

## GUEST COLUMN - April 2021

### Shaping the legacy of COVID-19

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*They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself.*

*Andy Warhol*

During a particularly difficult stretch of the lockdown, my professional coach invited me to engage my curiosity. This prompted me to consider the enormity of the pandemic from an entirely different perspective. I remain curious. Necessity may have been the mother of invention during lockdown but as the world returns to a semblance of normality, school leaders will need to ponder next steps.

Our College went into lockdown on 3rd February 2020. Although we were able to harness existing online platforms, there was a steep learning curve for all involved. We needed to rethink our approaches to teaching and learning. This required a challenging but constructive dialogue with stakeholders and our programme developed significantly.

There were obvious downsides to online learning, from isolation to the negative impact of extended screen time on physical and mental wellbeing. Schools are social places and learning is a social experience. I remember the sheer joy of our staff versus students rounders match on our first afternoon back on campus in May 2020.

There were tangible upsides as well. Online learning gave our students a more personalised experience. For example, our EAL students enjoyed the ability to pause and replay their teachers' presentations. Controlling the pace of their learning enabled them to master the language associated with the content and concepts being covered.

Students also valued the live-time feedback they received from their teachers and adaptive learning tasks powered by AI. Increased breadth of provision was another benefit. Online learning encouraged staff and students to engage with a wider range of resources and connect with a wider range of peers from across

the world. Bespoke master classes with the RSC undoubtedly added value to our English curriculum.

How can we build upon these positives as we move forward?

## **Reimagining the timetable**

To truly embrace the potential of edtech, leaders need to reimagine the timetable. It would be a missed opportunity and harmful to wellbeing if online learning is simply used as a vehicle for homework on top of the traditional school day. We need to do things differently. This will eventually involve reducing the taught curriculum and providing genuinely blended learning that:

- Enables time and space for wellbeing
- Provides students with greater choice, voice and ownership over their learning
- Provides real life opportunities for problem solving and collaboration

Melbourne Girls Grammar School pioneered this journey long before COVID-19.

## **Reimagining the skills and qualities required to be a good teacher**

COVID-19 has been a catalyst for upskilling teachers in edtech. We valued our partnership with Microsoft Education, although we view the progress made as the beginning of a much longer journey. With students accessing more content online and following more personalised pathways, the role of the teacher will be transformed.

There will be a shift in emphasis from demonstrating good subject knowledge towards being a good mentor. Coaching and counselling will become increasingly valuable skills as teachers provide students with the necessary care, guidance and support to negotiate the options available to them.

Academic departments will become more focused on curating the curriculum, harnessing AI and the wealth of online resources, than actually delivering it. This will require an ongoing commitment to professional learning and a strategic staffing plan that provides for an increase in counsellors.

## **Committing to Wellbeing**

Our return to campus was informed by our partnership with Dr. Michelle Sancho, an educational psychologist specialising in post-traumatic stress. We valued Dr. Sancho's specialist input and this encouraged us to reconsider our approach to wellbeing. The transformation of learning must go hand in hand with a deliberate commitment to wellbeing, with the positive education movement leading the way on this.

When the lockdown ended here in Shanghai, we understood that returning to campus was not the same as returning to normal. The changes experienced during the pandemic are only the beginning of a more profound transformation, and school leaders face compelling choices about how they shape the educational legacy of COVID-19.

### **Further Reading**

*The Future of the Professions*, Richard Susskind and Daniel Susskind

*Classroom in the Cloud*, Alex McGrath

*21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, Yuval Noah Harari

*Inadequate: The System Failing Our Teachers and Your Children*, Priya Lakhani

I also thoroughly recommend Alex Beard's [Learning Revolution](#) a three-part radio series for the BBC.

For more on the power of positive psychology during the pandemic, Clive Leach's [overview of four research papers](#) is a useful starting point.

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