the staff with compassion and clear direction, and seeking feedback through staff surveys during periods of remote learning. Early and effective structural changes were made to the timetable which have created more time for staff to focus on the quality of their online teaching. This decision continues to be critical to the sustainability of our remote classrooms during the second challenging period of lockdown. As a school we have instituted a whole staff fortnightly check-in system to ensure that each person has a regular opportunity to connect with one of our school leaders through a Microsoft Teams meeting. In its simplest form it has provided opportunities for individual concerns to be shared and additional support to be given. On a broader level, it has encouraged the psychological safety of our staff community, which is something that we always value and seems so important during this crisis.

A recent interview published by McKinsey and Company, (2020), highlighted opportunities the pandemic has created for increasing psychological safety in the workplace. Psychological safety was described in this interview as an absence of interpersonal fear. The authors assert that during the COVID-19 crisis, where there has been an explicit lack of physical safety, more open and honest dialogue has occurred between team members. The collective concern or fear around the pandemic has created a shared experience amongst colleagues that is potentially driving unintended collaboration and innovation. This is an unexpected positive and perhaps not one that is easily recognised as a driver of staff wellbeing. It does speak to COVID-19 providing opportunities for enhanced connection, albeit differently to what is comfortable and usual for school staff but opportunity all the same.

Keeping our community connected has been at the forefront of our staff wellbeing approach at Strathcona. Embracing the technology that was hurriedly thrust upon us, we have effectively used a Staff Wellbeing Microsoft Team to promote numerous health and wellbeing activities. This team has provided meaningful opportunities for our staff to practice self-care and has included access to various exercise classes, yoga, Pilates, meditation and mindfulness sessions. There have



IMAGE: A GIFT OF APPRECIATION FOR ALL STAFF

been regular times set for coffee catch ups, book club sessions and end-of-term celebrations. In the second period of remote learning we instituted a daily quiz, live weekly small group training sessions and lunchtime walking groups. The team has been provided regular and important communication of resources ranging from information about our Employer Assistance Program, to advice on how to access support for ourselves and our families. This platform has been another unexpected opportunity for staff wellbeing that we will look to continue in the future.

The pandemic has sharpened the focus for staff wellbeing, provided unexpected opportunities for development in this area and reaffirmed the notion that schools can and should explicitly promote the health and wellbeing of their people. At some point it is likely that we will return to a new normal. I'm hopeful that this new normal brings us back on campus, to the comforts of our staffrooms and our friends and support networks. We need to be back together to ensure that the whole school community continues to thrive. We are all looking forward to a holiday, those of us in Victoria are hoping we can see you soon! ▲

## REFERENCES

- McKinsey & Company. (July 2020). *Psychological safety, emotional intelligence and leadership in a time of flux*, McKinsey Quarterly online. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/leadership/psychological-safety-emotional-intelligence-and-leadership-in-a-time-of-flux>
- Ziebel, N., Acquaro, D., Seah, WT. & Pearn, C. ( July 2020). *Being a Teacher During COVID-19, Pursuit online*, Uni-versity of Melbourne. <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/being-a-teacher-during-covid-19>

# Uncharted territory

SHANTELE JANEK, YEAR 5 TEACHER, SOMERVILLE HOUSE, QUEENSLAND

**It is no secret that adaptability is a key strength required of educators to be successful in the teaching profession. The academic and social needs of our students are always changing and our pedagogy needs to remain flexible to maintain positive and student-centred learning environments.**

---

The impacts of COVID-19, which prompted necessary pandemic restrictions, fostered unexpected but remarkable opportunities for educators to view adaptability in an entirely new light. The implementation of Somerville House's Somerville@Home remote learning programme, prompted me to navigate my teaching and learning in completely uncharted territory. I could not have imagined just how much I would learn from this online schooling experience and how significantly it would alter my philosophy of teaching.

Negotiating the challenging demands of distance learning in a Year 5 class was largely centred on successfully creating and maintaining student engagement, while ensuring the social and academic needs of students were met. This was achievable by fostering a highly collaborative environment with my colleagues and students' families, designing and applying innovative solutions, and critically reflecting every day to optimise the academic progress and social wellbeing of the girls in my class. During our time planning for remote learning, we endeavoured to create content for our online learning platforms that was age appropriate, relevant, meaningful, and provided opportunities for timely and appropriate feedback. This was a mammoth enterprise and one that was not achievable in solitude. I worked cohesively with my year level team and was inspired and motivated by the contributions and collaboration between staff in differing roles across my school community. A whole site collaborative approach within our school placed us in an empowering position to initiate a more sustainable online program.

The first three days of our online teaching and learning experiences were launched in the last week of Term 1, 2020 and provided opportunities for students and educators alike to build both resilience and digital literacy skills in new and unfamiliar platforms. Critically reflecting on our redesigned online content and delivery, as well as feedback from students and families,

supported my year level team to collaboratively identify areas of strength in our online learning platforms and areas that required improvement to best suit our students' needs. We identified that the girls required more interactive online

sessions and thrived on interactions with both their peers and educators. During this reflective period, we also identified that online learning provided a unique platform to engage more holistically with our classroom families, authentically connect with our students in new ways, and cultivate positive online learning experiences that would increase student independence and automaticity. We also recognised the challenging task of supporting the diverse social and academic needs and differing learning circumstances of our students. The dedication and passion for education of the incredible educators that surrounded me prompted my focus to remain student-centred as we prepared for five weeks of remote learning in Term 2, 2020.

In response to the unique environment online learning created, the content we designed and implemented was highly flexible, and more avenues for student interests to be incorporated were provided. We achieved this by sharing choice boards, providing optional learning experiences, open-ended learning tasks, and continuously prioritising the voices of our students. Supporting students to design their learning by providing choices increased motivation and engagement, while also removing barriers for learning (Williams, 2017). Similarly, the online learning platforms we used enabled the provision of meaningful feedback in a more structured way and this prompted students to engage more deeply in their learning. While data collected from online learning tasks was used to improve ongoing instruction, it also provided an easy avenue to provide learners with immediate feedback that encouraged adjustments of strategies they were currently using in their learning (Gargiulo & Metcalf, 2017; Marzano, 2010). Ongoing learning experiences, student work, and feedback were all visible by both students and families. As a result of this online transparency with families, more collaboration and opportunities for authentic home school continuity were enabled.

Primarily students interacted with and responded to Seesaw tasks (a digital portfolio application) which commonly included multimodal instructional videos, interactive websites, learning tools, scanned text, and modelled concrete representations. Instructional videos recorded using Screencast-O-Matic were incorporated into Seesaw activities and demonstrated explicit instructions on how to complete tasks. Videoconferencing using Microsoft Teams was then used to support and extend students as they navigated the complexities of each activity. The tasks were adaptable in nature to accommodate the variances in materials available to the girls and adjustments were made to support different learning needs. Students' work was later shared on the Seesaw classroom blog, which provided opportunities for peer feedback and reflection. Their work on a scaled solar system model created in Science included planets made of lollies, paintings, drawings, chalk on roads, crayon on walls, balloons and printed imagery. The diversity of each model highlights the girls' individuality and the flexibility of this task increased student engagement which further ignited curiosities.

The unknown impacts of the pandemic, as well as the increased independence required of students to complete their tasks, did sometimes create anxiety among my students. To support students' emotional needs throughout remote learning, it was important to consistently review and adapt our learning designs to determine physical, instructional, attitudinal, or curricular barriers and enhance accessibility as necessary (Wood, 2006). School culture also supported me to invest time in creating a supportive environment and to foster compassion and connection. These skills are taught best when students learn through experience (Brown, 2012). This unique situation provided an optimum outlet to nurture the development of these qualities. To enable this we provided a plethora of quality growth mindset and resilience tools, frequent video conferencing in whole class, small group, and individual settings, and provided consistent encouragement and validation for student achievements and efforts. I was grateful I was supported by my colleagues to provide the reliability and consistency my students needed in this time, which contributed to ameliorating their feelings of anxiety and returned feelings of safety and control to them.

While teaching and learning online was an incredibly challenging experience it was also highly rewarding. It enabled me as an educator to enhance my pedagogy by developing stronger relationships with my students, their families, and my colleagues. I have a deeper understanding of the importance of progression and the need to be flexible and adaptive to remain responsive to my students' needs. During unprecedented times I witnessed the social and academic growth of my students and increased independence and ownership. I have also

acquired a heightened awareness of the passion and love of teaching that my school community possesses and the tremendous benefits of highly collaborative relationships with families and students. I am thankful for the lessons I have learnt while navigating this uncharted territory and I am motivated to continue to create more authentically student-led learning experiences, with increased collaboration with my colleagues and the incredible families of my students. ▲

---

## REFERENCES

- Brown, B. (2012). *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent and Lead*. New York, NY: Penguin Random House LLC.
- Gargiulo, M., & Metcalf, R. M. (2017). Introducing Universal Design for Learning (3rd ed.) (pp. 20-54). In R. M. Gargiulo & D. Metcalf (Eds.). *Teaching in Today's Inclusive Classrooms: A Universal Design for Learning Approach*. Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.
- Marzano, R. J. (2010). *Formative Assessment & Standards-Based Grading: Classroom Strategies That Work*. Moorabbin, VIC: Hawker Brownlow Education.
- Williams, J. (2017). Assessing and Evaluating Learner Progress (3rd ed.) (pp. 220-248). In R. M. Gargiulo & D. Metcalf (Eds.). *Teaching in Today's Inclusive Classrooms: A Universal Design for Learning Approach*. Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.
- Wood, J. W. (2006). *Teaching Students in Inclusive Settings: Adapting and Accommodating Instruction* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education Ltd.



### Science: Earth's place in our Solar System - Activity 2

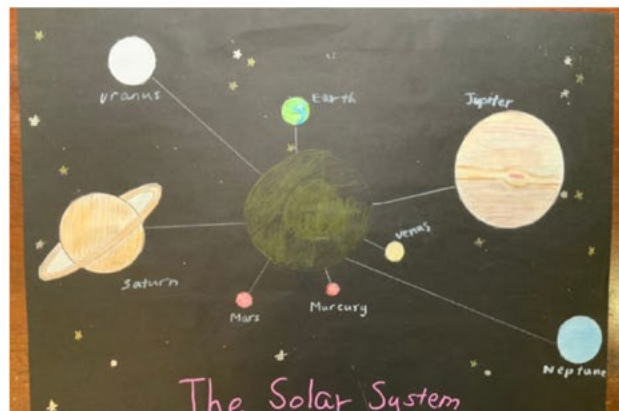
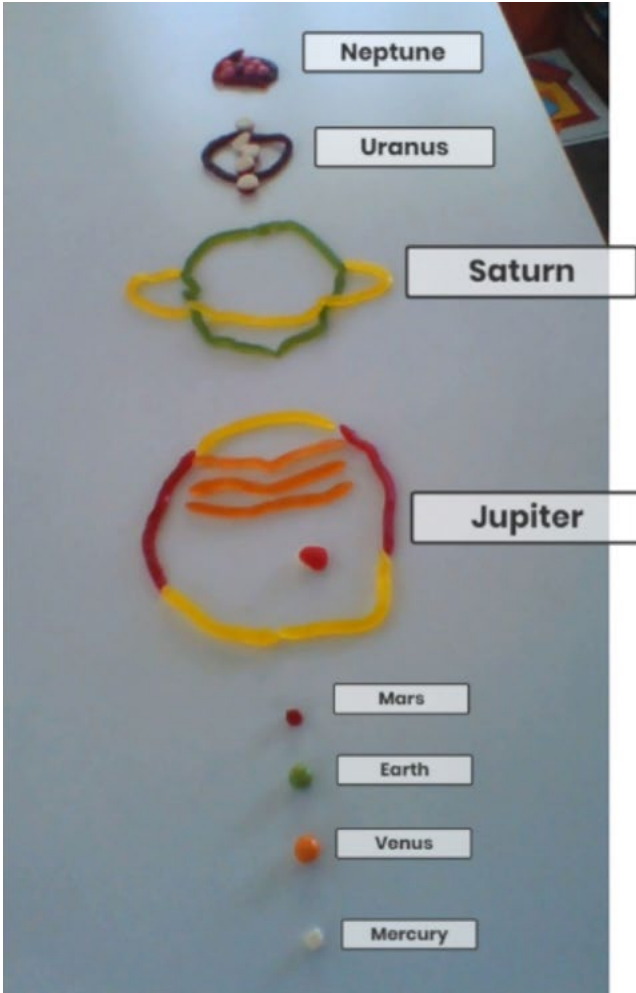
Today we will start making a model of the planets in our Solar System! This model will help us compare the size of planets in our Solar System to Earth.

Watch the video to find out how. Remember you can re-watch this video to make sure you have a good understanding of the task.

Be as creative as you like and if you have any questions you can ask me in Microsoft Teams in 5SCIB.

Make sure to click [Add response](#) and take a photo of your finished model so I can share this on our classroom blog. You can continue to work on this project over the course of the week. I can't wait to see what you create.

Have fun!



# Remote learning...by design

DR CHARLOTTE FORWOOD, DIRECTOR OF LEARNING DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT; KATE MANNERS, DEPUTY HEAD OF SENIOR SCHOOL – TEACHING AND LEARNING; EMMA HINCHLIFFE, DEPUTY HEAD OF JUNIOR SCHOOL; MICAH WILKINS, HEAD OF DIGITAL LEARNING AND INNOVATION, CAMBERWELL GIRLS GRAMMAR SCHOOL, VICTORIA

**E**arly in Term 1, while students were attending their last big event, House Athletics, Debbie Dunwoody, principal of Camberwell Girls Grammar School was following her intuition and beginning the detailed process of preparing the community for learning beyond the physical spaces of the school. This enabled the school to be well prepared for the eventuality of remote learning and reimagining school.

---

As every school leadership team is aware, there are many facets to running a school and each had to be considered both individually and in connection with others in preparation for what could have been a long initial lockdown based on the experiences of other countries. Three clear messages were communicated with the staff on their final day of onsite school in Term 1:

- The school values and cares for its community
- Teachers have choices in how they plan and implement learning for their students
- Teachers have permission to share widely the tools and resources that will help educators beyond our school.

We have approached remote learning in the same way we approach the design and implementation of learning experiences and wellbeing more broadly — with a design thinking mindset. The five key design thinking stages reflect the purposeful nature of what we do within the context of our school. We have looked within our school to tap into our collective expertise and looked beyond to harness the wisdom and experiences of the wider community.

Camberwell Girls has been at the forefront of contributing to the wider education community, assisting schools with shorter timeframes for moving to remote learning with sample communications, daily and weekly structures, infographics highlighting key messages, and departments freely sharing lesson and unit plans.

Clear, consistent communication has been a feature of our COVID-19 experience, with regular sharing of information and guidelines, ranging from remote learning principles, guidelines for videoconferencing

and updates on government recommendations to examples of student learning and family engagement. Regular opportunities for feedback from staff, students and parents have been provided and most importantly, the ways in which the school has responded to this feedback have been shared with the community.

Our staff have been quick to rise to the challenge of finding solutions to issues, such as how to run online assessments while maintaining their integrity, keeping track of students at risk of disengagement, or enabling year levels and house groups to stay connected. We connected with our parents through Zoom learning conferences to provide feedback to parents about their child's learning and provided parent webinars to walk them through the new Junior School learning hub, set up in response to the remote learning needs of our younger students. We trained class representatives to organise and host Zoom meetings to keep parents connected. As a team we have become more skilled at considering different viewpoints and framing questions to gain maximum insight and ultimately empathy, important aspects of Stanford d.school's Design Thinking process (2017).

The differences between face-to-face and remote learning are significant enough that unique approaches are required for effective teaching online. Careful planning and sustained support enabled our teaching and learning programmes to continue during remote learning. For some programmes, this required considerable rethinking such as the Year 9 AI (Artificial Intelligence) for Good conference, which transformed itself into AI (in the sky) for Good, leveraging opportunities to engage with panellists via Zoom and using online collaboration and communication tools.

This need to be flexible also extended into our Career Story Year 10 VCE (Victorian Certificate of Education) Preparation Days which were intentionally designed to be a blend of onsite and offsite experiences over two days.

From here, students were transitioned into an Online VCE Subject Information event, a regular in all schools but reimagined here to accommodate students and their families being remote. The collaborative efforts of subject departments within the Senior School, meant that everything that would typically be delivered in person, was absorbed into collaborative online spaces such as Padlet — a digital wall app, and Zoom. Dually, this enabled students and their families to engage with all that they needed in an asynchronous and synchronous capacity, according to their preferences.

Ongoing, the school's established Remote Learning Model has enabled hybrid offsite and onsite learning to continue with VCE students back on campus. With staff teaching across modes, the need to manage these workloads in a sustainable and flexible way has been paramount, so the initial design of this was done with anticipation of an eventual staggered return to school of different year levels.

We have tailored our Remote Learning Model to cater for our Junior School students. This has included differentiating the structure of remote learning to support their different developmental needs. For example, in order to continue to build foundational literacy and numeracy skills, we have provided regular small group videoconferencing sessions for both instruction, practice and consolidation of these key skills. The structure of the week has been carefully thought through to consider the cognitive load of different tasks and the intensity of remote learning, particularly for our younger students and their families who are key to much of their support.

Teachers and students have been supported to expand their use of familiar tools and to learn new tools and processes. This has included the use of Padlet and Flipgrid — a video discussion platform, for sharing of work, discussions and peer feedback. Yammer groups (Microsoft's social networking service) have been set up for year levels to stay connected and individual classes have used this communication tool for class discussions and sharing of work. Digital learning tools were carefully chosen to engage and excite, facilitate communication and discussion and provide students with greater opportunities for practice and feedback. Therefore, technology was used to enable and accelerate the learning of every student and to create engaging and meaningful activities that may not have been possible in a regular face-to-face class. Research has demonstrated the value of interaction through designed rather than incidental learning activities, especially when designed activities are informed by good pedagogy (Dalgarno, 2014).

What have we learnt from the various learning environments we have so far experienced in 2020? We have learnt not to make assumptions. Some students and teachers who we might have thought would have

struggled with remote learning have thrived, using the experience as a springboard to mastery of new skills, increased engagement and new initiatives. Others have struggled, challenged by change, new routines, lack of control, challenges with staying connected as well as the technical glitches experienced by everyone. Overwhelmingly, the feedback has been to examine how, when and what we teach in the context of a very different world and how we might enable our students to codesign their learning to combine the very best of their teachers' skillset with elements of choice and student interest, mindset and tool kit.

There have been so many ways that students have been able to take charge of their learning experiences. Student leaders have been engaged with their peers through challenges such as the House Cross Country which was run using apps and pedometers. Groups of students have been hosting Zoom panels including a Diversity Week panel with a diverse group of indigenous Australians from across Australia, while simultaneously, several Year 9 students created visual narratives using skills learnt in their AI for Good conference. These experiences have enabled students to learn and use new skills which have broad applications. We need to continue to harness these opportunities and provide students with regular, real world experiences which move beyond the mark book or formal exam. 'When learning has relevance and purpose, children can see how it feeds into their lives outside of the school walls and how it empowers them to have an impact on the world around them.' (Claxton & Carlzon, 2019, p. 68).

As we moved to remote learning, high impact teaching strategies came to the fore (State of Victoria, Department of Education and Training, 2019). Lesson structures in physical spaces do not necessarily translate into online learning lessons, neither should they. Staff were provided with options for engaging with their students and examples of how they might structure their lessons (if synchronous) and leverage the use of digital tools. For those unfamiliar with videoconferencing, this provided an initial scaffold as they developed the confidence and skills to interact with their students via digital tools. It is the combination of good teaching i.e. the use of high impact teaching strategies, with carefully chosen digital learning tools that can aid in the development of transferable skills, skills that prepare all learners to be life-long creative connected and collaborative problem solvers and to be healthy, happy individuals who contribute to the common good in today's globally interdependent world (Fullan & Langworthy, 2013).

Feedback is one of the teaching strategies with the highest impact on student learning. AITSL's Spotlight: Reframing feedback to improve teaching and learning



IMAGE: RECONCILIATION WEEK VISUAL NOTE TAKING

(2017) highlights the work of Wiliam (2010) and Hattie and Timperley (2007) in analysing the research, with numerous studies indicating positive gains for students including accelerated learning. Remote learning has presented new challenges for feedback, as immediate oral feedback is more problematic, particularly if given in a gallery of students, rather than the privacy of a one-to-one exchange. Our teachers have been creative, robust and rigorous in how they have gathered student responses and provided feedback. They have individually and collaboratively explored many of the tools which provide an insight into student understanding and mastery. Students have learnt self-regulation skills, a key determinant of future success (Duckworth & Gross, 2014). This has included having to organise materials and time, practise patience and develop an understanding of the boundaries between home time and school time.

We have established a weekly bulletin for all staff which has provided a continued focus on pedagogy, digital tools and purposeful design. It has also provided a forum for staff to provide an insight into their online classrooms, useful resources and tools.

As a staff we have been able to delight at the humorous instructional videos for Year 2 as they explore procedural texts, share in Year 11 Psychology

students' pain as they explore the psychological impact of orphanages, learn about Big Bang Theory through a student-created video, be amazed by the innovative ideas from Year 9 students as they consider how AI can be used to support people with disabilities, and understand the nuances of a Year 10 exploration of Shakespeare. We have had a glimpse of learning across year levels and discipline areas, in Junior School and Senior School as teachers have shared their remote learning spaces in some way. We have also seen the boundaries between classes blurred as remote learning has provided opportunities for teachers to participate in each other's virtual learning environments, for example, being a member of a Yammer group, making copies of Padlets, and providing student feedback to students from different classes.

We have been reminded about the importance of language, how the words we choose and the way we use them can have an impact on how a new concept is learned, whether or not a task is completed accurately, how a student responds to feedback or how a staff member interprets a message. As a learning community we continue to develop a shared vocabulary, one that has rapidly evolved during remote learning, incorporating newly needed words and phrases such as 'breakout rooms', 'Zoom fatigue', 'asynchronous' and 'synchronous'.

Every educational institution is likely to be asking their version of the questions:

- How do we leverage the positive outcomes of remote learning?
- What conversations do we need to have?
- How might school be different?

The challenge moving forward is to capture the experiences and desires of our learning community and find ways to honour these. There will be a dichotomy of responses: choice/directed; known/unknown; flexibility/structure; safety/risk to name a few. Our challenge is to be purposeful in the changes we bring, ensuring we reach out widely, and acknowledge the different stages of confidence and competence of our community.

The key to the provision of ongoing, rich learning experiences and smooth transitions back to school has been the consistent, transparent communication from the school leaders as well as the regular opportunities for students, teachers and parents to provide feedback to the school. In our first transition back to school, we had a strong focus on wellbeing and strengthening relationships as well as celebrating the effort and work our teachers and students have been engaging with during remote learning. As a school, we will continue to listen to and respond to our community and adapt with purpose to the learning environment, particularly with the continued uncertainty about the location of our learning in the short-term.

So what is the enduring message for us? Our community has thrived because of the effort of every single member. Our collective problem solving, work ethic, collaboration and idea generation has enabled our school to respond to the learning environment with purpose. It has not been easy but we have a common vision and the capacity to adapt and learn quickly. We have maintained our sense of humanity as we strive to build a more just and sustainable world. As per Hans Rosling's (2018) vision for education, we have endeavoured to remain humble and stay curious, being realistic about the extent of our knowledge and being happy to say 'I don't know.' Being a curious community, we have been open to new information and actively sought it out. We have let our mistakes trigger curiosity rather than embarrassment and have openly modelled this for our students. We are supported by a large and strong community to take the best of our previous learning experiences and interweave them with the new learning that we have lived through due to COVID-19.

What could be? We reimagine an education which respects our heritage, values the diverse nature of our learners, is purposefully designed and responsive to the changing needs of our local, national and global community. This time, perhaps unlike any other, has allowed us to think and act locally and globally about

things that matter and to work together to create our tomorrow. It will take the very best elements of remote learning and provide opportunities previous unimagined. ▲

---

## REFERENCES

- Claxton, G., & Carlzon, B. (2019). *Powering Up Children: The Learning Power Approach To Primary Teaching*. Crown House Publishing, Camarthen, Wales.
- Duckworth, A., & Gross, J. J. (2014). Self-Control and Grit: Related but Separable Determinants of Success. *Current directions in psychological science*, 23(5), 319–325. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721414541462>
- M.Fullan, M., & Langworthy, M. (2013), *Towards a New End: New Pedagogies for Deep Learning, Collaborative Impact*, Seattle.
- Rosling, H. (2018). *Factfulness: 10 reasons we're wrong about the world - and why things are better than you think*, Hodder & Stoughton, London.
- Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). (2017). *Spotlight: Reframing feedback for improving teaching and learning*. <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/spotlight-reframing-feedback-to-improve-teaching-and-learning>
- dschool-old.stanford.edu. (2017). *An Introduction To Design Thinking PROCESS GUIDE*. <https://dschool-old.stanford.edu/sandbox/groups/designresources/wiki/36873/attachments/74b3d/ModeGuideBOOTCAMP2010L.pdf?sessionId=1b6a96f1e2a50a3b1b7c3f09e58c40a062d7d553>
- State of Victoria (Department of Education and Training). (2019). *High Impact Teaching Strategies - Excellence in Teaching and Learning*. <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/support/high-impact-teaching-strategies.pdf>

# Keeping the spirit alive

HOPE BARR, MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER, ST HILDA'S ANGLICAN SCHOOL FOR GIRLS, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

**W**hen you bid your child farewell at the boarding house, you don't expect to see them back home a month later. But this is exactly what happened as COVID-19 changed the way we educated our children this year.

