

What Scotland Learned: building back better

January 2021



Foreword

What Scotland Learned – How to build back better

The Covid-19 pandemic, with its sudden closure of schools, led to extraordinary work across the entire education system to support learners and communities.

Some of those stories are told in our publication *What Scotland Learned, 100 stories of lockdown*. I have never been more proud of Scottish education – children, practitioners, learners, partners, families and communities – for all that was done to ensure the continuity of learning for our children and young people.

This paper takes these inspiring stories and synthesises them with education research. Designed to support education leaders and practitioners, it takes the six themes that came through the stories and explores the existing evidence-based findings to add depth and understanding to lived experience.

Scotland's education system is one of the most innovative and creative in the world. I really hope we can take forward the positive and innovative approaches we saw blossom across Scotland in order to build back better as we move on from the pandemic and progress our vision for an education system that enables all children and young people to fulfil their potential.

It is important for the system to be agile and responsive. The move to blended and remote learning, different approaches to the use of digital technology and the involvement and engagement of parents have all been substantial lockdown challenges and we have a great opportunity to build on these successes.

The dedication of professionals involved in supporting recovery has been a central feature of system leadership. We've seen real strength in leadership in a crisis, demonstrating a real resilience and showing adaptive leadership responses that reflect a context as it evolves.

I hope that you find this publication an inspiring and valuable resource for your professional learning and leadership.



Gayle Gorman

HM Chief Inspector of Education

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gayle Gorman".

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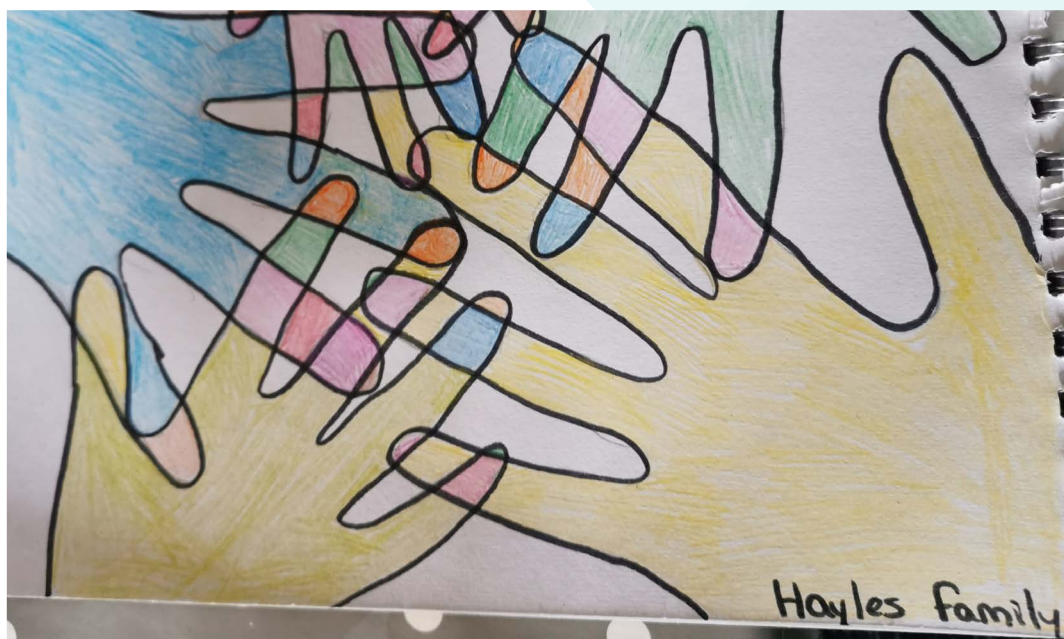
Introduction

What Scotland Learned (WSL) is a book published by Education Scotland. It captures examples of innovative practice from learners, parents and educators in Scotland during the period March to August 2020. One hundred stories from practitioners, local authorities, establishments, leaders, parents, learners, partners, volunteers and others were collected. Ten stories were also collected in the form of semi-structured interviews carried out with academics and educational leaders:

- Andy Hargreaves, Research Professor, Boston College
- NG Pak Tee, Associate Professor, Singapore University
- Chris Chapman, Professor, University of Glasgow
- Gayle Gorman, HM Chief Inspector of Education, Education Scotland
- Janie McManus, Strategic Director, Scrutiny, Education Scotland
- Graeme Logan, Director, Learning Directorate, Scottish Government
- Kit Wyeth, Covid-19 Education Recovery Group (CERG) Secretariat, Scottish Government
- Derek Brown, Executive Director of Education and Families, North Lanarkshire Council
- Laurence Findlay, Director of Education and Children's Services, Aberdeenshire Council
- Ian Munro, Rector, Dollar Academy

The questions for the semi-structured interviews were devised from the OECD report "A framework to guide an education response to the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020" (Reimers and Schleicher, 2020) and themes from How Good is OUR School, (HGIOS 4th edition) which are listed in Appendix 1.

The information from the 100 stories was analysed into six themes: These are relationships, leadership, health and wellbeing, learning and teaching, community and successes and achievements. In the next section, each of the themes are examined in detail. Examples and quotes from the stories are highlighted along with relevant research literature and suggestions on how to build back better. The stories used are listed in Appendix 2.



1. Relationships

▪ Introduction

This theme demonstrates how well people supported each other and built strong collaborative relationships to work, learn and achieve success in dealing with Covid-19. Collaborative relationships were formed at different levels: internationally, nationally, and within local authorities, schools, communities and families. Important aspects of collaborative relationships, which have featured strongly in the stories in this publication, are effective communication and compassion. As Gayle Gorman, HM Chief Inspector of Education, Education Scotland, said, "...collaboration and communication are intrinsically linked. Communication has been central; there is clear correlation between effective communication and the ability of citizens to cope. This is reflected worldwide." (WSL, 2021, p.138) Compassion is also important given that many adults and children are dealing with extremely complex and difficult situations.

In its framework to guide an education response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the OECD identified maintaining effective relationships as only second to supporting learning. The report urged people at all levels to collaborate under one common aim: "stepping up collaboratively....out of [your] comfort zone" (Reimers and Schleicher, 2020, p.7). This was a strong feature of our stories: interviewees used phrases such as "all hands to the pump" when describing the strong collaborative relationships they experienced.

▪ Literature context

The research literature from the UK and globally highlights the importance of strong collaborative relationships in dealing with situations and circumstances associated with the pandemic. These were at family, school and community, local authority, national and international level.

Strong supportive **family relationships** were highlighted as important for positive outcomes during lockdown. The survey results from Understanding Society (2020) Covid-19 survey, developed by Professor Brienna Perelli-Harris from the University of Southampton, indicated that, despite the stresses of working at home with children during lockdown, most parents who worked at home reported improvements in their relationships with their children. They reported improved bonding and better family relationships with their children.

This positive picture is however, affected by existing socio-economic inequalities. In its report of the situation at home during lockdown when schools were closed, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (2020, p.8) finds that “while the Covid-19 crisis has affected all families with children, it has not affected them all equally.” The pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities, particularly for those children who relied on the protective and safeguarding environment of school (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2020). As Burgess and Vignoles (2020, p.1) identify: “Household income and family environment are major determinants of children’s academic achievement ... Socio-economically advantaged parents also tend to compensate for any deterioration in schooling to a greater extent.” Families with children with additional support needs were also particularly impacted. Walters (2020, p.1) explained “the extreme stress ... for families of children with mental health needs who are often already struggling with basic compliance and day-to-day life at home prior to the pandemic.”

Close relationships with teachers in **schools** were also highlighted as important to children’s successful outcomes during the pandemic. The OECD framework stated that “the success of many students will critically hinge on maintaining close relationships with their teachers” (Reimers and Schleicher, 2020, p.21). The stories in this publication and the research literature have demonstrated that this effective relationship can be both online and physically at a safe distance. Dr Michelle Hagerman from the University of Ottawa set up a website, ‘Learning to Teach Online’ that offers advice on how to build strong relationships between the students and teachers to strengthen the school, student and community relationship. Writing in the Times Education Supplement, primary school teacher Hanna Miller (2020, p.1), emphasised the importance of establishing connectedness and support to her students and their families: “we wanted our children and their families to know that their school was still there to support them and to feel part of the school community.” Aspen Institute Education & Society Program (2020) also emphasised the depth of students’ connectedness to school and the quality of their relationships with adults and peers in school as critical to learning and thriving in life. Borup et al (2020, p.163) build on Vygotsky’s (1978) zone of proximal development to develop academic communities of engagement framework, which states that:

“students’ ability to engage affectively, behaviourally, and cognitively increases when supported by others...identifying two communities that can contribute to supporting students’ engagement...course community: those affiliated with the course or school, and personal community: those having long-relationships with the student.”

The benefits of schools building strong collaborative relationships with other schools in order to share and develop resources and ideas in dealing with the pandemic has been a common theme in the research literature. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (2020, p.65) identified benefits such as improving “ equity in access to home learning and frees up teachers’ time to provide more individualised teaching to pupils.”

The research also identified that relationships of entire **school communities** are important (Institute of Fiscal Studies, 2020). Betz (2020, p.1) stressed that “schools are uniquely positioned to help members of their communities, particularly those who may need additional support, to maintain a sense of connectedness and well-being.” Gutiérrez et al. (2020, p.1) at the Family-School Collaboration Design Research Project have emphasized the importance of family-school relationships in helping to deal with the social inequalities: “We know from decades of research that genuine, reciprocal, trusting relationships are the foundation on which educators and families can overcome educational obstacles.”

Children’s Neighbourhoods Scotland (2020, p.1) carried out qualitative research which highlighted the collaborative response of the **third sector** which “played a crucial role in responding to the Covid-19 crisis, particularly in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.” Similarly, Balkrishnan (2020) demonstrated that community-based initiatives including **private-public partnerships** are essential in mitigating the education crisis caused by Covid-19.

