

Education 2021: The Road Ahead

LP+ Webinar on The Challenges to Education Systems in the Age of COVID

London, December 2020

As countries begin to emerge from Covid-induced lockdown to confront the consequences of extended school closures, education systems all over the world recognise their need to develop integrated learning recovery plans. The learning losses for huge numbers of student of all ages, who have been out of school for many months, is of significant concern. Internationally, almost without fail, the emergency response to the crisis was to initiate distance and remote learning solutions, many of which were hastily devised, to try and maintain some continuity in students' education. To a greater or lesser extent, the solutions have been facilitated through EdTech solutions delivered through Distance and Online Learning (DOL).

During this time of evaluation and reflection as we move beyond the immediate and acute impact of the COVID crisis, it is timely to evaluate the effectiveness and the impact of this phenomenon of emergency remote teaching and look to a more secure and organised future. Access to state-of-the-art EdTech is helpful, but it is not essential for remote learning – when designing strategies policymakers must bear in mind the extent of the digital divide with, even in the developed economies within the OECD, upwards of 30 per cent of learners not having meaningful access to a digital device and being unable to rely upon good broadband connectivity in their family homes. Therefore, alongside any solutions that are reliant upon good and reliable access to a digital learning environment, so as not deepen the digital divide and to maintain equality of opportunity, there must also be solutions that enable learning recovery through tried, tested and well-established distance learning methodologies and low-tech solutions that are learning methodologies and low-tech solutions.

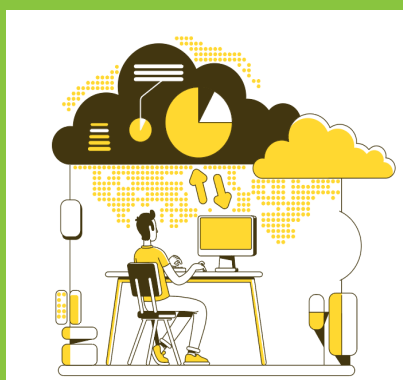
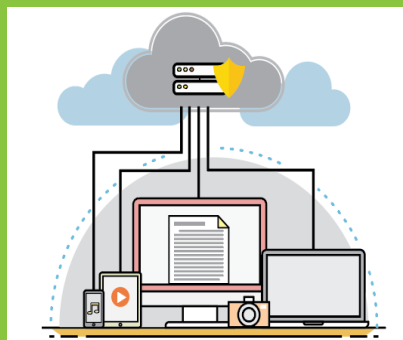


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Michael is a senior education consultant, with more than 30 years of professional experience in the fields of Education Technology, Capacity Building, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Lifelong Learning including technical advice on technology in education to governments in European countries, The Middle East, South America and South East Asia. Michael holds a Doctorate from the Institute of Education at University College, London.

Thanks to the initiative from Learning Possibilities, this week, a distinguished panel of education and technology experts and policymakers gathered online to debate the features and challenges for education systems in these times of uncertainty, when regular attendance on school premises can no longer be guaranteed.

Dr Mehool Sanghrajka, the CEO of Learning Possibilities opened the webinar with his observation that EdTech has probably done more for education in that last six months than in the previous six years. He shared some stark facts about the consequences of the school closures globally for example, from UNICEF, that 1.3 billion students globally are out of school with no home access to technology, and that learning losses for many students will take years to make up. Commenting on the reaction of banks and development partners to this crisis, **Dr Sungsup Ra** (Education Lead, ADB) said that, typically, there have been four priorities for education ministries that the development banks have been supporting – ensuring school continuity in the light of poor levels of connectivity; using Ed Tech for improving learning since COVID has been a wake-up call to governments to encourage the use of technology; enhancing teachers' skills to enable them to teach in these new and challenging conditions; developing a strategy for the reopening schools with health and social distancing measures in the place and how to cope with successive waves of the pandemic and its effects. He foresaw the importance of public private partnerships and stressed the importance of getting significant buy-in from governments to seek reliable private sector support and guidance. call to governments to encourage the use of technology; enhancing teachers' skills to enable them to teach in public private partnerships and stressed the importance of getting significant buy-in from governments to seek reliable private sector support and guidance.