---

Regionally-based parents who choose to send their children to board, do so knowing that the lack of family contact is balanced by the high standard of education, support and friendships they will get in Perth. The surprise benefit of COVID-19 for these families was that they experienced first-hand the advantages and value St Hilda's delivers. Online learning programs have given parents a glimpse into their daughters' lessons, giving them a stronger connection with their children and the school.

Still in challenging times, St Hilda's considered how flexible these parents have had to be as they've battled uncertainty and managed the ups and downs of having their children learning in their homes.

"Families shared that they enjoyed watching their daughter's classes online. It gave them a small window into how a lesson runs and how our teachers and students work together to learn. They got to see teaching and learning in action, with our girls taking responsibility for their learning, creating goals through conversations with

their teachers and identifying and understanding the next steps in their education. We have had girls accessing their daily lessons via NBN Sky Muster satellites, ensuring those in remote areas weren't

disadvantaged," Principal Fiona Johnston said.

However, the school recognised the need to keep connected not only with its boarding families, but with the community as a whole when the school was forced to move to online learning. We came up with a novel idea to keep our community connected — St Hilda's TV.

Fiona Johnston said, "I was so excited to launch St Hilda's TV, it provided a platform for our community to remain engaged during these unprecedented times. We know our school is so much more than just our buildings and grounds, it's about relationships and rapport and St Hilda's TV enabled us to connect, share stories and the incredible journey of St Hilda's through a different forum with each other."

Produced in-house, St Hilda's TV consisted of 10-minute episodes that included a number of segments such as positive messages from a range of staff and students, awards, virtual PE lessons, a forum for celebrating birthdays, funny jokes, a range of online competitions, Tik Tok dance take offs and a lip sync to 'We'll meet again' by Vera Lynn.

With school resuming in Term 2, it took a number of weeks for boarding students to return to campus due to restricted flights and regional boarder restrictions, and so the school kept St Hilda's TV running as assemblies weren't allowed and it ensured those who couldn't return to school could remain connected.

"Interestingly the parents enjoyed it as much as the girls, so our audience changed from what we had initially anticipated," Fiona said. "It's one of those things coming out of COVID-19 that certainly fell into that category of what we want to keep doing post-COVID and we're still using it regularly now as the girls love the content it captures which can only be done in this format. We are only just getting back to the 'new normal' of being able to hold whole school assemblies, so this bridges the gap and mixes it up a little," she said. ▲



# Going ‘Agile’ in a crisis

ELIZABETH GREEN, LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE STRATEGIST, LORETO NORMANHURST, NSW

**In 2019 I was the recipient of the Loreto Normanhurst Staff Scholarship. My project was around Agile methodologies and schools. In 2019 I wrote, “an organisation can’t simply decide to ‘do’ Agile, rather, shifting to an Agile way of working typically requires significant cultural change in changing the way employees and employers think about work”. Well...**

Despite the popularity of Agile (it’s graced as many business magazine covers as a 90s supermodel) and the different Agile frameworks, at its core I have come to understand Agile as frequent iteration and continuous learning and improvement. When COVID-19 suddenly turned our shared understanding of a current or present workflow on its head we were all forced to reckon with the fact that what’s true today may not necessarily be true tomorrow. Things were changing moment to moment. To quote one of my favourite lines from Yeats, “things fall apart; the centre cannot hold”.

In the face of shifting communication, a divided political landscape, uncertainty over the infectiousness of the virus and the need to prepare for a multitude of possible outcomes all while revising the schedules of our personal lives, we fundamentally changed the way we thought about work. We went Agile and I ate my words.

As Loreto Normanhurst, along with many other schools, made the gradual return to campus, staff and students remarked on what they’ll ‘keep’ from COVID-19. Students I have spoken with shared that they’d enjoyed additional time with their siblings as they were co-opted into the supervision space while parents juggled full households, one student told me that her mother had taught her the family recipes and there was a general appreciation of the slower pace of life. Around the (physically distanced) watercooler, staff too conducted mini retrospectives on what they’d like to keep from COVID-19 and whether we’re all the better for it. I humbly narrow my focus here to whether teaching and learning might be better in a post COVID-19 world. We are nowhere near accounting for the toll this crisis will wreak.

Back to the watercooler conversation. For us in education, and I suspect this is true for many businesses across the country, the decision to close workplaces meant a sudden grappling with technology and its

capacity to help us do our jobs remotely. But if we focus solely on technology, we will, to quote Eliot — another of my favourites, have “had the experience but missed the meaning”. In almost all aspects of remote teaching and learning we used technology

as a communication tool. Zoom video conferencing, the Canvas Learning Management System and collaborative documents are all means of communicating with our students and with each other. Loreto Normanhurst was already well-equipped with some of the necessary tools though we did have to learn very quickly to use Zoom in order to pivot into online learning effectively. Overall, the technological aspect was certainly a steep learning curve for many staff who were not yet plumbing the depths of the systems already available and as a result we have seen a marked improvement in staff and student utilisation of technology as a means of communication.

What I would most like to keep post COVID-19 however is the focus on continuous improvement. It’s not just learning how to use technology, it’s changing our processes and communications. The highly physical processes that underlie the school day were gone and we couldn’t replicate the physical classroom in Zoom. In an educational setting there are contextual breaks as students move from space to space around the campus; at home they are suddenly plugged into their computers all day. A simple fix was to cut the lesson time down in order to allow students scope to leave their laptops. At school, when a teacher walks into the classroom she is communicating that the lesson is about to start, her expectations are then further communicated through body language and the classroom setup. The students and teacher are always present. Over Zoom (and particularly after using Zoom to set up a lesson and then sign out) we needed to trust that our students were indeed carrying on with the lesson. We needed to be more thoughtful and economic in our communication as we were mindful of allowing students time to simply carry on with their learning. We became cognisant of Zoom fatigue and so moved to peel away the layers of instruction to reveal the lesson or teaching intention at its most stripped back.

Zoom as a tool also continuously improved by adapting in order to communicate better. They added gestures like hands up, and thought about how one might walk into a meeting in real life by adding microphone mute as a default setting.

What we saw was a whole education sector engaged in change management, from classroom teachers to support staff to school leaders. Suddenly it was everyone's job to be ready and able to respond and the only way that could happen is through teamwork, open communication and trust. These are the building blocks of Agile and why it abruptly felt like I was eating my words.

Reflecting on the lessons learnt I have turned my mind to what and indeed how we might ensure some of the very best of teaching and learning in COVID-19 might become permanent changes. There were five key areas that I focused on for my staff scholarship in 2019 when borrowing from Agile methodologies with Year 10 in Integrated Learning. No one could have imagined that 2020 would deliver a scenario where staff and students were asked to put into play some of the core concepts of Agile. Suddenly the abstract learning in the classroom had become a day-to-day reality.

### **Diverse teams**

A core component of our 2019 Year 10 teaching programme was that students worked in diverse teams or learning squads to complete the goals defined in a Design Sprint — a five day problem-solving methodology). All students undertook DiSC profiling and this information

---

### **“My peers were humanised in new ways as snippets from their personal lives came into play.”**

was fed into the formation of their learning squads. DiSC is a behaviour assessment tool based on the DiSC theory of psychologist William Moulton Marston (1928), which centres on four different personality traits which are Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Conscientiousness. Helping students understand their own strengths and areas for development is a good way to lay the foundation for the self-reflection necessary for an attitude of continuous improvement. For our students, where perfectionism can be paralysing, adopting a 'test and learn' mentality shifts the focus towards feedback and incremental improvement. In a longer-term view, it teaches a bias towards action and experimentation. In sum, just the sort of mindset necessary to be adaptable, curious, creative and well versed in managing one's own time and workflow.

When we lost the physicality of the campus we simultaneously gained additional insight into the daily rhythms of our students' lives. Many boarders were

expected to help out on the family property, some students shared study spaces with multiple siblings and indeed limited internet access with a whole family attempting to work from home. Acknowledging and appreciating the diversity of the community became so important when designing the learning. In many instances it meant we were engaged in asynchronous learning as well as synchronous lesson times. Trust in one another was paramount. In fact many students who tend to fly under the radar in a classroom suddenly worked their way through additional modules or learning tasks as they were able to get on with their work in a time and space that suited them.

Personally, I saw great trust, empathy and compassion in the Zoom communications as we virtually met with colleagues nursing crying children or whose partners suddenly appeared in the background. My peers were humanised in new ways as snippets from their personal lives came into play. There was also no shortage of students wanting to show teachers their pets or backyards!

### **Feedback loops**

In our 2019 programme students were given a delivery deadline and then worked together on short increments with feedback loops, by teaching students to apply sense checks early and often it is easier to adapt and respond to change. Students were also encouraged to run their own 'stand-up' at the beginning of each lesson in order to share what they'd done since the last lesson and what they planned to work on in the lesson ahead. A clear focus on the learning goals drove accountability for the team as a whole as well as the individual members.

In 'doing' remote learning, teachers have been acutely focused on paring back the curriculum to key learning goals only and many watercooler retrospectives have sung the praises of writing or making the learning intention of each lesson explicitly clear. Something you can reasonably only do when your focus is paired back and you're not trying to nail multiple outcomes in one activity.

As educators we also set shorter tasks, in many respects they were short learning 'sprints'. Students engaged with smaller online quizzes and mini tasks where they could master a skill or concept before moving on. As a school we shifted our focus from summative assessment tasks to formative tasks where students received feedback along the way. They may well have been working towards a larger project over the course of the term but sense checks allowed them to check their understanding and pivot early and often.

The school has also been engaged in a number of feedback loops. Staff, students and parents were invited



to participate in weekly surveys providing feedback on online learning. We used these surveys to respond quickly, making necessary changes and adopting a 'test and learn' mentality where we eschewed what's been done before or what may have worked in the past in favour of meeting the needs of our community now. Since returning to campus these short feedback loops have continued. Most recently in the space of conducting Academic Plenaries via Zoom where one evening's session led to incremental changes for the next.

### **Transparency**

In the Year 10 unit, we hammered home the value of transparency to students through a series of challenges such as 'Agile Art' and 'Fruit Salad problem sizing'. In both these games the key takeaway is that uniting behind a shared and transparent goal leads to better results. The largest gain we saw was around communication, a sharing of knowledge and cross pollination of ideas. Shared language and understanding leads to gains in velocity, the more trust and open communication within a team the better their velocity or output.

Students were also taught Kanban as a project management methodology (using Trello). Again, the core purpose was around transparency — everyone in the team could see what the whole team is working on as well as the work 'to do'.

With some students and staff still working remotely the importance of providing inclusive access is vital. Removing the barriers that prevented interaction with

or access to online learning was a huge task for our ICT Department. There are so many takeaways here for how schools and businesses choose to move forward. Rather than returning to the way things have been done, how might we democratise education further to ensure access to everyone? Online learning may not provide the same type of value as being on campus but there may be scope for how the education system grows over the next decade. We've certainly seen democratisation from large universities and cultural institutions who have opened back catalogues and provided free access to online learning. How might secondary schools grow, either within their own cities or to encompass outreach opportunities with remote communities?

The school significantly changed the way we communicated with our community. We over communicated but under complicated. In such uncertain times we also needed to be completely transparent in order to keep all stakeholders on board even when it meant being forthright with the fact that we didn't have all the answers or that what we communicated today may change.

### **Creativity**

The Year 10 programme reframed creativity as a muscle rather than a beret wearing artist. Activities were built to underline the fact that creativity can be taught and that most problem solving is looking at something working in one context and applying that same idea in new and novel ways elsewhere.

As a school, we also used COVID-19 to consult distance learning professionals as well as how online learning has been delivered elsewhere. It's an opportunity to look with fresh eyes, not just at the school up the road but at not for profits, big business and everything in between.

On the subject of creativity, I was bemused and delighted at the lengths our Mathematics Department went to incorporate numeracy around the house as students learnt from home. Our Head of Mathematics, Sally Brimfield, wrote in the school newsletter to not be surprised when your daughters started measuring and calculating the surface area of various packets in the pantry or measuring the diameter of the wheel of your car to calculate the distance travelled in 100 revolutions of the wheel. They even had Year 8 students looking for the different mathematics contained in bags of lolly snakes and boxes of smarties. Necessity really can be the mother of invention.

### Retrospectives

In our Agile unit, reflection was rebranded as a retrospective and cemented as a vital element of the Sprint. Reflective practice is well embedded at Loreto Normanhurst; what we aimed to do with Year 10 was formalise some of the ways it can be practiced.

---

**“...they will adapt and they will cope and they will be better for it.”**

Our teaching staff shared those watercooler conversations and what we hope to keep in the teaching and learning space in a post COVID-19 world. What better way to adopt Agile methodologies than to come together as a staff, look backwards and ask ourselves ‘what’s worth keeping’?

The second large scale project connected to the staff scholarship was the second iteration of Sprint Week where the students followed a Google Ventures Design Sprint methodology over five straight days in order to solve real business problems presented to them by our industry partners. Having utilised this problem-solving method in Year 10 Integrated Learning in 2019, the current Year 11s could not be better prepared for the leadership challenge presented to them by having to discard the way things have been done in the past and reinvent Loreto Day afresh in the time of coronavirus. I have had the privilege of working with these girls again and taking them through a mini sprint in order to help them grapple with what a school wide fete day looks like during COVID-19. How might we manage cash in a contactless world where not all students have debit cards? How might we have a communal lunch while observing restrictions around food distribution?

The Year 11s stripped back Loreto Day to its central aims, conducted research interviews to gather insights, sketched possible solutions and then undertook a gallery walk to vote forward the best ideas. They then quickly formed teams in order to bring their ideas to life. The students have been asked to pivot like so many businesses have had to do in order to remain viable throughout the coronavirus crisis. I don't think anyone could have imagined 2020 would bring a more pertinent example of the need to rapidly change in order to survive. The Year 11s have had to be creative in how they might still deliver on the key aims of building community, advocating for the chosen cause and raising funds. They have also accepted that the day will look different and that more than likely things will go wrong but they will adapt and they will cope and they will be better for it.

While the education sector may not have chosen significant cultural change, cultural change was nevertheless hoisted upon us by a global pandemic. In effect, the world decided that we'd go Agile and I believe that teaching and learning is better for it. You can only have genuine organisational change if it starts with the individual and then occurs at scale, in this crisis we have all had to alter the way we think about work. For most teachers that meant embracing a 'good enough is good enough until we know more' attitude.

While a perceived loss of control of the classroom strikes horror in the hearts of many classroom teachers, the flip side was the focus on continuous improvement as we learnt more and adapted our practices. It was uncomfortable but the discomfort is the part worth holding onto. Like the businesses we all saw in our local communities, we need to remain ready to change. It might not always be on such a grand scale but being ready to adapt a lesson schedule that's not working or shifting into a new mode in order to meet the needs of a student is a grand scale to our students. Loreto prides itself on authentic human interactions and what's more Agile than valuing humans over processes? ▲

---

### REFERENCES

Marston, W. M. (1928). *Emotions of normal people*. London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd.

# Brigidine pivots to embrace the new technological revolution

ALLISON JOHANSEN, ASSISTANT TO THE PRINCIPAL PROFESSIONAL TEACHING & LEARNING, BRIGIDINE COLLEGE INDOOROOPILLY, QUEENSLAND

**P**rior to COVID-19, as supported by Warschauer and Matuchniak (2010), society was in a fourth technological revolution, with 2020 most likely ushering in a fifth.

Interestingly, society uses threats — like the current pandemic — to reflect, alter and adapt to new climates. This was highlighted during our 'learning at home' phase during the pandemic lockdown, where the reliance on technology was accelerated and embraced. Brigidine College, Indooroopilly continually adapts to embrace the technological revolution in education, which includes a focus on 21st century citizenship, wellbeing and flexibility needed in pedagogy to suit the changing landscape.

Indeed, the requirement for 21st century citizenship for students has never been greater. Between 2012 and 2015, well ahead of COVID-19, the need for digital skills in the global job market increased by 212 per cent (Foundation for Young Australians, 2016). The Future Skills Report (2018) states that, "By 2040, Australians will need to invest significantly more time in education and training, as skills become a worker's greatest asset in more complex, machine-assisted workplaces" (AlphaBeta, 2018).

Digital skills are one of the most important assets to teach this generation of students, as those skills will greatly assist them in successfully engaging in the future workforce. When moving to the learning at home model, Brigidine College placed great importance on learning and wellbeing. During this time, the Brigidine community, like the rest of the world, was quite anxious. As such, decisions were always made taking into account the wellbeing and positivity that could be brought to the turbulent situation. Deputy Principal Curriculum, Melissa Dever, regularly posed this question to college staff when making decisions, "is it reasonable?" This helped to better support and consider the families in the school community.

In 2014, Brigidine College engaged with SEQTA to provide a new learning management system (LMS) that improved communication across curricular and co-curricular areas. This system helped families to nurture

and support their daughters' learning through the COVID-19 lockdown. The college also analysed the experience of other schools and learning from the

global community who had already begun to reflect on what had worked and not worked in their own countries and systems. This allowed the College Leadership Team (CLT) to circumnavigate the tribulations and teething problems many had faced. Advice from the CLT to teachers, from global community reflections, was to 'halve the curriculum, then halve it again.' Focus was put on competence, not content. Teacher professionalism was, as always, trusted as we were aware students may not be able to learn as quickly whilst learning outside of the classroom. The platforms enabled teachers and students to remain connected and engaged consistently during the learning at home experience.

It was during this time of learning and reflection that the college's IT support team put in place measures to support equity and ability to engage when online. The first step was to conduct readiness trials in the evenings to ensure programs and platforms would perform with all students and staff accessing simultaneously from home locations. Being a one to one school, with the college providing laptops, meant that students and teachers already had the equipment and systems required. During the trials, the IT support team was able to identify families that were having network issues based on their home internet access and solve them by providing the necessary support. This was further enhanced by IT support remotely accessing student laptops to boost Wi-Fi signals and syncing issues when learning at home. By having an IT support team, issues were solved quickly and efficiently, keeping everyone connected and supported, in much the same way when on campus. The ability to work remotely addressed flexible work arrangements, especially for the senior students and teachers.

Student wellbeing was a key concern for the CLT and teachers, as students would be online for considerably longer than usual. A weakness of the changing technological landscape and constant digital access

has been the overwhelming research that technology threatens student wellbeing (Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010; Lenhart, et al., 2008).

Taking this into account when settling on a daily plan, the college decided to follow the routine of the 10-day timetable which built in five minute breaks between classes to allow students to stretch, move, fill up their water bottles and engage with family members. Even prior to COVID-19, research showed that students struggled to 'switch off' due to distractions, procrastination and addiction (Turel, 2019). To combat this spiral, self-regulation was a key skill to teach students if the home learning model was to be successful. With ongoing pastoral care lessons, students were provided with explicit advice and skills to engage with technology, including the possible risks that could be associated by excessive and improper use (Turel, 2019). Further to this, the college shared advice with families on these same issues as well as online safety and the behaviour students were expected to exhibit whilst on the platform. Interestingly, a benefit of remote learning has been a renewed understanding and relationship with families regarding the education of their daughter and the impact education has on the household.

It is important to mention that the college's pastoral care program thrived in this online environment in ways that were unforeseen. As they did on campus, Brigidine College students began each morning in their vertical Home Room classes, having regular conversations and positive interactions with their peers from Years 7-12. The online connection brought light-heartedness and joy as students took on challenges that ranged from yoga and fitness, to 'show and tell' and participating in random acts of kindness. Students shared light stories that represented life exactly as it was during online learning — messy, funny, chaotic and beautiful. Further to this, daily contemplation continued at home allowing students and staff to meditate and recharge after lunch. This refocused students' thoughts, ideas, body awareness and emotions.

College staff again revisited policies and processes

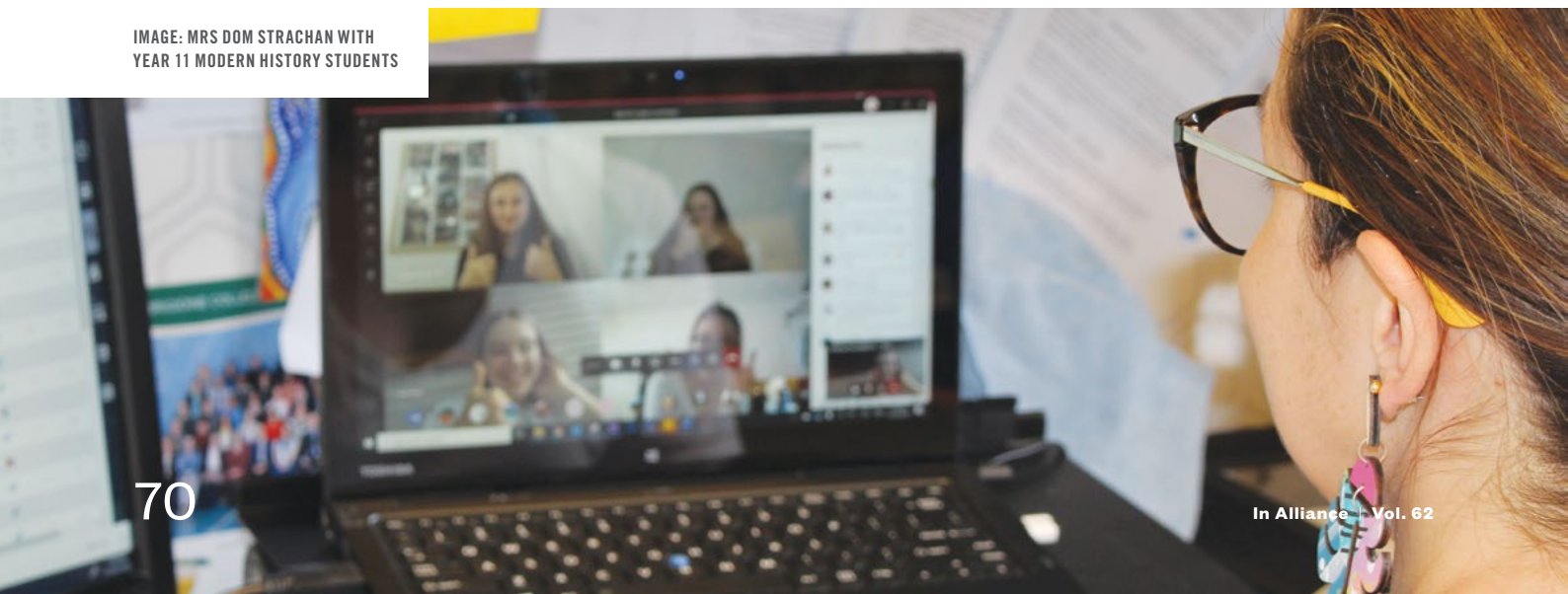
to support professionalism, including student protection and professional boundaries when learning at home through different modes. Examples of this includes communication to students and staff through school sanctioned communication tools; school uniform or school approved clothing to be worn (sports shirts) by students; advice that students should be in a visible space and not project video while in their bedrooms; advice to teachers on how to deal with vulnerable students; and support to create and maintain safe learning environments. These factors allowed for consistency and understanding of the processes, leaving nothing to chance, to make sure everyone knew the protocols and was supported in applying the learning conditions.

It is important to note that learning in a digital space still requires quality pedagogy. Creating a safe space where students feel valued and heard is critical to facilitate learning online (Comer & Lenaghan, 2013). Teachers bear that responsibility in developing strategies to promote the safe, responsible and ethical use of ICT in learning and teaching. Brigidine College reinforced cyber safety, online etiquette, protocols and reflection on personal wellbeing to promote safety and responsibility to students and their families.

A key reflection from Program Leader of Excellence Renee Dunne was that teaching and learning programs during this time "narrowed on the skills and content that students required, resulting in more purposeful teaching." Homework from the school day and weekend was removed to allow families to connect with each other. It also allowed more time for physical activity, ensuring students had balance in their day.

Collegial support was boosted through Microsoft Teams to allow all staff communication. A group was established for wellbeing where staff initially shared memes, articles, fitness videos and inspirational quotes. This later developed into ideas and tips for teaching online that essentially replaced the conversations staff might have normally had in the staffroom. This heavily used online platform, had all staff contributing and asking

IMAGE: MRS DOM STRACHAN WITH YEAR 11 MODERN HISTORY STUDENTS



questions, especially when new products or versions were released. It was another way teachers' demonstrated care for one another, displaying their spirit to face adversity as well as being flexible to their needs. No matter the challenges, requirements or timeframes, Brigidine College staff continue to be lifelong learners who adapt to ensure students are individually catered for in every respect.