The OECD framework for leaders of education systems and organisations emphasises the importance of strong collaborative relationships and effective communication creating an overall communications strategy by **local authorities and national government**. The framework emphasised the importance of:

“communication with families and facilitating teacher professional collaboration and learning, connecting with other school networks and systems to share information, developing a system to check in daily with each student.” (Reimers and Schleicher, 2020, p.6-8).

International relationships and collaboration have been strengthened during the pandemic to deal with a challenge to health which knows no boundaries. A plethora of international conferences allowed nations to learn from each other. For example, WISE – Salzburg hosted a global seminar in April 2020 to consider the consequences of Covid-19 on the traditional school model, and how educationalists can best optimise this time of crisis to rapidly innovate and embed system-wide change in our schools and education systems. These messages of building strong collaborative relationships and building back better feature strongly in the stories in this publication.

▪ Stories

The stories collected for this publication emphasise the points made in the literature in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. They illustrate the importance of strong collaborative relationships at international level, national level, local authority level, and within school communities and hubs, as well as with the third and private sectors.

At an **international level**, Andy Hargreaves, Research Professor, Boston College, identified the features of the countries who have handled the pandemic best by “signing up to a common aim aligned with strong relationships.” Leaders were open, transparent and collaborative, and everyone worked together effectively to make the situation less damaging as possible. He observed that how well a country copes: “depends on how collaboratively the government works with teacher organisations, and parents and community organisations.” These observations were shared and illustrated by many of those interviewed. Graeme Logan, Director, Learning Directorate, Scottish Government reported at the **national level**:

“The Scottish Government were working very closely with stakeholders and key partners through our (National) COVID-19 Education Recovery Group (CERG), which currently meets weekly and is chaired by the Deputy First Minister. Overall, our school safety guidance is working well and this has been verified by the Health and Safety Executive who have engaged with 500 schools on approaches to implementation. It is really important that school communities are empowered to work together to support each other.” (WSL, 2021, p.28)

Kit Wyeth, Covid-19 Education Recovery Group (CERG) Secretariat, Scottish Government, also commented on the strong collaborative relationship within the national CERG:

“The level of commitment and partnership working remains impressive, attendance at CERG meetings has been high throughout with members also regularly contributing comments in correspondence, often at very short notice.” (WSL, 2021, p.28)

National bodies like Education Scotland (ES) see their key role in dealing with the pandemic as working collaboratively through communicating effectively and supporting a positive response and clear direction. Gayle Gorman reported that ES offered “headspace sessions for headteachers and a series of blethers aimed at supporting leaders at all levels”. (WSL, 2021, p.138) Janie McManus, Strategic Director, Scrutiny, Education Scotland, commented:

“As nearly all the scrutiny work in ES was suspended due to the pandemic the team of inspectors had to be available to respond with agility to whatever the need was in the system. This involved lots of collaboration, building on our positive relationships with stakeholders...The emphasis is on collaboration; listening to different perspectives and reaching decisions together.” (WSL, 2021, p.188)

At **local authority** level, interviewees also commented on the importance of strong collaborative relationships and effective communication. Derek Brown, Executive Director of Education and Families, North Lanarkshire, commented:

“We have been fortunate that we enjoy good relationships with staff groups and key partners such as trade unions and NHS Lanarkshire. We drew extensively on these....Schools worked really hard to reach their communities. In Community Hubs, they built teams and relationships across schools which made amazing things happen....Dealing with the pandemic pulled the council together; we are clearly one team.” (WSL, 2021, p.176)

Similarly, Laurence Findlay, Director of Education and Children’s Services, Aberdeenshire Council, stated that:

“Synthesis Relationships have been front and centre of the approach taken. As a Director with 10,000 employees in total across all the services, there is a greater level of connection now. The opportunity for headteachers to hear regularly on a weekly basis from the Director has been welcomed by all. This has strengthened relationships across the local authority.” (WSL, 2021, p.140)

From a research perspective, Chris Chapman, Professor, University of Glasgow, highlighted the positive collaboration and communication in local authorities:

“Local policy and practice innovated and found new ways to collaborate very quickly. Practice in these settings evolved very quickly and understandably, faster than national policy because of the need to respond on the ground in real time. This demonstrated that some of the more bureaucratic and inflexible practices that exists within the system can be overcome.” (WSL, 2021, p.136)

Within school communities and hubs, many stories illustrated that responding to the pandemic had strengthened relationships by bringing people together with the common aim of helping families. This was true in both school communities and hubs. Graeme Logan stressed that “it is really important that school communities are empowered to work together to support each other.” (WSL, 2021, p.80)

Many commented that hubs were oversubscribed with teachers and others wanting to volunteer to help the most vulnerable children and children of key workers during lockdown. The author of the story from an Aberdeen City Hub commented:

“The success of the children’s hubs was down to people from a range of backgrounds and professions working together with a ‘can-do’ spirit. I have rarely seen before. COVID-19 has changed the way we live and work, but it’s important to take what positives we can from our experiences and for me, seeing the true value of proper partnership working is one of them.” (WSL, 2021, p.26)

New ways to communicate to families were developed to secure positive outcomes for children. The story from Allan's Nursery and Primary School in Stirling outlined the various ways they continued their strong relationships with families during lockdown. As well as digitally and through telephone calls, they connected with families by physically delivering school lunches. The school community pulled together and, as a result, relationships were strengthened. The author of the story reported:

“...door step visits were so important as many families looked forward to the contact and were able to let us know if they needed anything or if we could support them further - we could be responsive to our families! This enabled us to deliver essential food packages and organise Food Bank referrals.... also working closely with catering services, youth services, social work, plus, Educational Psychology, Parent Council to ensure that our community was connected and well supported.” (WSL, 2021, p.6)

St Luke's High School in East Renfrewshire also highlighted the central importance of relationships:

“Relationships are at the heart of our inclusive school ethos and so we were creative and innovative in our use of digital technology and communication to ensure that our learners were supported, challenged, connected and engaged. The school ensured that all families had access to devices and IT support so they were able to communicate and build relationships.” (WSL, 2021, p.12)

Stories identified the **third sector** as a key contributor to the pandemic response. Chris Chapman commented: “the third sector really stepped up in dealing with the pandemic and built strong relationships with the public sector and families who needed them.” (WSL, 2021, p.136)

The story from Anchor Early Action Project in Shetland which has been attached to the Sound Primary School in Shetland since April 2019 illustrated the importance of the third sector. The Project worked directly with a small number of families identified by the school as needing an enhanced level of support. It ensured that parents were able to work with one service, which signposted them to other relevant services. It supported parents to access appropriate services, supporting their mental health and importantly ensuring that “they did not feel alone.... the emotional connection during a period of isolation helped families feel cared about and not forgotten about, along with the support from the school.” (WSL, 2021, p.16)

Public-private partnership has also emerged as a positive a feature of lockdown. The story from the Youth, Family and Community learning service in South Lanarkshire demonstrates the importance of partnerships. It “highlighted that more can be achieved to benefit families by working collaboratively, using local contacts with business.” (WSL, 2021, p.182) The service delivered activity packs to support children, families and young people of all ages, including those with additional support needs, during the period of lockdown. It worked in partnership with Streetlevel and Regen:fx Youth Trust, using resources gathered through a range of sources including Fairshare, donations from local garden centres and excess consumables from schools. This approach enabled bespoke packs to be created to suit individual needs.

In Clackmannanshire, Dollar Academy staff worked in the local hubs and the school launched a new online open platform named [Dollar Discovers](#) to share the digital content they created during lockdown with young people throughout Scotland.

▪ Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that key parts of building back better are strong collaborative relationships, robust communication, connectedness and compassion. There is also a shared understanding of the challenges and respective roles. It is important to consider how we can embody the ‘can do’ spirit which was evident in lockdown and led to strong collaborative relationships, agility in decision-making and the focus on looking after our vulnerable children. As Research Professor Andy Hargreaves expressed, we have to move from “thinking about what we are losing” as we did during lockdown to “think harder about the things that are important like co-operation, relationships and figure out how to do it better.” (WSL, 2021, p.28) Equity is a major challenge which we should consider when we attempt to build back better education systems. The World Bank (2020) policy response to the pandemic outlined a series of propositions including multi-agency (non-competitive) partnerships bonded by mutual goals and building resilient communities. Many of the propositions are about building strong collaborative relationships and effective communication. The World Bank (2020, p.5) states:

“As the school system stabilizes, countries can use the focus and innovativeness of the recovery period to “build back better.” The key: don’t replicate the failures of the pre-COVID systems, but instead build toward improved systems and accelerated learning for all students. Everyone in the education systems needs to work together to learn from dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and build back better.”

Education stakeholders must also be aware of the danger of returning to the status quo. As Chris Chapman stated:

“One concern that I have is that the forces of conservatism send us back to where we were rather than using the pandemic as an opportunity to lever change. Without a doubt there is an opportunity, and I really hope that as a system that we can take the opportunity.” (WSL, 2021, p.126)

It is hoped that the key learning and experiences detailed in both the research literature and the stories from dealing with Covid-19 will be a catalyst for us to build back better with refined approaches to supporting the wellbeing and development of children and young people.



2. Leadership

▪ Introduction

“The work of educational leaders is always complex. It involves strategy, culture, relationships, administration, operations and complex decision-making, with multiple moving parts and often conflicting stakeholder views. During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools and school systems are additionally responding to constantly evolving circumstances, the increasing complexities of the lives of those in the communities they serve and to external narratives.” (Netolicky, 2020, p.1).

