

The future of schools beyond Covid-19





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Executive Summary

This report shares the collective learning experiences of speakers and participants during the European Schoolnet webinar series *“The impact of Covid-19 on schools”*. This report focuses on the webinars that run between November 2020 and March 2021. It aims to foster a discussion about how the future of school education beyond Covid-19 could and should look like. The focus topics of the report are digital infrastructure, the role of students and parents, digital inequalities, well-being online and fake news around Covid-19, school leadership and the future of education beyond Covid-19. The first webinar in March 2020 already highlighted how many teachers immediately rose to the

challenge when schools had to close due to Covid-19. Some key enablers emerged from the webinar series, notably effective school leadership, a strong connection with communities within and outside of school and support for those at risk of being left behind. One key lesson learnt from the webinar series was that each school and teacher is different and that there are no *“one size fits all”* solutions. Each school had a different starting point in March 2020 and coped differently with the task of organizing remote and blended teaching. Therefore, they also have different needs and visions on how to move forward towards a better school education beyond Covid-19.



Introduction

This report captures the moments of collective learning that took place during the European Schoolnet webinar series *"The impact of Covid-19 on schools"*. This report focuses on the webinars that run between November 2020 and March 2021. Twenty-six speakers from 15 countries¹ discussed their research and insights from policy making during monthly webinars with invited participants. The report focuses on six key topics, as suggested either by webinar participants or speakers, as relevant research evidence became available. These topics are digital infrastructure, the role of students and parents, digital inequalities, well-being online and fake news around Covid-19, school leadership and the future of education beyond Covid-19. While this report summarizes the rich discussions of the webinar series, it is not a systematic overview of the impact of Covid-19 on schools across Europe. Rather, it captures contributions from webinar speakers and participants.

"We are sitting at the end of the roof and we are drunk."

Rumi

The webinar series was initiated in order to provide an open space, as the pandemic unfolded, to exchange about immediate challenges and possible solutions between policy makers and researchers, and also to start developing a vision of the future of school education together. The context and spirit of the webinars was captured by webinar speaker Koen Marichal, Antwerp Management school, Belgium who quoted 13th century Persian poet and Islamic scholar Rumi to illustrate how actors in school education are still in crisis mode. In such a situation they even more need opportunities to, as Koen noted, *"sit together and ask each other how they are feeling, and what they are noticing in order to create a bigger sense of what is happening and to foster collective learning moments."* To enable fruitful exchanges and provide opportunities for all to speak, between 15 and 40 participants joined each invitation-

"Everyone has a steep learning curve. Everyone is forced to learn quickly."

Webinar participant

¹ Australia, Belgium, Denmark, France, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Ireland, Estonia, Netherlands, Spain, Serbia, Sweden, UK (England)

only webinar. Most were policy makers and researchers but regional inspectors, school heads and teachers were also represented. Some webinars discussed concrete initiatives at national, regional or local level, while others focused on new research evidence.

"The average used in surveys is a very poor way to describe what happened during the pandemic."

**Patricia Wastiau,
European Schoolnet**

The outbreak of Covid-19 changed schools almost overnight. There was suddenly a lot of uncertainty around the question of how to deliver school education. This new situation created a huge challenge for all actors involved. During the first webinar on 18 March 2020, participants from 18 ministries of education described the immediate challenges

faced: how to provide schools and homes with adequate digital infrastructure, digital content and learning platforms and support.

This first webinar in March 2020 already highlighted how many teachers immediately rose to the challenge, quickly organizing themselves to teach at a distance and supporting each other in communities sharing advice, links and resources. Two thirds of teachers were in fact ready to move to online and blended learning even though they had to switch quickly and with little support (Howard, S. K., Tondeur, J. et al, 2020).

Not all teachers and schools, however, faced the challenges in the same way and different schools needed different support, as Patricia Wastiau observed. As of March 2020, many focused on organizing schooling to minimize

"What we first need is a clear vision about education and pedagogy. Now is the time for schools to think about their vision."

**Jo Tondeur, Vrije Universiteit
Brussels**

negative impacts on students' learning and well-being, and, indeed, the school year 2021-2022 is also unlikely to be "business as usual". Nonetheless, it is time to reflect more deeply on what school education should look like beyond Covid-19. The new situation created by the virus has put a lot of pressure on schools but has also opened a window of opportunity to create a new vision of the school of the future together.

It is now that schools need to reflect about what they learnt and how to move on, which will be different for each school and teacher, said Sarah Howard. Many schools and teachers are keen to understand how to move forward by integrating new learning practices - which can become part of a bigger vision, she added.

This report shares the collective learning experiences of speakers and participants during the European Schoolnet webinar series. It aims to foster a discussion about how the future of school education beyond Covid-19

could and should look like. The report invites the reader to reflect on which changes in teaching and learning due to Covid-19 they would like to keep and which ones not. This report comes also with an invitation to take up

Koen Marichal's advice to ask other actors in education what they are noticing in order to create together a bigger sense of what is happening and to build a strong vision of school education of the future. The time to reflect on and discuss this vision is now!

"Change and innovation need to happen now, otherwise people start to settle in and we lose the momentum."

**Sarah Howard, University
of Wollongong**

How teaching during Covid-19 put digital infrastructures to the test

Webinar speakers November 2020



Aivar Hiio

Education and Youth Authority
([Harno](#)), Estonia



Claire Kramme

Meaningful Impact, on
behalf of the [King Baudouin
Foundation](#)



Karen Triquet

Department of Educational
Sciences, [Vrije Universiteit
Brussel \(VUB\)](#), Belgium



Jaakko Vuorio

Finnish National Agency for
Education ([EDUEI](#))

With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, many teachers started using new digital platforms and tools from one day to the next, sometimes making use of a number of temporary free offers provided by companies and/or temporarily agreed upon by educational ministries and continuity measures. As in many other areas, the outbreak of Covid-19 exposed issues related to digital infrastructure that existed prior to

the crisis. Speakers at this webinar discussed whether schools and homes had sufficient digital infrastructure, and how to support schools.

"A lot of schools did not even know what equipment was available at school, and what was available at home, so data is key."

Karen Triquet

Schools' digital infrastructure during the Covid-19 crisis

Across Europe, schools' digital infrastructure to meet the demands of emergency remote education varied. Overall, countries such as Finland and Estonia seemed to fare better than others. However, large disparities between and even within schools within countries emerged as a common factor across countries. In Estonia for example, large city schools coped better with the new situation than small schools on the islands. In Finland, new school buildings were better equipped than old ones. In Belgium, schools in Flanders were generally better equipped than those in Wallonia and Brussels and secondary schools were generally better equipped (and e.g. supported by an ICT coordinator) than primary schools. For many schools for example in Belgium, instant messaging services such as WhatsApp, Teams, Discord, Smartschool(BE), but also email, telephone and simple door to door physical visits proved crucial for maintaining communication between teachers, parents and students (Carretero, S. et al., 2021). One issue that emerged in Finland was that only around half of the teachers had work phones for personal use ([Finnish National Agency for Education](#), 2020).

Most Estonian schools use private solutions, with almost all students in the country registered to a local privately run learning diary system like eKool or Studium that have been used to facilitate communication between teachers, parents and students for years. Referring to the platforms used to manage everyday learning activities, most schools categorize themselves as either Google



or Microsoft schools. In countries across Europe such as Belgium, there was a visible growth in these private solutions (e.g. Microsoft and Google Classroom) but equally a collaborative effort of actors to ensure continuity at ministerial networks managed by Ministerial departments (e.g. [Klascement](#)), companies (for and not-for profit) and school level to provide more technologies to schools. One common challenge identified by webinar speakers was that

students at some schools were asked to use several digital platforms, depending on teachers' individual preferences or skills and comfort. This proved at times confusing and chaotic for students and staff alike. Schools with strong leadership were more likely to take a joint decision on which digital tools to use (see section "[School leadership in times of Covid-19](#)"). In general, schools with existing and comprehensive digital education plans and visions fared better.