Due to the excellent educational platforms and IT support, teacher aides and library staff continued to be utilised in supporting students and teaching. Microsoft Teams provided multiple teachers the opportunity to join classes and effectively teach and support students to engage in their learning. The library was also taking book orders online and organising drop off zones for students and their families to collect new reading materials each day.

To ensure a smooth process when teaching off campus, multiple professional training opportunities were provided for teachers to prepare effective teaching pedagogy for learning at home. These included a range of tools such as Microsoft Teams and its capabilities, such as recording explicit teaching through multiple means to enable for a wider range of pedagogies to be put into practice. Teachers displayed extensive flexibility and courage in amending and adapting class activities to suit different purposes in the online model. Tools for participation and collaboration were required to create a new 'participatory culture' based on speaking, as well as listening, writing, reading, producing and consuming (Jenkins, 2006). This participatory culture meant teachers focused on clear learning intentions and success criteria, recorded direct instruction and modelling, discussion through chat functions, collaborative tasks, reflective tasks and feedback tools. A focus on these pedagogies and appropriate technologies allowed this to occur, as well as providing a tremendous confidence for students and to effectively learn whilst at home.

As a result of explicit teaching and use of flexible pedagogies, students were self-motivated and engaged in peer teaching moments across all age groups. This connection led to a strong sense of belonging. It also brought attention to the effectiveness of individualised instruction (Education Endowment Foundation, 2019). This individualised instruction and immediate feedback are two of the strongest forms of pedagogy. Both staff and students enjoyed the benefits of this type of learning. Teachers reported that students had reflected: "Their favourite aspects of online learning...have been being able to work at their own pace and being able to get extension or additional help in a more targeted way" (Luke Critchley, 2020). Another teacher reported, "the positive feedback from online learning [from students] has been the opportunity to manage their own time and tasks" (Renee Dunne, 2020). Teacher Maree Owens echoed that, "being

able to give immediate feedback to students as they work has been a good thing."

The learning at home experience has been one of opportunity at Brigidine College. Students thrived and were supported due to the flourishing nature of the college's staff and the adoption of dependable technology. A heartfelt thank you to the College Leadership Team for their research, dedication and application to pre-plan effectively and utilise programs which supported best practice. Equally, the IT support team is congratulated for their continual efforts to ensure every staff member and student could successfully engage at home. Finally, it could not have been done without Brigidine College's world-class teachers and their willingness to adapt, change and continue learning. They transformed a unique situation into one of blessings and opportunities. ▲

---

## REFERENCES

- AlphaBeta. (2018). Future Skills Report. Retrieved from: <https://www.alphabeta.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/google-skills-report.pdf>
- Comer, D. R., & Lenaghan, J. A. (2013). Enhancing Discussions in the Asynchronous Online Classroom: The Lack of Face-to-Face Interaction Does Not Lessen the Lesson. *Journal of Management Education*, 37(2), 261-294. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562912442384>
- CommScope. (2017). The Generation Z Study of Tech Intimates. Retrieved from: <https://www.commscope.com/NewsCenter/PressReleases/CommScope-Research-on-Gen-Z-Tech-Intimates-Reveals-an-Always-On-Mindset/>
- Education Endowment Foundation. (2019). Evidence for Learning Teaching & Learning Toolkit: Education Endowment Foundation. Parental Engagement. Retrieved from: <https://www.evidenceforlearning.org.au/toolkit/parental-engagement/>
- Kafai, Y. B., & Peppler, K. A. (2011). Youth, Technology, and DIY: Developing Participatory Competencies in Creative Media Production. *Review of Research in Education*, 35(1), 89-119. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X10383211>
- Lenhart, A., Arafeh, S., Smith, A., & Macgill, A. R. (2008). Writing, technology and teens. Retrieved from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259255028\\_Writing\\_Technology\\_and\\_Teens](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259255028_Writing_Technology_and_Teens)
- Turel, O. (2019). Economic and Business Dimensions Potential "Dark Sides" of Leisure Technology Use in Youth: Time for balanced reflections on technology. *Communications of the ACM*, 62(3), 24-27. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.newcastle.edu.au/10.1145/3306615>
- Warschauer, M., & Matuchniak, T. (2010). New Technology and Digital Worlds: Analyzing Evidence of Equity in Access, Use, and Outcomes. *Review of Research in Education*, 34(1), 179-225. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X09349791>

# A remote learning story

INGE DOIG, MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS, SAMUEL MARSDEN COLLEGIATE SCHOOL, NEW ZEALAND

**A**s New Zealand moved from relative normality into strict lockdown on very short notice in March 2020, Preschool to Year 13 students at Samuel Marsden Collegiate School began 'Remote Learning @ home'.

Maintaining a regular routine for students that supports learning and which fosters a sense of belonging and community are key values right across our school. With these key values in mind, staff, parents and students embraced the challenges and opportunities this time provided.

In readiness for the possibility of school closure (which did seem like overkill to many at the time!), staff spent considerable time and effort planning effective remote learning programmes, and preparing students and the community for what this would involve. In the weeks prior to moving to remote learning, we surveyed our community regarding their access to technology and wifi connections at home, and were able to determine what was needed to best support families including making school equipment available for short-term loan.

The Marsden community was extremely positive about the quality of the remote learning programme delivered — demonstrated by their comments post lockdown. Key to the programme, was staff connecting virtually with students on a regular basis via online programmes such as Google Meet, EDUCA, Seesaw and Hapara.

A new remote learning timetable was created for Year 7 to 13 students. Students completing their NCEA (National Certificate of Education Achievement, an internationally recognised qualification that can be

used to gain entry to tertiary institutes around the world) in Years 11, 12 and 13 had two timetabled synchronous learning periods for each of their subjects each week, where the

lessons were live online. The remainder of the time was available for asynchronous learning. Students in Years 7 to 10 had one live synchronous learning period per subject per week (with the exception of English and Maths where they had two). "We were very aware that just replicating our normal timetable in a remote learning setting was not going to work well for either students or teachers. Students needed time to work independently and to have breaks from being on their screens. This was a great opportunity for 'deep dive' learning, where students could spend extended periods of time engaged in a learning task without the constraints that the normal school timetable provided", said Academic Director Margaret Adeane. Through asynchronous learning, there was a variety of tasks set via the Marsden Learning Management System (LMS), Hapara, and teachers could check in on student work and give feedback as they were working on it.

"A highlight of day two of our remote learning journey was an entire class of Year 10 girls turning up to their first online English class in character and full costume, ready to perform A Midsummer Night's Dream. Their English teacher had no idea this was coming and was blown away by their creativity and humour", said Ms Adeane.

A key component of the school day for all students in Years 7 to 13 was the continuation of their daily form group or tutor group meetings. These took place at 10.30 am each day and allowed the group to congregate in a virtual space via a Google Meeting to share their triumphs and challenges and to support each other's wellbeing. The girls were very keen to touch base with each other and their teachers.

"We were delighted to hear that some of the groups continued with these morning gatherings throughout the holidays, which occurred in the middle of the lockdown period, without their teachers, just to ensure they stayed in touch with each other", said Principal Narelle Umbers.

"Connecting was a key aspect in the success of our remote learning programme and for the wellbeing of our students during this time".

IMAGE: YEAR 1 FINDING THINGS STARTING WITH 'T'



The approach to structuring the remote learning programme was slightly different in the preschool and primary school. Preschool and primary students had a daily menu of offline and online activities provided by teachers in a self-managed learning menu. These activities took on a similar routine as the daily and weekly Marsden programmes, from invitations to participate in music and physical education lessons organised by specialist teachers, cooking and art opportunities, as well as students engaging in the traditional curriculum subjects of literacy and mathematics. The teaching and learning continued to be based on an inquiry approach which encouraged students to further their knowledge in particular areas of interest. And face-to-face connections with teachers and each other also continued on a daily basis.

As New Zealand's first Visible Wellbeing™ school, Marsden works to incorporate practices that enhance student wellbeing in every aspect of their academic and co-curricular programmes, and across all year levels. Now in the second year of the Visible Wellbeing partnership with Professor Lea Waters of the University of Melbourne, teachers are knowledgeable about the 'SEARCH' framework which underpins this approach and can expertly weave wellbeing learning into every lesson and co-curricular activity. As we planned the move to remote learning, we were aware that taking care of the wellbeing of students would be more critical than ever and created the idea of the 'Wellbeing Window' — a time every day when the focus would be purely on doing something to enhance wellbeing. The newly created 'Student Hauora' page on our LMS gave students access to their daily 'Wellbeing Window' activity. The focus was on strengths, gratitude, mindfulness... and a myriad of ways wellbeing could be enhanced every day. "We felt that it was really important to take a whole school approach with shared daily activities so that the aspect of 'shared experience' could be maintained, even though students were all learning in different locations", said Anne Field, Director of Pastoral Care. Similarly, 'Marsden Moves' was implemented with a daily physical activity challenge for students — a whole school approach to moving and staying fit during this time. The Hauora page also contained daily activities for prayer and reflection, and allowed student leaders to connect with the girls to promote leadership and service activities.

The senior students were also key in ensuring the girls stayed engaged and connected during the lockdown period. They led wellbeing activities during assemblies such as turning ANTS (Automatic Negative Thoughts) into PETS (Positive Enhancing Thoughts), setting challenges for younger students and sharing entertaining videos of their own lockdown lives and learning.

Communication was a key element in ensuring families, staff and students were on the same page, felt well

informed and connected. Timely and regular emails were sent to all of Marsden's community members, updates were placed on the school's website, and contact details were made widely available. The Pastoral Care team was available to assist both the girls and their families. Remote learning timetables, documentation and 'Remote Learning in Action' were all available in a dedicated section on the school website. Students and their families were encouraged to share their learning and experiences using the digital wall app, Padlet, and at their learning and more informal online meetings. Staff also stayed connected through buddy groups and some of these have continued beyond the lockdown period. Marketing pivoted to providing school experiences online, including open events and information evenings, both being well received and the latter something Marsden School will continue to provide in webinar format going forward.

A great deal of rich information about this period was obtained by the school via an independent survey report, which showed an overwhelming positive response to the school's remote learning approach. This included feedback specifically from parents on the independence, time management and organisational skills gained by students, the structuring and managing of their daily routines and the enjoyment and adaptation to online classes. Students benefited from doing things at their own pace, increased family time and being able to wake up later. Staff particularly enjoyed developing new skills in using technology and teaching, finding new, innovative ways of teaching and fostering independence in their students.

In response to the feedback, tweaks to the remote learning programme have been made including scheduling regular opportunities for parent and student conferencing, further reducing screen time and managing work load — particularly for senior students and staff. Retaining our commitment to providing a high quality, rich learning experience, are key focuses for the Marsden team.

The school is fully prepared to re-enter lockdown and take on remote learning again, if required, in this still uncertain future. We will positively face the many challenges this may inevitably bring but also look to savouring the priceless moments; the close up performances experienced during online assemblies, the ability to bring together all staff — teaching, support, part- and full-time staff — in online meetings, the many moments of creativity, laughter and shared experiences in common.

"I could sum up our learnings of this time with three elements", says Narelle Umbers, "those of communication, connection and caring. If we get those right at all levels we feel well placed to provide the best experience for our community." ▲

# Extraordinary times

SALLY RUSTON, HEAD OF JUNIOR SCHOOL, ABBOTSLEIGH, NSW

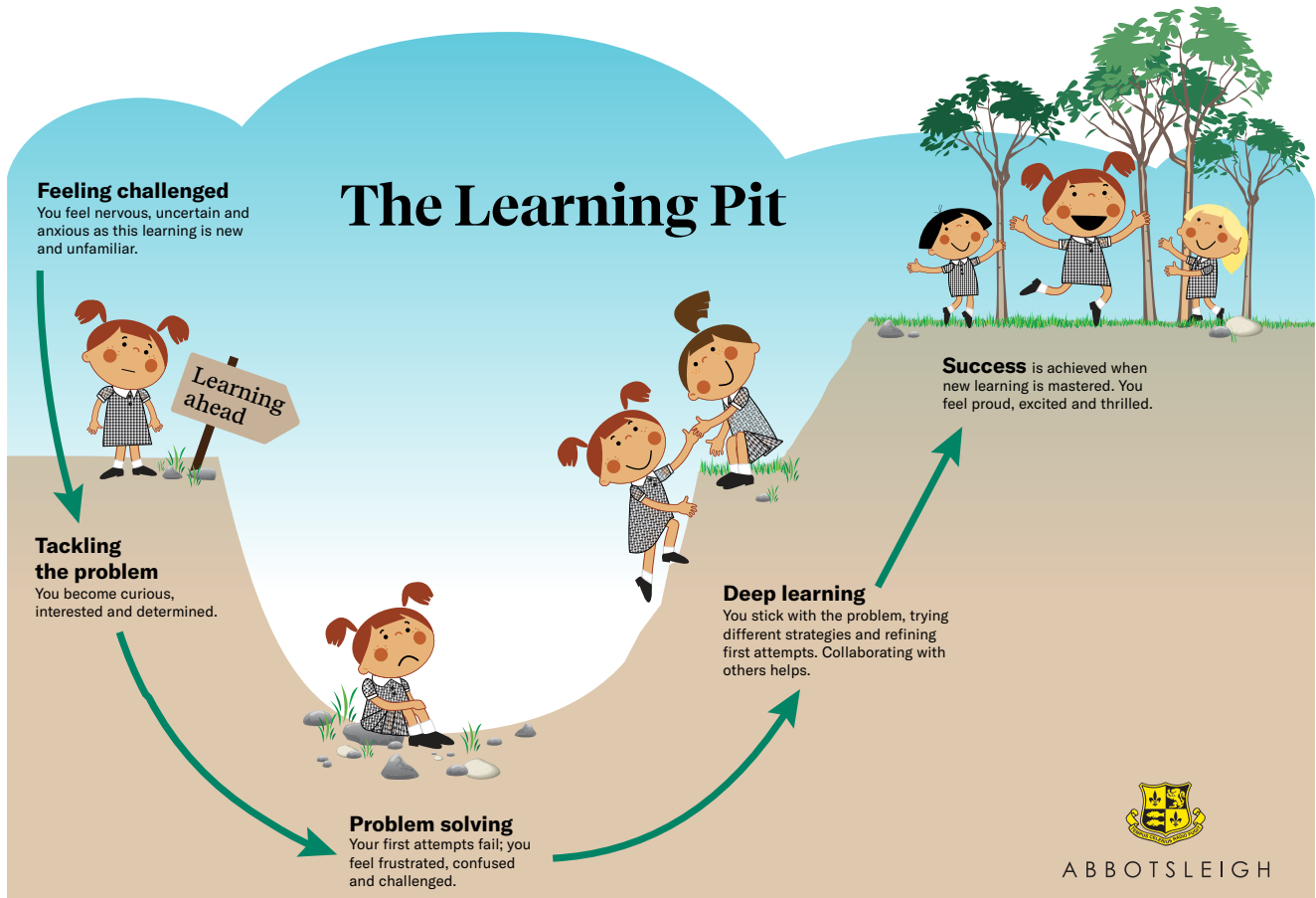
**T**he maelstrom of emotions that we have experienced as COVID-19 has taken hold have been exhilarating, overwhelming, challenging and ongoing. There were days when I wanted to get off this roller coaster ride as I didn't like the direction we were heading. Yet there was no landing station in sight and so, with the grit and determination we expect of our girls, it has been a matter of holding on tight to the joy and hope that mostly comes with new learning and experiences.

The virus has demanded enormous agility and preparedness to work and learn differently. As teachers, we have found hardship in relinquishing our great competence in classroom practice to enable new learning to occur in online worlds. Being incompetent is

a challenging place to inhabit. Yet equally, we know that great learning and new skills will not be acquired unless we get down and dirty in the learning pit and accept that first attempts will not satisfy. Persistence and refinement are required before success is ultimately achieved. We know this to be true for our girls, but it does feel strange and uncomfortable when we as the

experienced educators find ourselves in the same state.

This was especially so given that while we were in the fortunate position of having trialled new learning management systems in 2019, these hadn't been broadly implemented. We were planning a measured, progressive



role out in 2020. This timeline collapsed very early on and with the courage borne of necessity all teachers and students built the skills, knowledge and competencies to access learning through the learning management systems of Seesaw and Canvas. Such platforms enabled girls to access instructional videos, YouTube explanatory clips, pinboard discussions, quizzes, PowerPoints, documents and all manner of digital teaching resources. Timely teacher feedback was also facilitated by these systems. The graph in Figure 1 is testament to the incredibly fast uptake of Canvas. Our Seesaw data is equally impressive.

The girls have been remarkably adaptable and stoic in their resolve. As Term 1 progressed, more and more of the things the girls love failed to eventuate as more and more physical distancing and hygiene protocols became a reality. Carnivals were cancelled, so too were sport and all cocurricular activity, including the annual production. Excursions were an early casualty and then incursions were also cancelled. Finally, our biennial and much-awaited Literary Festival became impossible to mount. Yet the girls bore each of these changes with resolve and found the joy in physically distancing activities such as scooting, skipping and skateboarding. Equally their use of our online library skyrocketed as did their skills in Zoom, to connect not just for lessons but also as a modified version of a play date.

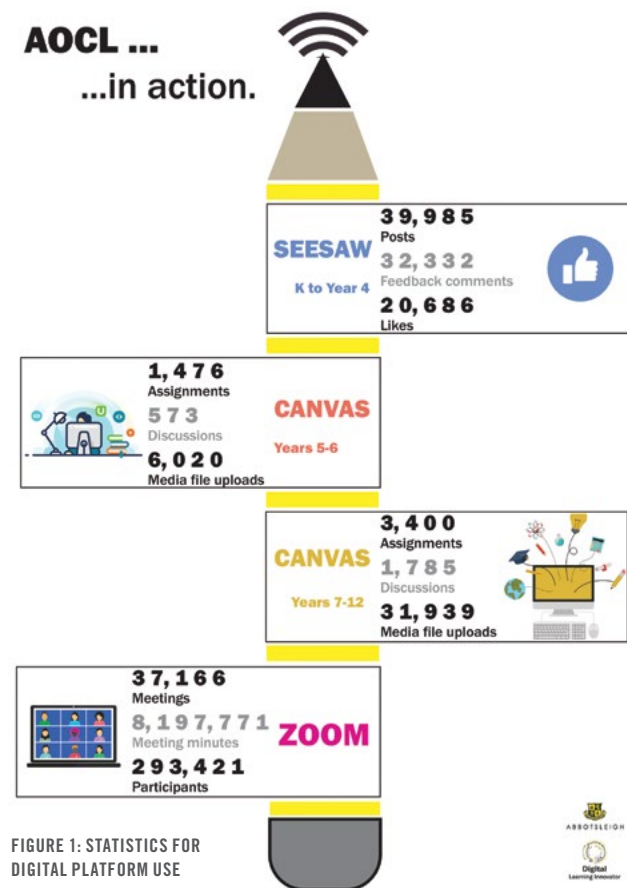


FIGURE 1: STATISTICS FOR DIGITAL PLATFORM USE

As we have transitioned back to school and a new normal has been established, we have been keen to review what worked well for our girls, teachers and school community. We have surveyed and gathered feedback from each of our stakeholders with some illuminating 'feed forward' insights becoming clear:

- A quantum of girls reported that they really enjoyed the freedom to decide on their study routine for the day. While a daily schedule was distributed first thing each morning, the girls soon came to realise that they could work independently with elastic timeframes through much of what was prescribed for the day. While being online on time for Zoom sessions was important, little else was minutely prescribed or immutable. The challenge is now that we have returned to the regular school timetable, how we continue to give the girls autonomy in their learning?
- Ongoing access to instructional videos enabled girls to be in control of building mastery for themselves. When clarity and comprehension weren't attained in the first viewing of an instruction, the girls readily took charge and replayed the video, often multiple times, until confidence and capacity were achieved. We will continue to use instructional videos, both teacher-generated and by accessing the enormous plethora of instructional clips online. Much of this will be done in a 'flipped classroom' context with girls being able to access the videos prior to and post lessons.
- We have seen many of our introverted personalities thriving in this online, self-directed learning environment. Shy girls, who sometimes present as withdrawn, have been very keen to contribute to online chat and discussion boards much more readily than they would have raised their hand in class. Providing multiple means of enabling participation, including the ongoing use of online forums will be a priority.
- The speed and rapidity with which teacher feedback was provided through the learning management systems has been highlighted by our girls as enhancing their learning. This was especially so for subjects such as Music, PE and Visual Arts where previously feedback was provided predominantly verbally during a lesson. Girls appreciated and were able to further reference written feedback to enable refinement of first attempts at learning.
- To ensure the girls' wellbeing and to monitor their progress in online learning, we introduced three-way interviews via Zoom. Typically, this involved the class teacher establishing a

Zoom meeting with the parents and daughter at home. Often one parent also Zoomed in separately to the meeting. We carefully scaffolded the structure with the girls prior to the meeting through an online questionnaire that provided feedback and goal setting details. This information formed the core of the session agenda. We were delighted that very frequently we had both parents and the daughter involved. This rarely happens when meetings are conducted face-to-face. The meetings were affirming, encouraging and allowed us to be confident that the girls were managing well at home.

- We will look to use the Zoom facility for many of our meetings moving forward. Our competence in using this medium will stand us in great stead connecting across two campuses and in making meetings readily accessible to part-time staff who can easily access remotely. Additionally, we have run parent information nights in Zoom and webinar formats. Parent feedback has been most positive, especially for parents of our younger children who have previously found it hard to find babysitters to enable attendance at such evening meetings.

While not yet fully underestimating the long-term impact of this virus on so many aspects of our lives, this disruption has also created room and opportunity for so many positive outcomes. Sometimes we must lose something before we recognise its true value. From the importance of engaging with friends in real time, to the freedom to actively participate in sport, dance, drama and music, we have come to understand just how fortunate we are to have these things in our lives in such abundance. While there has been a hiatus, we are hopeful and excited by the reality of these precious opportunities returning. What a time for gratitude and appreciation for the largesse we so typically enjoy!

As the goal posts around what is considered normal have changed continuously this year, we have become more accepting of mistakes, retakes, second attempts and in recognising what we can't change.

We have encouraged each other when flummoxed and confused. We have been kind and reached out to hold each other up. In the end, it will be our optimism, resilience and compassion that will shine through. And won't we be the better people, schooling community, country and world because of this? ▲

---

## REFERENCES

Nottingham, J. (2007). *The Learning Challenge: Guiding Students Through the Learning Pit*. UK: Corwin Press



# REAL Character Program: learning and living the science of character

KATRINA ALVIR, DIRECTOR OF REAL: SCIENCE OF CHARACTER PROGRAM, TANGARA SCHOOL FOR GIRLS, CHERRYBROOK, NSW

**H**appiness is the reward of virtue — Aristotle

'Educating towards the fullness of virtue' is Tangara's school motto. Our school's mission is to work in partnership with parents to form each student's character, educating for personal and academic excellence. We challenge our students to live lives of faith, and lead change for a more just and humane society.

Our vision is a happy and vibrant school, highly regarded as a centre of excellence, where every student is encouraged to be the very best person she can be. One of the key ways this vision transforms into action is through REAL: Science of Character Program.

The REAL program was launched in 2016 and it is for students in Years 7 to 10. It fosters a love for an authentic, real and solid character, rather than the fake, filtered and superficial images often promoted to girls via traditional and social media channels. It is about helping girls improve and develop themselves from the inside out. Girls are encouraged to invest effort into their character strengths rather than their digital image. We aim to achieve this through a four-year program that teaches students about the science of character.

REAL stands for 'Real Excellence' and 'Attitude for Life'. It is a unique program that combines elements of Aristotle's virtue ethics and the quest to understand and live a life of moral character. This character-based approach to morality assumes that we acquire virtue (strengths) through practice. REAL also includes aspects of positive psychology from Character Strengths and Virtues (Seligman & Peterson, 2004) and Mindset: The New Psychology of Success Growth Mindset (Dweck, 2006), plus various positive psychology interventions and the growing research in neuroscience and brain plasticity. It promotes an engaging and compelling case for young people to live a life of virtue, grow in character strength, improve their well-being and ultimately live happier and more balanced lives.

Tangara believes that character education is essential for students to excel and reach their personal best in all areas of their lives. Excellent students need a

strong character and likewise strong characters are forged through effort in academic

endeavours, creativity, sports, social life and service to the community. Through REAL, we help our girls reflect on the many daily opportunities they have to use their signature character strengths in their lives, as well as how to identify, encourage and appreciate the character strengths of those around them. Helping students identify their signature character strengths and showing them how to harness these to help them through tough times also grows resilience and a sense of self-efficacy and confidence.