On top of the routine pressures, educational leaders are currently facing the significant challenges of social distancing, high absence rates and intensive cleaning. Leaders working within these high-pressured conditions are part of a new leadership order that has emerged. Harris and Jones (2020) describe as having, “no preparation or development programmes, no inspection framework, no KPIs, no benchmarks” (p.246). Similarly what all current educational leaders navigating the Covid-19 landscape also have in common is their dedication, creativity and their unwavering desire to safeguard the learning and wellbeing of all children and young people (Harris and Jones, 2020).

This section explores the complexities and triumphs of being an educational leader throughout Covid-19.

▪ Literature context

“The first thing is to understand that you are not a bad leader if your first thought is that I have no idea what to do. The second thought is that I still have to do something. The third thought is who can help me” (Andy Hargreaves, Research Professor, Boston College).

At the best of times school leaders are consistently balancing strategic and operational leadership. This is the complex process described by Ron Heifetz as simultaneously making decisions with a view of the “dancefloor” as well as from the “balcony.” However, in the crisis we are currently in, this process is forced to happen a lot more quickly: “leaders have been operating in a highly responsive and reactive survival mode of leadership” (Professor Christopher Chapman, Director, Policy Scotland). They are reliant on guidance about Covid-19 that can constantly change depending on how the virus develops. Whilst also considering the “intricacies and idiosyncrasies of their contexts”, the impact and what is likely to work (Netolicky, 2020).

Michael Ryan, Executive Director of WHO, recently explained in regard to leaders’ emergency response, “Speed trumps perfection...everyone is afraid of the consequence of error, but the greatest error is not to move” (Marco Derksen, 2020 cited in Netolicky, 2020 p.1). Thus when making these fast, and fast and sometimes complex decisions, leaders have had to communicate with clarity and purpose but also with empathy and humanity (Netolicky, 2020).

As a result, educational establishments are operating in new, innovative ways. School websites, social media channels and digital technology are paving the way for communities to come together. One example can be seen at Rosewell Primary School in Midlothian. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) met with the Parent Council to discuss a partnership approach to teaching and learning and to support health and wellbeing in the community. They have adopted the tagline #WeAreRosewell #WeAreResilient. Additionally they have created ‘Rosewell Shares’ which supports families through regular food boxes and other financial support. The impact is described as:

“Overnight we provided learning and communication through Facebook, School App, Twitter, Seesaw and Google Classrooms. Some of these were new platforms so we had to quickly adapt and upskill both parents/carers and staff. SLT offered personal support over the telephone or on the doorstep to ensure everyone in the community had access to on-line learning and to the latest information.” (WSL, 2021, p.118)

Chapman (2020), Sahlberg (2020 a, b and c) and Netolicky (2020) all make the case that the pandemic has placed a greater emphasis on equity. Netolicky goes on to argue that Covid-19’s disruption to education has the education system considering the humanity of education, rather than its measurable outcomes:

“The realities of education in a COVID-19 world have brought equity into even sharper focus as governments, systems and schools interrogate access to Internet, tablets, laptops, printers, learning technologies, stationery, parent involvement and community support. Many of these issues have always been there, but a light is now shining more brightly on the inequities between schools, families and students” (2020, p.2).

Consequently crisis and change management are now, more than ever before, essential skills of leadership. Running an effective establishment in disruptive times requires collaboration from all staff with a strong, empathetic leader to model this. As Barth (1990) states, “if the principal tries to do all of it, much of it will be left undone by anyone” (p.128). In order to protect the wellbeing of educational leaders, especially when faced with the rapid speed of change that Covid-19 has caused, “a high degree of trust will be needed, as the collective glue, to ensure that issues are addressed collectively as they arise” (Harris and Jones, 2020, p.246).

▪ Stories

Netolicky (2020) and Shirley et al (2020) both argue that the pandemic has created a greater opportunity for increased teacher autonomy, resilience and innovation. They also recognise how formal leadership roles can recognise and support this:

“Educators’ well-being is likely to prosper in environments that engage them in deep and morally inspiring purposes over which they exert shared professional control; meaningful collaborative professionalism that brings them closer to each other and to their students in taking responsibility for and achieving these transformational purposes... Leaders of schools and system can work from this shared moral purpose, value teacher expertise and provide opportunities of meaningful collaboration in online, remote or physically distanced modes” (Shirley et al 2020, p.10).

Leadership is not just about a promoted position or title; it is action, behaviour and a way of being within your practice. There are inspirational examples of this happening across in order to support learners and their families during Covid-19. One such example can be found in South Lanarkshire. The Youth, Family and Community Learning Teams have created activity packs to support children, families and young people of all ages, including those with additional support needs, during the period of lockdown:

“The packs are bespoke, learner-centred, and are prioritised for young people and families who have limited access to technology or printing facilities... They can help alleviate boredom and improve the mental health of young people by giving them activities that they can carry out on their own and with their families. Packs are delivered directly to the homes of young people and families. This allows invaluable face-to-face contact (from a two-metre distance) with the community and the opportunity for staff to offer support if required. Over 3,000 packs have been delivered to households since the end of March.” (WSL, 2021, p.182)

As well as supporting the wellbeing of the learning community, many have also placed staff wellbeing at the forefront of their priorities during the pandemic. This is particularly pertinent for our educational leaders and something Falkirk Council sought to address:

“Maintaining connection and providing support for our senior leaders was considered by the service as a high priority for term 4. There was therefore a requirement to adapt planned headteacher (HT) and depute headteacher (DHT) sessions and re-imagine how this support for senior leaders would be designed and delivered.” (WSL, 2021, p.186)

These sessions called, ‘Break, Create, Transform’ and ‘Leading Well - From Uncertainty to Beyond’, focused on bringing peer groups together to reflect on their experiences of leading in lockdown, their personal and professional achievements. They also considered the leadership qualities required during this period and developing shared strategies for keeping well. One participant explained,

“I found the session very worthwhile and useful I came away with a few good ideas which I implemented with my teams. It was also good to know that my worries are not mine alone! I did leave the session knowing that I was doing a good job, that I had ideas about further improvement in my practice and I could contact other HTs if I had any other questions.” (WSL, 2021, p.186)

▪ Conclusion

Research concludes that the principles of effective leadership are pretty constant—having a clear vision, managing people and building capacity (Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins 2020 cited in Harris and Jones 2020). However the evidence also suggests the importance of adaptive leadership, implying a shift in leadership practices caused by COVID-19 (Harris 2020 cited in Harris and Jones 2020). As a result there are several implications for education leadership going forward.

The first focuses on the importance of leaders collaborating with a range of partners beyond their own setting to provide the most robust support for learners and their families:

“Communities are a key resource for school leaders, as they host a wealth of additional expertise, knowledge, and local capacity. Forging stronger links with parent/community groups to support families, young people and children is now a necessity to deal with the many issues that COVID19 has generated particularly for vulnerable, marginalised, or isolated young people” (Harris and Jones, 2020, p.246).

Secondly, it is important that there is adequate and relevant professional learning for those in formal leadership roles. Professional learning that is cognisant of the current landscape and that sufficiently prepares them with the leadership frameworks, skills and practices to meet the challenges they will face. Harris and

Jones go on to argue, “It would be a mistake to simply re-configure or re-badge what was relevant before Covid-19, as much of this training and development may no longer fit for purpose.” (p.246) Senior leader professional learning during and post Covid-19 will require significant reform.

Thirdly, Sahlberg (2020b) argues:

“If we really want to transform our schools, we should expect less from policy-driven reforms and more from the visionary leadership of principals, professional wisdom of the teachers, and passionate engagement of students as change-makers” (online).

We need to honour the professionalism of our teachers, school staff and leaders and facilitate ways to unmask their potential.

As discussed, educational leaders have difficult decisions to make for the immediate future. Covid-19 has pushed the education system out of its comfort zone into a situation of ongoing uncertainty and revision. On the other hand it has also potentially pushed the system into a place of opportunity for long-term renewal and growth. Can “we use the innovation and commitment within the Scottish education system to reimagine a better future?” Chapman (WSL, 2021, p.136).



3. Health and wellbeing

▪ Introduction

This theme demonstrates how practitioners in schools, local authority central staff teams, and third sector organisations in Scotland have ‘stepped up’ during lockdown to create ‘connection’ with children and their families and to specifically provide support for their health and wellbeing.

▪ Literature context

The British Educational Research Association’s (BERA) Position Paper on Wellbeing and Mental Health (2020) highlights that pupil wellbeing and mental health can consistently be linked with school connectedness. From early 2020, globally, this connection to school for many children and young people has been significantly disrupted. Many children, and their parents, say they have been very worried during the pandemic (The Children’s Society, 2020 a, p.2). A poll of 4,000 children and young people conducted by YouGOV for Barnardo’s reported a rise in issues related to mental health and wellbeing for at least one in three respondents (2020, p.5). In Scotland, the Scottish Youth Parliament’s survey (2020, p.3) Lockdown Lowdown reported similar findings. The raft of recent national and international surveys related to the pandemic has demonstrated that children have been affected by worries about the virus itself, losing their connection with family and friends, coping with the complexities of life and learning at home, anxiety about exams, and general uncertainty about the future. Parents have had to contend with these worries as well as supporting their children’s learning at home, potentially whilst

facing job or financial insecurities. Collectively, families, have had to cope with compound stressors especially those with additional caring responsibilities, those in large families living in crowded conditions, those facing food insecurity, or those providing essential services during the pandemic (Betz, 2020, p.4). These worries and issues have coincided with a time when children have been physically disconnected from their friends, their school, and wider family members. Andy Hargreaves (Research Professor, Boston College) refers to “the COVID generation who may be affected emotionally by up to two years as a result of being disconnected from their peers as ‘Generation C’.” (WSL, 2021, p.28)

The World Health Organization (2001, p.1) defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” and mental health as:

“a state of wellbeing in which an individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of everyday life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution.”