Students' access to devices at home during the Covid-19 crisis

For students' distance learning, their digital equipment at home was also a key determinant of continuity. Aivar Hiio quoted figures from a [Telia study](#) which surveyed 7,017 students in seven Baltic and Nordic countries² about their experiences during lockdown in spring 2020. According to the study, 92% of students had access to a device at home. At 67%³ Finland had the highest percentage of students satisfied with their experience of digital studying from home. In Belgium, "we saw both examples of the first and second digital divide between and within homes and regions", Karen Triquet explained. This meant that divides were visible both in respects of connectivity and hardware/software, as well as with respects to digital skills to make use of the materials to learn, or in the case of parents to support their child/ren (Mariën et al., 2020; Carretero, S. et al., 2021). Research shows that in Belgium schools that could rely on existing networks with actors within and beyond school (e.g. peer-to-peer networks, and longer standing school networks amongst leadership levels and ICT coordinators), were more efficient in being aware of and identifying gaps in students' equipment and working towards closing them. The ability to exchange information on students' presence in online courses and emerging challenges faced amongst peers, as well as collecting updated information reported on student realities at home through a school help desk function and/or amongst leadership, enabled greater response towards at-risk students, e.g. through requests to Digital for Youth laptop provisions (#Generation2020, 2020; Teach for Belgium, 2020a; Teach for Belgium, 2020b; OECD, 2020; Wallonie-Bruxelles Enseignement, 2020).

Aivar Hiio argued that schools are best placed to make decisions about their digital infrastructure for use throughout the school and should

be supported with the best possible information about what is available on the market in Estonia. He also stressed that ultimately student success did not depend on technology only: schools that fostered pedagogical approaches favoring students' and teachers' independence while working together using school wide tools fared best. This too was the case for Belgium. Teachers that had experience with technology, and more so technological pedagogical competence were more confident in their ability to pivot online. Moreover, in cases where teachers were not, absenteeism was also noted as a result, with students having reported certain teachers being absent during their online lessons. In cases where skills were varied, teacher teams (combining experienced and less experienced), as well as merely distributing the workload (one teacher recreating content and another delivering it) proved valuable and a way to diminish the barrier of uptake for more resistant peers. For Karen Triquet, training both for teachers and school leaders is key. Online professional development opportunities increased during the period of distance learning as well teachers' collaboration (Mineapic, A., 2020), in creating materials for lessons together, she added.

Students in Estonia that felt that distance education was not a big deal often already had experienced it. Some schools had previously organized such learning experiences for a few days, one day a month for example. Research in Finland showed that students with more positive opinions of experiencing distance education during the pandemic had generally been contacted more often by their school and received more real-time (synchronous) teaching during that period ([Finnish National Agency for Education](#), 2020).

"Our vision is for schools to take the lead in deciding what digital tools get funding."

Aivar Hiio

"We want independent schools that are more problem focused."

Aivar Hiio

² Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Norway, Sweden

³ Students that were satisfied with their experience: 60% in Estonia, 57% in Norway, 54% in Lithuania, 49% in Latvia and 45% in Sweden, 41% in Denmark

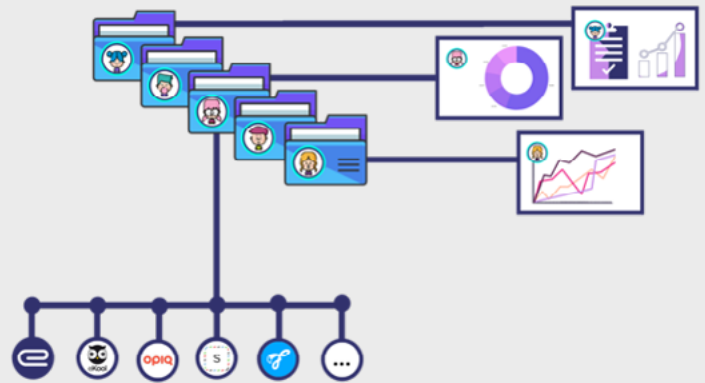
National plan to personalize student learning in Estonia

"We have now understood that without the help of technology it is simply beyond human capabilities to properly personalize learning for a big number of students."

Aivar Hiio

In Estonia, ambitious plans to personalize students' learning existed already prior to Covid-19. However, in the light of this new situation, a need for more personalized learning became even more apparent. The national education plan for 2035 sets out national goals. One is for education to become learner-centered and autonomy driven, so that students can set personal goals and plan activities. The plan is to set up a personalised learning path infrastructure that brings together data from different institutions, using the same infrastructure foundations for schools already in use for most public services (see figures 1 & 2). A lot of learning materials already exist, but they are often teacher focused, and need guidance to be used. The vision is to move towards small learning goals with corresponding material that students can use independently to reach goals they set for themselves. The system will suggest new learning materials to students, based on their previous performance.

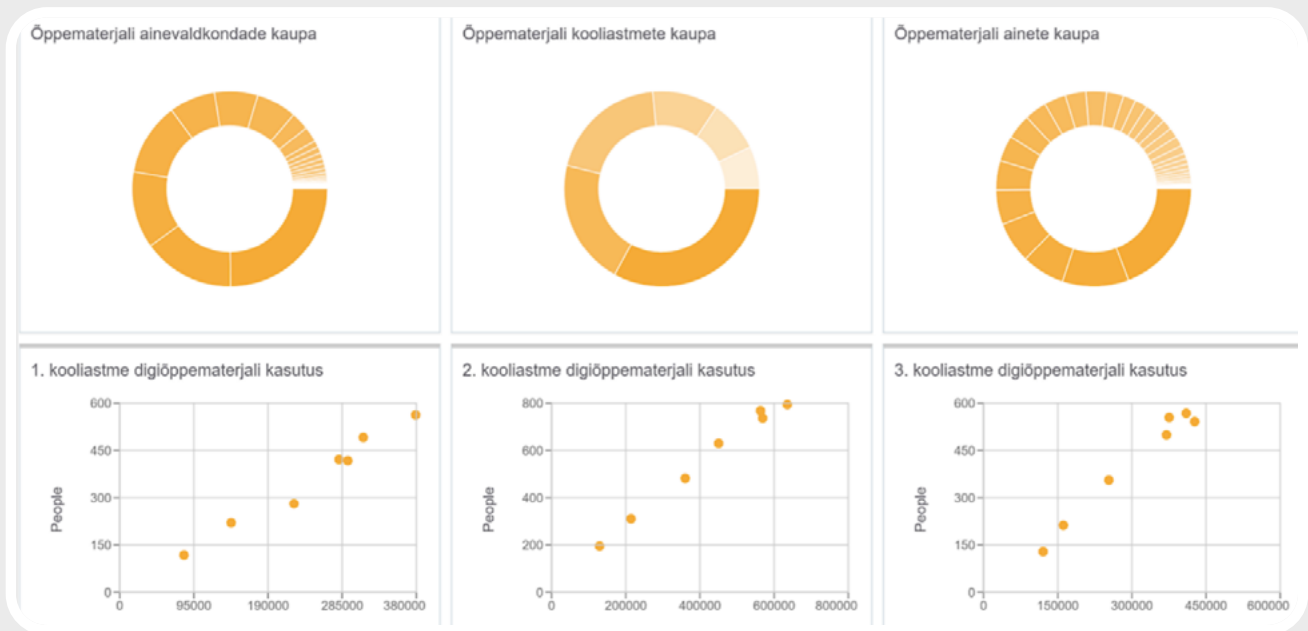
Figure 1: Estonia's plans for a learning platform



"The system we are trying to build is very trust centered. If there is not enough trust, schools, teachers, parents and students will not agree to provide their data."

Aivar Hiio

Figure 2: Estonia's plans for a learning platform



Setting up this system is a process that will take some time. The current focus is on bringing all stakeholders together to establish a common understanding of processes and to ensure that data privacy is respected. Another key aspect is to understand that a more personal approach to learning rests on the ability of students to work more independently, which in turn requires them to be more aware of their own mental state and be able to work on it, if need be. This suggests that in the initial stages of creating the infrastructure it might benefit from connecting to environments like [Clanbeat](#), which helps

students to be more aware of their emotions. A personalised learning model will make one device per student policy as a norm necessary for the first time since any gaps in the data collected might lead to making misguided suggestions to students on what to do next. Ideally, other countries would create similar processes and use similar standardization and interoperability approaches as Estonia because the country is too small to provide the multitude of necessary elements to provide maximum benefit to students.

How Covid-19 changed teaching: Voices from webinar participants

Teaching and learning was chaotic at first, but gradually became more structured, said Portuguese teacher Eduarda Maria dos Anjos Carvalho. New ways of teaching became *“less of an emergency response and more of a new tool in the box,”* her teacher colleague Luis Costa added. Faced with this new situation people showed more comprehension and compassion for others around them, according to Elisabete da Cruz Coelho Gonçalves, Ministry of Education and Science, Portugal.

In Ireland, remote learning has led to a massive upskilling across the education sector in the use of online platforms, explained Suzie Manton, PDST, Ireland. Teachers got better at teaching with digital tools and diversified their teaching to attract students' interest, commented Portuguese teacher Marta Sá. Teachers had to rethink their teaching strategy to improve assessment and to promote student autonomy in learning, her teacher colleague Carla Corga noted. Ana Catarina Gomes

Lage Ladeira Simão, another teacher from Portugal, observed that while some of her students were autonomous and more organized than she had expected, others were lost. She found that some students showed resilience and made a real effort to continue learning despite a lack of social contacts, good digital resources and a stable internet connection.