A helpful resource is the VIA Institute on Character's *VIA Character Strengths Youth Survey* ([viacharacter.org](http://viacharacter.org)). This character assessment reveals students' greatest strengths. Students discover and revisit their greatest strengths throughout the four-year program and are encouraged to use them in practical ways in their everyday lives. Research shows that using character strengths can help improve relationships, build resilience, strengthen our ability to overcome problems and enhance overall wellbeing ([viacharacter.org](http://viacharacter.org)).

Coupled with the REAL program is our powerful mentoring system designed to guide development of students' academic and life goals. Mentors (staff members), meet with their student mentees once a fortnight to follow progress in their academic studies, as well as character, moral and social development. The meetings are informal conversations that help each student grow in self-knowledge, set personal and academic goals, and bring out her full potential. Parents meet once a term with mentors to contribute their own insights about their daughters' progress. Parents and mentors prepare for the meeting by noting issues for discussion and identifying areas of growth for the student.

At Tangara, teachers, mentors, parents and staff share a commitment to educate the whole person: mind, body, spirit and heart. Tangara's system of personalised education means that character development is integrated into everything we do. Our unique mentor system helps each student to be the best person she



can be. At the core of Tangara’s educational philosophy is the conviction that parents are their daughter’s first and most important educators. Therefore, a close and constant link between the school and the parents is essential. This link is the student’s personal mentor.

Our mentor system also facilitates individual follow-up conversations on the character strengths identified in REAL. Students can bounce ideas and findings off their mentors and share the personal goals they have set themselves for the character strength theme of each term. The character strength of Term 2, 2020 was having a growth mindset and focused on the virtue of perseverance. Students completed Angela Duckworth’s Grit Scale (2016), Duckworth defines grit as a blend of passion and perseverance and the 10-question online survey provides a ‘grit score’ which students shared with their mentors and set goals to improve in their grit and perseverance.

Teachers responsible for delivering the REAL program receive regular training to enable them to lead fortnightly interactive sessions with their homeroom classes. Each term staff participate in a REAL seminar as part of their professional development. Here they learn about what the students are currently learning and thus are better able to support them and use the language of ‘character strengths’ to encourage them in their lessons and daily interactions. This year’s seminar began with the theme of Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance, based on Duckworth’s 2016 book of the same name. In hindsight, this proved to be the perfect theme for both students and teachers in preparation for the grit needed for online teaching and learning in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

Through the REAL program, guest speakers relevant for each particular character strength are invited to the school. These range from inspiring personal stories

to experts in fields relevant to the character strengths. In connection with the character strength of Strong spirits and will — self-mastery, a specialist doctor in sleep hygiene spoke about the importance of sleep, the cognitive and emotional effects of not sleeping enough and the need to switch off from screen time. There are also regular seminars and workshops on key themes such as Social and emotional intelligence: Growing REAL friendships; Internet ethics: REAL netiquette; Living virtues online; and REAL beauty — which covers body image issues, self-worth and self-respect. The four-year REAL: Science of Character Program covers the following character strengths:

Term 1: Strong minds — growth mindset

- Optimism, diligence, giving our personal best, academic rigour and integrity. Responsible decision-making — evaluation and reflection, personal and ethical responsibility.

Term 2: Strong spirits and will — self-mastery

- Grit, intrinsic motivation, perseverance, goal setting, fortitude, temperance and courage.
- Self-management — impulse control, stress management, good sleeping habits and motivation.
- Goal setting — achievement skills such as planning, setting timelines, solving problems and seeking assistance or more information.

Term 3: Strong connections — social awareness

- Social awareness — empathy, respect for others, and perspective taking, respectful disagreeing and negotiation.
- Compassion, friendship, conflict resolution, apologising and restitution, listening, kindness, service and gratitude.
- Relationship skills — cooperation, help seeking and providing and communication skills.

#### Term 4: Strong hearts — self-awareness

- Emotional intelligence, resilience and reflection. Living in the present moment.
- Self-awareness — identification and recognition of one's own emotions, recognition of strengths in self and others, sense of self-efficacy and self-confidence.
- Courage, coping skills, helpful thinking and skills for managing strong feelings.

The students are given time to regularly write in their REAL journals, to record their insights, discoveries and goals. The implementation of the REAL program has seen a change in students' attitude towards themselves and others. The students are becoming more self-aware, they reflect on their actions and reactions, they are more engaged in their character progress and are able to track their improvements as well as see the impact this has on their academic life, social life and overall wellbeing. They are also more aware of the character strengths of others and this helps them to relate to each other on a deeper level.

To give a practical example, we run a workshop called 'From 2D to 3D Friendships' about fostering authentic friendships that go beyond the digital realm. It includes brainstorming the qualities of REAL friendships and gives ideas for better communication and conversation skills. Students also learn about the art of apologising and conflict resolution skills — as every friendship will have its difficult moments. Another example of the practical ways we foster the living of REAL is in the unit 'Strong connections: social awareness, empathy and respect for others'. This year during the COVID-19 lockdown, we encouraged students to write 'Thinking of You' cards to the residents of the local nursing homes located near the school. The girls created beautiful handmade cards, their messages reflected genuine concern and empathy, and they also experienced a deep joy in the process.

Teaching REAL during the COVID-19 lockdown was challenging, especially since REAL is a very interactive lesson, revolving around class discussions, visible thinking and collaborative learning pedagogy. During the online learning weeks we needed to rethink the lesson content and decided to use this challenge to encourage the students to become 'leaders in lockdown'. We created lessons on 'Living everyday leadership in a COVID-19 world' and used a Ted Talk as stimulus — 'Everyday leadership' (www.ted.com). In this funny talk, Drew Dudley calls on all of us to celebrate leadership as the everyday act of improving each other's lives. He believes leadership is not a characteristic reserved for the extraordinary. He works to help people discover the leader within themselves. The students watched this talk and had several reflection tasks to complete. Afterwards they were required to take-action with their own 'What's your lollipop leadership moment?' The task stated: In the next

few weeks, we will be living in extraordinary circumstances due to COVID-19:

1. Make a list of ways you could live everyday leadership in your life right now.
2. Make a list of the people in your life that you are grateful to for their everyday leadership.
3. Today, write an email or send a text message to one or two of the people in your list. Tell them THANK YOU and tell them why they were a leader for you.

We also provided students with suggestions on how they could make the most out of lockdown with service ideas at home: baking and cooking for their family or elderly neighbours; spending quality time with siblings; doing home projects like gardening or a creating a vegetable patch; contacting grandparents, lonely friends or family members. They were encouraged to share their service goals with their mentors via email and keep them updated on their progress during lockdown. Throughout lockdown mentors would email their mentees giving them ideas and encouraging them to be leaders where they were. Mentors also supported parents by regularly sending them ideas on how to support their daughters' mental and emotional wellbeing during these challenging times. And mentors were available to chat over the phone with parents throughout this time.

As the program continues to evolve, our aim is to make character education both engaging, meaningful and practical. We hope the girls discover the truth in Aristotle's timeless conviction: 'Happiness is the reward of virtue'. In a world that leaves little time for young people to stop and reflect, the REAL sessions are highly valuable moments in their busy lives to grow in self-awareness, reflection and appreciation of their own inner character strengths and those of others. In a culture that pressures girls to live focused on the outside, REAL is a time to remind them of the inside, and the beauty and inspiration they can find there. ▲

---

#### REFERENCES

- Duckworth, A. (2016). *Grit: The power of passion and perseverance*. Scribner/Simon & Schuster
- Duckworth, A. Grit Scale. Retrieved from <http://angeladuckworth.com/grit-scale/>
- Dudley, D. (2010). *Everyday Leadership*. TedxToronto 2010. Retrieved from [https://www.ted.com/talks/drew\\_dudley\\_everyday\\_leadership?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/drew_dudley_everyday_leadership?language=en)
- Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House.
- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. American Psychological Association; Oxford University Press.
- VIA Institute on Character, *VIA Character Strengths Youth Survey*. Retrieved from [www.viacharacter.org](http://www.viacharacter.org).

# Leadership in a time of need

BELINDA YORSTON, CEO, YLEAD

**C**COVID-19 has taught us many things; from how to teach and engage through a computer screen, to entertaining ourselves from the comfort of our own homes. It has also taught us the importance and need of great leadership in our world.

---

I remember March 13, 2020, vividly. Never had the weight of responsibility felt so heavy on my shoulders. For the first time in my short stint as CEO, I really acknowledged that I was responsible for the livelihood of our team. In that same breath of realisation, I thought of the need in our world for the work we deliver. Not just to support our young volunteers but the students and educators we respect and serve.

It is often said that leadership is universal. As I held the mirror up to myself to reflect on the lessons I have learned through COVID-19, there was a resounding similarity to those of young Year 12 leaders across the world.

Here is a culmination of just some of those reflections, captured from a collaboration with yLead and the Alliance of Girls' Schools Australasia's Leading from Lockdown webinars.

## Connection

It's not just the big strategies, but the small conversations that can have the most impact.

*Reflections from a CEO:* Often our excuse is 'I don't have time' to stop and chat. But in the middle of a pandemic we did it; we made time. In between strategy and policy meetings we checked-in; to feel the room and to show that we cared for everyone's wellbeing. It became apparent that making that time complemented the endless strategy meetings, it humanised the expectations and answered some of the questions that had just been discussed in that meeting. Stopping to ask questions and being unafraid to ask big questions allowed me to be informed and aided in further decision making.

*Reflections from Year 12 Leaders:* During isolation it was noticeable that girls were taking the time to reach out to girls they wouldn't usually talk to, just to 'check-in'. Through these moments it was mentioned that it is 'not the shiny moments on stage that matter most but the ways you extend your compassion into open conversations'.

## Communication

Keeping the hope alive — the balancing act of reality versus positive momentum — your influence and communication is critical.

*Reflections from a CEO:* Behind the scenes we were deep in excel spreadsheets. The numbers didn't stack up and we were playing out worst case scenarios. At the same time, I didn't want to create fear amongst the team and there were urgent tasks that still needed completing; however, something had to be communicated. I heard it said recently that if you are fearful of something then chances are your team is too. So why not lead an open conversation around it, instead of allowing talk to happen behind your back, in a place where you cannot influence its direction!

Being open and vulnerable is key to building a committed culture where the whole team is part of the solution. My communication is always well thought out. I often remember a session we once facilitated where you squeeze a toothpaste tube onto a black piece of card to write a word. The task is then to get the toothpaste back into the tube — impossible. A reminder that the words we say are difficult to take back. It takes time to orchestrate your words, to balance the hope and the reality and how it all flows together. Often I will deliberate on this for a day or two (but in a pandemic this now turns into minutes or hours — if you're lucky!).

*Reflections from Year 12 Leaders:* As leaders we continually learn how to communicate better and many girls mention, 'even though it can be awkward at the start', communication is used in so many ways for so many things; to delegate tasks, to engage the school community, to motivate self and others, continue house spirit, to issue challenges, to keep positivity alive.

## Creativity

Let nothing hold you back from starting something new — believe in your team and just give it a go.

*Reflections from a CEO:* Never could I have imagined that we could engage an audience online and replicate the open, empowering, fun, inclusive and life-changing experience that we do in person. But we have, leaving

even full-time team members in disbelief of the results. This is only possible because we launched a crowd-funding campaign that raised over \$50,000. There was so much doubt behind whether we would succeed, but I knew that I wanted the world to see we were doing everything we could. We were not going down without a fight. It made me realise that when you have the courage to break through the glass ceiling, nothing is impossible. This is the time for doing things we have always dreamt of doing, but have never known if it would work. As a collective I am seeing an openness to try new things and learn along the way, unleashing those ideas that you hold reservations on.

*Reflections from Year 12 Leaders:* This was the exciting part for most young leaders. They loved having the freedom to put together initiatives that the school had never seen before. Girls created podcasts, Instagram take overs, wellbeing newsletters, house challenges, competitions, catch ups — all done in their own homes and through the use of technology. Many reflected on the ability to connect with girls they had never been able to reach before.



IMAGE: TOP TIPS FROM THE WEBINAR LEADING AFTER LOCKDOWN, CREATED BY ASH TSUI-PO

## Community

Empower your community — it is where the strength lies — be unafraid to ask for help.

*Reflections from a CEO:* At yLead we have a phrase 'Together Has Power'; it's not about being proud to do it alone, but to be astounded at what we can achieve when we do things together. Leaning on your community through challenge is a proven tool to aid in forming strong resilience. When you look for the good you find it. We went looking for the good in our community and it came in floods. Educators, past participants, parents, all reaching out to ask, 'how can we help?' We had to create ways that our community could support us through this time. It is easy to put up a guard and say that we have it all under control, but I learnt that by asking for help there was so much help to be offered. Our community then felt like we were working together through these times. They felt needed, appreciated and a part of the solution.

*Reflections from Year 12 Leaders:* Even though girls were physically distanced from each other, in a way they felt more connected. They felt a strength in their school community. This was enabled by them being empowered to use their creativity. They created new forms of engagement (as mentioned above) and in return it provided them with renewed energy and something to celebrate in their time of uncertainty. The girls really hope their voices can continue to be heard. They want to be asked the big questions: What did they love about isolation? What worked for them? What ideas do they have and how can they be implemented as we hold hope for a transition back to 'normal' school life?

Continuing to navigate uncharted waters as a leader is a skill — one that most of us have had an opportunity to develop in these times. Let's hold the mirror up to ourselves and continue to be unafraid to learn and share through these times.

Moving forward, I commit to: continuing to make time to ask 'how are you?'; being brave enough to ask big questions (even if I won't like the answer); using this time to unleash creativity and give things a go; and finally, share my thoughts and communicate to the community (if not in person, then online).

What will you commit to? ▲

# Our practice illuminated

JANELLE O'NEILL, DIRECTOR OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING, MT ST MICHAEL'S COLLEGE, QUEENSLAND

## Extract from 'Pedagogy in Action' newsletter, 12 May 2020

Technology is no longer the disruptor but the symbiotic hero with educators in the online learning response to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the end of March 2020 remote learning was imminent as the college's Technology Leaders and Technology Support Team worked with teachers of varying technology capabilities. In 2019 the college introduced the strategic move to commence training staff in the use of Microsoft Teams. Whether early adopters of online platforms or supported users of Microsoft Teams and Office 365 OneNote, our designers of pedagogy were integrating digital technologies and this positioned us well for the introduction of remote learning.

Our students were presented with varied modes of delivery in the classroom with their Toshiba laptop and stylus pen. Our teaching and non-teaching staff were continuous learners, familiar with adapting administration, assessment and reporting processes to efficient emerging technology. Our leaders reinforced and necessitated the strength of our collective through the sharing of professional insight and learning; both consistent and balanced autonomy.

As a learning community we were strong: an amalgam of a whole staff's calling and love of being around learners.

Our well-established Positive Education Program espoused a call for 'what can we control' in the unknown and unsettling wake of this pandemic. A mindful balance of screen time and movement was reinforced for both adults and adolescents, while establishing routines and expectations through the guiding documents 'Student Agreement Learning from Home' and the 'Teacher Guide to Online Learning'. Teachers were championed to build on their effective practice and to continue our reciprocal learning environment through ongoing virtual observations of our colleagues.

Never has our craft been more visible.

Visible to our colleagues in substantial sharing of pre-recorded videos where our explicit teaching was observed. Visible to our students as we remained available and present, albeit remotely. Visible to our community as they listened or watched our evolving modes of delivery outside the classroom. Visible to our family and friends as we planned, pre-recorded, delivered, reflected, reviewed and refreshed in preparation for another day of connections with our students and colleagues. Indeed, we illuminated our profession and professional practice.

Our Practice Pedagogical Statement 2020 Lens — 'Promote a culture of inquiry and innovation where creative exploration and independent learning are valued' — summarised this time for both adults and adolescents.

Our Middle Leaders became a part of history leading their teams in sharing adaptive delivery whilst ensuring mapped cognitions were met and student engagement maintained. Check-ins and checkpoints for the students were mirrored by the college Leadership Team's pledge to support all staff in this time. We quickly moved from informing publications from the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA), Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), to making remote learning our own. As we reflect on how our pedagogy was challenged when 'learning from home', the question remains: "Will we continue the positive impact by considering the hybrid of synchronous and asynchronous learning to meet our students' needs when we return to the classroom?"

The preceding information provided the basis for the front cover of our quarterly in-house 'Pedagogy in Action' newsletter. Its publication in May formed part of our weekly Tuesday afternoon professional learning session with our whole teaching team.

It was the fourth week of 'learning from home' and, as we sat in our makeshift home satellite offices, we connected and shared our craft after a full day of delivering online learning experiences. A sample of our teaching team were asked to contribute a candid snapshot of their learnings and perspectives as we paved new ground in remote pedagogy, and this was placed as the centrefold of the newsletter. The essence of this teacher reflective voice is included below.

"The unprecedented coronavirus pandemic has necessitated novel and profound changes to both our daily lives and our vocation. While my pedagogy is ordinarily differentiated and predominately digitalised, these circumstances have demanded a high level of digital literacy and fundamental changes to my practice. Microsoft Teams has become an essential element to my teaching; unifying pedagogical applications, communication, collaboration, and resource dissemination. I have felt equipped for this challenge because of our ongoing training and easily accessible support and am grateful that the college places a high emphasis on our professional development." — teacher with six years' experience

"Establishing a routine with a pre-determined class timetable, like in a physical school environment, is essential. Uploading regular videos prior to every lesson is also a good way to explain the learning goals for the day, recap what was previously learned and make a connection with what will be taught. It also gives the student the opportunity to engage with content in advance, setting the ground for the lesson. Keeping the camera on and working in groups also proved to be effective methods to diminish the potential online loneliness. The remote delivery mode stimulated creativity in making us search for different resources to deliver the content and I will probably keep adopting these on a regular basis." — pre-service teacher supervised by AITSL Certified Highly Accomplished Teacher

"The COVID-19 pandemic has placed large

restrictions on my ability as a teacher to build, foster and grow the nurturing relationships that are so pivotal to the very nature of our roles as teachers as it has removed the face-to-face emotional insights that allow us a snapshot of how our students are travelling. What the pandemic has not removed is the crucial role that teacher-driven pastoral care plays in our classrooms. Finding solutions to this has allowed me as an educator to innovate and promote a culture of nurture through different delivery techniques. Simple yet powerful actions, such as finding time for a quick chat with girls as the class logs in, the extra sentence with some well wishes and caring words in feedback to submitted work, or a quick email to see how they are faring, make the world of difference to our learners. While the lack of

---

**“I feel that a real ‘win’ of this testing time has been a better and stronger connection of the individual student-to-teacher relationship.”**

classroom walls has meant less face-to-face time with the class, I feel that a real ‘win’ of this testing time has been a better and stronger connection of the individual student-to-teacher relationship.” — new teacher to the college

“How to give students assistance when they are not physically in front of you? This brought me back to the start of my teaching career where I would have to work through most of the questions, so you could predict/ know where students would have difficulties. We, as a cohort teaching sub-team, have used this professional foreseeability to prepare videos of questions in exercises where we thought students may have difficulties. These scaffolded learning videos were linked in class OneNote pages as well as shared in the year level collaboration sections.” — experienced teacher

“What are the positive outcomes of online teaching? This has been a period of pedagogy renewal. Resources have had to be designed so they are almost self-explanatory. It has been a real learning curve with technology. Some classes have been more attentive in the absence of classmates and the physical distraction that can occur. Also, the individual and group conferencing has been very good, especially when supported by the updated resources mentioned previously. I will continue to use Teams and OneNote and transfer some of the hard-won learning about class involvement back into our face-to-face classroom.” — experienced teacher

“Based on my reflections from Term 1, I realised that a key area for improvement was ‘follow-through’. My goals for this term focused on being more proactive in

checking homework and assessment checkpoints, as well as providing more considered and consistent feedback. While I was slightly trepidatious about working in the online learning environment, I have found it to be an excellent opportunity to improve my skills in this area. With help from my colleagues, I have learned how to use many helpful ICT tools that have helped me to monitor the progress of my students more effectively. This experience has reiterated the importance of ongoing professional learning, and I will continue to investigate effective ways to engage with my students in my future practice.” —graduate teacher

“A month ago, students were resistant to liking a post, engaging in a OneNote collaborative space or contributing to a discussion. Now, due to our forced online learning and our consistent use of online platforms, students find this practice more normal and routine. With this culture shift I can now activate an efficient and effective catch-up and differentiation method for those absent from class or who need extra think time to pause mid-explanation or synthesise ideas. Self-paced learning will assist as we strengthen Year 12 students’ independent study skills. I will continue to create my 5-6 minute pre-recorded videos that explicitly model concepts and cognitions as we prepare for QCAA External Examinations.” — experienced teacher

### **Positive reframing and student insights**

We commenced remote learning amidst every news channel broadcasting the inflammatory language of ‘home school fail’. The fear and anxiety of the unknown called for positive reframing within our context. Our educators modelled vulnerability and overcoming hurdles faced in the uncomfortable zone of learning while ensuring our students’ needs were met. Students witnessed teachers perfecting their online delivery. The stage was set for modelling persistence and resilience for our learning community as adults and adolescents formed a new partnership as they moved out of their comfort zone together.

As we embarked on remote learning, the teaching team were encouraged to ‘keep it simple’, ‘build on our practice, concepts and cognitions’, ‘model your thinking through worked solutions and short pre-recorded videos’, ‘students need to know you are still checking their work; you care and are there!’ Even in the sampling of teacher reflections above, students’ participation, emotional reactions and investment in their learning continued to be the insight teachers craved and creatively sought. Whilst there were negative coping skills presented by some students, such as avoidance of



being online, hiding behind an icon, incomplete set tasks and non-show in lesson time, this was remedied by many supportive strategies offered and enforced by teachers and families. We stayed true to our positive messaging and reminder that ‘this was a moment in time that was not going to last forever’.

After three weeks of remote learning, Years 11 and 12 students returned to the classroom while their younger sisters continued to engage online for another two weeks. Some enjoyed the relative self-regulating environment where they were supported to go ahead or delve deeper with their learning, while a minority were reluctant to get back on task regardless of face-to-face or remote learning, but all were happy to return safely to the familiarity and connections that communities such as Mt St Michael’s promote and provide.

An interesting insight was obtained at the end of the semester when all students completed a student perception survey. This survey included twenty statements that highlight the positive messaging and cognitive engagement expected across our classrooms. The students were invited to comment in the open-ended prompt, ‘My learning in this subject could be enhanced by ...’ for each subject. Interestingly, out of 5,000 potential opportunities in this whole-school data, only one student in one subject commented on the impact of learning from home. Many comments reiterated, on reflection, the strategy or intent to improve in one of the twenty statements. Notably, none of the twenty statements included seeking clarification or asking questions, and yet students across all year levels included the following:  
Year 7: “I need to ask more questions and know I don’t have to be scared of asking questions”.  
Year 8: “Ask more questions”, “I could not give up if I do not get something”.  
Year 9: “Asking more questions, do revision questions weekly”, “participating more in class and asking questions”.  
Year 10: “Asking for guidance on what to revise for the test”, “asking more questions to consolidate learning”, “asking more questions when I don’t understand things in class”.  
Year 11: “Asking questions in class”.  
Year 12: “Asking more questions”, “asking more questions to further understand the concepts”.

The self-evaluative need for help-seeking behaviours to persevere when challenged is an interesting outcome to the relatively short but intense time when learning from home. We will work on developing the skills to enable this identified need alongside self-regulation for independent learners.

On return to the classroom, a message from a Year 8 homeroom read, “No matter how many mistakes you make or how slow you progress [sic], you are still ahead

of everyone who isn’t trying!” This handwritten message was positioned on the classroom door for every Year 8 class member’s attention as they entered the learning environment and every teacher as they entered or walked by. Moving forward, this is a strong message for our community. A community which has now taken the united step from traditional face-to-face communication and discovered the benefits of a virtual conference. We have all tried! Parent-teacher conferences and subject selection information evenings have now been conducted using the same online platforms as teachers and daughters used, from the comfort of home. Daughters are now guiding their parents and being more engaged in this trilogy of learning, support, and connection. Together we can use this foundational navigation around evolving user-friendly digital collaboration software to build efficient habits for the 21st century adult and adolescent learner. While there is much conjecture regarding the state of play for education and whether we are on the brink of a culture shift in this digital world, we continue to nurture a student-student, student-teacher, teacher-teacher learning environment and are very grateful that we all remained safe in this time.