Wellbeing in more general terms can simply be described as how we are doing. Good mental health is understood to be “the foundation for wellbeing and effective functioning for an individual and for a community” (WHO, 2004, p.10). The Children’s Society found in their annual survey (2020 a, p.4) that boredom, anxiety, emotional behaviour, attention difficulties, sleep problems, panic attacks and urges to self-harm are some of the potential effects of the pandemic on children and young people’s emotional and mental health. During early lockdown these negative effects would have been compounded by reduced access to non-academic school support (Hoffman and Miller, 2020, p.302) and reduced mental health supports (Young Minds, 2020, p.7).

“For me going from being quite an outdoorsy person to not being able to go out; kayaking, seeing friends or even being able to go to school was really difficult. As a carer in education, I love school. Now that might sound like a strange concept to some, a pupil actually liking school. School is a respite for carers, a time to focus on something other than your caring role and give yourself time to try to relax. However, during lockdown that was taken away. I found myself having no motivation to do schoolwork and the stress was building, not only for me, for the whole family. All my coping mechanisms were taken away from me, and most carers were in similar positions to myself.”..... “If I were to make a prediction, there will be a dramatic rise in mental health cases around December/early January time for prelims and an even bigger increase April/May time.” (Sam, Young Adult carer)

Reports suggest that the impact of the pandemic on health and wellbeing is not felt equally across all groups of children and young people (Betz, 2020, p.5; World Bank, 2020, Davies, 2020: p.1). Children and young people with disabilities, who are care experienced or young carers, those for whom English is not their first language, those who identify as Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI), those who live in poverty, or who are homeless, have to cope with existing stresses due to their circumstances plus the additional stressors associated with

the pandemic. In terms of emotional wellbeing, the State of the Nation Report (Department for Education, 2020, p.12) indicates that children and young people with special educational needs or a disability, disabled young people, children and young people with disadvantaged family backgrounds, and some children from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds reported as being more anxious than children and young people without these characteristics.

“I feel good because I want people to live. I think everything is going quite well, but I don’t want to go back into lockdown, if we do I am really worried about school work! Then there is the two household rule, I get supervised contact, so that is three houses, so my sisters can’t come! I can just see my sister, because that is not supervised, but it’s not happened yet, because we didn’t know. We hadn’t been given all the information, we only found out today. I don’t want to go back to lockdown because then contact with my family will just be on the phone, and I don’t like that because I can’t see them.” (B. Baggins age 12, Children’s Parliament, 2020b: Corona Times, Edition 6)

Despite all the threats to children’s and young people’s health and wellbeing caused by the pandemic including self-isolation and other imposed social restrictions during lockdown there have been some positives. Many parents have reported improved relationships with their children, children spending more time outdoors, and some children stating they feel less pressure from peers when they do not have to attend school. (Department for Education, 2020, p.114; Smith and Barron, 2020, p.40).

“Being active is harder than it used to be, my karate was cancelled which is my main exercise but what I have found is I walk a lot more than I used to so I get my exercise. My family have realised that we never go on walks or really exercise, so after coronavirus that’s our plan. My Mum also wants to go out more in general as soon as coronavirus has blown over and I don’t blame her., I really just want to see my friends.” (Bruno the Hamster, age 12, Children’s Parliament, 2020a: Corona Times, Edition 2)

▪ Stories

“Schools are uniquely positioned to help members of their communities maintain a sense of connectedness, an important part of wellbeing, and to identify those who need additional support” (Betz, 2020, p.1).

“We see lots of really heartening examples where people are looking at the principles of nurture and improving resilience to help children and young people work through what we are living through ... there has been a strong focus on reconnection and renewal with families and communities.”
(Graeme Logan, Director, Learning Directorate, Scottish Government, WSL, 2021, p.80).

For example, during lockdown, Claypotts Primary in Dundee put together CALM boxes for all 390 children filled with worry dolls, play dough, mindfulness colouring ins, bubbles, breathing sticks, teddy bears with a script and suggestions about how the children could use these to help them regulate stress. They then used the Compassionate and Connected Classroom resource to help the staff then plan for the pupils return to school to develop their focus on the synergy between learning and wellbeing through learner agency.

“Well, some people have been stressing out and my teacher has given us this helpful thing called '30 – 3 – 30'. If you're annoyed or stressed in class, you're to do 30 seconds of anything that will help calm you down. Then, if you're still feeling stressed you do three minutes and after that, thirty minutes. It's a really good thing. Lots of people in my class have been stressed because of the way that Coronavirus is going. I think most of the people feel happy to be back at school but some would rather be staying at home to play the Xbox. We haven't really talked about lockdown, not really. I don't think it'd be as helpful for me but for other people in my class it would be really helpful because you can just tell that some people are stressed from coming back from lockdown. Others are much calmer.” (Ringtone, age 11, Children's Parliament, 2020b: Corona Times, Edition 6)

In Stirling, the Youth Participation Group worked with a number of primary schools to deliver a resilience programme for young people struggling with confidence and self-esteem. The focus of the work was on coping mechanisms, resilience, outdoor learning and working together, building connections and relationships. Ricky Williamson (Youth Worker Lead) said “lockdown has highlighted the need for this kind of intervention more than ever, and has focused our practice moving forward.” (WSL, 2021, p.164)

The Children's Society, recognised that:

“some of the things young people feel boosted their emotional well-being in lockdown are closely linked to the five ways of wellbeing. Music, art, connecting with family and friends, and sport have all helped buttress children's wellbeing during this difficult time.” (The Children's Society, 2020a, p.28).

On these themes, Scotland's educational settings, youth, community and voluntary groups rose to the challenge of using creative solutions to support or improve health and wellbeing during lockdown.

For example, in East Ayrshire the Strings n Things group helped people who often struggle with depression, anxiety or low confidence to feel valued and maintain a sense of belonging through weekly Zoom music performances. In Glasgow, North/South Lanarkshire, and East Renfrewshire, Bazooka Arts helped vulnerable children and families regulate stress and anxiety through weekly therapeutic art workshops and regular wellbeing check-ins. The Frisson Foundation organised sing-alongs, on-line tutorials, and events such as the Virtual Glee Choir Concert and 'Glee-o-vision' to share the benefits of music and song with hundreds of children and young people across Scotland during lockdown.

As the scientific understanding of the pandemic developed, the public health advice changed, and it was realised that that learning outdoors should be encouraged as a means of improving physical and emotional wellbeing:

“We worried that our youngsters were perhaps spending too much time online and, after surveying the pupils and parents, we introduced some activities that took pupils away from the computer screen, such as exercise sessions and nature challenges.” (Ian Munro, Rector, Dollar Academy: WSL, 2021, p.78).”

In the Highland Council the Youth and Community Gaelic Officer created a wide range of Gaelic medium videos to stimulate health by encouraging children to go outside and explore. Topics included birds, wild animals, Scotland’s trees, flowers and Gaelic place names.

As the lockdown extended beyond early expectations, children and parent’s enthusiasm for ‘living and learning’ under restricted conditions started to wane, the risk of emotional and mental health issues developing increased.

“One of the things that we need to do is create hope” (Gayle Gorman, HM Chief Inspector, Education Scotland: WSL, 2021, p.138).

In Comely Park Primary, Falkirk one class teacher fostered a positive mental health message. They took on the persona of the school mascot, Parker the Bear, and wrote the children a rainbow based poem about missing them, positive lockdown experiences and hope for the future. The project created a positive buzz over Twitter and Teams. Parents commented how much they enjoyed working with their children and sharing their published work with family members they could not physically visit. “The engagement with literacy was overwhelming, and the positive response to the lockdown experience and expression of feelings and hopes for the future were extremely touching and moving (Katrina Lucas, aka Parker the Bear: WSL, 2021, p.180).”

Some groups of children and young people who experienced disadvantage, were considered vulnerable, or required additional support before the pandemic were at risk of being made more vulnerable or disadvantaged during the pandemic. Education children’s services and third sector organisations quickly galvanised to try and meet the needs of these groups. For example, the Scottish Centre for Children with Motor Impairment proved that absence wasn’t a barrier to learning and therapy for their children and young people with complex additional support needs. They kept children who were medically vulnerable connected to the school community through learning activities such as recorded stories from familiar staff reading in their familiar class rooms, fortnightly whole school Zoom Assemblies. They supported parents with online interactive directed therapy sessions. In South Lanarkshire, Vertigo Theatre for Youth have created mental health support networks and reduced exclusion by creating story telling videos in English, British Sign Language, and Makaton. In East Lothian, the Connected Communities programme used creative solutions to reduce isolation, increase social engagement and provide emotional support to care experienced young people throughout lockdown. They used a partnership approach across their children’s services to provide a range of diverse programmes tailored to the needs of their young people including an outdoor learning biking programme, an art group, and a music bus. In

Edinburgh, Gracemount Primary School and Gracemount Secondary School worked with youth and community groups to tackle food poverty by creating the 'Lunch Stop'. Collaboratively they provided 250 families a day with packed lunches, ready meals, store cupboard essentials, toiletries and cleaning products. There has been an effort to support children through a range of imaginative initiatives.

“The pandemic has highlighted the system’s strength and capability for working with more vulnerable and disadvantaged children and families.”
(Chris Chapman, Professor, University of Glasgow: WSL, 2021, p.136)

▪ Conclusion

‘Schools are important in meeting children’s non-academic needs’ (Hoffman et al., 2020, p.302).