Several webinar participants said that the new teaching situation due to Covid-19 made already existing shortcomings in education more apparent. *“The new situation has highlighted the disadvantage learning gap and the need to reflect on methodologies being used to achieve learning targets,”* Suzie Manton, PDST, Ireland, observed. Teachers have become more aware of students' individual needs and the lack of equity in education, reflected Janey Ramos Gregório, Regional Directorate of Education of the Autonomous Region of the Azores, Portugal.

“I had the possibility to network with IT colleagues at different levels to really reflect on what digital and traditional pedagogy really means.”

Andrew Lyons, European School Munich, Germany

“The pandemic has highlighted the importance of schools also fostering students' social and personal skills.”

Lucia Schilter, Deputy Head teacher, Italy

How learning changed for students and their parents

Webinar speakers December 2020



Ilona Goessens
PO-Raad, Netherlands



Roberth Olofsson
Swedish National Agency for
Education, Sweden



Silvia Panzavolta
INDIRE, Italy



Letizia Cinganotto
INDIRE, Italy

"Families built this bridge between schools and students."

Letizia Cinganotto,
Italy

The outbreak of Covid-19 changed many things for students and their parents. Both the lockdown and move to blended learning meant that parents and students had to organize themselves differently. How did they manage,

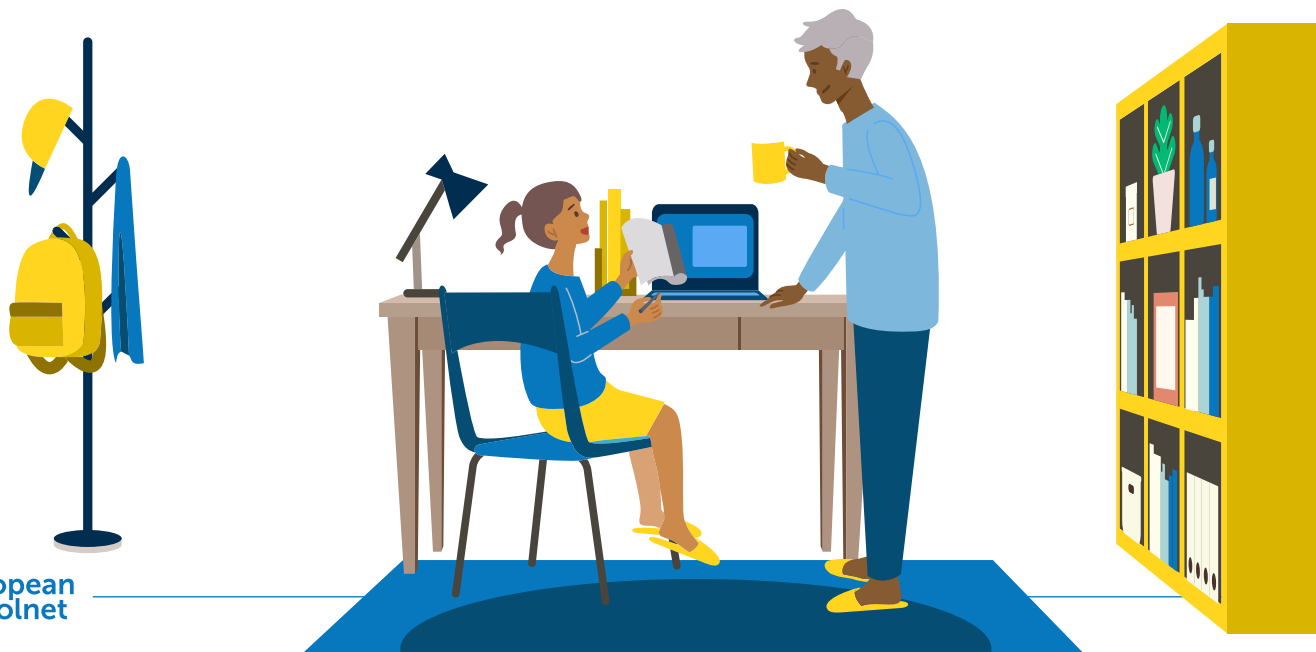
and which of these experiences can be taken forward for the future? Research from Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden presented during the webinar shed some light on new roles of students and parents during the first lockdown. All three reports highlighted how diverse the experience of distance and hybrid education was for teachers, parents and students alike.

How remote teaching was organized during the first lockdown

INDIRE published the report [Indagine tra i docenti italiani. Pratiche didattiche durante il lockdown](#) (Survey among Italian teachers. Didactic practices during the lockdown) on how teaching was organised during the lockdown, based on 3774 replies⁴ from teachers. According to the report, during the lockdown in spring 2020 the majority of teachers organized activities addressed to the whole class (e.g. video conferences). There was less group work and individual activities. It emerged that teachers mainly tried

to replicate the "frontal lesson approach" in online lectures and that online sharing environments were used primarily as repositories rather than as collaboration spaces. However, data from the same research also points to improvements on several soft skills, such as collaboration and self-regulation during distance learning, in particular for secondary school students. Popular activities to engage students more actively in their learning were group activities, short discussions or student presentations and practical exercises. Among the

⁴ 10% pre-primary school teachers; 29,8% primary school teachers; 21,8% lower secondary school teachers; 38,4% upper secondary school teachers.



different tools used during the lockdown, Whatsapp turned out to be most popular, together with the electronic register, e-mails and Google Suite. This resulted in a combination of formal and informal learning and teaching modes adopted by the majority of the teachers especially during emergency remote teaching (INDIRE, 2020).

For the report [Monitor hybride onderwijs](#)⁵ (Hybrid education monitor) published by PO-raad and Kennisnet, 195 Dutch

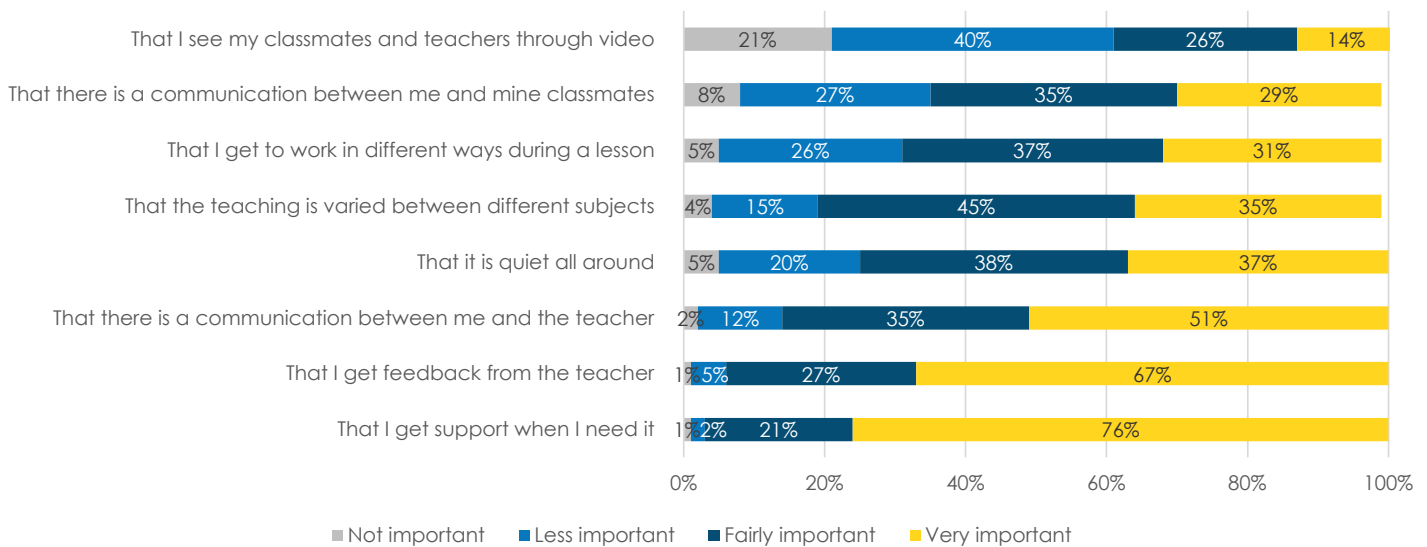
primary schools⁶ were surveyed between June 2020 and January 2021 about their experiences with hybrid education. From mid-March to June 2020, teachers expected their students to spend an average of 3.1 hours on distance learning activities during school days. Teachers estimated that they spent an average of 7.6 hours per school day on education, of which an average of 2.6 hours was spent online with their students.

