

## **What can be learned from the period of remote and flexible learning to strengthen school education in Victoria?**

COVID-19 has been a difficult time for many Victorians, but it has shown that our young people are resilient, creative and critical thinkers who, when given the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning, can be excellent self-managers and thrive in often challenging circumstances.

It has shown us that with well-designed and technology supported learning experiences, the locus of control can shift from the teacher in the classroom to anytime, anywhere learning driven by young people and expertly facilitated by educators.

This gives hope that we can move from a one-size-fits-all model of schooling to a more flexible, personalised and authentic learning journey for each young person, with the school as the hub and learning experiences coming from the local and global communities.

COVID-19 has created an extraordinary opportunity for what the Brookings Institution has called educational 'leapfrogging' – harnessing the power of innovation and opportunity to create transformative shifts in models of learning to meet future needs compared to slow incremental change.

Through our research and communication with educators, the Australian Learning Lecture makes the following observations and recommendations.

### **1. The capacity of young people to thrive when given personal pathways, greater agency and responsibility.**

Young Victorians are growing up in a situation where a global pandemic, climate crisis and diminishing trust in democratic systems are a constant part of their life narrative. Educators within the current school model do an impressive job of growing and celebrating the skills and attributes which we need as a society. However, they have to do this within the context of an often rigid approach to curriculum and assessment. Remote and flexible learning provided a new direction for young people to take control of their learning, be flexible in how and when they learned and to take more responsibility for their own growth and development. This is reflected in the student feedback to many schools - and in those schools who are using the pandemic as a transformative moment to reimagine their educational offering.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Recognise that our young people can be highly resourceful when given the right opportunities.
- Change our approach to education in Victoria to put learner pathways and agency at the heart of the process.

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## 2. The critical role of schools in young people's lives

COVID 19 demonstrated that the 'School' has a critical role to play in young people's lives as a physical and social space.

This was made evident in the feedback of young people and their desire to be reconnected with their school community. Schools are spaces which allow for the supervision of young people so parents who choose to, can contribute to society through work, caregiving and other activities. It is these aspects that we need to continue to nurture.

### Recommendations:

- Review, reimagine and redefine the purpose of school beyond "a place of learning".
- Explore the role of the physical school as a place to nurture belonging, collective learning and social interaction.
- Consider how schools and the wider community can *both* be enhanced through collaboration and being more porous to each other.

## 3. Equity and accessibility

Remote learning not only highlighted inequity but exacerbated it. In-school learning allows for a levelling of the equity playing field. Learners during COVID who had a safe, quiet place to learn, access to reliable hardware, wifi/NBN and materials were able to undertake remote and online learning either directed by their teachers, supported by their parents or independently. Young people who did not have these home conditions or those with additional learning needs struggled to learn irrespective of the format of learning.

### Recommendation:

- Review the provision of technology and access to learning platforms to ensure every child has access to high quality learning when in remote learning mode and has appropriate learning support available.

## 4. Parents and guardians as essential partners in learning

Where remote flexible learning was most successful, there was a strong partnership between the school, the students and parents/ guardians. The learning process was more visible to parents and guardians, raising questions about what was being taught, how it was being learned and the processes of feedback and assessment.

### Recommendation:

- Explore opportunities for partnership and a stronger sense of connection between schools, teachers, learners and parental guardians.

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## 5. Models of learning

There were multiple approaches in Victorian schools to restructuring learning. Some schools put the whole, unaltered timetable online via video calls; other schools allowed entirely self-directed learning with little access to teachers.

Both extremes had limits. The unaltered “business-as-usual” had the negatives of young people sitting in front of a screen for a whole day. The totally independent learning proved the need for supportive feedback and feedforward from expert educators as well as peer collaboration.

The most effective models of learning combined both in a blended experience with intensive synchronous learning, student focused asynchronous learning and an intentional focus on wellbeing and social connection. These models gave learners the agency and context to practise and develop the skillsets, mindsets and toolsets necessary to thrive now and into the future.

### Recommendation:

- Review the evidence related to learning to produce Victorian Learning Design Principles that consider changes to timetabling, curriculum and learner agency to allow different structures of learning.

## 6. Assessment

If the positive lessons of COVID-19 are to be built on, it is necessary to recognise the skill sets students have developed which strengthen their preparation for the new emerging economy. The current high stakes testing cannot credential these skills of independence, entrepreneurship, communication, resilience and digital capability.

### Recommendations:

- Implement the kind of learner profile outlined in ALL’s *Beyond ATAR* paper to measure broader skill sets of each individual student.
- Reimagine the assessment system as a driver for this change and rethink the Victorian Certificate of Education to become the Victorian Portfolio of Credentialed Capabilities.

## 7. Targeted professional learning for educators

The sudden shift to remote and flexible learning accelerated the adoption of technology. However, it also highlighted the generally underdeveloped technology and pedagogical skills of educators in a primarily online environment. It did not leave time for targeted professional learning for teachers and technology was most often used as a substitute for analogue pedagogy.

### Recommendations:

- Ensure that the Victorian Learning Design Principles include approaches where technology genuinely enhances learning, global communication, creative media, interaction with experts outside the school.

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- Strengthen the partnership between those who manage technology infrastructure and those who drive learning and teaching approaches to ensure technology amplifies the best pedagogical practices
- Support all educators to be expert learning designers with seamless and purposeful use of technology.

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