Educational settings are likely to play a vital role in supporting and improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people as we progress through this pandemic by providing familiarity and predictability, connection, safety, structure, and pastoral support (Betz, 2020, p.2). The return to schools and colleges may ease some of the main worries identified by children and young people in the numerous surveys conducted during lockdown but we must not become complacent. Quotes from the Good Childhood Report (2020) demonstrate the fear, stresses, and challenges young people expect to face as they try to ‘catch up’ on the months of missed, or reduced education. Going forward “we must listen to what children and young people are telling us and respond. Yes, we must keep the positives, but we must also move quickly to address emerging problems.” (The Children’s Society, 2020a, p.2).

“I used to worry about school work, now I still worry about school work. But the big worry is around the virus. If a friend doesn’t get in touch for a day I think, are they okay? My Mum found out that someone in my school is ill and in hospital so that’s a worry. It makes a difference knowing someone who is ill. Some of my friends are feeling lonely or down being in the same place every day. I would like adults to try to play games with us, make it more fun. Teachers need to understand that they need to make lessons less boring. They are trying to make it easier but with that it becomes boring. And parents need to try and have fun too, like children. Like, prioritise fun and active things.” (Creative Songstress, age 14, Children’s Parliament, 2020a: Corona Times, Edition 2)

Since mental health and wellbeing are fundamental to learning, (Panayiotou et al., 2019, p.193) they must be prioritised.

The mass of data collated and all the lived experiences of children, parents and the people who work with them during this pandemic have made it obvious that education cannot simply return to pre-COVID practice and thinking. If we are to ‘build back better’ the education system needs to ‘learn and change’. Ideas for change are emerging, and in terms of wellbeing common themes include:

- “We need to promote wellbeing all of the time in our educational settings” (The Children’s Society, 2020 b, p.28), not just during this pandemic or other times of crisis. This may require a national strategy.
- We need to develop a national measure of children’s wellbeing to provide an evidence base for planning and evaluating ‘wellbeing’ interventions at a local level.
- We need to plan ‘wellbeing’ supports within the context of a child’s family.

“We need to look holistically at the entirety of children’s lives..... A child worried about food or safety, or the loss of his parent’s job, is not going to be able to absorb much learning, online or offline..... If we want children to learn better, schools and other agencies helping children have to find ways to help their families” (Davie, 2020, p.1).

- We need to rethink teacher professionalism to enable all teachers to perform a wider range of roles beyond a focus on learning to include proactively supporting wellbeing and engaging more with parents and families (OECD, 2020, p.8)
- We need to create “more equitable education systems” (Chapman, WSL, 2021, p. 136) by identifying and supporting all ‘vulnerable’ learners for as long as that support is needed.

“As a school this pandemic has forced us to work closer together and meet the needs of our young people in a more holistic fashion as we believe without meeting the basic human needs of our young people it is more difficult to engage in meaningful education” (Daniel Williamson, Balnacraig School, WSL.2021, online WSL, 2021, online).

The pandemic has taught us to never again underestimate the value of the support that early learning centres, schools, colleges, and youth and community services provide to children, young people and their families. It has also taught us to be flexible when faced with unforeseen challenges. In many cases this has led to strong collaborative relationships between stakeholders and flexible approaches to deal with the changing circumstances and needs. We must also remember that this support comes from the people within these organisations and who have also lived through the pandemic. Although this article has been focussed on the wellbeing of children and young people, we also need to reflect on the wellbeing of the amazing staff who work within them and be vigilant in understanding the pressures which is being placed on individuals.



4. Learning and teaching

▪ Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on learners and educators across the globe. World Bank reported that by the end of April 2020, schools had closed in 180 countries, calling this “the largest simultaneous shock to all education systems in our lifetimes” (2020, p.5).” Learners across all sectors were impacted by national lockdowns as governments acted to get the virus under control. Approaches to learning and teaching had to change drastically as learning establishments were forced to close. There is no doubt that “school closures at short notice created severe disruption, and headteachers had to mobilise staff to teach remotely with little preparation or training time.” (Bubb and Jones, 2020, p.209)

This theme demonstrates how educators responded to the challenge, adapting approaches in order to support learners and the continuity of learning during unprecedented times.

▪ Literature context

It is widely reported that the pandemic and resulting disruption to learning and teaching has the potential to lead to widespread learning loss (World Bank, 2020), (Balakrishnan, 2020). It is also recognised that this will likely have a greater impact on those from disadvantaged backgrounds or living in poverty.

“This crisis exposes the many inequities in our education systems – from the broadband and computers needed for online education, through the supportive environments needed to focus on learning...” (Schleicher, 2020, p.1)

“The assumption is that the learning loss experienced by children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds will be greater than those from more advantaged backgrounds and therefore COVID-19 will reinforce and amplify educational inequities.” (Chapman and Bell, 2020, p.1)

Pasi Sahlberg (2020b) notes that the Covid-19 pandemic has not created new inequalities, but it has made existing ones more evident. As reported in the United Nations Policy Brief (2020), learning continuity became a priority for governments world-wide, many of which turned to ICT. This required teachers to move to distance learning and online methods of delivery.

“We tend to think about online learning as the way to do distance learning. However, we might be able to learn from many South American and African countries that have been doing distance learning for many years via television and radio because of the lack of infrastructure in remote areas. A multi-media approach will probably be needed to reach all students...” (Doucet et al, 2020, p.12)

The potential inequity of online learning was clear to educators across the country. Ensuring equity emerged as a major challenge as well as a priority. Recognising the importance of maintaining contact with their learners whilst in lockdown, educators quickly sought solutions to providing access to learning for all.

“Teachers turned into contortionists as they strove to support their students in any way they could, no matter how unusual. They emailed, texted, did video chats and conferencing and communicated the old-fashioned way: by telephone.” (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2020, p.330)

Local authorities and establishments took steps to try and ensure continuity of provision. The stories in this publication highlight some of the efforts to mitigate against potential inequity. Settings may have closed, but learning was still on the agenda.

“A significant change to schooling included the move towards online learning. This allowed teachers to carry on teaching and learning online. During the pandemic, there have been many opportunities for students to learn outwith schools. **Learning can take place anywhere.**” (NG Pak Tee, Associate Professor, Singapore University: WSL, 2021, p.174)

Across Scotland, many practitioners demonstrated agility in their response to Covid-19, embracing new skills in their use of digital tools to ensure learners felt connected and continued to learn. Another key factor in the success of learning at home is the learner's ability to learn independently. Sahlberg (2020a, p.7) identified the following:

“An important lesson from the COVID-19 pandemic is that schools and students who are more self-directed in their own teaching and learning often do better in both normal and crisis situations, than those who haven't learned to do so. Self-directedness strengthens student engagement, brings about authentic learning and helps schools respond better to emerging inequalities.....learning from home is an opportunity to ... learn how to learn.”

This is borne out by the research of Bubb and Jones (2020), who found that there was a consensus amongst stakeholders that pupils became more independent during the home schooling experience of Covid-19. Learners expressed increased motivation and a sense of ownership from taking responsibility for their own learning.

World Bank (2020) and Chapman and Bell (2020) both recognise the importance of educators establishing the learning that took place during lockdown, as well as identifying any learning losses or gaps in learning. This will be vital in planning appropriate strategies to overcome increased inequities and support the system to recover.

▪ Stories

Graeme Logan, Director, Learning Directorate, Scottish Government stated:

“Our use of technologies to support learning has advanced significantly. We now know how it feels to be working remotely and therefore have a new level of understanding on how it feels to be remote and/or isolated.” (WSL, 2021, p.80)

Gayle Gorman, HM Chief Inspector, Education Scotland, highlights that “digital technology and integrated 21st century learning is a ‘silver lining’ and this should be built on. We've seen transformational use of technology by teachers across Scotland.” This is a feature of many of the stories shared in ‘What Scotland Learned’ which consolidate and build on existing practice.

The question of how remote learning addressing subject choice is an important issue. e-Sgoil has sought to enhance and enrich the learning experience of pupils whilst removing barriers to equity of subject choice since 2016. Their experience and expertise in using technology to support learning across Scotland and further afield, came to the fore during the Covid-19 lockdown period. Working with a range of partners including the Association of Directors of Education Scotland (ADES) and Education Scotland, e-Sgoil continues to supplement and augment pupils' learning following the reopening of schools.

“For many young people this was their first experience of remote learning and teaching. Not only was e-Sgoil able to offer access to live, real-time lessons to complement the work of schools, it also offered young people the opportunity to develop digital skills essential for learning, life and work.

e-Sgoil staff drew on their expertise and experience to produce a series of ‘Nutshell’ guides as the Scottish Education Community adapted to their new normal. These guides – produced for pupils, parents, schools and practitioners – shared advice to all stakeholders on how to maximise remote learning and teaching. This gave teaching staff across the nation valuable tried and tested techniques to adopt as they adapted their provision in response to lockdown – building capability and confidence.” (WSL, 2021, p.132)

Professional learning for practitioners to support and enhance pedagogy has been a common feature of the pandemic. Many staff engaged in upskilling themselves in the use of digital technology. Collaboration and networking to share practice and discuss challenges has happened on a local, national and global scale, with a range of online conferences, workshops, webinars and ‘blethers’. In one example, The Highland Council worked with partners and community organisations to create interactive, bite-sized professional learning sessions for early years staff. These focused on areas such as Outdoor Play and Learning, Family Learning and Realising the Ambition. The recorded sessions enable staff to access professional learning and support flexibly, and provide a source of connection for practitioners who may otherwise feel isolated. Given the rural nature of the local authority, there is real benefit in continuing to make use of this approach in the future.

Similarly, the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA) Scotland transformed their approach to delivering adult learning from a majority of face-to-face engagements in community settings, to a virtual learning environment with almost all of its provision accessible online. Many learners have indicated their preference for virtual learning which allows them a degree of flexibility and choice not afforded by set class times and in-person sessions. The pace of this change has resulted in WEA achieving their five year virtual learning target in six months and will lead to a sustained transformational change in their practice.

