The School of Education

Teaching and Learning During School Closures: Lessons Learned

Executive Summary & Key Findings

Irish Second-Level Teacher Perspectives

July 8th 2020
Ann Devitt, Aibhín Bray, Joanne Banks, Eilís Ní Chorcora

www.tcd.ie/education

Executive Summary

Irish pre-schools, primary, second-level schools and further and higher education settings closed on 12 March 2020 based on advice from the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET) as part of the government's efforts to contain the spread of Covid-19. This report provides an analysis of teaching and learning during school closures from the perspective of a representative sample of teachers working in second-level schools. Given their centrality in engaging and providing continuity of learning for students, it is essential for policy development that the perspectives of teachers are captured, and their experiences of online teaching understood. The survey sought their personal views around the barriers to effective communication and engagement with students in addition to their experience of using different approaches to teaching and learning during this time. Taking a solution-focused approach, the survey also asked teachers about their own capacity and ability to teach from home and what supports they view as important to ensuring meaningful engagement across all groups of students as school resumes and in any future school closures.

The full report is downloadable here: http://www.tara.tcd.ie/handle/2262/92883

For more information: https://www.tcd.ie/Education/research/covid-19/teaching-and-learning-resources/

Key Findings

Student Engagement during Covid-19

• Overall, levels of student engagement with learning during school closures was medium-high, with 79 per cent of teachers reporting engagement from more than 30 per cent of their students.

• Teachers in **DEIS schools were almost 3 times more likely to report low engagement** from their students compared to those in non-DEIS settings.

• The most significant barriers are **lack of interest, lack of support** in the home and a **lack of access to devices**, with all of these barriers significantly more prevalent in DEIS settings.

• Teachers who reported low **self-efficacy** (level of belief in one's capacity to exert control over motivations, behaviours, and environment) were more likely to report lower levels of student engagement.

• The **mode of delivery** of teaching and learning was associated and students' levels of engagement with more interactive and collaborative approaches to teaching and learning impacting positively on levels of student engagement.

Key Findings

Teaching and Learning during Covid-19

• There is a predominance of **asynchronous** (not occurring at the same time), **transactional modes of communication** with students with some, but **relatively little live, synchronous interaction**.

• There is evidence of teachers using a **wide range of means to engage with students**, including the post and phone calls in DEIS schools in particular.

• The practices associated with supporting key skills of creativity and communication have increased during the school closures with **teachers offering multiple modes of engagement and representation to learners**.

• There has been a substantial **decrease in practices to minimise distractions** and threats in the online context across all school types.

• **Nearly 20 per cent of teachers report not having fostered collaboration** among their learners during school closures and over 50 per cent report a decrease in this practice since school closures.

• **Practices to foster collaboration, support scaffolding and choice in learning** were predictive of higher student engagement across school contexts.

• **In DEIS schools**, the practices related to **promoting learner motivation** are also predictive of student engagement.

Teacher Supports and Professional Development

• Schools that did not take a **coordinated approach** to the move online have lower levels of online collaboration between colleagues and lower reported student engagement with online education.

• Teachers in **non-DEIS schools were more likely to report that a whole-school approach** was taken in the transition from traditional, in-school education to online learning.

• **Support from colleagues** was also important and teachers particularly used this as a source for advice around technology but also as a way in which to share ideas and teaching approaches.

• Teachers found **in-school supports and social media** such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram useful sources of information for continuing their teaching online.

• Teachers who engaged in Continuous Professional Development during school closures **opted for courses and webinars to do with technology, wellbeing and SEN**.

• When asked what supports and professional development would be needed to continue online learning, teachers called for support in relation to meaningful integration of technology and **pedagogy for online teaching and learning** rather than how to use the technology itself.

Policy Recommendations

System-Level Recommendations

Model of Best Practice

1   **Distil all existing evidence in order to establish a model of best practice for school management for future planning**. It is recommended that the DES collate and distil guidance and evidence for best practice in Ireland in the move online into a coherent set of guidelines for schools.

Professional Development

2   **Prioritise CPD in relation to practices that will enhance and develop student engagement**. The provision of professional development that supports and enhances interactive and collaborative practices should be encouraged. Such practices have been shown to have a positive impact on student engagement, and teachers are actively seeking support in this area.

3   **Provide school-based contextualised professional development for teachers:** In terms of sources of support, those from within the school were highest rated, and teachers who identified higher levels of collaboration between colleagues were more likely to report higher levels of engagement from their students. This should be capitalised on through the provision of support to develop communities of practice.

Devices and Infrastructure

4   **Address digital poverty**. Expand on existing governmental measures to address digital poverty,[1] and explore others, such as the Tech2Students[2] initiative, that offer potential structures that could be implemented at system level.

5   **Address school IT infrastructure**. It is essential to ensure that all schools have reliable and GDPR compliant systems that allow for information transfer and collaboration.

---

[1] https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2020-press-releases/PR20-04-22.html

[2] A collaborative initiative between Trinity Access. Camara and the ESB: https://www.tcd.ie/trinityaccess/tech2students/

Policy Recommendations

School- and Educator-level Recommendations

Future Planning

6   Articulate a **contingency plan for future closures** that draws on DES guidelines and on individual, school-based reflections on the Covid-19 school closures. Use this to draft a whole-school approach for any future closures.

Social Context

7   **Prioritise re-establishing the social context for learning whether online or face-to-face**. Developing and maintaining a social presence for both teachers and learners is essential for sustaining student engagement. It is critical to re-establish positive relationships for learning between teachers and students, supported by interactive and collaborative pedagogies.

Partners & Contributors

The Authors

The authors collaborate as members of the Research Advisory Board for Trinity's widening participation programme, Trinity Access.

Ann Devitt

Dr Ann Devitt is a lecturer and researcher in language and literacy education at the School of Education in Trinity College Dublin. She is currently Director of Research at the School and Academic Director for Learnovate, the Enterprise Ireland funded research and innovation centre focused on educational technology which is hosted in TCD.

Aibhín Bray

Dr Aibhín Bray is lecturer and researcher in education and leader of the mathematics strands in the School of Education in Trinity College Dublin. She has conducted research and professional development for many years in the domain of widening participation.

Joanne Banks

Dr Joanne Banks is a lecturer and researcher in inclusive education at the School of Education in Trinity College Dublin. She has worked for over a decade in social research focussing on inclusive education, the school experiences of students with disabilities and educational inequality more generally.

Eilís Ní Chorcora

Eilís Ní Chorcora is the Coordinator of Research and Impact at Trinity Access, Trinity College Dublin. A qualified primary school teacher with a postgraduate degree in Psychology, she works to support people from areas of low progression to higher education to achieve their full educational potential.

Partners & Contributors

Trinity Access (TA) aims to transform the education system, through work at student, school and system-level, so that every young person can reach their full potential. Their mission is to work in partnership across the education sector with students, teachers, families, communities and businesses to widen access and participation at third-level of under-represented groups. The TA schools programme breaks down barriers by partnering with schools to develop strong 'college going cultures' and innovative approaches to teaching and learning through three 'core practices': Pathways to College, Mentoring and Leadership in Learning.

Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

TRINITY ACCESS

LEARNOVATE
Leading Learning Innovation

Contact

For more information, please contact:
Dr Ann Devitt
The School of Education
Trinity College Dublin
Dublin 2
Ireland

W: **www.tcd.ie/education**