Ridwan Othman (Education Lead, NTT Data) agreed that teacher professional development is key in getting the digital tools available to be used more effectively; he also commented on the big role that parents are having to play in supporting the learning of their children at home and how unprepared most parents have been to support their children effectively. **Vipul Bhargava** (EdTech Specialist Department of International Trade, UK Gov) was concerned about the attainment gap that has been accentuated during these COVID times, as students who were already low attainers are falling even further behind with their studies, he noted that this was not a problem for any one national education system but that it was endemic across the world. **Dr Rani Burchmore** (Education Lead, Microsoft APAC) acknowledged all these challenges and pointed out that one-to-one device access has become an absolute necessity to support hybrid learning; she compared the position in schools to that of the business world where it would simply be unable to function without their employees having secure access to internet resources with reliable connection and mobile devices to serve their productivity needs. She made clear that shipping the devices was not enough, and that the ultimate goal should be for education systems to provide the training, connectivity and rich content to make Ed Tech an indispensable part of learners' lives in the 21st Century. To this end she shared her optimism that governments are already having deep conversations with national telecoms companies about opportunity for universal connectivity through novel commercial arrangements.

The webinar was simultaneously streamed on the LP Plus YouTube channel and received a total of over 500 logins with participants accessing the event from more than 20 countries covering the Middle East, North America, Europe, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Central and South East Asia – a truly global event. A challenging flow of questions were addressed to the panel through a lively chatroom facility within the event and the experts tackled the queries and agreed on many of the key and critical points that must be addressed if school closures are not going to blight a whole generation of learners. A broad consensus emerged about the key challenges that are common across pretty much all education systems internationally.

Key Challenges for Schools and Education Systems

The seminar participants all recognised that in response to the Covid-induced crisis, ministries, schools, teachers, students and families all over the world have had to rapidly adapt, with very little preparation, to a wholly unprecedented interruption to their routines, practices and expectations. Despite the varying levels of technical sophistication of different education systems internationally there has emerged a remarkable degree of similarity about the issues to be faced, to a greater or lesser extent, and these can be summarised as follows:

▪ UNDERDEVELOPED LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

As schools re-open they are coping with consequences and aftermath from emergency remote teaching – teachers, students, parents; there are evident strains on infrastructure – hardware limitations and connectivity, with challenges with bandwidth.

▪ LOCAL CAPACITY ISSUES

The sudden shift to remote learning has exposed weaknesses in teacher technical capacity. Moreover, as teachers have often had to work alone from home there have been issues related to morale and absent school leadership. A great many economically marginal private schools are falling into insolvency forcing more students back into an already-challenged public sector.

▪ LEARNING LOSS

In many countries, two school terms have been lost and in some, almost a whole school year of learning has been sacrificed during 2019-2020 – issues are related to not just lack of curriculum content coverage, but also to students getting out of the habits of learning; more than ever before, it is becoming increasingly apparent that education systems and policies must make a shift in emphasis so that students are required to develop independent learning skills, metacognition and self-governance.

▪ CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

In almost all scenarios, the content of a whole year of knowledge-based curriculum cannot simply be squeezed into a few remedial weeks; conventional assessments within controlled and secure examination conditions were, for the many countries, abandoned this year. There is clearly now an urgent need for alternative, authentic and reliable assessment methodologies that are able to securely evaluate a whole range of learner achievements including skills and competencies as well as knowledge and understanding.

▪ SYSTEM AND CONTINUITY PLANNING

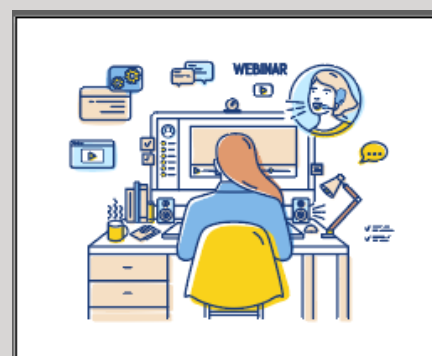
A lack of planning for learning and business continuity caused by school closures for health or public emergency reasons has shown that building local resilience is an urgent necessity. Operational plans must be developed for continuity of learning in ways that will rely increasingly distance learning and students' individual agency represented by their capacity to undertake self-paced learning.