How students experienced distance learning

The Swedish National Agency for Education, in collaboration with Sweden's student unions, surveyed students on their experiences of learning during the lockdown. [Results](#) point to what students find important for their learning, even though they have to be taken with some caution, as the response rate was only 13.4% (7,937 students responding). The study asked how important various activities were for students for them to be able to concentrate in distance lessons. 76% of the surveyed students considered "to get support when I need

it" very important, and 67% "that there is a communication between me and the teacher". As many as 50% of students stated that they felt worse as a result of the rapid change from physical to digital distance learning. In many cases, students stated that it was because they felt that they were missing clarity about what is expected of them or because they found it difficult to meet the expectations (Sveriges Elevkårer, 2020).

Figure 3: Students' opinions of different teaching and learning activities in Sweden



Students' motivation to learn from home was overall quite strong in all age groups in the survey of Dutch primary students presented in the Dutch report (Smeets, 2020). Some benefited from home learning as they thought that they learnt better and enjoyed a quiet place to study. However, there were marked differences between students in all classes. While some really liked the experience, others did not like it at all and 62% agreed that they would like to continue doing exercises from home via their computer in the future (Smeets, 2020)⁷.

Teachers in Italy found that their students' autonomy had increased and that they were overall quite engaged and motivated during distance education. However, students also missed interacting with peers and teachers and found it more difficult to get support from both (INDIRE, 2020). At all education levels in Italy, some students were excluded from distance education because of lack of equipment or for socioeconomic reasons (INDIRE, 2020) (see also section "[Covid-19 amplified digital inequalities](#)").

⁵ A [first version of this report](#) was published in November 2020 and an [updated version](#) of the same report in April 2021. This paper mainly refers to the first version, as presented by Ilona Goossens during the webinar.

⁶ 206 school heads and ICT coordinators, 1188 teachers, 4747 parents, and 3172 students participated to surveys

⁷ Followed by "work on week tasks" and "doing exercises found via the computer" which 47% of students want to continue doing from home, working on presentations (39%), working together with other children (30%), and getting extra help or explanations from the teacher and asking questions via the computer and getting answers (both 23%).

How parents supported their children's distance learning

Silvia Panzavolta presented preliminary results for Italy from the [Survey data on the impact of Covid-19 on parental engagement across 23 countries](#). (Osorio-Saez, E.M., Panzavolta, S. et al. (2021). 4,600 parents and carers, most of them mothers, from 23 countries responded to a survey investigating ways in which parents and carers were building capacity to engage with their children's learning during the lockdown in spring 2020. According to the survey, 56% of parents⁸ spent between 11 and 20 hours every week to support their child.

One in three parents in Italy did not receive any plans or guidance from their child's school. Those who did received guidance did so on a daily or weekly basis. Checking and implementing the plans with learning activities they received was reported to be a challenge for parents.

Almost half of the parents surveyed implemented their own ideas. Most either had to invent something⁹ or to merge their own ideas with lesson plans issued by schools. Results from this report are similar to those in the Dutch report Monitor [hybride onderwijs](#) according to Ilona Goessens, who said that parents in the Netherlands helped their students three to four times a week¹⁰. They checked if schoolwork was finished, provided explanations, followed progress and worked with their child. There were again big

"Schools should help parents in supporting their children's learning."

Ilona Goessens

differences between students about how much help they received from their parents.

For Silvia Panzavolta one conclusion from the study she presented was that parents needed coaching to support their children's learning. Dedicated courses could help them with technical skills and more cultural requirements. Ilona Goessens agreed: *"Schools should support parents helping their children by providing structured programs, contact and information."* Karen Triquet, Vrije Universiteit (see section ["How teaching during Covid-19 put digital infrastructures to the test"](#)) highlighted an interesting idea: children in a project could use a *"take a break" card to remind their parents to relax and thereby support their parents. One positive outcome in the Netherlands was that parents saw how their children learnt and progressed and had more respect for learning and schools as learning spaces.* *"There is a new collaboration between parents and schools which will hopefully last,"* said Ilona Goessens.



⁸ 29% of parents spent less than 10 hours per week to support their child, 11% between 20 and 30 hours and 4% more than 30 hours.

⁹ How often did you do these activities? Following my ideas on what my son/daughter should learn: 17% always, 31% very often, 26% occasionally, 16% rarely, 9% never.

¹⁰ Parents gave extra work or extra practice tools once a week, helped judging information online, searched together for information, helped with computer programs and talked with their children about online safety.

Covid-19 amplified digital inequalities

Webinar speaker December 2020



Ellen Helsper

Professor of Digital Inequalities in the Department of Media and Communications at the [London School of Economics](#)

"In Finland the estimate is that we had 4000 students that we could not reach anymore after school closures so we did not know where they were. We have to invest heavily in care and psycho-social support for children and get an overview of what long-lasting problems school closures possibly have created."

Jaakko Vuorio, Finland

Many policy makers are concerned that the Covid-19 crisis and the move to remote and blended teaching for several months affected those already struggling with learning more profoundly. Looking at research evidence, this

webinar aimed to understand more concretely who is most in need of support in these unprecedented learning circumstances, and what kind of support.

Existing inequalities prior to Covid-19

Ellen Helsper began her presentation at this webinar by saying that there are big differences in the educational outcomes of young people: for those in the lowest parental income category 12-13% of learning outcomes are negative, while for the highest 20% only 4% are. This was an outcome of the project: [DISTO - Digital Skills to Tangible Outcomes](#) (van Deursen, Helsper, & Eynon, 2014). Further, she said, what needs to be recognized is that, far from being digital natives, half of young people do not have any technical skills at high level.

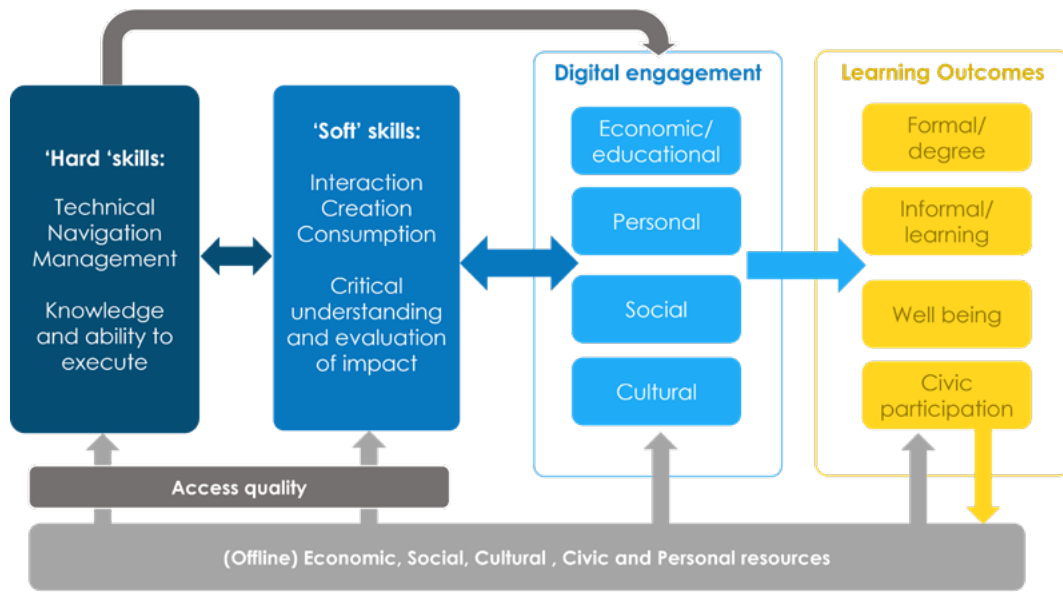
Technology and education do not exist in a vacuum but are built in a society where people have different resources. Research looks at how different factors systematically relate to differences in the opportunity and ability to use technology, but more importantly to differences in actual

learning outcomes (both in formal and informal learning). Systematic differences between groups indicate that a whole group is put at disadvantage. Amplifications of digital inequalities appear at different levels and access to technology is only one of them. Young people with lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to have high quality access to technology. They might only have a smartphone at home and no laptop.

When young people have access to a digital device, what they can and will do is very different and depends on their circumstances. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds can learn relatively easily skills that are about "button knowledge" (technical functional knowledge), as this can be learnt through experimenting. They may have more difficulty in transferring their knowledge to different digital environments, as they have often less opportunity to experiment than others.



