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How the remote learning experience can improve onsite learning

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It's safe to say remote learning has been one of the biggest changes, and largest learning curves, that Australian schools have faced in a quite a while – if not ever.

The role technology has played in learning and in school operations has grown steadily over the last couple of decades, but no one saw coming the extent to which we would rely on it this year.

While we all hope to get back to something resembling normal soon, **there's no denying that some things will have changed permanently.** If you've had a hard time with remote learning, then this might sound daunting. But a bit of change can be a good thing – if approached correctly.

We didn't have much time to prepare for remote learning the first-time round, but we have plenty of time now to prepare for the coming years. By embracing the positive aspects of remote learning, you can **make changes to learning, teaching and technology that will greatly benefit the whole school community.**

Technology makes things easier – until it doesn't

Each school had their own experiences and their own challenges setting up a remote learning environment. No one was really prepared (how could you be?) and it affected everyone differently. However, nearly across the board, we saw two key challenges that quite significantly affected how quickly and successfully everyone was able to adapt:

Technology and IT access and support

When learning becomes remote, schools are expected to deliver the everyday schooling experience and services in a remote format. This includes access to devices, and technical support to run them. Making sure every student and teacher had access to required hardware and software, as well as dealing with IT issues (even if they were local, like Wi-Fi connectivity in the home) suddenly became a school IT issue. What was once an internal system in one location became, in some cases, several hundred individual systems. Not being set up to provide this kind of remote support meant that many schools struggled to get things up and running at any speed or consistency.

Together, **these challenges delayed the effective start of remote learning for many**, and made it a lot harder to deliver the full learning experience that students and parents expected, and the working experience owed to teachers.

Teaching style and capabilities

Teaching in a classroom and teaching online are two incredibly different tasks, as many teachers and schools quickly discovered during remote learning. Teachers were forced to change the way they teach and they way they interacted with their students – which is no easy ask, especially without any preparation or training to do so. This was compounded by the fact that many teachers themselves were unfamiliar with the technology they were being asked to use to run classes.

While these are issues that have been raised from this unique situation, they uncover gaps in schools' approach to technology and the way it used in learning. Teaming a traditional learning pedagogy with a rapidly evolving digital environment carries high risk of these challenges continuing to hold back schools who don't adapt.

Recognise the benefits of remote, and integrate them onsite

Despite the general feeling of doom and gloom around remote learning, it wasn't all a bad experience. Like businesses who never thought they could work from home have discovered they actually can, **schools have been forced to find new ways of learning and teaching.** And it's created some positive results.

Online parent teacher conferences, pre-recorded lessons, and flexible teaching/learning options for different students and learning styles are all examples of recent successes we've seen. And they're all things that can be continued to improve schooling going forward, even when face to face and onsite schooling can resume for good.

Obviously, remote learning was rushed and a bit of trial and error. Some things worked, but maybe not as well as they could or should have. (And then there were the things that didn't work at all, as we've already mentioned).

To ensure you can successfully apply the good stuff, and leave the problems behind you, there are a few questions you need to ask:

- Look at some of the tools and resources that you've quickly pulled together and evaluate them. Does that still make sense post-COVID? Does that structure work? How can we refine or restructure it for the future?
- What IT capabilities do you have, and what will you need to acquire?
- What teacher or student support/training will be required to ensure they are able to work with new tools and processes?

By changing the way we look at this – not as a forced change, but as an opportunity to change – schools have a chance to get more out of eLearning, and out of teaching and schooling more generally.

Embrace change – it's here to stay

This year schools have been forced to change the way they think about learning and teaching, and adapt the 'traditional' idea of a classroom. And despite the challenges, we've seen some positive outcomes. **Introducing these outcomes into the long-term curriculum brings the opportunity for schools to be able to better provide for their communities and be seen as innovators of education.**

But to be able to make these new things work, you need the backend support. IT and technology are now so tied up with the way we teach, learn, and run our schools that when one changes, the other needs to change with it.

One or two guys in the back office responding to email problems is not an IT solution that will support this increased reliance on IT. **IT has changed, and our expectations of service delivery should as well.** To be able to provide quality eLearning solutions and improve your school's digital capabilities, your IT should be:

- Remotely accessible, with easy external support options
- Cloud-based
- Proactive, not reactive
- Delivering a range of services, from technical support to training

A school has lots of different professionals and specialists on staff to deliver a range of services that students need, and parents expect. In this new world of remote-enabled, highly digital learning, IT should be the same.

The schools that adapted best to remote learning were the ones that already had external, remotely delivered IT and proactively prepared systems. And as we continue to see challenges and changes to the way we structure learning, those who have flexible systems will continue to come out on top.

Making sure your IT delivers what your school needs to good the increasing changes to schooling when you don't have background IT knowledge can be hard. Step Fwd IT is a leading provider of IT services to Australian Catholic schools, and can help you audit your current setup to determine what will work best for you. You can learn more about Step Fwd IT's services here, or click here to talk to one of the team.