Common Systemic Features to be Addressed

The recovery dynamics and the call to action can be summarised through these six important takeaways that encapsulate the necessary response to the present education emergency and the long-term future of schools and schooling

HYBRIDISATION

“SCHOOLS WILL HAVE TO DEVELOP HYBRID MODELS THAT MAY HAVE TO BE IMPLEMENTED OVER MANY MONTHS OR EVEN YEARS THROUGH A COMBINATION OF LEARN AT HOME WITH SOME FACE-TO-FACE TEACHING”





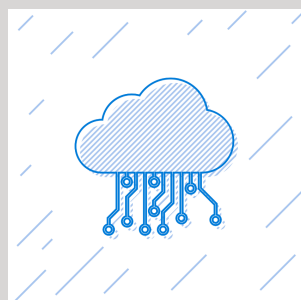
**Entrance
Examinations**

OVERHAUL OF STUDENT ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS

“EXAMINATION SYSTEMS IN THEIR PRESENT FORM MUST BE RE-EVALUATED WITH EVIDENCE FROM WRITTEN TESTS SUPPLEMENTED BY ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT”

DEVELOPING ROBUST IT INFRASTRUCTURE

“RELIABLE CONNECTIVITY AND ACCESS TO DEVICES MUST BE IMPROVED TO SUPPORT ALL LEARNERS AND AVOID THE DIGITAL DIVIDE FROM BECOMING AN ABYSS”



NEW LEARNING SKILLS FOR STUDENTS OF ALL AGES

“STUDENTS’ DIGITAL SKILLS AND THEIR CAPACITY FOR SELF-GOVERNANCE WILL BECOME EVEN MORE CRITICAL; NOT JUST FOR LEARNING FROM HOME, BUT IN THE NEW ECONOMY WHERE WORKING FROM HOME WILL ALSO BECOME THE NORM”

SUPPORTING TEACHERS TO MAKE BIG CHANGES

“TEACHERS MUST HAVE THE SUPPORT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES TO BECOME MORE FAMILIAR WITH TECHNOLOGY, AND IN SUPPORTING REMOTE LEARNING”





SUSTAINABLE DISTANCE LEARNING SOLUTIONS

“DISTANCE LEARNING SOLUTIONS SHOULD INCLUDE: PLATFORMS, CONTENT, DEVICES AND CONNECTIVITY AND GOVERNMENTS MUST CONSIDER HOW TO SUPPORT ALL THEIR LEARNERS”

Concluding remarks from the panel

The webinar concluded with **Dr Mehool Sanghrajka** highlighting the fact that we are now at a crossroads for education – on the one hand we have the pandemic, and now the promise of a vaccine, but, on the other there is no clear idea about the timetable for learning recovery and what this will look like. He challenged, in turn, each of the panelists to put themselves in the position of framing advice to ministries of education on the best way forward : what are the goals and priorities that they would propose ? what are their predictions for the year ahead in 2021.

Dr Rani Burchmore stressed the economic imperatives of New Learning - what had been a battle for teachers to tackle their education futures has now become a battle for nations to preserve their GDP. She shared her belief that there is now an urgent need for a centralised solution from ministries to get the economies of scale necessary to achieve universal connectivity and one-to-one device ownership through centralised procurement. The procurement must also specify how content is to be expedited. In these ways learning can be personalised through the use of big data and standardised systems at a national level.

Ridwan Othman shared his views that cloud-based solutions must be utilised so that learning can be personalised with real tools available to promote agility of learning using, for example, Artificial Intelligence. He hoped that issues of access and equality would be addressed and sought to find ways in which technology companies and governments should work together to ensure equality and access to all learners.

Dr Sungsup Ra regretted the widening inequalities in education caused by COVID. He foresaw that 2021 would be a year for renewals with new budgets and new priorities across the world with a shift in emphasis to the skills that are in high demand and the development of digital capital. He recognised the need for remedial teaching to compensate for learning loss and the importance of using suitable tools to interrogate the learning losses. Of critical importance, he predicted the growth and development of self-directed learning for students of all ages.