Figure 4: The impact of offline resources on digital skills and learning outcomes in the UK (England)



[Von Deursen, Helsper, Eynon, & Van Dijk, 2017]

“50% of young people do not have any technical skills at a high level. We need to stop thinking that young people are digital natives.”
Ellen Helsper

Other skills necessary to achieve positive educational outcomes such as using and adapting educational platforms according to individual learning needs need to be acquired more formally. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds more often do not have the skills to use educational platforms and tools to make their ideas and voices heard. They do not know how to engage with the content or community in the right way or how to ask questions. Often these skills are still not taught in the curriculum. Many young people do not even know how to do a simple google search, as the [Youth Skills project](#) showed (Helsper et al., 2021).

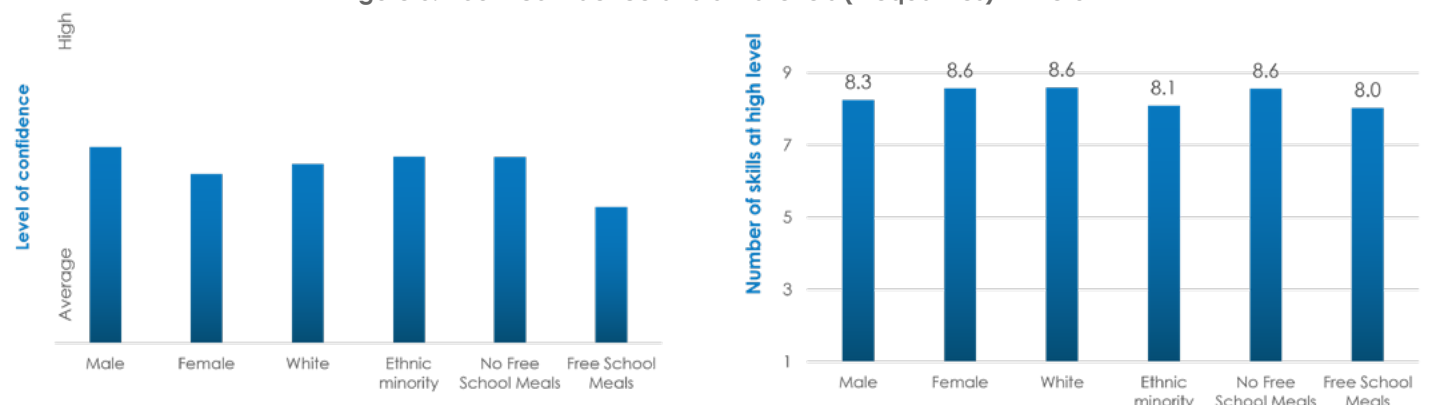
Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds often lack support networks, such as parents helping them learn how to look for information online. Those who live in very homogeneous neighbourhoods are most at risk because of missing support systems and a lack of diversity in skills and experience. More diverse environments such as London enable more interaction between groups and this benefits students from disadvantaged backgrounds, as highlighted by the [DiSTO Networked effects of digital inequalities](#) project. Among those with no history of poverty, there is hardly any difference in skills level between young men and women. Where there is history of poverty, girls have higher levels of skills than boys.

Students with a history of poverty have less confidence

For young internet users (aged 16 to 24) in the UK, there are also differences between confidence and skills, as seen in the project [DiSTO NEETs](#). Young women’s skill levels are on average higher than that of men (8.6 vs. 8.3), but their confidence level is lower. Quite remarkably, students with

a history of poverty (as indicated by being entitled to free school meals) have significantly lower levels of confidence, with differences in actual skills levels being much less prominent (8.6 vs. 8.0).

Figure 5: Youth confidence and skills levels (inequalities) in the UK

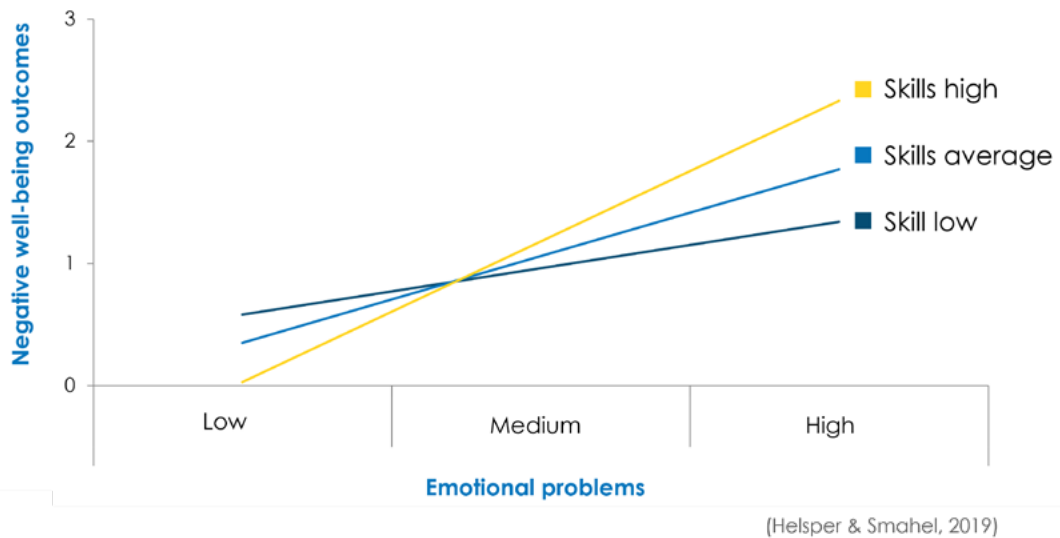


DiSTO NEETs (Helsper & Smirnova, 2016)

Research highlights the importance of social and critical skills but struggles to identify programmes that really work well in teaching these skills. What is clear is that campaigns that focus only on technical skills will not translate into positive learning outcomes. Equally, campaigns that just focus on how great or bad technology is do not get young

people engaged. They should offer a balanced view on technology as this is also the way that young people look at technologies. Importantly, young people from discriminated or psychologically vulnerable groups are much less likely to achieve positive outcomes from using technology, even if they have adequate access and skills to use them.

Figure 6: Relation between emotional problems and negative well-being outcomes (in 25 European countries)



Digital inequalities in times of Covid-19

The general assumption is that during distance education due to Covid-19, students with higher skills were more able to engage with educational content. However, the students at highest risk of experiencing negative learning outcomes were actually those with significant emotional problems and high skill levels. They were more likely to flee into an online world and into negative situations

“Learning is a social situation.”

Ellen Helsper

online without getting support. Young people with emotional problems are generally less able to engage in online live discussions as they are less confident in giving their opinion. Teachers sometimes lose track of them as technologies are designed in a way that makes those who do not speak “disappear”, and these are often young people with emotional problems. It is important that teachers are aware that such processes can happen online.

Moreover, young people with advantaged backgrounds are much more likely to achieve positive informal learning outcomes, for instance about Covid-19. Men are more likely to pursue this positive informal self-learning (van Deursen, Helsper, & Eynon, 2014). Disadvantaged young women in particular are often required to participate more in family

life while boys are allowed to browse online and so learn informally. There is overall still little evidence from research on informal learning.

Since learning is not only taking place in schools, a multi stakeholder approach is needed to support students at risk. Parents need to be engaged in their children’s learning and students whose parents do not have the resources to help need additional support. Organisations such as sports clubs and churches can help. International comparative research highlights the importance of the local context (neighbourhood, infrastructure) for people’s engagement with the community ([DisTO networked effects of digital inequalities: DiSTO Brazil](#)). It is important to consider this local context to determine how best to support schools, students and their parents. Finally, Ellen Helsper concluded, young people need to have positive experiences not just with their teachers but also with other institutions, especially when more of these interactions move online. 50% of young people not in employment or training do not interact with people online who are not part of their close network, 37% trust no one online. These young people are much less likely to engage with formal institutions or government services (Helsper & Smirnova, 2016).

Is Covid-19 just fake news?

Well-being online in times of Covid-19

Webinar speakers January 2021



David Wright
UK Safer Internet Centre,
United Kingdom



Martin Bregenzer
German Safer Internet
Centre, Germany



Billie
BIK Youth ambassador,
Ireland



Joana
BIK Youth ambassador,
Portugal



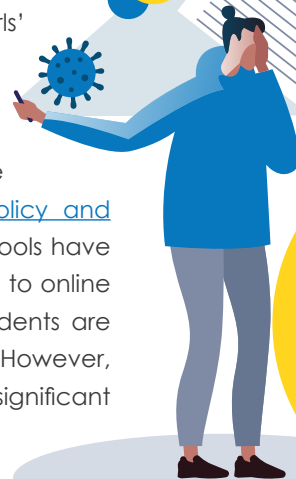
Manahil
BIK Youth ambassador,
Germany

Ministries, regional governments, municipalities and schools face the challenge of how to communicate effectively to families about Covid-19 and restrictions related to it. While some parents and students question the need for restrictions, others are very afraid of the virus. How to reconcile these contrasting views and provide adequate support? David

Wright and Martin Bregenzer from Safer Internet Centres in the UK and Germany discussed these questions together with Better Internet for Kids (BIK) youth ambassadors Adrian, Billie, Joana and Manahil, all aged 15 or 16, from Spain, Ireland, Portugal and Germany.