## Afterword

Recent reform in Queensland Education has included the implementation of the Australian Curriculum for Years 8-10 from 2012, the incorporation of Year 7 tweens to secondary school in 2015, and the senior curriculum recalibrated to include subject specific external assessment debuting for Year 12 in 2020. Consequently, as a teaching team we have had to continually adapt to the emerging needs of our students and will continue this professional growth beyond the pandemic. ▲

# #RuytonTogetherApart

LINDA DOUGLAS, PRINCIPAL; CATHRYN FUREY, DEPUTY PRINCIPAL/DIRECTOR OF LEARNING; TRISH HATZIS, DIRECTOR OF WELLBEING; DR BERNADETTE NICHOLLS, RESEARCH LEAD AND STUDENT LEADERSHIP CO-ORDINATOR, RUYTON GIRLS' SCHOOL, VICTORIA

**B**eing a strongly connected community has always been noted as one of Ruyton's strengths. As we have lived through the stark reality of COVID-19 in Melbourne in 2020, the strength of this connection has been tested time and time again. Thankfully, we have seen this strength is owned and lived by students, staff, parents, past scholars and our extended community. We may have been 'together apart' for long periods of time this year but we know now, more than ever, that we are stronger together.

support our parents digitally, mindful that during this time parent engagement was more critical than ever. The first of these events, a virtual 'Digital Wellbeing Conversation' facilitated by digital wellbeing expert Robyn Treyvaud, could not have been more timely, as we transitioned to distance learning for students and blended models of working for parents. The number of parents

## A connected community

As uncertainty grew with the pandemic, the importance of maintaining the connections between and within the student, parent, staff, and alumnae communities was ever present in our thinking. We knew this was the lifeline to draw us together and see us through the challenges. The communication and management of information was crucial to successfully managing the situation and supporting our community with clear and timely communication via the school newsletter and school intranet. From the outset parents, staff and students knew who would communicate and where to access information. Keeping our messaging clear, consistent, concise and timely has reassured the community throughout this time and also heightened awareness of the value of this approach.

Like most schools, Ruyton has leveraged digital tools to facilitate events that previously were held on site, including parent-teacher interviews, information evenings, and a range of formal and informal meetings. Parent and student engagement rates in these events have been close to 100 per cent, and there is no doubt that some events will not return to their original format, while the value of a face-to-face will remain central in building community and connections. One of our greatest learnings, however, has come through adapting our parent education programme. The Ruyton Powerful Parenting Series had been planned as a series of face-to-face events in 2020, advertised to the community with a 'save the date' postcard. As on-site events became less likely, we looked for opportunities to engage with and

engaging with this programme increased from previous, similar events held on-site. The reasons are complex: the virtual format was easier for parents to attend, there were less social and co-curricular evening commitments for parents and students, and the challenges of managing the digital environment were more visible and pressing for parents at this time.

Our next event was our Virtual Book Club for parents. Once again, this had been planned to be face-to-face, based on feedback and interest expressed when parents had been surveyed previously. Instead, one evening each fortnight over an eight-week period, the Principal, Deputy Principal and Director of Wellbeing met with parents online to explore Lisa Damour's *Untangled*. From the comfort of our homes, we shared insights, experiences, challenges and joys of supporting our daughters and students in the transition to adulthood. We were struck by the trust and honesty so quickly evident within the group, as well as the gratitude parents expressed for the schools' support of them and their daughters, and the opportunity to forge stronger connections with school leaders in an informal setting. It took just one hour of our time a fortnight but the impact was truly significant.

One parent wrote of their book club experience: "While so many aspects were beneficial — especially the practical advice offered from the book, Ruyton staff and other parents — as a new parent to Ruyton, this experience affirmed for me that we have chosen a school for our daughters that is genuinely and deeply committed to the wellbeing of girls. It was inspiring to see how staff and parents were so honest and open to understanding



IMAGE: RUYTON COMMUNITY CHOIR – ‘HAPPY’

and responding to the complex issues our daughters and their friends will face in the coming years”. Another parent expressed gratitude as follows: “I would just like to thank everyone for their time and especially Ruyton staff who cared for the wellbeing of not only our daughters but their families during these challenging times. To continue to provide the powerful parenting sessions in a climate when it would have been much easier to defer or cancel was very impressive and shows their level of commitment to the Ruyton community.”

These comments speak for themselves in terms of the power of this collaboration in both fostering connections in our community and maintaining our reputation as a school where wellbeing is at the heart of all that we do.

### **Powerful learning: now and into the future**

Our transition to distance learning came earlier than some, as growing anxiety in the community led us to make this move late in Term 1. For distance learning to be successful for our students, it had to be successful for our teachers. And we all had to be prepared to take risks, learn from our mistakes, and continually adapt our professional learning support. The messaging from the

start was consistent and clear: keep it simple and less is more. By modelling this through a rapidly designed and deployed blended learning model for our staff, to support them in both using the tools supplied by the school (principally Microsoft Teams) and online learning pedagogy, our transition was relatively smooth and, based on feedback from parents and students, overwhelmingly positive. We also modelled effective online collaboration in our planning sessions and meetings. As we gained confidence, we experimented with different modes of collaboration, both synchronous and asynchronous, with our model evolving using tools including Google Slides and Padlet to undertake virtual thinking routines such as the ‘Chalk Talk’ protocols. Throughout our journey, with the added complexities in Melbourne of a combination of face-to-face, distance and blended learning models, we constantly seek and share feedback from the whole community and respond by making timely adjustments to our process and practice. Staff have risen to the challenge of having their classroom practices more visible, particularly to parents. We have been able to normalise experimentation with pedagogy, and failure, in the quest to achieve best practice. And this in itself is powerful learning for staff, parents and students.

Our shift in practice has led us to develop a simple model for distance learning which we can implement across the school during lockdown.

This model has led us to ask more questions about face-to-face models for learning as we reflect on our learning from this period and imagine the future. How might we focus more on 'learning time' and less on 'teaching time'? What does this mean for the structure of the school day? For teacher loads? For learning design? How do we ensure that 'pace, purpose and pedagogy' are at the heart of learning design?

We have asked the same questions of staff, parents and students at regular intervals throughout distance learning: one of them being 'based on your experiences of distance learning, how could we improve teaching and learning back at school?' The data has been meticulously analysed and common themes are clearly emerging relating to differentiation, flexibility, student agency and choice in learning, and changes to the structure of the day.

"Being mindful of mental loads by not overloading students and providing more time to complete tasks at their own pace. More opportunities to have flex — to slow down and not be in a constant hurry." — Junior School teacher

"Less is more! Demonstrations are crucial so that girls can see rather than only listen to what is required of them. Allowing more time to work on things is something the girls have really enjoyed. We need to slow things down." — Junior School teacher

"Better differentiation — students being able to pace their learning individually and taking more ownership." — Senior School teacher

"Many students are self-motivated, therefore they could be involved in more flexible / independent learning styles." — Senior School teacher

"Remove the structured timetable (eek). Expecting students to switch every 50 minutes from one task to the next can be exhausting and I don't feel this is an effective way to learn or build intrinsic motivation." — Senior School teacher

Students' reflections on positive and successful learning experiences tell the story of how this challenge provided them with the opportunity to adapt, evident in their growth in independent learning, organisation and motivation.

"I have learnt to be more independent in my learning because you can't just put your hand up and the teacher will be there straight away." — Year 7 student

"One thing I will do is to ask the teachers more questions as I value their feedback and while face-to-face, I want to make the most of it." — Year 7 student

"My problem-solving skills have improved. I have had to work independently and figure out the answers or understanding things by really focusing and staying on track." — Year 8 student

"I will be more inclined to study independently and communicate with classmates online now I have the tools to do that." — Year 11 student

As a school with a culture and history of research embedded in our practices, we continue to collect and review our data which will further inform our immediate decisions and the next iteration of our strategic plan.

## **Wellbeing of all**

Recent events amplified what we already knew to be true at Ruyton; our 'Powerful Learning' strategies needed to provide an agile and flexible learning environment while at the same time supporting the holistic wellbeing of students. We also knew that both endeavours were co-dependent, hence the success experienced in one directly impacted the achievement of optimal outcomes in the other. In responding to the challenges presented by COVID-19 it was therefore important that we not only provided the best possible distance learning programme, but that we also nurtured in each student the skills to recognise and capitalise on their own strengths — especially when faced with such challenging learning conditions. To further strengthen their resilience we also focused on fostering positive emotions such as optimism, gratitude and mindfulness; all key elements in ensuring our students were able to thrive while learning in distance mode across our curricular and co-curricular programmes. Nowhere is this more evident than our Virtual Community Choir, established this year to provide connection and joy through music and collaboration. Current and past students, parents, staff, siblings and pets were all welcome, each contributing in their own way to celebrate the unique thread that holds us together—the Spirit of Ruyton.

The school response to the wellbeing of students and staff could best be categorised into two key areas: firstly our processes and support structures, and secondly, our wellbeing programmes. From the outset we used a multi-faceted approach to support structures. For example, in the Senior School we established a Virtual Senior Study Area, as well as providing additional mentoring and counselling services. We also created an online student 'check in' platform which proved invaluable for gauging the wellbeing of the year level cohort, as well as individual students. There was a need to critically assess, adapt and restructure the delivery of health and counselling support for our students, in particular our more vulnerable students during this time. Adaptations included online counselling sessions, Microsoft Teams support meetings and a Health Centre triage system. Interestingly some of these adjustments were retained, in the return to face-

to-face learning. Importantly, students reported a high level of self-management and independence in relation to assessing and responding to their own needs while in distance learning mode and beyond. As one student said:

“I will try and problem-solve for myself because sometimes at home I had no choice and I felt good once I had fixed something for myself!” — Junior School student

We also found that restructuring the school day in the Senior School to include longer changeover breaks, as well as the embedding of a daily wellbeing period, provided much needed rest breaks and time to mentally refresh. When asked about what they found of benefit, students said:

“I think prioritising staying healthy, by eating healthier and doing more exercise really helps me de-stress and just stay more productive and positive” — Year 11 student

“...having some breaks throughout the day to increase productivity” — Year 12 student

“Taking time to focus on mental and physical health, as well as having sufficient breaks from study” — Year 12 student

---

### **“Our Community Relations Department also contacted older alumnae.”**

Consideration is now being given to ways that we might continue to incorporate this valuable wellbeing time into our school day when we completely return to face-to-face learning.

Upon returning to face-to-face learning but still restricting our campus population to only students and staff led to a new ‘Kiss and Drop’ approach in the Junior School. This proved to be of real benefit in developing greater independence in students, in particular our Prep students. As our Head of Junior School, Kate Giles, observed: “In settling into our new rhythm and routines of the day, my confidence in young people’s resilience and ability to adjust has been strengthened. One such example is the way the girls adjusted to saying goodbye to their families at the gate ... There was a sense of calmness and as year levels played in particular spaces, we have ensured the girls are able to find and connect with other friends in their year level.” This adjustment was further enhanced by advice from our Junior School Wellbeing Advisor, Jahanna Parry, who encouraged families to create a special farewell ritual together to help set students up for a positive start to their day. We certainly witnessed some very innovative and thoughtful farewells. A ‘Click and Collect’ system also enabled Junior School girls to access library books and class materials. This was accessed by so many girls that it has continued in Lockdown 2.0. Our girls

have really enjoyed activities such as The Secret Singer and online trivia competitions through ‘JS Connects’ on MS Teams each Wednesday afternoon, an informal and joyful connection point with all of our Junior School students and families.

We were fortunate to have had a well-structured, fully documented and dedicated wellbeing programme already in place in the Senior School and this proved invaluable in allowing us to quickly transfer to an online platform for the delivery of sessions; each one aimed at supporting a student’s overall wellbeing. In addition to this, we published a Student Wellbeing Weekly in both the Junior and Senior School which became an added source of support and complemented comprehensive wellbeing resources on our school intranet.

Our staff have adapted extremely well to the teaching challenges associated with distance learning, but it was in the area of their personal wellbeing that we realised we needed to focus our efforts. To provide all staff with connection and support a staff ‘check in’ system was created and largely overseen by our middle leaders who then relayed any concerns back to the Wellbeing Team and, if needed, the School Executive team. A dedicated Staff Wellbeing intranet page containing wellbeing resources was also created and staff were able to access personal office equipment to ensure physical wellbeing was optimised whilst working from home. The wider community also provided much appreciated support through individually packaged morning teas as well as community ‘shout outs’ and virtual gratitude walls.

Finally, it was essential that we recognised and supported the role of our first educators: our parents and carers in overseeing the overall wellbeing and success of our students while they learnt in distance mode. In the early days of distance learning, phone calls were made by key wellbeing staff to every Ruyton family in order to ‘check in’ and ensure they were receiving the assistance and support they needed. Ruyton has a strong sense of community and this extends well beyond our current students and families, so to ensure the wellbeing of all, our Community Relations Department also contacted older alumnae.

### **Learning leadership in challenging times: “As a leader, I have learnt to overcome, adapt and pivot”**

Leading Ruyton during this extraordinary time of COVID-19 has been both challenging and yet a profound learning experience for our Year 12 girls who have experienced first-hand what it takes to be an authentic leader in disruptive and challenging times. Some of our Year 12 girls shared personal insights into their leadership lessons during the first Victorian Stage 3 restrictions.

As student leaders they navigated many challenges, personally, socially and academically. Little did they know at the beginning of the year they would be engaging in a tsunami-like learning curve, which could never have been predicted: “As a leader, I have learnt to ‘overcome, adapt and pivot’ ... when you are navigating uncharted waters, it is easy to feel as though you are sinking, but knowing everyone is in the same boat makes it a lot easier to stay afloat.” They embraced the challenges and through adversity they recognised the strength of ingenuity, adaptability and the unity that prevails when teams pull together, communicate and generously support each other despite the obstacles: “Leaders are only powerful when they have the support and voice of a team.”

“The power of human kindness has been a wonderful silver lining!” Unexpected surprises fed their spirits and enabled them to dig deep to serve their community. They discovered that their success depended on enabling the success of others: “I have witnessed incredible compassion from students in our school community and the initiation of amazing ideas solely for the benefit of others.” They adopted a leadership style that was effective and inspiring; rather than being driven to lead people they were driven to serve them.

Leadership is a journey rather than a destination and our leaders experienced enormous personal growth. They were malleable enough to learn from the many curve balls: “This situation has allowed me to uncover parts of my character that I had not really valued beforehand. I now feel proud of my sense of determination and willingness to challenge myself, my perseverance and conviction.” Accepting the challenge to grow through resilience, rather than fall into despair, shaped how the leaders chose to

respond: “Leading in isolation has made me realise that I can get through anything. It has made me more confident, ready to face all the challenges that may be thrown in my path, and ready to find ways to deal with them, no matter how unexpected they may be.” Paradoxically, they also learnt that in order to effectively lead during adversity, it was critical to adopt self-care practices and adapt to external situations they could not control: “I have learnt to flow with and adapt to the situation. I realised there is really no point trying to live a ‘normal’ life during unprecedented times. I learnt to adjust to the situation and not be too harsh on myself when things don’t go to plan. This is a time for self-love, self-care and compassion.”

Reflecting on the wisdom of our student leaders’ experiences of 2020 demonstrates how they learned leadership skills and dispositions that may not have eventuated if this had been a ‘normal’ year at Ruyton.

## Conclusion

As we finish this article, it is a dark day in Melbourne with 723 cases of COVID-19 and 13 deaths recorded. This is our 49th day of distance learning for many staff and students. As a community we have let go of our definition of normal and found meaning in this chaos by establishing different routines and rituals. We have become far more nimble, flexible and proactive. We have celebrated endeavour and success and found moments of joy. Hopefully we have become kinder to ourselves and others and more empathetic. We know that as a community we have definitely become stronger as we have all made this work #togetherapart. ▲



IMAGE: HOUSE QUA-RUN-TINE

# Somerville@HOME: from Mindful Monday to Fit Friday

KIM KIEPE, PRINCIPAL; LOUISE MCGUIRE, HEAD OF JUNIOR SCHOOL; TIM SMETHAM, ASSISTANT HEAD OF JUNIOR SCHOOL; JULIE BRUNCKHORST, DEAN OF STUDENT WELLBEING, SOMERVILLE HOUSE, QUEENSLAND

**E**ducation during the COVID-19 pandemic has been an altered experience for both the learner and educator. Many teachers would agree that the pandemic has been a positive catalyst for change. The following reflections on the Somerville House experience capture the reality that, throughout the remote learning period of Somerville@HOME, many aspects changed.

“Pyjama Day Fit Friday”. It was testament to the parental engagement and such an uplifting and positive experience to witness.

**Some unexpected outcomes —  
Louise McGuire**

## Leadership — Kim Kiepe

For the first time ever, parents were able to join their daughter(s) in the virtual classroom for the synchronous style of teaching and learning. Teachers changed their pedagogical approach on the fly, quickly learning that the asynchronous style of communication via emails, text message and video was the best way to disseminate basic instruction or launch a discussion and set relevant deadlines. Student survey feedback revealed that girls enjoyed the option to watch teacher explanations at their own pace, even watching repeatedly to enhance their understanding of the content. Meanwhile, synchronous communication via videoconferencing in Microsoft Teams was also embraced for its benefits of discussions and spontaneous conversations.

Through the lens of Somerville House Principal, a change evolved in natural leadership styles, with the adaptation of a transformational approach to leading. Leadership Team members provided emotional support in their interpersonal relationships, as they encouraged staff navigating the new challenges of teaching via online platforms. Ultimately, the hard work of the staff and their willingness to adapt and adjust their teaching styles resulted in some wonderful outcomes for students and their parents. It has been rewarding to receive feedback from the parent community as they relate their appreciation for the tremendous effort of teachers in the classrooms and coaches in extra-curricular activities.

One of the best days at the office was highlighted during the remote learning period after watching the video recording of a Junior School student and her parents (wearing pyjamas) as they shared their funky dance moves from their living room in celebration of

The Somerville House Junior School faced challenges but quickly learned to embrace the new opportunities as the world changed throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. In the early days, there were noticeable Angela Duckworth moments of staff expressing passion and exuding grit to problematise new ways of engaging teaching and learning. Teachers learnt to jettison old habits, acquire new skills and connect differently with students, parents and sometimes each other.

The Junior School Leadership Team of three (Head of Junior School, Assistant Head of Junior School – Teaching and Learning, Assistant Head of Junior School – Pastoral Care and Administration) were also on a steep learning curve as they embarked on their own ways to stay connected to the students. They developed a WellbeingConnect@HOME programme, with the framework of Mindful Monday, Tasty Tuesday, Wonder Wednesday, Thankful Thursday and Fit Friday. Further, they utilised various technologies to communicate with students and parents, and encouraged girls to share the fruits of their online engagement not only with their teachers and peers, but also with their parents and the Leadership Team.

Head of the Junior School, Louise McGuire, endeavoured to lead the way for ‘encounters of the personal kind’. For many weeks, videos were captured of her reading picture books and chapters of novels to each year level, sharing those recordings through the online platform. The response to these stories was genuinely exciting. Girls initially replied with ‘thank you’ messages, followed by book recommendations, photos of students proudly showing they owned the book being read (or had recently purchased the book to read along), videos of girls reading their books to their younger brothers and



IMAGE: LISTENING TO STORIES ON A FIT FRIDAY

sisters, sharing of their own reading targets and posting comments about their reading, and the creation of reading blogs for classmates to enjoy.

On Fridays, adorned in lycra and sweatbands, the leadership team shared fitness activities, and a similar pattern emerged with these 'Fit Friday' videos. The first online fitness activity was one young, 'old girl' volunteer and the Head of Junior School. The good-spirited Assistant Heads of Junior School then 'muscled in' on the act, helping to create humorous and entertaining fitness routines for students of all ages to enjoy. The responses flooded in, in the form of children's comments, videos of themselves exercising, then videos of them teaching others to exercise (including their pets), then a pyjama party of parents Zumba-ing through the house. What began as a simple two-way digital interaction resulted in its own pandemic of applications.

The levels of initiative demonstrated by the girls as well as their evolving critical, creative and technical skills were well beyond staff expectations. Getting to know Junior School families more personally and up close was very much unexpected but thoroughly enjoyable. Staff were given access into lounge rooms and studies, followed girls to their favourite backyard play spots, and met siblings, pets and other household members. Often the responses felt exclusive and direct — rich communication that took us beyond the historic limitations of the classroom.

### **Interactions: Fit Friday**

Teachers learnt that learning can occur anywhere, anytime, and in multimodal ways. They learnt that new modes of learning could be motivational, even inspirational; could invoke new skills, new ways of connecting and new relationships. The Leadership Team learnt that some students and educators found something new in themselves, perhaps unrecognised talents and new ways of looking at familiar things. Paradoxically, the leaders learnt much more about their students as they connected more personally and more often than they would have under normal circumstances. Perhaps the adoption of an Appreciative Inquiry approach, with its explicit discourse of positiveness and fun, paved the way for a more personalised approach. Perhaps the combined impact of positive collaboration and contingency fuelled capacity for focusing more on personalised student learning outcomes and higher levels of wellbeing.

Recent months have witnessed the informal establishment of 'communities of practice', especially surrounding the development and use of many technology-based pedagogies. Given that these have become naturalised amongst staff and seen to produce positive learning outcomes and parental approval, it seems that these might become the new norm.

### **Changes in practice**

Who would have thought that remote learning could unleash so many unforeseen educational and community

building opportunities for the Junior School? Using the Seesaw platform, students engaged with their learning in new ways while teachers grappled with a vastly different teaching environment, while learning new skills that will be used well after the pandemic. Undoubtedly much of this would have been difficult without technology and yet it is the connections forged that have strengthened this school community and given every person an appreciation of a shared humanity.

### **Tasty Tuesdays — Tim Smetham**

‘Tim’s Tasty Treats’ was one of the wellbeing themes where a cooking demonstration video was available on a weekly basis for all students.

Students responded in a variety of ways including text comments, photos and video clips showing their own cookery attempts and, in some cases, students created their own cooking demonstrations.

Aside from all the educational possibilities arising from following a recipe, using utensils, working with ingredients and savouring the aromas and tastes of the finished product, the activity provided numerous ways where families could connect. It has provided a whole new dialogue at the afternoon pick-up with families asking for more episodes of Tim’s Tasty Treats. Perhaps it is time to create that new YouTube cooking channel!

### **Music Teaching Online**

Loreta Fin, Director of Strings, describes being on a very steep learning curve as she had to quickly transition to teaching strings online. Loreta created a series of instructional videos for her Year 3 beginner string programme and then assigned these via Seesaw, a digital engagement platform.

The results were staggering as students responded by uploading a total of 522 photos and videos demonstrating their best instrumental technique and performances over the course of five weeks. Loreta responded to each one and recalls being pleasantly surprised by the amount of work that was covered during this time by the students.

Loreta, along with other music colleagues, agreed that nothing can beat face-to-face music lessons or rehearsals, but her young musicians were able to stay connected using Microsoft Teams for ensemble rehearsals and Zoom for private instrumental lessons.

Perhaps the most important lesson in all of this lies in our teachers’ ability to adapt and engage creatively in a different learning environment. In doing so we try out new ideas, build stronger communities and make schools the exciting and energising places they always should be.

### **Impacting wellbeing during isolation — Julie Brunckhorst**

WellbeingConnect@HOME connected students, teachers, parents and staff. This programme — designed

in consideration of the psychology of isolation from peers and the need for healthy mind and body practices — created a routine and tools for connection. The student programme supported the school’s choice to retain the usual sequential schedule, while also considering the impact of significant screen time.

The programme incorporated the following:

1. A daily programme of activities. Students were invited to upload photographs of their efforts through the learning management system, Moodle. Some were identified and celebrated for their efforts and highlighted in daily Student Notices. In addition, students were encouraged to make origami to bring to school on their return and bring something from home to help their transition. The origami was linked in staircases, symbolic of the belonging to the school environment, at school or from home. Any challenge involving photographs of fantastic food creations and of prized pets proved to be the most popular.
2. Highlights of the personal supports available and how to connect with teachers was advised to students and their parents. This included Pastoral Care and Tutor teachers, Heads of Year, the School Psychologist, Careers Counsellor and Chaplains. A set of protocols for one-to-one communication via Microsoft Teams and other platforms was distributed to school staff.
3. The opportunity to engage with peers and Tutor teachers during Tutor group daily on Microsoft Teams. This allowed for students who were isolated boarders to meet with their peers and teachers, see their faces and chat.
4. A Wellbeing Pulse Survey was distributed through Microsoft Forms to all students (similarly to teachers and staff) to check on their wellbeing in Week 4. This five-question survey provided valuable data about students in need of assistance and ensured targeted intervention. A follow-up survey was distributed after return and an additional survey was scheduled.
5. Assemblies, Chapel, pastoral care lessons and year level assemblies continued as usual within the timetable. These were virtual presentations, incorporating videos/audios, live presentations and/or images. Particularly popular were the Life Lessons videos presented by the Principal, including practical tips on car maintenance, demonstrating how to check the oil in a car through to making the signature family pikelet recipe.
6. Brain and Body Breaks were scheduled into the timetable and recommendations were made

to students on how to use these moments between classes to move and stretch, connect and converse with family at home, eat healthily, etc.

When screen fatigue was identified, lessons were shortened to finish the school day early. An additional lesson was timetabled to allow time for senior students to meet teachers through Microsoft Teams to conference. It allowed other students time to work on assignments, communicate with teachers through various mediums and for younger students to complete homework to ensure limited screen time later in the day. This gave students the opportunity to complete the daily WellbeingConnect@Home challenge, exercise, and engage meaningfully with their families.

Students returned to school after lockdown excited by their personal connection with others through their time away. Parents and students were grateful for the focus on wellbeing and connections and provided positive feedback about the ongoing care.