As indicated by the literature however, there was recognition that moving everything online would exacerbate inequalities for some learners. Mitigating approaches included distributing a range of devices to families to ensure children had access to the online learning opportunities on offer. This was the case in many establishments who also supported the provision of internet access for some families.

Many educators also recognised that focusing on technology alone to support learning during lockdown would not meet the needs of every learner. Hargreaves, (WSL, 2021, p.28) reflects on OECD advice on the use of technology in education:

“The OECD’s education chief, Andreas Schleicher, has warned that despite some promise shown by technology options during the coronavirus pandemic, “education systems need to pay close attention that technology will not further amplify existing inequalities in access and quality of learning.”

Glasgow’s Improvement Challenge Team adopted an innovative approach, working in partnership with the Glasgow Evening Times to publish a range of family friendly learning resources and activities from early to second level, three times per week. This ensured that fun, family learning activities which encouraged taking learning outdoors, were made easily accessible.

“The materials compliment Glasgow’s literacy and numeracy progression frameworks and follow the descriptions of activities previously outlined above to engage and encourage our children at home. The materials are also providing Glasgow’s teachers with effective, relevant examples of activities for engaging homework and the legacy to continue to support future home learning post pandemic.” (WSL, 2021, p.42)

Community Learning Development in South Ayrshire demonstrated a similar understanding of the challenges their literacy learners would face during lockdown. Tutors and volunteers distributed easy readers to ensure continuity of provision. Tutors then called learners to discuss the book. As restrictions lifted, groups of learners came together for physically distanced walks, taking the opportunity to discuss their books and reflect on their experiences. The opportunity to connect with others was as important to learning as the formal literacy activities.

The move to learning at home for children placed significant responsibility on parents to support learning during the lockdown period. As Gayle Gorman stated, “Parental engagement that is meaningful and involves learning has been evident. Parents have been seen as real partners.” (WSL, 2021, p.138) This was not without its challenges. Many parents were working from home, whilst trying to support learning with more than one child at different stages in the system.

“Support to parents is crucial, as home-schooling will be new to many and could be a heavy burden that takes an emotional toll. Parents are critical to providing a structure to the activities of the child even if their child has good access to remote learning. Parental support is even more important for children with disabilities and diverse learning needs, whose educational services—if they benefited from such services before the crisis—would most likely have ended with the school closures.”(World Bank, 2020, p.22)

The Donaldson Trust recognised the challenges of life in lockdown for families of children with complex needs. They maintained contact with parents throughout lockdown in the absence of other support mechanisms. Individual support packages were created for each child and staff pre-recorded signed videos to pupils, setting a daily task. The most important factor was maintaining routines, structures and emotional wellbeing.

“Most children enjoyed the tasks and it gave the families a focus during the day. Some children struggled with the concept of doing school work at home. We made it clear that the tasks were there as a means of offering structure and engagement, but if they caused more anxiety, they were not compulsory. Some children showed increased independence skills at home that transferred back to school.” (WSL, 2021, p.52)

Many settings became more creative in their approach to developing learning activities which parents could support at home. There was an increased focus on the principles outlined by the Refreshed Narrative on Scotland’s Curriculum, (Education Scotland, 2019). Manor Park School in Aberdeen responded to feedback from parents who felt overwhelmed by trying to manage different learning activities with more than one child at the same time. Staff developed learning challenges using different contexts so that families could engage in learning together.

“Our staff developed a greater understanding of learning across the four contexts and created resources which produced more creative and skill-based approaches to learning. This supported our professional learning as a team, and also an awareness of how to support parents to engage with their children’s learning. This has supported teacher leadership with curriculum development and has raised awareness about what our children need now and for the future.” (WSL, 2021, online)

Reimers and Schleicher (2020) outline the need to ensure that teachers have a deep understanding...of the process of designing a curriculum and the pedagogies that will best communicate the ideas behind the curriculum. Laurence Findlay, Director of Education and Children’s Services, Aberdeenshire Council, expressed the following hope:

“There is a real opportunity to look at the curriculum, ensuring that we adhere to the design principles, exploring parity of esteem with skills and the traditional curriculum, engaging with employers, etc. This is an opportunity to radically reshape the curriculum rather than tinker around the edges, which has been a feature of former practice.” (WSL, 2021, p.140)

The Creative Arts Department at Kibble Education and Care Centre in Renfrewshire undertook a new project during lockdown which embodies this aspiration. They aimed to provide learning which was inclusive and nurturing as well as promoting attainment, engagement and enjoyment. They ensured learner agency was a key feature in the development of their Virtual Fashion Show, with students and staff learning new skills in sewing, fabric design and theatrical special effects.

“The Fashion Show not only boosted our learners’ self-esteem and confidence but ensured the attainment of many skills required for our ever-changing world, including communication, collaboration, problem solving and self-regulation. Our outlook as practitioners has widened, we were able to see the delivery of the curriculum through a different lens, one that included a digital component. This ...has allowed us to see the avenues we can future follow to educate our learners.” (WSL, 2021, p.74)

This is perhaps best summed up by the International Commission on the Futures of Education, (2020).

“COVID-19 makes us ask “what is learning for” and invites us to reassess what sort of skills and capabilities we are really expecting education and learning to deliver..... (p.17).

This is the right time for a deep reflection on curriculum. We must prioritise the development of the whole person not just academic skills. Curricula should be increasingly integrated and based on themes and problems that allows us to learn to live in peace with our common humanity and our common planet.” (p.18).

▪ Conclusion

Covid-19 has forced us to reflect on and adapt our approaches to learning and teaching. The pandemic has had a significant impact on learners and whilst this may result in ‘learning losses’, it is important to recognise the ‘silver linings’ for education and capitalise on these. There is a greater understanding of how technology can be used to support learning and the importance of developing digital skills. There have been creative approaches to ensuring equitable access to learning and more flexibility in terms of ‘time and place’. This has encouraged professional reflection by educationalists on the nature of learning, the potential to refine practice and for teachers to become real catalysts for change. This will help to ensure that developments are embedded and sustainable with the potential to generate further momentum. There has been genuine partnership with parents, partner organisations and other services. There has been a move towards creative approaches to learning and skills development to engage and motivate learners and we have a strengthened understanding of the skills learners require to become independent in their learning. Educators should build on the learning from this crisis, collaborating and sharing as a system, locally, nationally and globally.

“It is essential that teachers and communities be better prepared and supported if equitable and inclusive learning, in and beyond classrooms, is to be guaranteed. Technology alone cannot guarantee good learning outcomes. More important than training teachers in ICT skills, is ensuring that they have the assessment and pedagogical skills to meet students at their level and to implement the accelerated curricula and differentiated learning strategies likely to emerge in the return to school.” (United Nations, 2020, p.23)

Formative approaches to assessment will support educators to plan appropriate next steps. It is important to focus on what learners **can** do and build from this. As we support recovery in education we need effective and inclusive practice to overcome increased inequities. (Chapman and Bell, 2020)

“Clearly, effective learning out of school placed greater demands on autonomy, capacity for independent learning, executive functioning, self-monitoring, and the capacity to learn on line. These are all essential skills for now and for the future.” Reimers and Schleicher (2020, p.7)

We need to focus on developing these skills in our children and young people in order for them to become flexible, agile and resilient learners, ready for the uncertainties of the future. As outlined by Luthra and Mackenzie (2020, p.1):

“In this ever-changing global environment, young people require resilience and adaptability – skills that are proving to be essential to navigate effectively through this pandemic. Looking into the future, some of the most important skills that employers will be looking for will be creativity, communication and collaboration, alongside empathy and emotional intelligence; and being able to work across demographic lines of differences to harness the power of the collective through effective teamwork.”

We are fortunate that Curriculum for Excellence affords the flexibility to tailor the curriculum to the needs of our learners. Perhaps it is time to realign our rationale for education to ensure it meets the relevant demands?

As we support educational recovery, we have a unique opportunity to consider not just a return to the system we had, but a fundamental reimagining of what education should be in the years ahead. What is the true purpose, nature and value of education? We have learned valuable lessons and worked together to overcome significant challenges. Let’s use these “crisis-recovery strategies as a basis for long-term improvements, and seize the opportunity to ‘build back better’.” (World Bank, 2020, p.37)



5. Communities

▪ Introduction

“Communities come in all shapes and sizes, as exemplified in physical or geographical communities, special interest groups and virtual spaces which offer both compensation and escape from the ‘real’ world.” (Delanty, 2018, p.206)

This section aims to highlight the incredible response across communities to a pandemic and the impact achieved when the community works together. Effective communication, compassion and relationships are key features of the evidence, which leads to positive impacts. The Strategic Guidance for Community Planning Partnerships: Community Learning & Development (CLD) states CLD acts to: “empower people, individually and collectively, to make positive change in their lives and in their communities through learning.” (Scottish Government, 2012, p.3).

Specifically, in relation to schools:

“Communities are a key resource for school leaders, as they host a wealth of additional expertise, knowledge, and local capacity. Forging stronger links with parent/community groups to support families, young people and children is now a necessity to deal with the many issues that COVID-19 has generated particularly for vulnerable, marginalised, or isolated young people.” (Harris and Jones, 2020, p. 246).

Effective partnership work and collaboration has mitigated the problems experienced by individuals, families and the wider community during Covid-19, and is reflected in the experiences of communities.

▪ Literature context

Research and literature from the UK and Internationally recognise the importance of community, which, is made up of both the place and the people within it. It remains clear that:

“a community is sustained because individual people believe in it to be important...[and]...the concept persists in different forms as a touchstone for the animation of people...working together for the common good.” (Coburn and Gormally, 2017, p. 91)

The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted the importance of communities to individuals. The collective responses and support of individuals and organisations can lead to powerful outcomes.