Concerns around fake news increased during the Covid-19 pandemic

The report [Covid-19: Expectations and effects on children online](#) by David Wright makes the point that the digital effect of Covid-19 was to migrate many physical activities online. The report quotes statistics showing that the [coronavirus is a huge topic in Google searches](#), revealing how Covid-19 is seen around the world. There is a lot of concern about fake news, partly because adults do not necessarily understand how media works, according to David Wright. A [briefing published by Girlguiding](#) quoted in his report, based on a survey of 6,678 girls and young women in May 2020, concluded that the crisis has increased girls' concern about fake news and what information they can trust. For the briefing the UK Safer Internet Centre and other safer internet centres provided guidance on [safe remote learning](#). The recently published [UK Schools Online Safety Policy and Practice Assessment 2021](#) shows that most UK schools have strong policies in place and a consistent response to online safeguarding incidents and helping ensuring students are not exposed to harmful and upsetting content. However, there are some aspects of concern, the most significant being staff training.



"We need to be prepared for the unexpected and prepare our education systems to be able to flexibly change when something in the world happens. In order to change the future, we need to be able to change our education systems with us."

Billie, 16 years old, BIK Youth ambassador, Ireland

Webinar participant Jane McGarrigle shared a video [Explained: What is false information?](#) produced as part of the recently developed digital media literacy programme for teens [Connected](#). The Irish Safer Internet Awareness Centre highlighted the on-going challenge of tackling misinformation and disinformation particularly in

relation to the pandemic and identified a greater need for more resources and education for parents. Joanna added that young people want to get information quickly, so they tend to believe information that they find easily on social media or via a quick search online.

Ways forward beyond Covid-19

The challenge is not only to correctly identify fake news but also to know how to deal with it, as webinar participant Sabrina Vorbau, European Schoolnet, observed. In Portugal, Joana works on initiatives to raise awareness about the need to cross check information and develop young people's critical thinking. For her, learning about media literacy could benefit both students and teachers. Such learning together could be a game changer in developing media literacy skills, she thinks. Manahil from Germany added that it is important to educate teachers and parents as they can educate students and help each other with online navigation.

"The Covid-19 pandemic has stressed the importance of integrating media literacy education in the curriculum"

Sabrina Vorbau, European Schoolnet

School leadership in times of Covid-19 and beyond

Webinar speakers February 2021



Karin Heremans

[GO! Royal Atheneum Antwerp](#),
Belgium



Koen Marichal

Adjunct professor, [Antwerp Management School](#), Belgium



Donal O'Reilly

[National Centre for School Leadership](#), Ireland



Tony Weir

[Department of Education](#),
Ireland

"Successful leadership is about the team, not the person – the person builds the team. A good leadership team builds both the formal and informal leadership roles, reflects on that and is aware of their own and others' skills and areas of improvement. It builds relationships, is inclusive and is committed to continuous professional development."

Donal O'Reilly

What does effective school leadership look like?

One aspect that emerged in the webinar series as a key success factor in navigating the current situation is effective school leadership. Shared leadership that includes all relevant actors formally or informally can increase a school's capacity to cope with the crisis and mobilize energies to cope and innovate. Schools that had decisive leaderships seemed to have fared better during the crisis. Some evidence even suggests that any decision was already better than none. But what does successful leadership look like? And what has the current crisis taught us about effective school leadership?

Karin Heremans highlighted several aspects crucial for successful school leadership such as trust, collaboration, involvement, responsibility, professionalism and orientation towards results. Leadership needs to be shared and authentic. *"It is part of your identity and not a role you take for a few hours a day"*, she suggested. Successful school leadership involves a multifaceted range of management and leadership skills, as Tony Weir emphasized. Koen Marichal added that more externally oriented leadership becomes more important as schools increasingly become part of wider ecosystems. He stressed that school leaders should employ a systematic mindset when looking at their ecosystem and interdependencies.

School leadership in the future will need to be agile to respond to changing circumstances. To that end, Tony Weir suggested that school leaders should also be ready to question the relevance of old educational priorities for the future. For Donal O'Reilly, the goal ultimately is to change the school culture and build a culture of leadership.



Guiding schools through self-evaluation in Ireland

In Ireland, the document [School self-evaluation guidelines 2016 – 2020 post-primary](#) is used to guide both schools' self-evaluation and their external evaluation. It looks at four areas: school leadership leading teaching and learning, managing the organization, leading school development and developing leadership capacity. The idea behind is that schools conducting an annual self-evaluation themselves is more authentic than waiting for an inspector to arrive to tell them what to do. To a large extent, schools decide themselves which areas they want to develop for the next one or two years. Once they have done that, schools are asked to follow a six step cyclical process (see figure 7), using a template. A [website](#) and monthly newsletters are also part of support for schools in this process.

"This has worked quite successfully", noted Tony Weir. Schools like the autonomy of being able to choose what is important for themselves. Now school inspectors come in as advisors on the process, asking questions around the schools' self-evaluation such as why a school picked a particular theme and how information is gathered. Inspectors' engagement with schools as part of the school self-evaluation process helped to emphasise the support role of the Inspectorate in Ireland. It enables a more open discussion around what works and what does not work, where inspectors can point schools in the right direction for further progress. An

additional feature of this process, as explained by webinar participant Barbara Collins, Primary District Inspector at the

Figure 7: The six step cycle (Ireland)



Department of Education and Skills, Ireland, is that schools are encouraged to use this information to appoint leaders. Until recently, leadership positions were appointed by seniority but now they are appointed by open competition.

Schools with a decisive leadership fared better in the crisis

Speakers at the webinar on digital infrastructure in October 2021 had stressed how important school leadership was for schools to successfully organize distance and blended learning. Echoing this view, Claire Kramme said, "We saw major differences in terms of the quality and consistency of the decision-making process that was related to the leadership capacity of the school," (see also section

"[How teaching during Covid-19 put digital infrastructures to the test](#)"). In schools with effective leadership,

teachers were more reassured and willing to try out new tools and learning environments.

It was not at system but at school level where differences in coping with the crisis became most apparent, added Karen Triquet. Especially at the very beginning of the crisis, when little guidance was provided at policy level, schools that knew what to do or were at least decisive had an advantage.

Schools that already had good structures in place welcomed the support offered and used it effectively seemed to get through the early stages of the pandemic easier than those that did not. Irish schools whose school policies (see textbox "[A more unified approach to the choice of digital platform](#)") were seen as living documents "were able to hit the ground running and got a little head start", Donal O'Reilly observed.

"The current crisis has shown us that our school leaders are very adaptive, innovative and quick to react."

Donal O'Reilly

"Many school leaders said that their staff has progressed more digitally than they did in the last 10 years. The emergency situation forced everyone to re-think their priorities, and where this was effectively led by school leaders, it worked very well."

Tony Weir

A more unified approach to the choice of digital platform in Ireland

In the Irish context, school leadership was tested like never before, observed Tony Weir. Demands on school heads were extraordinary. Schools that had digital platforms in place fared a lot better. According to Tony Weir, there were three groups of schools:

1. For schools that already had a comprehensive and unified system in place, closing school doors did not make a dramatic difference, as learning continued in an online environment.
2. In schools where the choice of digital platform was left to individual teachers, students potentially had to cope with 5 or 6 different platforms (see also section "[How teaching during Covid-19 put digital infrastructures to the test](#)").
3. Schools that had no digital platform in place in March 2020 really struggled to provide education during lockdown, e.g. by sending learning materials by mail or email.