## Final words

At Somerville House, all teachers, leaders, co-curricular coaches and co-ordinators have worked hard to ensure the online experience has been a positive one for all students. The pandemic circumstances have forced practitioners to think and work differently, while tailoring their programmes to suit the needs of the learner and meet curriculum goals. From these unprecedented times the key focus has been maintaining strong communication with parents. As educators, it is important that the question is asked: What will be the permanent changes to teaching and learning practices? ▲

IMAGE: ROALD DAHL PROVED TO BE A POPULAR CHOICE FOR READERS



# Fundraising and alumnae relations in challenging times

RACHEL JEFFERIES, CONSULTANT, ASKRIGHT

**F**undraising is about relationships. When times are challenging, maintaining the relationship you have with your donors is key. Ensuring donors feel appreciated, informed and engaged is more important than ever. The suggestion to cut your fundraising budget or even put your fundraising programme into hibernation is likely to be raised. This may be supported with assumptions such as: our donors can't give right now, our donors won't give right now, or now is not the time to fundraise.

great deal about clear, decisive, and empathetic communication in challenging times. In a fundraising context, clear and empathetic communication can be as simple as giving donors a quick phone call to ask how they are. Keep your donors in the loop and let them know about the needs your school is meeting right now.

It is important to recognise that this course of action has both short- and long-term consequences. Short-term, your fundraising revenue will drop — that is obvious enough. But long-term, you face the difficult task of regaining considerable lost ground, from rebuilding your relationship with the donors you have retained, to taking much longer to bounce back financially than those who continued fundraising.

Additionally, it is important to challenge assumptions about donors. While some donors will have reduced disposable income right now, or may choose not to give, others may well see their disposable income increase, or feel particularly drawn to support your cause at this time. The needs that you met before the pandemic, supported by your donors, still exist. Stephanie Pietromonaco (2020) advises in *Disaster Fundraising: Lessons from the Australian Bushfires* that “Philanthropy gives people a way to feel in control and that they can make a difference”. Allowing donors to decide for themselves whether they want to support your cause can create win-win-win outcomes. Now is the time to ask, albeit mindfully.

## Communicate with clarity and empathy

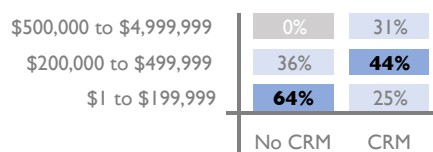
Many female world leaders have shown exceptional leadership during the global pandemic. New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, Norway's Prime Minister Erna Solberg, and Finland's Prime Minister Sanna Marin have all given special coronavirus press conferences for children, addressing children's specific concerns and anxieties about the coronavirus. These women teach us a

## Using technology

A customer relationship management (CRM) software system is a fundamental fundraising tool. In AskRIGHT's *Fundraising and Alumnae Relations in Girls' Schools 2018 Survey* (2018) conducted for the Alliance of Girls' Schools Australasia, 36 per cent of schools reported having CRM software to support their fundraising activities. These schools showed a large lift in donation activity compared with the 64 per cent that had not invested in a CRM platform. In an update of this research, AskRIGHT's 2020 survey, to be published later this year, shows that the proportion of schools that have a CRM to support fundraising activities has risen to 53 per cent. Again, the results suggest that using a CRM to support your fundraising will give you better results, enabling you to target, track and report on your fundraising activity.

The 2020 survey report also shows that 75 per cent of schools indicated that they run fundraising events — unchanged from 2018 — but with many events cancelled and some uncertainty around future events, virtual events are worth exploring. Furthermore, results indicated that two out of three schools or alumnae associations host events in cities other than their home

## Schools with a fundraising CRM reported significantly more in total donations in 2019 than schools with no CRM





location (up from 52 per cent in 2018 report), and 55 per cent host events overseas (up from 35 per cent reported in 2018). Regardless of our current situation, virtual events offer powerful yet affordable opportunities to continue the momentum for expanding schools' geographic reach to alumnae.

Technology can also lend itself well to opportunities such as peer-to-peer fundraising — where your supporters fundraise on your behalf within their networks, and to online giving days.

### Learn about your donors

Your database includes details of many different people. Learning more about each group will help you to hone your engagement and build stronger relationships with your donors over time, giving you a sustainable advantage.

Take time to investigate database segmentation, that is grouping the people in your database according to certain shared characteristics. For example:

- Type/s of stakeholder (donor, prospective donor, lapsed donor, recent alumna, long-standing alumna, student, parent, grandparent, staff, former staff, trustee, former trustee, volunteer, etc.)
- How long she has been giving
- How often she is giving
- How much she is giving
- Her preferred method of communication
- Her interests.

If you already segment your database, consider taking it to a more granular level. Whether you're starting from scratch or building on what you already have, this will help you to better understand your donors — who is most likely to give, and therefore the donors to focus most of your time on. Segmentation enables you to personalise and target your communications more effectively, building stronger, more resilient donor relationships in the process.

Get to know more about potential funders in your extended school community too. Use prospect research and wealth-screening tools to identify individuals and organisations with the most giving potential.

### Develop with your strategy

As your fundraising strategy shifts and adapts, the mix of fundraising skills required to deliver it will also change. Add to and grow the skills in your fundraising toolbox through professional development, for you or for others in your team. Consider investing in one-to-one coaching on major gift solicitations and tricky donor conversations with an experienced fundraising coach. Developing your skills in concert with your strategy increases your chances of fundraising success.

### Future giving

While it is important to focus on what you can do for your fundraising programme in the short- to medium-term, it pays to keep one eye on the long-term view too. Results of AskRIGHT's 2018 Survey showed that 53 per cent of schools received one or more bequests, or received notification of the intention of a bequest, in the previous year. The promoting of bequests and developing a more active bequest programme are areas that deserve attention from girls' schools.

Finally, I would like to repeat that fundraising is about relationships. The relationship your school has with current students and parents has been disrupted. Potentially, this disruption could weaken the strong bonds usually developed between students and their classmates, the school, and the wider school community. A reduced feeling of personal connection may well have a negative effect on these students' potential giving as alumnae in the future. Exploring community engagement strategies to help mitigate this risk and increase resilience will have long-lasting benefits for your fundraising programme. ▲

---

### REFERENCES

- AskRIGHT. (2018). *Fundraising and alumnae relations in girls' schools 2018 survey*. Alliance of Girls' Schools Australasia website. <https://www.agsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/2018-AskRIGHT-Fundraising-Alumnae-Relations-Report.pdf>
- Pietromonaco, S. (2020, March 13). *Disaster fundraising: Lessons from the Australian bushfires*. The Giving Institute. <https://www.givinginstitute.org/news/493495/Disaster-Fundraising-Lessons-from-the-Australian-bushfires.htm>



IMAGE: OXFORD UNIVERSITY

# What COVID-19 teaches us about education

SANDHYA DAS THURAISSINGHAM, UNDERGRADUATE, OXFORD UNIVERSITY AND ALUMNA, PLC MELBOURNE

**A** great many things are obscured by the rhythms of everyday life. We are carried on trains and planes, across borders and boardrooms with a momentum that leaves us with little time to examine our actions, choices and environments.

As it continues to disrupt these rhythms, the coronavirus unveils a number of truths. Some are ugly (but important): the undercurrent of social disparity that props up capitalist culture. Others are warming: our profound need for social engagement despite growing digitisation of interaction.

Many of these learnings pertain to education, wholly shaken by the pandemic at every level. An acceleration towards the trend of online learning allows us to appraise our existing approaches to teaching and learning, understand which of these we value, and confront those

that require revitalisation. Importantly, however, it also underscores the importance of education itself, a broad-based, liberal approach to it, that is.

## **A reminder on the (often understated) value of the liberal arts degree**

Approaches to mitigate against the threats of the virus vary considerably between countries. In some, it forms a powerful political weapon, brandished intimidatingly in discourse but addressed only feebly. Even in the best of cases, states' strategies are nonetheless a delicate interplay of economics and epidemiology, media semantics and geopolitical relations; the existence of governed society consequents that the handling of any widespread public crisis, regardless of the specific

threat it poses, depends on political decision-making and intervention. In other words, science alone will not cure us of disease and disaster. There are questions of equitable and effective vaccine distribution, stimulus packages and sustained economic intervention, and our response to actions of other countries, all of which require answers from politicians, not scientists. Quoted in the epigraph of Fareed Zakaria's *In Defence of a Liberal Education* (2015), E.O. Wilson asserts that "the world will be run by synthesizers, people able to put together the right information at the right time, thinking critically about it, and make important choices wisely" (p.9). Certainly, it is not information that we are most lacking, but rather the ability to wield it well.

We may then wonder why it is that liberal arts degrees which equip individuals with these skills and often provide pathways to political careers — eight of Australia's past ten prime ministers hold arts degrees — are facing a steady decline in reputation. Indeed, it is ironic that the recent fee hike on arts degrees coincides with events that compel us to concede the importance of humanities education. But this is by no means a new trend.

Between the years of 1990 and 2019, the number of students enrolled in their first year of an arts degree at the University of Melbourne saw an increase of only 59 per cent, compared to increases of 189 per cent and 151 per cent in the size of commerce and science cohorts, respectively. At Monash University, 2019 enrolments in arts degrees were approximately a third of those in business and economics, despite the range of subdisciplines the arts spans. These numbers are telling — in recent years, technological developments have driven a focus on skills-based learning and readiness for direct employment, orienteering students vocationally and practically, rather than towards the open-ended pursuit of knowledge.

The Melbourne Model, as it was conceived in 2008, foresaw the university "[amalgamating] all specialisations into a Bachelor of Arts and Science" (Simons cited in Nguyen, 2018) and introducing an emphasis on interdisciplinary study — 'breadth' — presently unheard of in the Australian higher education sphere. The introduction of the model, however, saw the number of first preferences received by the university on students' VTAC forms fall from 11,774 to 9,936 within two years (Nguyen, 2018). Monash University, the university's "closest competitor at undergraduate level," subsequently described it as "one of the best things to ever happen to Monash" (King, 2011). Ten years on, we witness a pared-down version of the university's initial vision — it offers seven undergraduate degrees — and are reminded of the growing emphasis on immediate academic specialisation. The proposed decreased subsidy on humanities degrees reaffirms that the value of critical thinking and communication skills, being able to articulate

argument with precision and isolate truth from swaths of opinion, is being dangerously diminished by both rhetoric and the hand of the market.

It would be in error to suggest that education does not serve the primary purpose of job training; that is not my intention. I rather aim to refute the permeating belief that the liberal arts degree is a leisure afforded only by the wealthy (fee inflation is a separate, but mounting issue across all courses), an enjoyable time-wasting strategy until the student decides what exactly she would like to do with her life.

In his book, *In Defence of a Liberal Education* (2015), Fareed Zakaria outlines the origins of the liberal arts degree in Ancient Greece. He traces the role of education across the history of modern civilisation, as children received training in hunting, farming, and fighting, to prepare them for the roles they could expect to occupy in their lives. As societies progressed, wealthier individuals began to educate their next-of-kin in the art of war, politics and diplomacy, the skills required of countrymen-to-be.

This all changed, however, Zakaria suggests, when the seeds of democracy were first sewn in Athens, some two and a half millennia ago. With power no longer lying in the hands of an elite minority, but that of the whole people, the need for a common education quickly became evident — in order for citizens to take proper control of the state, they had to receive a common education that would enable them to examine, debate, and charter the direction of their society. Only thus would they be free actors in a newly democratic world; this education granted them their liberty.

Centuries have reshaped the contents of this education. Adopted by a majority of American universities, the modern liberal arts degree is a four-year program in which students study a common interdisciplinary curriculum for two years before proceeding to specialise in a field of their choice. This common curriculum was born, the Yale Report of 1828 explains, of a desire "not to teach that which is peculiar to any of the professions; but to lay the foundation which is common to them all" (cited in Zakaria, 2015). In other words, the liberal arts degree aims to nurture qualities that aid in the acquisition of new skills, rather than focus on the teaching of particular skills. Such an education will prove paramount to graduates' success in a job market rattled by COVID-19 in which a rare certainty is the need for ready adaptability.

Zakaria (2015) also comments on the potential for greater social cohesion afforded by a shared knowledge base. He references C.P. Snow's *The Two Cultures* (1959) to caution against the "polarisation of knowledge" lest we fuel a dynamic of "mutual incomprehension," "hostility and dislike" (Snow cited in Zakaria p. 65). Snow's

ideas on the danger of relegating science to scientists — a resulting ‘optionality’ of science — are of exceeding relevance as debates on face masks and climate change endure on false equivalence. They remind us of the consequences of eschewing a common, liberal education in favour of specialist training, many of which we are already experiencing.

The liberal arts degree and its emphasis on exploratory, interdisciplinary study is quite evidently more than an intellectual playground for the affluent and indecisive. Rather, it is a stage of education necessary to ensure individual liberty from overbearing public institutions and possesses a value that should be recognised by government and, as the Greeks once sought to do, made accessible to all.

### **The makings of a meaningful education**

Our second lesson learnt of COVID-19 concerns itself with the university experience and what it should constitute. Requirements for social distancing have stripped university life to its bare minimum: lectures, tutorials, exams, and the occasional convening of a society via Zoom. Speaking to a friend at the beginning of the pandemic, she lamented the loss of what I can best describe as a peer-to-peer education: group study in the library, lunchtimes debates in the lawn, and networking events after sundown.

Her feelings are echoed by a significant portion of the global student body. A recent *New York Times* survey of college students found 75 per cent to be disappointed by the online university experience (Barrett, 2020). Speaking to *The Age* in May, a Victorian College of the Arts student bemoaned a limited learning experience. “It’s obvious [that] our learning has been compromised,” she said. Others referenced the lost experience of collaborating, and the effect this would have on their education (Fowler, 2020).

It would be a certain oversight to dismiss these complaints, as some have done, as a ‘snowflake’ generation’s perpetual hedonism and simple unwillingness to grit our teeth and get on with the challenge at hand. We would be better off interrogating these as a means to understand what universities are doing well — what students miss the most.

It has been suggested that up to 50 per cent of what a student learns is from “interaction with other students and aspects of their environment outside the classroom” (McRobbie cited in Ross 2020). Returning to *In Defence of a Liberal Education* (2015), Zakaria discusses how colleges, common to universities in the UK and US, “enhance the experience of [education] beyond the curriculum” (p. 49). He goes on to quote Harvard’s Samuel Eliot Morrison as saying: “Book learning along might be got by lectures and reading; but it was only by studying and disputing, eating and drinking, playing and praying as

members of the same collegiate community, in close and constant association with each other and their tutors, that the priceless gift of character could be imparted.” (Morrison cited in Zakaria, 2015, p. 49)

I reiterate these sentiments anecdotally — there is a striking synergy in serendipitous interactions enabled only by proximity — with the single caveat that residing in on-campus residency is perhaps not financially viable for all. This rich environment and density of experiences is the reason why students leave home at tender ages to pursue degrees in far off places. Lauded student unions and secret societies, crowded college stadiums and intimate tutorials draw students to the larger-than-life campuses they later call home. They shaped my own motivations to apply to Oxford University, where I will commence a degree in Philosophy, Politics and Economics this October, and are why, as we speak, these universities are adapting to welcome students back onto campus for the start of the new academic year. The pandemic encourages us to reflect on and heed the value of informal peer interaction, not as a by-product of campus life or amelioration of academic pressure, but as necessary elements of a meaningful education.

### **The future of education — changes that will remain**

As we are reminded of what we value in an education — broad liberal curricula and peer-to-peer learning — the coronavirus reveals yet another truth: the education system has been reluctant in its uptake of new technology and still employs many a bricks and mortar approach unsuited to the digital age. Requirements for remote teaching have propelled us into a new age of online learning and provided us with ideas on how we may continue to employ technology to enhance, make more accessible, and entirely revolutionise the education sector.

Use of online platforms to aid learning is by no means a novel affair. Recent years have seen the rise of educational creators on YouTube and the emergence of websites designed to supplement classroom teaching by way of summary videos, appealing graphics and worked solutions to problems. I clicked through an online course the day before my literature mock exam and went on to receive my highest mark in the subject hitherto. (A little dramatic, but the point stands — the internet is a powerful educational tool.)

One such platform, Khan Academy, which provides free video lessons on a wide range of subjects, reported soaring usage of the platform since the onset of COVID-19, “from 30 million minutes a day to a peak of 92 million [minutes],” (Anderson, 2020) with registrations for parents at up to twenty times the usual rate. Students typically responded well to this style of teaching, short videos explaining particular syllabus points followed by

a couple of worked examples. Therein lies an approach for schools' consideration: a flipped classroom model whereby material is made available (in similarly bite-sized segments) prior to class, freeing up lessons to address problem hotspots and individual concerns. Indeed, this personal support — the irreplaceable classroom feature — is what many found lacking in the remote setting. The bulk of content, however, could generally be conveyed effectively online.

The pandemic also provides us with the impetus to consider online learning as an avenue towards greater accessibility of education. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) hosted on platforms like Coursera and EdX give students access to certifiable courses from Ivy League schools for a fraction of the cost and the freedom to study whenever, wherever. The analysis of big data from students makes for a (somewhat) personalised online experience (Zakaria, 2015, p. 131-132), limited as it may be in comparison to the 'real deal'. Not that such comparison is fair or warranted, given distinctions in cost and audience. Nonetheless, these opportunities exist, and the platforms are spearheading developments in online education.

Another innovative newcomer to the online education scene is Crimson Global Academy (CGA), a registered online high school designed to supplement or substitute a traditional school-based education for students in Year 9 onwards. Offering International GCSE and A-Level subjects, CGA is an effective tandem of virtual classrooms (each of no more than twelve students) and highly personalised one-to-one tutoring. The set-up gives students the freedom to learn without limits, progressing on the basis of achievement rather than age, and without an upper limit on the number of subjects they may pursue.

Having recently gained admission to Oxford, I'm sometimes asked how I occupied my final years of school in preparation for this goal. Prospective applicants are often surprised by my response: a fairly unextraordinary list of books I read, online courses I started (but never completed), pieces I wrote and the odd competition I did alright in (but didn't win). No prize-winning essays and, a secret, reader: many a sluggish Sunday on Netflix. You see, although I can offer no exclusive insight into the mind of an admissions officer, I've come to believe that these universities are not looking for accoladed individuals, but inquisitive scholars. They need not know mountains, but should covet the open-ended pursuit of knowledge, self-initiating this journey in unassuming, but significant, ways. They will thrive within academically engaged student bodies and on vibrant campus environments. They are not, I'm quite sure, just looking for another qualification.

The virtual classroom, in all its forms, allows us to take these steps to nurture our curiosity and, beyond

impressing employers and admissions officers, bestow a liberal education upon ourselves. It enables us to grow into more considered individuals who will shape better societies. There is the task at hand of recognising the value in some of the more traditional approaches to education without blinding ourselves to the untapped value of online learning and the need to adapt to the possibilities it presents. Equally, we should consider why we devote much of our lives to this pursuit of education; beyond plumping our pockets, I'd argue, learnedness defends our liberties. In doing so, we might perhaps imbue our classrooms and minds with a fresh spirit of scholarship to carry us into a new age of education before the days of the pandemic are over. We have some time, I suppose. ▲

*Sandhya Das Thuraisingham was supported in her application to Oxford University by Crimson Education.*

---

## REFERENCES

- Anderson, J. (2020, July 1). How Khan Academy hopes to reduce Covid-19's impact on education. Quartz. <https://qz.com/1857486/how-khan-academy-hopes-to-reduce-covid-19s-impact-on-education/>
- Barrett, L. F. (2020, July 8). College Courses Online Are Disappointing. Here's How to Fix Them. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/08/opinion/college-reopening-online-classes.html>
- Fowler, M. (2020, May 4). Uni students bemoan impossibilities of online learning. The Age. <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/take-responsibility-uni-students-bemoan-impossibilities-of-online-learning-20200504-p54po4.html>
- King, S. (2011, April 29). Undergraduate education and the Melbourne Model. The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/undergraduate-education-and-the-melbourne-model-993>
- Monash University. (2020, June 15). Monash at a glance. <https://www.monash.edu/about/who/glance>
- Nguyen, A. (2018, June 10). Melbourne Model 2.0. Farrago. <http://farragomagazine.com/2018/05/21/melbourne-model-2-0/>
- Ross, J. (2020, June 4). Pandemic 'confirms face-to-face teaching is here to stay.' Times Higher Education. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/pandemic-confirms-face-face-teaching-here-stay#survey-answer>
- Simons, M. (2010, March). Dangerous precedent. The Monthly. <https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2010/february/1284956481/margaret-simons/dangerous-precedent#mtr>
- The University of Melbourne. (1990). The University of Melbourne Annual Report 1990 (p.85). <https://digitised-collections.unimelb.edu.au/handle/11343/23481>
- The University of Melbourne. (2020a). Bachelor of Arts : Entry requirements - The University of Melbourne. <https://study.unimelb.edu.au/find/courses/undergraduate/bachelor-of-arts/entry-requirements/>
- The University of Melbourne. (2020b). Bachelor of Commerce : Entry requirements - The University of Melbourne. <https://study.unimelb.edu.au/find/courses/undergraduate/bachelor-of-commerce/entry-requirements/>
- The University of Melbourne. (2020c). Bachelor of Science : Entry requirements - The University of Melbourne. <https://study.unimelb.edu.au/find/courses/undergraduate/bachelor-of-science/entry-requirements/>
- Zakaria, F. (2015). *In Defense of a Liberal Education*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

# Passion, purpose and pathways in a pandemic: helping girls find their shine

KRISTY KENDALL, PRINCIPAL, TOORAK COLLEGE, MT ELIZA, VICTORIA

**T**he people of Japan believe that everyone has an *ikigai* — a reason to jump out of bed each morning and the key to living a fulfilled life.

---

But for young Australians, predicted to be the hardest hit as the economic fallout of the COVID-19 crisis becomes clearer, the search for their *ikigai* has taken a backward step as they grapple with their passion, purpose and career prospects.

Many have lost jobs, or are on the cusp of entering the workforce, and are at risk of missing out on developing much-needed skills and experience during the crucial early stages of their careers.

Enter Toorak College's Student Futures program. Centred around three pillars — self-insight, career inspiration, and career resilience — it is empowering young women to pinpoint where their passions and talents intersect, set goals for their futures and strive towards achieving them.

## Dare to dream

Whether they have been inspired by their favourite sportsman or a love for animals, we know boys and girls begin to make pivotal decisions about their future career from a very young age.

We also know that for girls, stereotypes, gender inequality and the lack of female role models in a range of key industries have an impact on career planning as they transition to young women. Unfortunately, too often we see the widening of the gap between the ambitions that girls have and their desire to pursue them. Worse, we see girls downplay or discount their dreams, not taking a chance or not fighting for what they truly want.

To help develop self-insight and lay the foundation for optimistic career planning, Toorak College students undertake the Morrisby Vocational Assessment and have individual counselling sessions with our Student Futures Specialist. Students can articulate their unique strengths and passions, be supported in developing their career aspirations and engage in a range of activities that will help them achieve their individual goals.

The significant under-representation of women in STEM has been well documented and in recent years,

Toorak College has transformed its approach to STEM education from Early Learning through to Year 12, ensuring that girls are

STEM-skilled and digital technology literate.

Attracting girls to STEM means maximising all opportunities for girls to participate in STEM subjects and to be inspired. With many new curriculum initiatives and the launch of a new state-of-the-art Science and Technology Centre in January 2020 (designed by McBride Charles Ryan and built by LBA Constructions), we have seen a 15 per cent increase in the number of girls enrolling in VCE STEM subjects.

With interest in STEM and digital technologies growing in the classroom, it is no surprise that interest in STEM careers is growing, and with many current students and recent graduates reassessing what their future might hold in a post-COVID-19 world, our girls are seeing STEM careers as both necessary and viable options.

## Inspiration through connection

Following the mantra 'you can't be, what you can't see', Toorak College launched the *Empower Network* to connect senior students with Toorak College alumni, providing students with real-world examples of women in our community who they can model themselves after.

Via a private online group on LinkedIn, students and recent graduates are able to network directly and individually with alumni in their field of interest, to ask questions and secure work shadowing, internship and employment opportunities.

With competition for graduate jobs set to be tougher than ever before, we are seeing students and recent graduates feel the pressure to stand out from the crowd. Having partnered with LinkedIn Learning, many of our students are taking matters into their own hands to enhance and extend their learning at school and fast track their knowledge and skill development in areas that are critical to their aspirations and employability.

In addition, after seeing the results from a range of youth mental health surveys throughout COVID-19 lockdown periods, Toorak College launched a series of free workshops for alumni on everything from resume



writing, tips for online job interviews, managing finances and developing a professional wardrobe. With over 400 alumni registering to participate, these workshops will no doubt help support recent graduates who would normally be embracing new freedoms and making big decisions about their lives and careers.

