Open Schooling Lessons Learnt from COVID-19

Key messages from the #Ed2030 Global Forum by OECD (19-20 May 2020):

⇨ **The current COVID-19 reality is clearly challenging for everyone involved in education, but also provides is us a unique opportunity to learn from each other – H.R.H Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands**

⇨ **We can use the momentum from the crisis to reshape curricula and learning environments to the needs of the 21st century – Andreas Schleicher, OECD Director for Education and Skills**

> The experiences of school closures starting in March 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic has some elements open STEAM schooling initiatives can use as leverage. The active use of digital tools is just one aspect. If we want to use these experiences, we need to focus on other elements such as new ways of assessment, playfulness, collaborative learning methodologies, intergenerational learning, focus on arts and life skills, or the secondary nature of academic content.

The education research community has reacted quickly and there are several ongoing or already finished research activities and evidence related to the impact of school closures due to COVID-19 published by May 2020. Researchers call for a stark differentiation between digital or online learning and provisions due to school closures, but there are research results that can be useful for designing open schooling activities in regular times.

It is important to stimulate innovative teaching and learning practices that enhance educational projects, adapted to a mixed and differentiated teaching system, focusing on: the diversification of pedagogical methodologies, in particular active methodologies, expanding and deepening project-based ways of learning and teaching; intensifying self-directed learning, team work and other forms of learning; and the creation of inclusive and non-discriminatory environments, adapting time schedules, reconfiguring, within the legal limits, the existing teaching loads.

There is a need to develop programs to enhance skills for the future (as part of the post-COVID approach) through peer learning sessions for professionals. These activities should stimulate dialogue and the sharing of good practices among institutions at national and international levels, making the possbile scaling of innovative projects a reality. It can also be an opportunity to develop and consolidate institutional partnerships at European level.

Online provisions can enable the flexibility of teaching and learning anywhere, anytime, and this has been very well received by both students and their families. For teachers, however, balancing work and family life has proven to be challenging. Online learning also carries a stigma of being lower quality than face-to-face learning, despite research showing otherwise. These are significant considerations when designing open schooling as teacher well-being is as important a consideration as that of learners. When designing open schooling provisions, there are the highly variable design solutions that have been developed and implemented: distance learning, distributed learning, blended learning, online learning, mobile learning, and others. It is crucial to understand their characteristics and benefits when designing open schooling.

As Janet Goodall[1] has put it, the current situation makes it possible for all school stakeholders, but especially school leaders "to consider what's really important in schooling – to think about what schools are for, and to concentrate on that. Schools were originally set up to enable groups of children to learn the things that society deemed were important for them to know (Goodall, 2017), and have come a very long way in being able to do that, mainly through the dedication and professionalism of the staff within the school walls.

Now, though, we need to get back to those basics, to become radical if you like (the word means 'root') – what's really important for our children to learn? To do, to be, to become? And how can we help families support that learning? Now, more than ever, we need to see growing partnerships between school staff and other families – and I say 'other' because one facet of the whole debate that seems to be ignored is just how many school staff are themselves parents or carers."

Non-formal education providers have made a vast amount of content and tools available for free, and have gone a long way curating content to support emergency remote schooling, proving to be suitable partners in open schooling.

Child mental health experts have urged governments to prioritise children's play and socialising with friends over formal lessons and academic progress when schools reopen. At the same time there is long-established evidence about the benefits of playfulness in learning, as well as gamification methodologies supporting iterative learning. Open schooling in STE(A)M can support the implementation of diverse methods more beneficial for deep learning than traditional school instruction. In a recent research by Scientix a grim picture has been drawn about the use of non-traditional, non-frontal methodologies in STEM teaching in Europe, while their benefits have proven to be widely known.

Last, but not least, current experiences also made education stakeholders rethink the role and use of digital technology, to understand the difference between passive screen time and using the screen for being active and to evaluate the benefits against potential risks. Open schooling partnerships can contribute to finding a healthy balance between digital and traditional education having partners more proficient using technology than the average school teacher. Maintaining the use of digital alternatives can also help reduce pressure on the environment by making choices between necessary and not-so-necessary travel, while keeping a healthy level of physical interpersonal contacts. Open schooling programmes can also support teachers to become more proficient using digital platforms and tools.

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[1] https://impact.chartered.college/article/engaging-parents-during-school-closures/#respond

ABOUT PHERECLOS

PHERECLOS is aiming to establish "Local Education Clusters" (LECs) of different design as examples of open schooling. All LECs will bring together schools and other relevant actors in the education ecosystem in a particular pilot region, supported by a peer mentoring programme. The LECs will be incubators for enabling a dialogue between various parties and help to set up joint activities in formal and non-formal education. The LECs will also help to develop collaborative learning environments as experimental testbeds for schools, and in parallel, they aim to impact on the quality of science engagement opportunities available in these areas.

More information: www.phereclos.eu