From September 2020, all schools were required to offer a single digital platform as a unified solution across the school. Schools could freely pick their platform and most opted for Microsoft Teams or Google classroom. This arrangement

worked very well, according to Tony Weir: *"Even if schools never close again, these platforms will be a really valuable educational tool to be able to extend learning beyond the classroom."*

More connections between school actors

During the pandemic school leaders stepped up communication with teachers and students. Karin Heremans, head of the [GO! Royal Atheneum school](#), communicated with teachers every day during the crisis, and this became a new habit. Relationships not only with teachers and students but also with the wider school network were key. This was

the case despite the fact that interactions moved into different spaces whether online or in school but at a two metres distance, said Donal O'Reilly, Koen Marichal adding, *"Many school heads and teachers have discovered the first law of universal leadership: First connect and then lead, first connect and then learn."*

Sharing leadership between more actors as a way forward

At the GO! Royal Atheneum school, Karin Heremans had already previously worked with different school teams. During the Covid-19 crisis, she created a transition team to manage the crisis. Tracking what has been learnt can foster conscious choices on what changes to move forward with, Koen Marichal commented. Karin Heremans said she also let new people take on leadership roles in her school. Within school teams, a shared process was fostered in which teachers

took decisions for their teams and students themselves. This new way of working is something that still needs to be put into an actual structure. Across schools in Europe, teachers took on new roles as course designers, digital architects, and team facilitators. *"The crisis highlighted the importance of shared leadership in general and of informal leadership roles in particular"*, Donal O'Reilly concluded.

The future of school leadership beyond Covid-19

Schools need support in designing education post Covid-19, as Donal O'Reilly and others stressed. Such support needs to take into account the fact that schools are at different junctures in their journeys and be both flexible and sustainable. Karin Heremans emphasized that it will be up to school heads to decide in what direction they want to go. With her school she wants to go towards a more hybrid school. Schools should continue to move towards becoming learning organisations, Koen Marichal added. For him, school heads should act as change managers.

Tony Weir concluded the webinar presentations by stating that future leadership would have to be agile and flexible. *"As Andreas Schleicher, OECD, highlighted recently in*

"School leadership should become cultural, with students also taking on leadership roles. Once it is cultural, when you enter the system, you just become it."

Donal O'Reilly

another online event, we need school heads who are courageous enough to respond to the needs of tomorrow's learners and to educate young people for their future", Tony Weir suggested, citing John Hattie who argued in his [Education cargo cults must die](#) that long established priorities in education may no longer be the priorities of the future.

School leadership beyond Covid-19: Voices from webinar participants

Webinar participants shared their opinion about school leadership in the webinar registration form.

"Successful leadership has the capacity to translate vision into reality."

Silvina Maria Marques Rosa Nunes Pimentel, Ministry of Education and Science, Portugal

For Tom Lonergan, PDST, Ireland, successful leadership needs to be *"agile and able to respond to the unexpected."* School heads need to be *"resilient, positive and a positive example to their community,"* added Portuguese teacher Carlos Manuel Maceira de Campos. As Portuguese school head Sonia Silva put it, successful

school leadership can organize a school to pursue goals in education with a happy and motivated team.

Several webinar participants highlighted the importance of inclusive leadership. Rosa Celeste de Almeida Micaelo, Ministry of Education and Science, Portugal, observed that successful leadership promotes the involvement of all actors in teaching and learning and identifies potential problems and their solutions. For Portuguese teacher Judite Carvalho, the crisis has taught us that *"we need to listen, have empathy, put oneself in one's shoes"* and *"that we cannot accomplish anything on our own"*.

The future of education beyond Covid-19

Webinar speakers March 2021



Marco Montanari

European Commission, Joint Research Centre



Maria Ranieri

University of Florence



Sarah Howard

University of Wollongong



Jo Tondeur

Vrije Universiteit Brussels

"The last year and a half have been difficult for many. However, the idea that school can change and that it can change en masse has really come over in the last year or so; it has been really exciting."

Sarah Howard

Schools need sufficient digital skills and infrastructure

Patricia Wastiau, European Schoolnet, said that for many years already international surveys have pointed out gaps in digital infrastructure, but without any consequences. Surveys have repeatedly found that even though students spent a lot of time online, they still lacked certain digital skills and teachers lacked competences to teach with digital tools (OECD, 2015).

With the outbreak of Covid-19, students, teachers and parents had to improve their digital skills dramatically over

the last 12 months, said Marco Montanari, adding that digital skills are likely to remain key for all actors in education in the future. However, it is still the case that not all schools and homes have the necessary digital infrastructure. Getting that infrastructure to those in need is a key concern, which will also be at the heart of most country proposals in the context of the [NextGenerationEU program](#) (see also section "[How teaching during Covid-19 put digital infrastructures to the test](#)").

"A certain share of the school population is basically cut off from any remote learning environment. This is something that in Europe we cannot accept in the future."

Marco Montanari



Schools need support to reflect and experiment

Covid-19 created a momentum for change and innovation, webinar speakers agreed. Jo Tondeur added that schools would now benefit from opportunities to experiment and reflect together as learning organisations about their future, and this future will be different for each school. Schools could reflect on which learning experiences they want to create and which they want to take online. *“Schools need to develop a vision not necessarily on where they want to go in the end but on where they want to start,”* argued Sarah Howard. This means they need to consider where they are as an organization, in regard to learning online, and from there decide what to carry forward in a future plan.

Teachers should be enabled to be more responsive to their students. School leaders need to support such change. Schools need to become institutions of change, suggested Sarah Howard. Research showed that teachers that felt supported by their school were more ready to teach online, even if they did not feel very confident. This suggests that with strong school leadership, teachers would be likely to adopt and continue new teaching practices they found advantageous (see also section [“School leadership in times](#)

[of Covid-19”](#)). To enable school heads to support their teachers, they themselves need support and opportunities for exchange.

Schools need more flexibility in how they organize their learning both in time and space and support to move forward, Maria Ranieri suggested. She said that for schools in Italy sharing practices with other schools was crucial during the pandemic. Two thirds of teachers were ready to move to online and blended learning even though teachers had to switch quickly and with little support, according to the study [Ready, set, go! Profiling teachers' readiness for online teaching in secondary education](#) (Howard, S. K., Tondeur, J. et al, 2020). The study, however, also noted that differences between teachers were considerable. Teacher training needs to be personalized to take better account of such differences.

“We do not change education with big ideas or fantasies about the future. We change it in weekly discussions. School heads and other education actors need more opportunities to exchange.”

Koen Marichal

Schools need to connect with homes and communities

Schools of the future should maintain and enhance strong links with local communities starting from the parents of the students and opening up to new local community actors, Marco Montanari suggested. Sarah Howard found the idea to move learning out of the school into the community and homes and see parents' roles change as part of that process very interesting (see also section [“How learning changed for students and their parents”](#)). Learning outside school can help students to acquire complex knowledge they may need

for the future. Sarah Howard shared lessons learned from an approach taken by the [Northern Territory Government](#) in Australia to support local decision making. Schools there built in an integrated approach close connections to the community and families. *“This approach takes on a quite different feeling about learning, which is something that schools might want to explore more, also with the idea of equity in mind,”* Sarah Howard concluded.

Schools need to design blended learning that fosters student autonomy

The online learning that took place because of Covid-19 was often *“just doing our best not to lose students, parents and even hope. It was not powerful yet,”* said Silvia Panzavolta during the webinar [“How learning changed for students and their parents”](#). To move forward, teachers need to create digital learning experiences that could not take place physically in the same way, she added. Such learning experiences could for instance focus on inter-disciplinary project

“We need to think about how to connect the online space with face-to-face environments to create even more powerful learning environments for students.”

Jo Tondeur

work. There is no doubt that face to face social interactions are critical for students. However, this does not mean that schools cannot organize blended learning, where students work independently in class, Sarah Howard suggested. Such new practices foster new affordances for student learning such as fostering student autonomy and self-regulated learning.

In online and blended learning, students have to manage different activities, times and spaces where learning takes place. In this context, self-regulated learning becomes more

“We should start having more confidence in our students.”

Maria Ranieri

important. As students got more freedom and autonomy to decide on their learning process, they were made more responsible for their own learning. Many students appreciated their own planning for learning time and less rigid day schedules and were able to develop self-regulation skills to focus on learning and not get distracted in the home environment (Carretero et al, 2021). Even some students at primary level appreciated the increased level of autonomy they had studying at home. Some students even declared that the most important skill they acquired during the lockdown was to become more autonomous in their

learning (Gaggioli, Ranieri & Fini, submitted). Schools should support students to become more autonomous learners and teachers should be trained for that, Jo Tondeur postulated. Some students begin learning autonomously more easily than others. It is important to identify and support those that still struggle with learning on their own, as Katarina Grgec, Ministry of Science and Education learned from experiences in Croatia. Jo Tondeur agreed that students' ability to become more autonomous learners differs not only between age groups but also within the same age group.

Schools need to re-think assessment

"The current crisis creates the momentum to re-think assessment. I would like to see students' learning experiences redesigned, including new skills such as critical thinking which requires a new kind of assessment."