### **The role of industry**

When it comes to pathways to employment, before COVID-19 Toorak College took a step back and examined the long-accepted education journey — 13 years of schooling leading to university and then the workforce. Doing this inspired us to flip the model and work with industry leaders to develop alternative pathways to employment.

An example is a partnership we have formed with Downer Group, the third-largest employer in Australia. This partnership provides industry exposure and mentoring to students in Years 9-12 and culminates in an agreement that ensures up to two Toorak students are selected for the highly sought after 'Road Services Cadet Program' each year, fast tracking their career in STEM fields. Upon graduating from university, they are guaranteed employment with Downer Group at project manager level.

On hearing of this program, many other industry leaders have become keen to cut out the 'middle man' and open alternative recruitment and employment pathways for talented students. This is more pertinent now than ever before and we are already working with other science and technology companies with the hope to expand the program in 2021.

### **Finding motivation and focus**

There is no doubt that this generation of young women are facing unprecedented instability and disruption, particularly those who have ambitions of working in industries that have been heavily impacted by COVID-19.

In speaking with students and recent graduates, they are struggling to find motivation and focus, with many making last minute adjustments to subject selections or deferring their degree.

The forgotten victims of COVID-19? Perhaps. Can they get through this and thrive on the other side? Absolutely! Resilience is the key and is a characteristic that I expect students and graduates of this generation will have developed in spades throughout their educational journey.

One of the main purposes of a school is to prepare students for their unknown futures. Toorak College supports each student's transition from school to the world of work through individualised study and career planning sessions and a series of experiences and workshops focusing on networking, career decision making, giving and receiving feedback and working through setbacks.

I am confident young Australians have what they need to accept that these are challenging times and then adapt, innovate, seize opportunities and jump at new prospects that may present. Now, together with parents, industry and society as a whole, schools continue to play a significant role in preparing students for their future and reminding recent graduates that the world is still their oyster, that they have what they need and that it is up to them to believe in themselves and find their shine. ▲

# Lessons from COVID-19: from the “old grammar of schooling” to the new normal of learning

SHERI UPASIRI, HEAD OF MIDDLE SCHOOL, ST HILDA'S SCHOOL GOLD COAST, QUEENSLAND

**The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has seen a shift in policy, practice and priorities as schools have altered focus to deal with the demands of this unique situation.**

---

These changes have resulted in some enduring benefits and, as identified by Hattie (2000), a change to the “old grammar of schooling” as previous norms have been challenged and evolved in reaction to the changing climate. At the essence of the changes has been the realisation that the previously non-negotiable elements of schools have been re-imagined in a way that has added to the life of the school and educational practices. Through the pandemic the importance of flexibility, creativity and collaboration have shone through and have been essential to community building during this very different time.

An enduring legacy of COVID-19 has been the importance of communication. As our communities were exposed to information from a variety of different outlets and restrictions were evolving, the importance of clear and consistent communication was evident. In a time of flux, families needed reassurance. As school leaders we had to be agile in responding to evolving conditions and circumstances so as best to support the wellbeing of our community and maintain a sense of calm in the somewhat uncontrollable situation we found ourselves in. To help achieve this, consistent and clear communication became our practice and one that has stayed with us despite the return to school-based learning. The “old grammar” of the monthly newsletter has led to a shift to our regular communications so families are kept abreast of what is happening on campus. This has cemented our sense of community and allowed families to engage with student learning in real time with ‘live learning’ updates introduced as a way of connecting school and home. Communication has also been key in terms of maintaining staff morale. Regular check ins and conversations, particularly with staff identified as vulnerable, was essential in maintaining lines of communication and as we found more time to connect with colleagues this resulted in a greater sense of camaraderie and a stronger feedback culture. From a teaching and learning

perspective, communication was also key as the regular codes and cues we as teachers used to gauge student learning were not

always visible online, meaning that staff had to ensure that they were actively checking for deeper understanding. Consequently techniques for blended and asynchronous learning have been readily adopted by staff, with most continuing with these practices beyond the online period. The pandemic has afforded us the opportunity to examine what areas matter to us as a school, and its impact is that while we may have shifted teaching and learning practices and reimagined curriculum and assessment, our ‘normal’ of wanting a safe and supportive environment for our girls, staff and families endures.

A key takeaway of the online process was that the gains from the experience were organic and often at grassroots level rather than top down. As educators we spent the period in the lead-up to online learning meticulously tweaking curriculum, school programmes and assessments to suit the process. We plotted how to safeguard our students with technology use, we broke into teams and mapped out division of work, trained to become experts with the learning technologies at our disposal and, armed with advice from our British and American counterparts, approached the home-based learning experience with surety. While these initiatives had their merits and allowed our educators to approach the experience with confidence, some of the greatest gains were not made because we were research active or had made wise investments around time and resourcing. The greatest gains of the experience were the human gains. While our girls benefited from the preparation of their teachers, while we worked on contingency plans and tying up loose ends, they took more from our welcomes of a morning than our planning. The reality is that our girls knew how passionate their teachers were in their subject areas so their location did not matter as long as they had their community. What they needed were those things that were familiar to them. They needed the assemblies, the carnivals and the pastoral care sessions



IMAGE: MRS AMANDA RIGBY TEACHING SENIOR HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

to help them feel like they had a vestige of normality at a time of uncertainty. They needed the check ins and the conversations at the beginning and end of lessons. As the process went on, what became apparent was that some of the powerful takeaways were small, organic interactions orchestrated by the students themselves. Now, as most of our girls have returned to campus, we are slowly uncovering the social and emotional benefits of the experience. The stories of classes organising to call through to each other on Microsoft Teams twenty minutes before each school day to catch up on each other's news. The groups having virtual lunches together at break times to have the incidental conversations they were craving. The impromptu fitness programs that were taking place as neighbours were spending break times together to get some exercise and focus on wellbeing. Despite the evolving landscape, the importance of connectedness shone through and, in many ways, our level of community deepened despite the distance. The pandemic, while leading to many restrictions, also paved the way for opportunities and, as educators and school leaders, we realised that some of the greatest benefits were the ones we did not plan or prepare for.

Another key element to come from COVID-19 is an enduring sense of gratitude. Gratitude for colleagues who

rose to the new conditions and exhibited as much passion for their specialist areas online as they do in person. Gratitude for a parent community who embraced the change and supported the school despite often juggling their personal circumstances. Gratitude for collaboration on a micro and macro scale as educators within and outside the school shared resources, ideas and words of wisdom through professional learning forums and groups. Another enduring legacy from the online process has been the sense of gratitude for the noise, the hum of a school once students returned and the incidental corridor conversations with colleagues and students which have proven so valuable after a period of none. Despite the new normal of the online learning experience, and the many benefits it afforded us, the buzz of a learning community is part of the "old grammar" we long to keep. ▲

---

## REFERENCES

- New South Wales Department of Education. (2020, June 9). The unplanned experiment for teaching and learning. *School News Australia*. Retrieved from: <https://www.school-news.com.au/news/the-unplanned-experiment-for-teaching-and-learning/>
- New South Wales Department of Education. (2020, June 1). Every Student Podcast - John Hattie interviewed by Mark Scott [podcast transcript]. Retrieved from: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/news/secretary-update/every-student-podcast-john-hattie>

# Schooling in the time of COVID: an opportunity to liberate learning

ALISON BEDFORD AND DEIRDRE GEDDERT, MIDDLE AND SENIOR YEARS TEACHERS,  
THE GLENNIE SCHOOL, QUEENSLAND

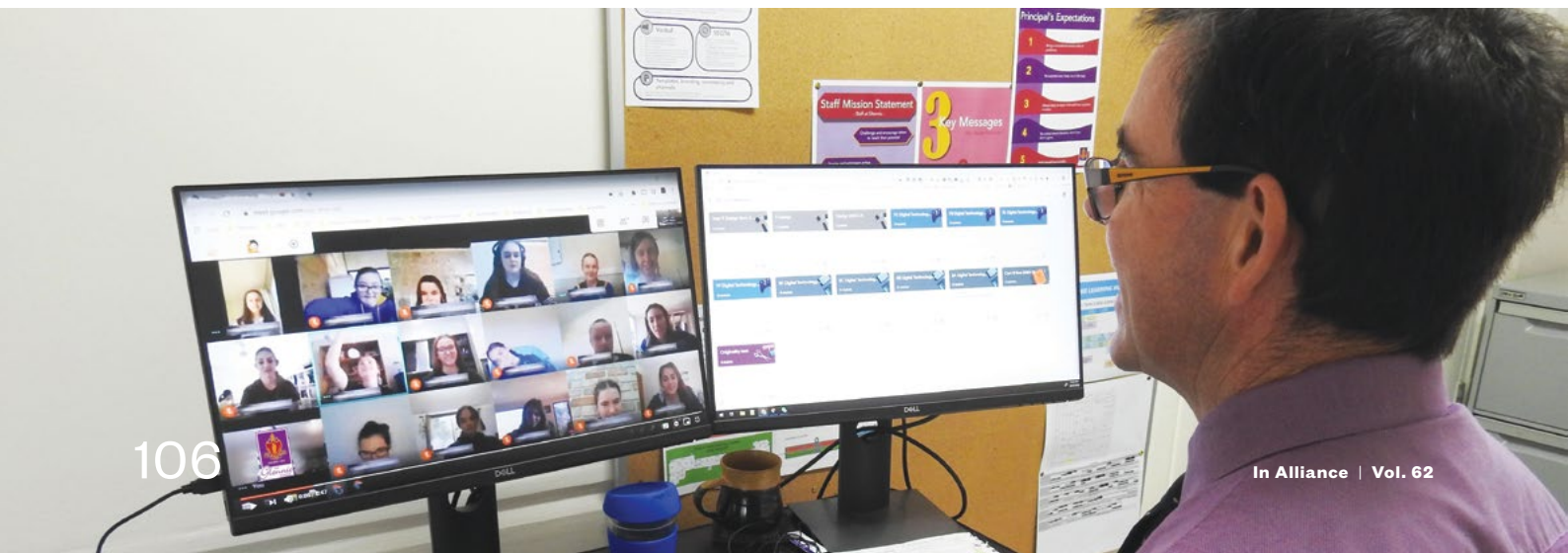
**In 2020, school campuses were abruptly closed as a result of the global pandemic COVID-19. All classes at The Glennie School were rapidly transferred to an online platform under the 'iLoveGlennie' schooling initiative. Within this initiative, students were assigned a new form of timetable that required synchronous lessons to be delivered in the morning and independent work activities to be completed in the afternoons for the five weeks of schooling at home.**

Multiple subject specific classroom teachers collaborated in order to present lessons for the entire subject cohort on a single Google Classroom. At the conclusion of this five-week online immersive, surveys to staff and students were issued in order to prompt reflection upon the experience. In addition to a marked increase in collaborative habits, a large number of participants noticed the students' preference for the 'independent learning' experienced during the 'iLoveGlennie' initiative. The type of independence that students described anecdotally closely aligned with a classroom technique known as a 'flipped classroom'; wherein interactive class time is used to clarify and apply the content that is first encountered during independent study. The purpose of this article is to compare and contrast educational practice before and during the COVID-19 online learning season in order to highlight beneficial and consequential deviations.

## Our context and experience

The Glennie School is an Anglican all-girls, day and boarding school in Toowoomba, Queensland. The school has had a one-to-one device program for almost thirty years, which potentially aided the initial rapid shift to school-wide online learning during quarantine.

In the lead up to off campus schooling due to a rise in COVID-19 cases across Australia in March 2020, all students were able to take their laptops home and were already very confident working through online platforms such as Google Classroom. While some boarders from very remote communities did struggle with Internet connectivity, the school worked collaboratively to support these families in gaining access to a more robust connection. Despite hopes to complete Term 1 while on campus, advice shifted swiftly and classes moved online in the last week of term. The 'iLoveGlennie' initiative was launched with one primary directive; to prioritise connection before content delivery. Full attention was paid to the wellbeing and reassurance of students during this week of transition, which likely led to the positive responses and resilient flexibility demonstrated by all involved parties throughout the following weeks of curricular learning.



One area that required flexibility was the school timetable. Conscious of the fatigue generated by too much screen time, the Term 3 schedule shifted into a new format with short, face to face lectures limited to early sessions followed by independent work time in the afternoons. Except for subjects such as Languages that were taught synchronously in the morning session, all other classes were asynchronous which allowed a degree of flexibility for the learner. Most staff followed a pattern wherein a weekly outline and content was loaded on a Monday, including scheduled Google Meet catch-ups for discussion and questions throughout the week. Check-ins, emails, comments and formative data collection allowed educators to monitor student engagement as well as progress. Children of essential workers who were on campus during this period were socially distanced in a large teaching space and supervised, but continued to complete the online learning program. Our return to campus came faster than anticipated, and again, the rapidity rather than the actual requirements of the change was unsettling to both staff and students. The staggered return of some year levels provided a challenge to both staff and families with multiple children, so teachers of these year levels went through a transition of teaching both online and on campus simultaneously. As of June 2020, Glennie is fully reopened, with almost all students having returned. Staff continue to leverage the skills they gained during the period of online learning in order to cater to students who are unable to travel to campus, keeping them connected to both their peers and the curriculum.

While the rapid shift to online learning presented many challenges, it provided educators with an opportunity to reflect upon our 'standard' practices, discover new skills and reimagine what teaching and learning could look like in our context. Extensive staff and student feedback on the experience of online learning was collected shortly after the return to campus by our school administration, and is informing conversations about the direction the school takes next.

### **Key Findings: an anecdotal comparison of two teaching models**

Overall, the 'iLoveGlennie' experience was anecdotally reported as one of great advancement in the areas of staff relations as well as in ICT (Information and Communications Technology) capability, but also as one of challenge when responding to disengagement among learners. Interestingly, the valuing of professional expertise, collaborative practices and the emotional efficacy amongst colleagues saw more significant and widespread improvement across responses than the area where many would expect improvement during online schooling; the use of technology. Staff articulated notable improvements in areas of collegial sharing, as well as

an improved sense of belonging within the professional environment; "it has encouraged and enforced collaboration and professional conversation among colleagues — and supported a 'whole-cohort' mentality" (Survey Responses, 2020). The data consistently suggests that while meeting the COVID-19 distance challenges, teachers more openly shared their expertise with each other to help meet the demands of this sudden change. In doing so, educators increased their sense of collegiality within the school and felt a higher sense of value. Many subject cohorts adopted the use of a single shared Google Classroom, which teachers felt "allowed [them] to work more efficiently as a teaching team. [Teachers] shared the planning load to ensure consistency across all year levels. This has allowed [teachers] to be more creative in developing shared resources for the students" (Survey Responses, 2020). It is compelling to note that the increase in professional sharing across all platforms (including ICT) led to the subsequent improvements in collegiality and value felt by teachers. Therefore one cannot discount the role that enhanced usage of ICT resources has played.

The increase in perceived ICT efficacy is expected considering the mass shift to online platforms. The number of staff reporting confidence in their ability to utilise online education platforms nearly doubled after the 'iLoveGlennie' experience. Anecdotal comments consistently declare that teachers "feel far more confident in using technology [such as] recording videos, [and] Google Classroom" (Survey Responses, 2020). When asked how the COVID-19 experience will change pedagogical process, the majority of respondents signalled intent to continue utilising the ICT platforms; "I have developed new ICT skills and will now be able to use more interactive strategies to more easily monitor students progress and responses" (Survey Responses, 2020). These skills among teachers are "the skills required to conquer adversity, and emerge stronger... than ever, are the same ones that make for extraordinary leaders" (Bennis and Thomas, 2002). In short, educators are well equipped to adapt as a team.

The improvements in congeniality or parity felt amongst staff were not mirrored within teacher-to-student relations online. The greatest dissatisfaction reported pertained to the inability to motivate or gauge the investment of students. Once a student disengaged from the program, it was very difficult to regain their participation. Even student survey feedback identified low motivation as the top problem with the online learning experience (Survey Responses, 2020). The data demonstrates that it is harder to directly engage students online rather than in person, particularly those who are not motivated to begin with. As one teacher noted, "I now realise how much impact my physical presence has with my students" (Survey Responses,

2020). An element of engagement was lost when face-to-face classrooms were lost. Those with learning difficulties also faced a steep decrease in classroom effectiveness as educators struggled to implement differentiated strategies online for those on individualised programs. In hindsight of this COVID-19 experience, it behoves us as educators to proactively consider how we can further refine teaching strategies that may not see such a steep decrease in engagement were schooling to ever shift back to online again.

The question raised by the current key findings is; given enough time, would the improved sharing of teacher professional expertise be able to overcome the immediate weaknesses of the online platform? Glennie educators are already considering the question; “I have begun to think more consciously of how I can empower students to have more autonomy and take more leadership in their learning journey” (Survey Responses, 2020). The data suggests that, in the wake of a sudden massive change, teachers automatically aligned themselves to do so. Thus, for the remainder of this article, let us consider what areas did benefit engagement between students and teachers.

### **The benefits of asynchronous learning**

The disruption of classroom teaching translated into a disruption of the rigid classroom timetable under which we had all been functioning. The school’s decision to offer predominantly asynchronous learning gave both staff and students greater flexibility in terms of managing when they were able to engage with learning and this proved beneficial. Salmons (2019) highlights many of the benefits of asynchronous forms of content delivery and communication for online learners, including the ability for students to access materials at times most convenient to them. Students could engage with peers through online discussion forums where they could post and respond over a period of time rather than on a tight and limited schedule. The need for this sort of flexibility was evident, with many of our boarders completing work outside the traditional school day, as ‘all hands on deck’ activities such as mustering livestock meant their days would not fit into a rigid school timetable. The combination of live lessons for some subjects, bi-weekly catch ups and independent time gave students the opportunity to plan their day more flexibly.

Asynchronous learning had many positives, but did offer some challenges. Our Languages teachers quickly found that synchronous teaching better maintained student engagement because it provided more immediate guidance when learning a foreign language. The school acknowledged this and scheduled online lesson times for Languages. Bi-weekly lessons were also scheduled for all other classes to foster connection and collaboration. Synchronous lessons such as these have benefits but as Wells and Holland (2015) note, also present a challenge when participants do not arrive; “the need for a critical

mass of those with a common interest to engage within the environment usually at or within a specific time-frame. Therefore, a sufficient number of learners must be present and actively participating during a given time-frame for meaningful learning to occur” (Wells and Holland 2015). Students who missed scheduled lessons rapidly became disengaged and those that did attend were often reluctant to speak up, making genuine collaboration a challenge. As one Glennie teacher noted, “In an online learning environment, [some learners] simply do not log in, respond to emails, or...contact you for assistance” (Survey Responses, 2020). We believe that while the challenges with engagement were significant, when asynchronous principles such as the more student-centred flipped classroom approach are applied in a long-term form, intrinsic motivation will help to nullify disengagement.

Another challenge was the speed at which staff and students had to master the technology of online learning. Wells and Holland (2015) observe that flipped classrooms and online teaching place a heavy burden of continual growth upon the teacher to stay abreast of emerging technologies and changes to platforms. Delivery of asynchronous content provoked a great deal of teacher reflection upon their task design. Many teachers commented on their need to be more clear and concise in their instruction giving and expectation setting. As one teacher noted, “I have learned to be more explicit in my instructions and to provide more opportunity for student feedback” (Survey Responses, 2020). Teachers realised both the need for clarity in expectations and also feedback to the students about how well they met these expectations. We have IT support staff as well as teaching staff who lead and promote the integration of IT into practice, so the teachers had technical and pedagogical support in adapting to Google Classroom or their chosen platform. Janet Salmons’ (2019) research highlights for “online collaboration to successfully occur, the instructor must be prepared to take an active role” (p. 36), so the need for staff to rapidly improve their skill set was vital to the engagement and success of students.

### **Flipped learning: the unexpected outcome**

Both staff and students intuitively adopted a flipped classroom approach as their core pedagogical framework. As Wells and Holland (2015) explain:

The Flipped Classroom is a blended model of learning that essentially reverses what would traditionally be considered classwork and homework. Therefore, lectures that used to occur in face-to-face settings can instead be accessed through online technologies at home, and face-to-face class-time can be used for discussion, problem-solving and collaborative work. This flipped form of learning can support a myriad of pedagogic approaches within web-enabled learning eco-systems, particularly where participatory,

social technologies are harnessed to support and transform the learning experiences.

This model played out with teachers prerecording content-driven lesson material and posting this to the Google Classroom, with face to face (via Google Meet video conferencing) spent on discussion and problem-solving. Student-led asynchronous collaboration was less common, but this may be due in large part to the limited period of time online learning occurred within. To foster a student-centred 'learning eco-system' online, teachers needed a wider range of collaborative strategies and students needed to develop the trust and willingness to participate, which is the sort of cultural and behaviour shift that takes more than five weeks.

Head of Mathematics, Amy Markham, recounts how this model was adopted by her staff, and has continued after the return to on-campus learning:

The remote learning in Mathematics allowed girls to work independently and at their own speed. The department focused on the use of instructional videos for the initial learning phase, with most of these videos made by individual teachers, so that the girls could hear and see their own teacher. Students were able to pause and replay videos depending on their own learning needs. Since returning to face-to-face learning, we have continued to use the flipped learning process. Students in Senior classes have been given instructional videos to view before class learning, and then once in class check for understanding is completed. Once student

---

### **“Teachers were quick to recognise that their classrooms may be unnecessarily teacher-centred.”**

understanding has been established, students work independently on problems, and this has allowed students to work on more complex questions with the ability to have access to teacher assistance. This has meant that there has been less time spent on homework questions as independent learning time has been incorporated into class where students can gain support. (A. Markham, email correspondence, 30 July 2020).

A flipped classroom approach was intuitively taken up by staff. Video recordings by individual teachers exemplify one of the ways in which staff sought to maintain connections with students. The continued use of the pedagogy demonstrates that staff have recognised the benefits of the flipped model more broadly.

Even during the relatively short period requiring online learning, teachers were quick to recognise that

their classrooms may be unnecessarily teacher-centred. Glennie's experiences mirror Wells and Holland's (2015) observation that "online learning communities have the potential to liberate learning from the constraints of singularity of context, convergence of perspectives and over-reliance on educator created resources and educator expertise." A number of teachers observed that students are capable of and desire the opportunity to have greater independence in their learning. One teacher noted the time "allowed the girls to work more independently...I realised that I was the 'resource' for many of my classes and so had to find more transferable, tangible resources" (Survey Responses, 2020). Many "realised the extent of many students' independent learning abilities" (Survey Responses, 2020) and came to appreciate the possibilities of a non-teacher-centric classroom. As Janet Salmons (2019) notes, "Constructivist learning environments require student work that is intrinsically motivating to them; learners reaching a certain level of self directedness; and teachers who provide support (scaffolding), context, relevance, and constant feedback". While teachers did not necessarily recognise the shift to a more constructivist stance, the evidence in the surveys shows this shift quite markedly.

### **A call for liberated learning**

Reflection upon which aspects of the 'iLoveGlennie' model should continue when returning to the classroom, brought focus to elements of flipped learning, increased student independence, and collaboration and feedback. Teacher comments called for a continuation of

"collaboration among teaching teams", for "more individualised feedback, more flexibility for students to work at their own pace", "less instructional work in class, and more time to work on the challenging problems together" and "more regular work submissions to enable

a more accurate insight into student understanding" (Survey Responses, 2020). These comments highlight the common themes emergent in anecdotal feedback from educators. This reimagining of their pedagogy and professional practice also caused consideration about the ways in which the school could adapt to benefit from what we learnt during our period of online learning. Many teachers were eager for the traditional eight period timetable to be reviewed, questioning the need for students' time to be so rigorously structured. Many suggested that a continuation of the independent learning time that was a beneficial feature of the COVID-19 structure. Another common request was for recognition that staff can work remotely and outside of the traditional school day. Many staff enjoyed the increased flexibility and feeling of trust with one respondent noting, "I was trusted as a professional to work from home where this was viable" (Survey Responses, 2020). The

continued provision of a virtual link for staff department meetings has already been implemented, allowing staff with children to collect from school or meet other after school commitments by not requiring them to return to campus to attend meetings physically. Interestingly, this increased autonomy reflects an increased investment among colleagues — one we can hope will soon translate to students as we empower them.

Moving forward, flipped classroom learning and increased student independence are seen as key features of Glennie's future. Cimino (2018) suggests a blend of the flipped classroom with Fisher and Frey's (2009) 'Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR)' model in what he terms 'Flipped GRR'. 'Flipped GRR (FGRR)', guides students through independent and collaborative tasks from the "I do it" stage, to "we do it together" and finally back to the "you do it alone" stage. The two major advantages of this approach are the increase in opportunities for formative assessment and differentiation. Cimino (2018) points out that by integrating formative assessment into the content delivery asynchronous component of learning, the teacher can identify issues and differentiate subsequent activities on the topic according to student need. Cimino's (2018) 'FGRR' model provides one possible framework for developing an independent culture through a consistent approach to flipped classrooms while also providing a scaffold for increasing student independence, which both staff and students have recognised as a key outcome of our online experience.