“Never before has the power of people and communities been clearer. When we emerge into the ‘new normal’ and whatever that looks like, it is clear that community responses will play a vital role in rebuilding and responding to the new challenges ahead... We are seeing communities responding to the crisis in their own unique ways by using their insights of what is needed locally, and organising around the knowledge and skills they have to meet those needs and concerns.” (McLean, 2020, p.1)

Schools have highlighted the significance of the wider community to support families and children, particularly those who are vulnerable and were shown to be most at risk during this time. In a recent paper on closing the attainment gap Professor Kintrea (2020, p.11) advocates encouraging communities to mix and supporting schools “to look beyond their gates and work more directly with communities.” Learning from projects such as [Children’s Neighbourhoods Scotland](#) has been valuable when asking people what they would like to see happening in their area.

A recent Mental Health & Covid-19 report ‘In Our Own Words’ (Barnardo’s, 2020, p.29) highlights the support in the community that children and young people were able to access when schools were closed:

“Many children and young people said that they continued to access support from groups or services in the community. These were a vital source of help and often these services had developed ways in which to support children and young people remotely – either online or by delivering resources to their home. We know community-based support – often delivered by the voluntary sector – is particularly important for children and young people who might face barriers... such as those from BAME backgrounds, LGBTQ+ children and young people or children living in or leaving care.”

Gormally, Beggan & Coburn (2020, p.1) all assert, “the current context provides a common narrative for re-asserting the importance and value of community and its purpose including and beyond times of crisis or insecurity.”

▪ Stories

Graeme Logan, Director, Learning Directorate, Scottish Government commented that the following had been identified as critical:

“There has been a strong focus on reconnection and renewal with families and communities. It is important that we assess where children are sensitively and carefully and continue to ensure that we focus on achieving excellence and equity for all learners...I also think it is more important than ever for the education system to work with other multi-agency partners to understand the needs of children and families and to help them to make progress.” (WSL, 2021, p.80)

The stories submitted for this category illustrate the way in which communities working together in collaboration can have an overwhelmingly positive impact on individuals and families. Opportunities for communities to come together have always existed, however, the pandemic brought about a collective urgency to work together at pace, and a willingness from institutions of power to hand over that power to those who live in the communities.

Falkirk Council CLD staff worked with local community groups and businesses to deliver crisis support in the form of food parcels and prescription pick-ups. They felt that “working in partnership with others on a common goal should be the key thing that comes out of the current crisis.” (WSL, 2021, p.110)

Several stories touch on strengthened working relationships: within local authorities; with third sector partners; between individual community members and between schools and youth work partners. This also resulted in swifter decision making and reduced bureaucracy, benefitting all involved.

Laurencekirk School in Aberdeenshire felt strongly that working with the local community had been essential. Local businesses and community members came together to celebrate the Primary 7's leaving, putting up good luck signs in local shops and cutting a giant 'good luck' in the grass. (WSL, 2021, p.102) The visual support reaffirmed the community spirit.

Practitioners identified the needs and quickly responded. Delivery styles and approaches were adapted for online provision. Class teachers in primary and secondary, family learning, CLD practitioners delivering digital youth work, adult learning and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) were agile and responsive to needs. Pedagogy changed overnight as practitioners developed a new set of digital skills to ensure learning opportunities continued/accessible.

“The pandemic has compounded inequalities that already existed and has hit hardest the most vulnerable and marginalised in society.” (Barnado's, 2020, p.9)

Schools have highlighted the significance of the wider community to support families and children, particularly those who are vulnerable and were shown to be most at risk during this time. In North Lanarkshire, depute headteachers worked with the CLD Youth Work team to identify vulnerable families:

“we knew that vulnerable young people and their families would find this a difficult time for a variety of reasons...we wanted to be at the forefront of any community response.” (WSL, 2021, p.104)

Partners worked together to ensure support like foodbank referrals and benefit advice continued for these families. They assumed an advocacy role for families.

North Ayrshire’s CLD youth work team reflected on the impact of their continued online offer:

“During a period of uncertainty and isolation...activities and events that gave young people and their families a common goal, a sense of community and helped them overcome feelings of social isolation and low mood...it created stronger partnerships and a more cohesive approach to the needs and wants of those young people and their families.” (WSL, 2021, p.88)

Ardler Primary School in Dundee continued to engage with families throughout lockdown with activities such as online cook-alongs and doorstep deliveries of activity packs and food parcels. The school’s family worker stated, “it made us realise that the school is more than just a building, it is a community and in difficult times we can all support each other.” (WSL, 2021, p.100)

Derek Brown, Executive Director of Education and Families, North Lanarkshire Council, reflects:

“Schools worked really hard to reach their communities. In Community Hubs, they built teams and relationships across schools which made amazing things happen. Looking back, we would benefit from maybe more consistency operating across the school communities and learning from the best examples of our work. But empowering people and enabling creativity was a feature of the response.” (WSL, 2021, p.176)

▪ Conclusion

There is a real sense of togetherness in the face of adversity and people of all ages are finding new ways to connect with those around them and those further afield. It is interesting to reflect on the extent to which circumstances arising from Covid-19 are creating opportunities to forge new communities and reshape lifestyles and interactions. Many of the stories reflect on these ‘new’ communities and plan to build on the growing relationships and partnerships.

Where practitioners have had to think outside the box, there is recognition that some new ways of working (e.g. online/blended learning, online groups) are more efficient and effective than practice and engagement prior to the pandemic. They have encouraged a widening of educational experiences. Where there is evidence of improved methods of engagement and support many plan to continue and develop approaches delivered during Covid-19. Practitioners aim to retain what worked well and adapt what didn’t to ensure they continue to meet the needs of everyone in communities.

A Principal Teacher, Linwood High School, Renfrewshire reflects:

“I hope we, and Scotland, have learned that we are more efficient, capable and stronger when we work together and will try and ensure that this is embedded in our practice and planning in the future.”
(WSL, 2021, online)

In conclusion, Janie McManus, Strategic Director, Scrutiny, Education Scotland, succinctly sums of the theme of communities:

“Externally, it has to be about joint endeavours, that no-one can do this on their own, that we need everyone contributing. Recognising the moral imperative across different layers of education to achieve the very best for children, young people and communities. The emphasis is on collaboration; listening to different perspectives and reaching decisions together.” (WSL, 2021, p.188)

Moving forward it is crucial that families and wider communities have a voice in future decision making. There is a desire to build back better and firm acknowledgement, from a range of stakeholders, that we are all in this together with a shared collective purpose and that next steps cannot be achieved alone.



6. Successes and achievements

▪ Introduction

This theme is about how well learners were supported to have opportunities to develop interests, skills and talents both within the curriculum and beyond. It focused on the different means through which learners experience success. It also illuminates a developing and strengthening spirit of hope across the country as communities grapple with the demands on education, brought about by living through this pandemic. There are a number of both intended and unintended consequences being encountered/emerging. Educators have had to become more responsively agile and emboldened as they address daily challenges emerging from this public health crisis. In response, their professional commitment, determination, and the importance of greater cohesion across support for children and their families has been tested like never before. This has possibly brought out the best in society with a willingness to embrace change, as means of addressing need.

▪ Literature context

The potential disruption of schooling for children and young people due to the response to Covid-19 has been well-documented (Pietro, Sumner et al and The Edge Foundation (2020). The voices warning about attainment gaps potentially widening are all too clear in Scotland, (Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland, 2020), the rest of the UK (Cullinane and Montacute, 2020) and internationally (World Bank, 2020).

Concerns around the well-documented correlation between equity and poverty (SOSU, Edward, ELLIS, 2014) are longstanding and continue to feature strongly in policy and practice (Scottish Government, 2018). However, it is also important to realise despite the significant challenges being faced across the world the successes and achievements that have been brought about due to the response to the pandemic. Andy Hargreaves, Research Professor, Boston College, stressed that it was important that educators provide the environment for learners to thrive and flourish "taking account of where they are and not necessarily where they would have been without this crisis." (WSL, 2021, p.28) The importance of recognising and celebrating success and achievement during lockdown and beyond have become increasingly important, perhaps essential, in order to realise hope for the future. Janie McManus, HM Inspector, Strategic Director, Education Scotland confirmed the importance of this:

"It is critical for the education system to celebrate success. One of the areas of work we are focusing on is working with schools who we knew had highly effective practice and to illustrate how they applied this effective practice during the period of recovery. This has gone down really well with schools saying that it has really lifted their spirits." (WSL, 2021, p.188)

There is no doubt that educators have become more skilled in using digital technology, and local authorities have strived to provide/make digital technology accessible to all children and young people. Lucas et al (2020, p.18) in their survey found that "teachers feel well-equipped for providing remote learning support for pupils, both in terms of the support they are receiving from their schools, and their personal confidence and skills in using it." Zalaznick et al (2020, p.3) noted that "the pandemic has made digital equity a No. 1 priority ... (stressing the importance) of continuing offering professional learning to teachers" in digital technology. He also sees the improvements in digital technology as a "silver lining" in response to the pandemic.