Sarah Howard

"Formative assessment is an essential component of blended learning practices," stated Sarah Howard. Moving learning online raises the question of how to assess students' progress and scaffold learning and this has become more prominent for schools, added Jo Tondeur. For Sarah Howard it is the technical limitations of working in an online format that have pushed schools to think differently about what they ask students to

do and how they assess their work. Assessment was one of the most challenging issues during distance and blended learning. European countries reacted very differently in particular as regards high stake assessments, Marco Montanari explained. Some countries cancelled exams, some organized a less formal new structure, and others moved to simplified online exams. Many teachers found assessment in that context new and almost impossible, said Maria Ranieri.

During distance and blended learning, schools put more emphasis on formative assessment and the process of learning. According to Marco Montanari, in the coming

months formative assessment will remain important to identify students' learning gaps due to lockdown periods. For Maria Ranieri it is also essential to assess students' learning gains during the pandemic. Knowing which learning journey students are on is more important than ever, Sarah Howard concluded. Maria Ranieri said that if we really want to make a change towards more formative assessment, we need to challenge the idea that assessment is necessarily linked to control. One big issue is that many teachers have significant questions about how to best use formative assessment to support learning. Teachers need good practice examples and formative assessment needs to become part of a wider vision of how education should look like in the future, Sarah Howard suggested.

"We desperately need to know what knowledge our students lost over the past few months. This learning loss affects all students, even though more vulnerable students are more affected."

Marco Montanari

For digital and in particular high stakes assessment, there are still issues around validity and plagiarism. There is progress in this research area and artificial intelligence has great potential to further education. Nonetheless, *"we need to carefully look at what technical solutions we actually want to use in education,"* Sarah Howard stressed.

Schools need to connect more closely with research

"We need stronger monitoring systems."
Patricia Wastiau, European Schoolnet

New types of surveys have already been initiated for instance in Italy and Norway to better take account of schools' experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic and move forward. Projects in Norway will make data collection closer and more permanent. *"We need a closer relationship between research and practice for instance via action-oriented research,"* Patricia Wastiau suggested.

Maria Ranieri agreed, advocating a new alliance between university and school to create future education. Universities can support schools by gathering evidence of best practices of, for example, formative assessment and blended learning

models, added Sarah Howard. More research in areas like self-regulated learning, the role of parents in student learning and school leadership will also be key.

What changes are here to stay: Voices from webinar participants

"The current crisis taught us how important it is to be flexible and to adapt to changes."

Giovanna Papa, teacher, Italy

The webinar registration form invited participants to suggest which changes in school education they would like to see continue beyond Covid-19. While many highlighted the potential of online learning, such as to cater for students during periods of absence and to foster student motivation, others stressed its limits. For Portuguese teacher Marta Sá learning should still take place in person as much as possible, but other activities, parent-teacher meetings for example, could be more convenient and productive online.

Several webinar participants stressed the importance of increased collaboration not only between teachers but also with parents. The importance of decision making at local level was stressed, but also the need to include the wider

community – teachers, students and parents should not solely be responsible for school education. *"It is important to strengthen school-family-community collaborations"*, suggested Ana Cristina Almeida, Assistant Professor, University of Coimbra, Portugal.

Webinar participants also highlighted the impressive progress of many teachers and students.

They showed resilience and maturity. Students became more autonomous in their learning. However, they also stressed the need to focus on students' general well-being and health. Finally, they emphasised the need to protect teachers from burnout from a high workload in the future.

"The current crisis also taught us how important it is to have empathy and stay connected with each other even from a far, as well as the importance of solid values like trust, respect and dialogue."

Giovanna Papa, teacher, Italy

The future of education: Voices from webinar participants

• More collaboration and wider networks •

"Education should be more flexible and open to changes and society. Partnerships and school exchanges should be encouraged and promoted in Europe on a larger scale. Teachers should have more specific training on wellbeing and collaboration with parents and families."

Lucia Schilter, Deputy Headteacher, Istituto Comprensivo di CODROIPO, Italy

"The future is always unpredictable, but in the coming years I foresee more types of collaboration between students (in and outside of the classroom), between teacher and students and between teachers and schools: more collaborative networks. At a greater distance I see an Educating City, more than an Educating School. In all of them, I see the teacher having a primary role in education, however education will turn out to look like."

Joaquim Santos, National Federation for Education, Portugal

• Fostering wellbeing •

"A bigger variety of working methods will hopefully stay. The school health system has to work much more proactively also online for example to reach out to students if they need anything."

Roberth Olofsson, Swedish National Agency for Education, Sweden

"There is a window for schools to integrate digital - in the return to face-to-face work. There may be a kick back against digital learning. Central conversations of wellbeing of students and staff need to be maintained."

Bernard McHale, Teacher Educator, Ireland

• New learning spaces and ways of teaching •

"We need to better understand where and when learning takes place and figure out how to optimise learning spaces and opportunities."

Anthony Kilcoyne, PDST, Ireland

"We need to focus more on the process of learning and less on content. This could include incorporating coaching techniques in learning and using a learning by design framework."

Janey Ramos Gregório, Teacher, Coordinator and Trainer, Regional Directorate of Education of the Autonomous Region of the Azores, Portugal

"School education should be less content driven and focus instead on concepts, skills and dispositions. Children's engagement is paramount. We should meet the children where they are at, rather than where we feel they 'should' be at a particular time in the year."

Suzie Manton, PDST, Ireland

"Innovation is essential. We should use different methodologies for better learning."

Maria do Céu Robalo, Teacher, Portugal

"The relationship between teachers and students needs to be the focus, so whether remotely or in presence, each teacher needs to know the students' needs and provide strong and conscious formative assessment."

João Sá, Teacher, Escola Secundária de Avelar Brotero

• New visions of school •

"No classes, no grades. Students going forward at their own pace, collaborative work becomes as important as individual work."

Fabiola Cardoso, Teacher, Portugal

"It should be more versatile, more mobile; unfettered by restricted compartmentalized curricula, timetables and textbooks."

Eduarda Maria dos Anjos Carvalho, Teacher, Portugal

"Teachers should be seen as an important and worthy profession, in order to attract creative, bold and truly engaged people into this job. This is the only way to solve the huge educational problems of the world."

Teresa Santa-Clara, Project Management in School Libraries Network, Ministry of Education, Portugal

"It is crucial to improve initial teacher education to respond to needs articulated during the pandemic. Students will expect more from education providers. However, it remains to be seen whether adequate changes will be introduced after the pandemic, where they are necessary."

Marija Filipovic Ozegovic, Director, Foundation Tempus, Serbia



Conclusions

The outbreak of Covid-19 forced schools across Europe to close repeatedly partly or fully and actors in education to adapt to a new reality they could have never imagined before. Many teachers and schools rose rapidly to this unprecedented challenge. Changes that before few even dared to imagine occurred on a big scale. Many teachers and students quickly developed digital skills, students learnt more autonomously, and parents became more involved with school. How can those positive changes become part of a vision for the future of schools beyond Covid-19?

Some key enablers emerged, notably effective school leadership, a strong connection with communities within and outside of school and support for those at risk of being left behind.

It is true that the reality of distance and blended learning during this period was often far from the ideal learning scenarios enabled by new teaching methods and technology. During the last one and a half years, schools, students and their families faced many challenges that had a negative impact on student learning and their wellbeing. Many were overwhelmed with their new, unfamiliar, tasks and many students learnt less (well) during this period. Experiencing the shutdown of both general public life and schools had a negative impact on the wellbeing of many in and outside school education. Joint efforts to support schools are essential this school year in a way that enables students to overcome learning losses.

“Education is now among the top political priorities in all countries, and this was not the case prior to Covid-19. Wherever we want to go, now is the right moment to give a direction, as everyone has understood that education will be key for recovering in the long term.”

Marco Montanari

One key lesson learnt from the webinar series was that each school and teacher is different and that there are no “one size fits all” solutions. Each school had a different starting point in March 2020 and coped differently with the task of organizing remote and blended teaching. Therefore, they also have different needs and visions on how to move forward towards a better school education beyond Covid-19.

The outbreak of Covid-19 has challenged many of society's beliefs and ideas that were taken for granted. It created (and allowed) a huge experiment for schools on how to organize learning differently in a way that one could scarcely have imagined before. The world of school education has indeed been disrupted by Covid-19 but it also opened a window of opportunity to define a vision for the future of schools. As a starting point, the diversity of opinions and experiences during these exceptional times needs to be acknowledged and embraced. Only together can a sustainable vision for better learning in schools in the future be constructed. For almost 25 years, European Schoolnet has had its mission to foster exchange across Europe to improve school education at the heart of all its activities. Covid-19 has emphasized the need to continue listening to all voices in education to be able to move forward together, and European Schoolnet is committed to facilitating exchanges such as this webinar series.

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