These outcomes have prompted discussion and reflection, as Crystal Hede, Head of Operations and member of the Senior Leadership Team notes, "In respect to teaching structures and approaches in the post-COVID-19 transition, the Senior Leadership Team is exploring adaptations to the conventional timetable to facilitate increased student independence and to better support a flipped-classroom approach. These timetable changes have the potential to improve teacher outcomes as well, by increasing the opportunities for teams to collaborate" (email correspondence, 31 July, 2020). The SLT's recognition of the potential benefits of integrating some of the positive outcomes gained during our time online into our standard practice liberates both teachers and students to work and learn in ways that are flexible and create positive collaborative relationships.

## In conclusion

While survey responses reveal the challenges staff faced, they also speak to the ways in which staff rapidly adapted their practice to continue to deliver a high quality, meaningful education to our girls. The greatest challenge that we have not exhausted is the issue of disconnection; how to 'get back' those students who disengage when learning at home. While a strong sense of community and connectedness are obviously important,

more tangible and practical means of promoting and maintaining engagement need to be found should we need to return to entirely online learning. Despite this remaining challenge, many positives have emerged that the school can continue to build upon. Independent, and intrinsically motivated learning can be equated to the Holy Grail of education. Empowering our students at Glennie, through increased asynchronous and collaborative mechanisms have shown positive initial results in efficacy as well as quality learning during exceptional times. Our immersive experience online during COVID-19 reflects the ability of teachers to draw together as a team and emerge stronger. One of the ways this is most evident is in the accidental but rather global adoption of FGRR which provides us a common platform from which to move forward. The online learning prompted by COVID-19 has offered our school an opportunity to reconsider how we teach and reimagine what our school can offer our students as they develop as confident, connected, flexible and increasingly independent learners. ▲

---

## REFERENCES

- Benis, W.G. & Thomas, R.J. (2005). *Crucibles of Leadership*. Harvard Business Review. pp. 60-69.
- Cimino, M. (2018). Synthesising the Flipped Classroom with the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model, *AEL 40: 1*. pp. 40-42.
- Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2013). *Better Learning Through Structured Teaching: A Framework for the Gradual Release of Responsibility*. ASCD.
- Salmons, J. (2019). *Learning to Collaborate, Collaborating to Learn: Engaging Students in the Classroom and Online*, Stylus.
- Survey Responses. (2020). Internal staff polling undertaken at The Glennie School.
- University of Adelaide. (2018). Flipped Classroom Design Framework. The Flipped Classroom Explained. <https://www.adelaide.edu.au/flipped-classroom/about/>
- Wells, M. & Holland, C. (2015). Flipping Learning! Challenges in Deploying Online Resources to Flipped Learning in Higher Education in J. Keengwe & G. Onchwari (Eds.). *Handbook of Research on Active Learning and the Flipped Classroom Model in the Digital Age*. IGI Global.

IMAGE: A SENIOR BOARDING STUDENT MAKES THE MOST OF LEARNING FROM HOME



# The exigency of student wellbeing

DR JOE THURBON, CTO AND NABIL SHAHEEN, CEO, EDUCATOR IMPACT

**S**tudents' academic competence has long been measured by schools and systems of schools. Increasingly, school leaders across the globe acknowledge the importance of a more holistic approach to education; one in which students' academic, social and emotional development is understood as equally important and mutually reinforcing goals. Indeed, student wellbeing is a new paradigm for improving outcomes.

However, when we look at the status of student wellbeing both globally and specifically within in the Australian context, the statistics are alarming:

- 25% of students experience bullying<sup>1</sup> (Kids Help Line, 2019).
- Almost one in seven (13.9%) of 4-17-year-olds were assessed as having mental disorders in the previous 12 months. This is equivalent to 560,000 Australian children and adolescents (Australian Psychology Society, 2016).
- Based on these prevalence rates it is estimated that in the previous 12 months:
  - 298,000 Australian children and adolescents aged 4-17 years had ADHD,
  - 278,000 had anxiety disorders,
  - 112,000 had a major depressive disorder, and
  - 83,600 had conduct disorder (Australian Psychological Society, 2016).
- 20% of adolescents may experience a mental health problem in any given year (World Health Organisation, 2003).
- 50% of mental health problems are established by age 14 (Kessler et al., 2005).
- 10% of children and young people (aged 5-16 years) have a clinically diagnosable mental problem (Green et al., 2004), yet 70% of children and adolescents who experience mental health problems have not had appropriate interventions at a sufficiently early age (The Children's Society, 2008).

Tackling student wellbeing is a very significant and growing challenge for educators.

## What exactly is student wellbeing?

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) defines student wellbeing

as "a sustainable positive mood and attitude, health, resilience, and satisfaction with self, relationships and experiences at school". Similarly, in its *Scoping study into approaches to student wellbeing*, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) defines student wellbeing

as: "a sustainable state of positive mood and attitude, resilience, and satisfaction with self, relationships and experiences at school". It also adds that "a student's level of wellbeing is indicated by the degree to which the student demonstrates effective academic and social and emotional functioning and appropriate behaviour at school".

Internationally, definitions of and approaches to student wellbeing are similar. The OECD's *Student wellbeing report* refers to the psychological, cognitive, social and physical functioning and capabilities that students need to live a happy and fulfilling life. In the OECD's view, a student's wellbeing is the result of interactions among four distinct but closely related domains: psychological, social, cognitive and physical (OECD, 2017).

The psychological, social, cognitive and physical domains are ubiquitous when it comes to student wellbeing frameworks (elaborated below). Suffice to say that a broad consensus informs our understanding of what student wellbeing is. But why is wellbeing so important? And how does wellbeing connect to other student outcomes such as academic performance?

## The case for making wellbeing central

The link between student wellbeing and academic outcomes is well established, thanks to decades of research. The link between poorer wellbeing and poorer outcomes is similarly well established.

For example, a large study of student wellbeing published by the *Journal of Positive Psychology* found that those students who reported high results on factors such as 'feeling good' and 'doing good' reported "superior grades, higher self-control and lower procrastination than students who were moderately mentally healthy or languishing" (Howell, 2009).

<sup>1</sup>We note that there is evidence that (a) at girls' schools there are typically lower rates of bullying, and (b) the most common types of bullying vary between girls' schools and both boys' schools and co-ed schools.

By contrast, students with poor mental health experience substantial challenges with their learning and school performance. A national survey conducted by the University of Western Australia which interviewed 6,000 families as part of Young Minds Matter found that “mental disorders affected one in seven students in the previous 12 months and students with mental disorders scored lower on average than students without mental disorders in every test domain and year level”. The report recommended “a need to improve the

---

**“A third of students would turn to a teacher or school counsellor for help instead of family and friends.”**

effectiveness of interventions to reduce the prevalence of mental disorders in children experiencing socio-economic disadvantage and to improve the effectiveness of programs to help students”. Importantly, the report also emphasised that: “Teachers are not mental health professionals and should not be expected to diagnose and treat mental disorders” (UWA, 2017).

A concern for educators is the growing number of students who identify as experiencing mental health challenges. The Mission Australia Youth Survey of 2019 reported that 43% of young people (15-19) feel ‘extremely’ or ‘very concerned’ about coping with stress; a three-fold increase since 2012 (Fieldes, 2019). Critically for schools, the same study found that a third of students would turn to a teacher or school counsellor for help instead of family and friends.

This is further supported by research conducted by the Australian Psychology Society which recorded the following:

- One in six (17.0%) children and adolescents aged 4-17 years had used services for emotional or behavioural problems in the previous 12 months.
- Of this group:
  - One in seven (14.8%) used health services.
  - One in nine (11.5%) used school services.
  - Just over half (53.5%) of 4-17-year-olds using services used both.
- Data for the 95.9% of 4-17-year-olds attending school or another educational institution showed that:
  - A school staff member was among those to suggest that some help for emotional or behavioural problems was needed in two fifths (40.5%) of cases.
  - One in nine (11.5%) students had used a school service for emotional or behavioural problems in the previous 12 months.

**Parent expectations: Identify and refer**

These statistics align with growing parent expectations of schools. According to social research group McCrindle’s *Future of Education 2019 Report* “almost all parents (97%) believe schools should have a holistic focus and play some role in the management of wellbeing.” The report also found that “almost half of parents (46%) believe schools should provide individualised support for wellbeing but refer on to other experts. Similarly Gen Y teachers see themselves as the first line of defence and will then refer on to experts” (Education Future Forum & McCrindle, 2019).

Against this backdrop of a fast-growing wellbeing challenge, and increased pressure on schools

to ‘notice’ emergent individual cases, research has generated a wealth of positive education of wellbeing frameworks.

**Student wellbeing frameworks in Australia**

In Australia there exist a number of wellbeing frameworks with which schools can align, both national (such as the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework and the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth framework) and at the state level (such as The Wellbeing Framework for Schools in NSW and the Student Learning and Wellbeing Framework in Qld). Some independent schools have even developed their own frameworks (St Phillip’s Christian College, n.d.).

While all of the frameworks construct ‘wellbeing’ in their own distinctive terminology or language, many of the core components of these frameworks are actually very similar. For example, in most frameworks, the capacity for students to have resilience and be able to ‘bounce back’ is seen a key facet of healthy wellbeing. Resilience appears in (to name a few):

- The ARACY framework, under Participating (ARACY, n.d.).
- NSW student wellbeing framework, under Emotional Wellbeing.
- SA student wellbeing, under Empowering (Department of Education and Childhood Development, n.d.).
- Panorama Education SEL Framework, under Learning Strategies (Panorama Education, 2019).
- Australian Student Wellbeing Framework, under Participation (Education Council, n.d.).
- ACER Social-Emotional Wellbeing (SEW Survey), under Emotional Skills (ACER, 2018).

Beyond similarities at the level of specific behaviours, Australian wellbeing frameworks share similarities at the domain level. For example, all frameworks identify to

some degree (though often with different labels) cognitive wellbeing (achievement, persistence, grit); emotional wellbeing (resilience, self-awareness); social wellbeing (positive relationships); and physical wellbeing (sleep, health). Some frameworks extend wellbeing into the spiritual domain, although this is not universal. As noted above, these domains (cognitive, emotional, physical, social) are essentially universal insofar as they also appear in the OECD's definition of student wellbeing.

In addition to similarities in their construction, Australian wellbeing frameworks tend to be deployed in very similar ways; that is, Australian schools typically start with data to analyse wellbeing.

### **How data is used to diagnose wellbeing**

Many Australian schools currently collect data to help them understand how their school is faring on the wellbeing front. Surveys are central to this evidence-based approach. For ARACY, surveys allow schools to “share evidence-informed school practices for enhancing student wellbeing.” (ARACY, 2013). For BeYou (which aligns with the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework), surveys “empower all members of the learning community to share their voice about mental health and wellbeing”. Surveys “capture subjective data relating to perceptions and levels of understanding of mental health and wellbeing from the perspective of all learning community members” (Be You, 2019).

### **Annual and anonymous**

Just as most wellbeing frameworks depend on data-collection and analysis, most schools collect wellbeing data in identical ways: through large-scale, anonymous surveys distributed annually.

ACER's Annualised Social-Emotional Wellbeing (SEW) Survey, for example, describes itself as “a confidential strength-based survey for students aged three to 18 years”. The SEW Survey provides schools with information about their student population (whole school, specific year levels or targeted groups), which can be used to direct planning and problem-solving efforts. The survey collects data anonymously and has, depending on year level, between 50 and 76 statements that require a strongly disagree to strongly agree response.

Similarly, the Tell Them From Me (TTFM) survey used by NSW government schools provides “school principals and school leaders with insight into student engagement, wellbeing and effective teaching practices at their school, from the perspective of students ... The survey is offered once a year. The survey has a large number of statements to respond to and normally takes students 20 minutes to complete” (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, 2019).

The Attitudes To School Survey (Victorian Government Schools) is an annual student survey offered

by the Department of Education and Training (Vic) to assist schools in gaining an understanding of students' perceptions and experience of school. The survey contains 52 questions with responses ranging from ‘not at all’ to ‘all the time’.

And finally, BeYou's Educator Survey is “designed to help gather mental health and wellbeing-related perceptions from all educators and staff within the learning community. Responses gathered from educators can be used to highlight what we are doing well, and identify what we can focus on as part of our commitment to continuous improvement. The survey takes approximately 20 minutes to complete and includes 48 questions. The responses are anonymous and only summarised results are used to help us better understand how to improve mental health and wellbeing in our learning community” (Be You, 2020).

### **Limitations of current approach to data collection and analysis**

Large-scale anonymous surveys can provide interesting data. A recent review (Houng et al., 2016) of the Attitudes to School Survey found that “statistically significant coefficients appear sporadically for student motivation, connectedness to peers, a stimulating learning environment, class behaviour, and, surprisingly, student distress.” The authors go on to clarify that “while it is plausible that positive attitudes towards school contribute to student achievement it is also plausible that successful students and their teachers have more positive attitudes to school”.

Across the board, the data collected is both aggregate and anonymised and can give researchers and school leaders some very interesting insights. However, there are some serious limitations to annual, aggregate and anonymous survey approaches:

1. They are a point-in-time annual survey and thus fail to capture wellbeing trends over a school term or year.
2. They are large surveys and subject to survey fatigue.
3. Most importantly, they provide no capability for early intervention, especially at the individual student level.

### **The necessity of early intervention**

As African-American writer Fredrick Douglass put it: “It is easier to build strong children than to fix broken adults.” Douglass's point of view correlates with evidence that, like many conditions, early intervention is key to long term health and minimising impact.

Early intervention is key for student wellbeing as well. Child Family Community Australia's paper on *Defining and delivering effective counselling and psychology* found that “almost all well conducted studies of mainstream counselling interventions have concluded that regardless

of the model used, the average effect size of counselling is substantial and compares well with effect sizes achieved in established medical practice” (Moloney, 2016).

School counsellors and similar-styled programs that provide services for students around wellbeing have been known to not only impact wellbeing but also student success in other areas.

From an academic perspective, the American School Counselor [sic] Association shows that student counsellors (with ratios of 1:250 students) had a significant effect on student attendance, mathematics, writing and verbal scores (Parzych et al., n.d.).

---

### “Annual and anonymous surveys are not helping schools identify specific cases for intervention...”

Finally, the ‘The effectiveness of school-based mental health services for elementary-aged children’ found that “considering serious barriers precluding youth from accessing necessary mental health care, the present meta-analysis suggests child psychiatrists and other mental health professionals are wise to recognize [sic] the important role that school personnel, who are naturally in children’s lives, can play in decreasing child mental health problems” (Sanchez et al., 2017).

Annual and anonymous surveys are not helping schools identify specific cases for intervention, so what is the alternative?

#### Addressing the challenge

Most modern solutions have been incremental improvements on large-scale paper-based surveys. Improvement in technology and usability open the door to the use of digital Pulse surveys as the new approach to collecting and acting on wellbeing data in schools.

#### How can it be done better?

A key barrier to facilitating behaviour change and performance improvement is complexity. If the process of change is too complicated or too hard, people disengage. Pulse check-ins overcome this challenge by:

- Frequently collecting small bits of data as opposed to large annual surveys.
- Utilising artificial intelligence (AI) to prioritise the data capture of the most important areas at that particular time.
- Enabling students and staff who are experiencing immediate wellbeing challenges to seek help.

Pulse check-ins help schools transform:

- From measuring to monitoring.
- From intuitive to evidenced based decision-making.

- From out-of-date to up-to-date approaches and methods.
- From tunnel-vision to full-field perspective.
- From insight to action.

Leaders of schools and school networks need to make decisions about how to improve all aspects of their schools. However, the information they currently have at their disposal is limited in that it is aggregate, anonymous and quickly out-of-date due to the emphasis on annual data collection.

By combining real-time, predictive indicators of a school’s culture with predictive analytics, Pulse check-ins enables leaders to act quickly and frequently to enhance wellbeing. It gives leaders an understanding of what it’s actually like being in their school: simultaneously building a comprehensive picture of the school’s organisational health and providing increased capability to intervene to address wellbeing issues as early as possible.

#### Educator Impact (EI)

EI Pulse is an application that collects weekly wellbeing and engagement inputs from students, teachers, staff, and leaders. Its real-time insights provide guidance on immediate next steps, and helps leaders act before major issues emerge. Designed principally for action, not research, user-friendly dashboards provide leadership with actionable insights in as little as a week.

#### What sort of data does EI Pulse collect?

Data is collected in the following areas:

- Student engagement and wellbeing.
- Staff engagement and wellbeing.
- Work environment.
- School values and vision.
- Leadership and style.
- Community engagement.
- Teaching and learning.

#### How it works

Pulse can gather data from every stakeholder in the school: students, teachers, parents and non-teaching staff. Pulse check-ins can be completed in less than 60 seconds.

1. Once a week participants are prompted to answer 5 questions using the school Pulse app.
2. Students that need help can use the check-in to reach out.
3. Each week the questions change so many data points can be captured over time.
4. A unique picture of the school’s health begins to emerge.
5. Every week new data provides a ‘school health’ picture over time.

## What does this mean for schools?

Leaders of schools and school networks obtain an unprecedented insight into their schools: they get to see what it's actually like to be a student/teachers/staff member/leader/parent at the school. More specifically, leaders will get visibility of leading indicators of future cultural, wellbeing or organisational health issues.

## Conclusion

There is international recognition that student wellbeing is fundamental to student outcomes. However, evidence shows that a significant and growing number of students are struggling with their wellbeing and turning to schools (rather than friends and family) for help.

Independent of the particular wellbeing framework adopted, current approaches to measuring wellbeing are

limited. Because data collection tends to be conducted via aggregate, annual and anonymous surveys, school leaders have little insight into wellbeing issues as they emerge, and no way of using data to assist with early interventions. This is problematic because evidence tells us that early interventions by schools through counsellors or other targeted programs are directly correlated with improved student wellbeing.

EI Pulse helps schools improve wellbeing by enhancing data collection and analysis, empowering students (and staff) to ask for help, and enabling early, targeted intervention. At the time of publication, EI Pulse is being used by tens of thousands of students in schools that have adopted Pulse around the globe. ▲



---

## REFERENCES

- ACER. (2018). Social-Emotional Wellbeing Survey. Retrieved from: [https://www.acer.org/files/SEW\\_A4\\_Brochure\\_2018v3.pdf](https://www.acer.org/files/SEW_A4_Brochure_2018v3.pdf)
- ARACY. (n.d.). The nest in action - Australian research alliance for children and youth (ARACY). Retrieved from <https://www.aracy.org.au/the-nest-in-action/the-nest-in-action>
- ARACY. (2013). The student wellbeing action network symposium - Australian research alliance for children and youth (ARACY). Retrieved from: <https://www.aracy.org.au/events/event/the-student-wellbeing-action-network-symposium>
- Australian Psychological Society. (2016). The framework for effective delivery of school psychology services: a practice guide for psychologists and school leaders APS professional practice. Retrieved from: <https://www.psychology.org.au/getmedia/249a7a14-c43e-4add-aa6b-decfea6e810d/Framework-schools-psychologists-leaders.pdf>
- Be You. (2019). Be You. Retrieved from: <https://beyou.edu.au/>
- Be You. (2020). Be You surveys - Be You. Retrieved from: <https://beyou.edu.au/planning-and-implementation-tools/be-you-surveys>
- Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation. (2019). Student survey. NSW Government. Retrieved from: <https://surveys.cese.nsw.gov.au/ttfm-surveys/student-survey>
- Department of Education and Childhood Development. (n.d.). Wellbeing and learning for life: a framework for building resilience and wellbeing in children and young people. Government of Australia. Retrieved from: [https://www.education.sa.gov.au/sites/default/files/wellbeing-for-learning-and-life-framework.pdf?acsf\\_files\\_redirect](https://www.education.sa.gov.au/sites/default/files/wellbeing-for-learning-and-life-framework.pdf?acsf_files_redirect)
- Education Council. (n.d.). Australian student wellbeing framework.
- Education Future Forum, & McCrindle. (2019). The future of education. Retrieved from: <https://www.teachermagazine.com.au/articles/research-files-episode-49-survey-data-to-inform-student-wellbeing-planning>
- Fieldes, J. (2019, February 7). The research files episode 49: survey data to inform student wellbeing planning (interview by J. Earp). Retrieved from: <https://www.teachermagazine.com.au/articles/research-files-episode-49-survey-data-to-inform-student-wellbeing-planning>
- Green, H., McGinnity, A., Meltzer, H., Ford, T., & Goodman, R. (2004). Mental Health of Children and Young People in Great Britain, 2004. Psychextra dataset. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1037/e557702010-001>
- Houng, B., Justman, M., & Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic And Social Research. (2016). Student and staff attitudes and school performance. Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research. Retrieved from: [https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/downloads/working\\_paper\\_series/wp2016n26.pdf](https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/downloads/working_paper_series/wp2016n26.pdf)
- Howell, A. J. (2009). Flourishing: Achievement-related correlates of students' well-being. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 4(1), 1-13. Taylor & Francis Online. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760802043459>
- Kessler, R. C., Berglund, P., Demler, O., Jin, R., Merikangas, K. R., & Walters, E. E. (2005). Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 62(6), 593. National Library of Medicine. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1001/archpsyc.62.6.593>
- Kids Help Line. (2019, February 26). What to do if you're being bullied. Kids Helpline. Retrieved from: <https://kidshelpline.com.au/teens/issues/bullying>
- Moloney, L. (2016). Defining and delivering effective counselling and psychotherapy. Retrieved from: <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/sites/default/files/cfca38-effective-counselling.pdf>
- OECD. (2017). Student's well-being: What is it and how can it be measured. OECD iLibrary. Retrieved from: [https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/pisa-2015-results-volume-iii/students-well-being-what-it-is-and-how-it-can-be-measured\\_9789264273856-6-en#page1](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/pisa-2015-results-volume-iii/students-well-being-what-it-is-and-how-it-can-be-measured_9789264273856-6-en#page1)
- Panorama Education. (2019). Social emotional learning. Panorama Education. Retrieved from: <https://www.panoramaed.com/social-emotional-learning-sel>
- Parzych, J. L., Donohue, P., Gaesser, A., & Chiu, M. M. (n.d.). Impact of school-counsellor-to-student ratios on student outcomes. Retrieved from: <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/school-counselors/careers-roles/effectiveness-of-school-counseling>
- Sanchez, A. L., Cornacchio, D., Poznanski, B., Golik, A. M., Chou, T., & Comer, J. S. (2018). The effectiveness of school-based mental health services for elementary-aged children: A meta-analysis. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 57(3), 153-165. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2017.11.022>
- St Philip's Christian College Cessnock. (n.d.). Wellbeing - Cessnock. St Philip's Christian College. Retrieved from <https://www.spcc.nsw.edu.au/cessnock/our-community/wellbeing>
- The Children's Society. (2008). The good childhood inquiry: Health research evidence. The Children's Society.
- UWA. (2017). Study links mental health to poor school results. University of Western Australia. University News. Retrieved from: <https://www.news.uwa.edu.au/2017121810236/study-links-mental-health-poor-school-results>
- World Health Organisation. (2003). Caring for children and adolescents with mental disorders: Setting WHO directions. Retrieved from: [https://www.who.int/mental\\_health/media/en/785.pdf](https://www.who.int/mental_health/media/en/785.pdf)

## **inAlliance**

### **The official magazine Alliance of Girls' Schools Australasia**

#### **Managing Editor**

Loren Bridge, Executive Officer  
(e) [loren.bridge@agsa.org.au](mailto:loren.bridge@agsa.org.au)  
(m) +61 408 842 445

#### **President**

Marise McConaghy, Strathcona  
Girls Grammar, VIC

#### **Vice President**

Jacqueline Barron, St Hilda's  
Collegiate School, NZ

#### **Treasurer**

Dr Toni Meath, Melbourne Girls  
Grammar, VIC

#### **Directors**

Julia Davidson, Wellington Girls'  
College, NZ

Dr Kate Hadwen, Pymble Ladies'  
College, NSW

Susan Middlebrook, Tara Anglican  
School for Girls, NSW

Fiona Nolan, Mount Carmel  
College, TAS

Dr Marie Perry, Methodist Ladies'  
College, WA

Julia Shea, St Peter's Girls'  
School, SA

#### **Alliance Patrons**

Elizabeth Broderick AO  
Dame Jenny Shipley DNZM  
Gail Kelly  
Erica McWilliam

**ISSN 2203-4323**

**Vol. 62: 2020**

---

#### **Contact the Alliance of Girls' Schools Australasia**

PO Box 139  
Tugun Queensland 4224  
Australia

Telephone +61 7 5521 0749

Email [agsa@agsa.org.au](mailto:agsa@agsa.org.au)

**[www.agsa.org.au](http://www.agsa.org.au)**



Alliance of  
Girls' Schools  
Australasia

The Alliance of Girls' Schools Australasia is a not for profit organisation which advocates for and supports the distinctive work of girls' schools in their provision of unparalleled opportunities for girls.





Alliance of  
Girls' Schools  
Australasia



**Volume no. 62**

**[www.agsa.org.au](http://www.agsa.org.au)**