Vipul Bhargava emphasised the importance of governments and ministries finding ways to overcome the exacerbation of the achievement gap produced by school closures. Crucially he recognised that, with the enormous and unprecedented strain on public finances, the private sector will have to step up its interventions across the globe. He voiced his optimism about the improved contributions from the private sector, as venture capital is already flowing into Ed Tech. He looked forward to great improvements in the digital literacy of students and teachers and improvements in the security of innovative assessment systems using EdTech through, for example, remote proctoring. Finally, he looked for guidance to emerge soon for the development of statutory quality assurance mechanisms for online learning providers and hybrid schools.

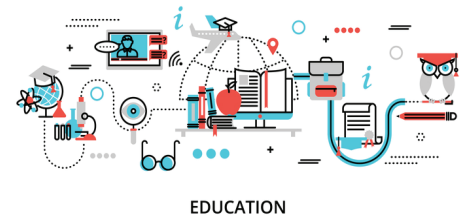
Dr Mehool, summarising, noted that COVID has been the catalyst for online and digital learning to come of age, and we have now reached the point that we have been talking about for years: teachers now can no longer ignore Ed Tech and this will make huge difference; the new normal will be reflected in schools, and, as the workplace changes, so schools will need to reflect this.

System solutions from Learning Possibilities

As a well-established and trusted EdTech partner with governments across the world Learning Possibilities can respond to the needs of education ministries for the remodelling of the systems at many levels with its secure and stable cloud-based solutions built on Microsoft technologies. We have the skills knowledge and experience to intervene at any stage of complexity, be it at school, school cluster, or at whole national system level.

To assist in system recovery and renewal in these challenging times, we have devised a five-stage intervention, the detail of which can be customized according to local needs.

1. **OASIS – Online Assessment System In Schools** from Learning Possibilities is a survey tool, which can be used across platforms, including desktop and mobile devices. The system consists of an eReadiness survey amongst all stakeholders: teachers, school leaders, students and parents. OASIS is a school-based survey, which can be scaled to national system level to inform strategic planning. The results of the survey inform the next stage.
2. **Gap Analysis** – an audit is conducted on school infrastructure, staff and student digital competence and the policymaking and governance of technology. A report and action plan is produced and these set the agenda for the road ahead.
3. **Identity and Assessment** - Create and manage teacher and learners identity in the cloud to allow single sign-on and authentication for all their digital tools and resources.
4. **Learning & Collaboration Platform** – based on the system and user needs we tailor the implementation of the LP+365 learning platform to meet the learning, curriculum, administrative and assessment needs of schools.
5. **ePortfolio** – in addition to traditional assessment, is our development tool for ePortfolios. Students are able to gather and store evidence of their competency development and achievement across the six key core competencies of : communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, character and citizenship. Teachers can view, assess, moderate and verify students' progress and achievement in these key skills, which are regarded as the foundation for the new skill agenda.
6. **Device Management** – using the security tools built into the LP+365 platform, teachers and administrators are able to authenticate the user activity, even remotely, to prevent unauthorised access to students' learning spaces and devices. They can also ensure that formal assessments – quizzes, tests, examinations, can be carried out remotely with a high degree of confidence that no cheating is taking place.



“In this paper I have tried to capture the main points that were made during the wide-ranging webinar, with participants from all over the world joining the distinguished international panel of specialists. The COVID crisis of 2020, like nothing before it, has focused the minds of policymakers, practitioners, parents and learners of all ages on digital and online learning. From South East Asia to Africa, and from South America to the Middle East and Europe, in all the regions and countries where I have worked the issues are broadly the same – and they have been eloquently explored during this webinar. The five-point intervention plan from Learning Possibilities represents, in my mind, the best way in which schools and school systems can gear up to meet the challenges facing education systems. The plan starts with a diagnostic assessment and needs analysis and ends with an implementation and security plan that embraces all stages in the learning journey including curriculum and assessment.”