Another success in dealing with the pandemic is the realisation of the importance of self-regulation for children and young people. Kit Wyeth, Covid-19 Education Recovery Group (CERG) Secretariat, Scottish Government, stated "that some children and young people have benefited from increased autonomy and independence in their learning while they were at home." (WSL, 2021, p.190) However, there is now a need to teach skills/confidence to support effective self-regulation. Lucas et al (2020, p.22) stated that: "Supporting pupils to work independently can improve learning outcomes, especially for disadvantaged pupils, for example, by providing explicit support on self-regulation." This is a view endorsed by Andy Hargreaves who emphasised that we now "have to look at the importance of self-regulation and focus attention on self-regulated and self-directed learning and how we can consciously develop it." (WSL, 2021, p.28)

Due to the problems of sitting/staging the national diet of examinations exams for senior pupils there has now been an increasing dialogue about how we assess senior pupils both in the UK and internationally. Chapman et al (2020, p.4) stated: “Importantly, the reflections on the assessment procedures ...should provide both the mandate and catalyst for rethinking how we assess our students and recognise their achievements.” The World Bank (2020, p.34) also reiterated this view stating that there “is the need to adjust high-stakes examinations.” In rural North Texas:

“ the disruption accelerated ...the journey toward a new model of student-driven instruction that has been freed from the strictures of standardized tests.” Zalaznick et al (2020, p.1). There is a sense that we now need to consider widening the outcomes we want for our children and young people as citizens. Chapman et al (2020,p.8)

outlined this message by stating:

“ we need to think more deeply about outcomes in a much broader sense, to give more equal standing to social and emotional health and wellbeing outcomes and consider educational outcomes in terms of the capacities necessary to play a full and active role in society. These outcomes will also need to be part of a reimagined system of assessment and achievements.”

The stories illustrated innovative ways of celebrating success and achievement.

▪ Stories

From the responses sent to Education Scotland, there has been an illumination of empowerment driven by need as the situation has given added voice and poignancy to it. Staff have identified the professional development they needed and moved quickly to ensure it was available. There has been a drive to support one another to respond quickly to the changing needs of schools and communities. Andy Hargreaves describes this as being ‘nimble’ in his thought piece for this report. (WSL, 2021, p.28) Regular communication and consistent messaging to staff has supported the system to adapt quickly with continuing options for children and young people to be educated. Throughout this the importance of recognising success and achievements have been recognised.

Aspire Education in Kilbirnie which provides community based living and learning environments to support vulnerable children and young people focused on recognising success.

“Learning resources and lessons were designed to be relevant to topical issues and current affairs. Success was celebrated weekly amongst education and care staff, with some pupils joining a Zoom call to share a PowerPoint which collated evidence from each service.” (WSL, 2021, p.14)

The Good Shepherd Centre runs a close support and semi-independent service for vulnerable young people from 12 to 17 years of age. They also recognised the value of celebrating the success and achievements of young people. Again due to the Covid-19 restrictions they had to adapt to do this:

“We had to postpone our annual ‘G in the Park’ event, however with careful planning we were able to re-brand this ‘G in the Hoose’ this September. The whole event was streamed and consisted of a reflection on the events of the year, messages from local celebrities, a Masked Singer performance (after careful consultation with the Scottish Government), a virtual quiz and distribution of certificates to young people highlighting achievements.” (WSL, 2021, p.64)

A common theme among the stories is how learning at home is successful and children can achieve? St. Joseph’s Primary School in Fife worked with their families to identify the pain points and pressures of parents trying to support their children’s learning at home. As a result, they completely changed the content and allocation of homework activities to make them successful family learning experiences were children achieved. Due to the well-received feedback and positive endorsement, they will continue with this new approach. Shetland local authority staff also looked at ways to make learning at home successful and fun while also supporting existing curriculum learning outcomes so that children achieved. They:

“created ten ‘Nature Nudge’ videos to “nudge’ pupils outdoors to learn in nature. We released a video a week with accompanying activity sheets and links. We also developed a page for community submissions. The project connected all ages with their local landscape and wildlife, provided a sense of community and increased the chances of a good engagement with education Nature Nudge lifted spirits.....One parent stated that Nature Nudge was a great reason to do things together and outside, we learnt so much, as a family.” One mum told us it made lockdown bearable for her 9 year old.” (WSL, 2021, p.60)

There were other examples of teachers using their initiative and local knowledge bringing in people from the community to develop successful collaborative projects which engaged children successfully to achieve. In Dumfries & Galloway, a teacher at St. Andrew’s Primary developed a collaborative project during lockdown, between the Scots Language children’s author, Susi Briggs, and her primary 2 class.

“Every single child in my class took part. We worked with Susi to create a video of the Scots words that we weren’t sure of and asked Susi to help us with their meaning. Each child in the class was given a word or phrase from the story and they created a poster with a video asking Susi what their word or phrase meant. Susi then very kindly, recorded herself answering each child, and the Nip Nebs Virtual Glossary was born. Their delight and excitement that the “real life” author of the story they were currently reading had taken the time to answer their questions was almost tangible....It also meant that we were making use of IT in a creative way, which motivated the children.” (WSL, 2021, p.44)

Other schools looked at ways to make the important transition process for Primary 1 children successful despite lockdown. Carmuir's Primary School, Falkirk were:

“determined to build relationships with the children and their families. We set up a transition blog where the P.1 teacher introduced herself by video and set small challenges for the children....On this we shared our virtual classroom where children could watch the P.1 teacher and headteacher read stories, and there was a virtual gallery where the families met the leadership team. Together with the nursery staff, the P.1 teacher walked to each home and stood on the end of the pathway to say hello and deliver a transition pack with activities and sunflower seeds to plant....On day 1 at school, the children were dropped off in the school garden and felt like they knew their teacher well from the videos on the blog and the visit.” (WSL, 2021, p.11)

Schools celebrated events which would normally bring communities physically together in innovative ways. St. Francis Xavier's in Falkirk responded to the cancellation of live performances by having an online talent show to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the school. The whole school watched the YouTube premiere over three days from the comfort of their own homes. They then took to their class teams to vote for their favourite act. This was shared via Twitter and the winners were selected and announced by Susan Boyle.

At key times after school and in school holidays there are stories which illustrate that Youth, Family and Community Learning Service staff supported vulnerable families to learn together successfully different skills. Staff based within KEAR Campus, South Lanarkshire:

“delivered weekly support to each young person from a designated keyworker and those identified as vulnerable by Social Work. Themed family activity packs were delivered to 191 families (294 individual young people) during each week of the summer holiday period such as: Family Cook Off – This pack was food themed, aiming to increase family confidence in cooking together as well as providing various fun activities. In addition to ingredients for a hot meal, this pack included all of the ingredients required to do some non-cook family baking, enabling young people of all ages to be included in the process...Positive feedback from parents, carers and young people via text, phone calls and social media has ranged from maintained behaviour, family engagement and development of new skills and interests, and they have praised how much it is bringing them together...Staff were able to help young people prepare for return to school and progress beyond school, linking in with Skills Development Scotland staff. “ (WSL, 2021, p.20)

Youth workers at Wick High School delivered daily, online, after school activities on the school's Google Classroom. For example Monday Motivation – setting weekly fitness challenges and setting intentions and goals for the week. They had young people involved with community art projects and intergenerational work with a local care home. “...all the contact and activities were successful in raising ...the volume and validity of pupil voice and fostering leadership at all levels has impacted positively on progress. ... Throughout lockdown this contact was crucial to ensure the health and wellbeing of our young people was supported.” (WSL, 2021, p.144)

The emergent themes: communication, compassion and connectedness are evident in the examples of submissions shared with Education Scotland illustrating success and achievement. The place and need for authenticity in education has been identified as a silver lining of the experience of the pandemic and may be a valuable legacy in the future design and delivery of education. There is greater understanding of the experiences of families through the changes enforced by circumstance. For many, this has brought an empathy and willingness to share and support in new ways.

The benefit of having a curriculum that is flexible and supports change is clearly evidenced in actions taken in response to the pandemic. As Graeme Logan, Director, Learning Directorate, Scottish Government stated:

“The flexibility we have in the curriculum for excellence framework ensures that teachers can very much adapt their learning and teaching to take account of the needs of their learners and the current circumstances in an appropriate age and stage way.” (WSL, 2021, p.80)

This will be influenced by local experiences. It may be an opportunity to revisit and better strengthen the vision of curriculum for excellence (CfE) to include a greater focus on the skills agenda and developing the young workforce. For others, it will allow them to strengthen online and outdoor learning.

It will be important to ensure educators are supported to use the wider range of evidence they hold about children and their families. This could focus targeted support where it is needed to secure equity outcomes and achieve a fairer Scotland.

By understanding the nature of isolation either through location or health experiences, there is a sharper focus on committing to fairness and equality. There has been a greater sharing of education ‘wealth and knowledge’ to help support and develop choice for young people across the country that is not dictated by postcode or school.

The closure of schools and living with a pandemic has brought to light the importance of self-regulated and self-directed learning. Now is the time to work on developing these attributes to better prepare children and young people to cope successfully with the changing world.

NG Pak Tee, Associate Professor, Singapore University, believes that the pandemic has demonstrated learning can take place anywhere. He promotes a philosophy of ‘teach less, learn more’ advocating more creative teaching and learning approaches to enhance the way children and young people learn. (WSL, 2021, p.174) Another positive stated by Gayle Gorman, HM Chief Inspector, Education Scotland, is that:

“Globally, **people value teachers**. Through the adversity of the lockdown, the work of the profession was recognised and valued. The expertise and skill of the profession has been welcome and positive.” (WSL, 2021, p.138)

This theme illustrated how children, young people, families and educators developed many successes and achievements from dealing with the pandemic.

▪ Final Conclusion

What Scotland Learned: building back better paper has built on innovative practice that learners, parents, educators carried between March and August 2020. The information from the 100 stories was analysed into six themes: relationships, leadership, health and wellbeing, learning and teaching, community and successes and achievements. This paper synthesises and blends research and the stories.

Although the six themes were discussed separately, they share important findings including the practice of strong collaboration, communication, compassion, resilience and fostering hope. The stories evidence that different people/groups in our communities rallied around a common aim to help children and young people through the pandemic, through innovation and with a focus on social and emotional health and wellbeing outcomes. The pandemic demonstrated the speed of change was made possible through agility of leadership, a shared purpose and the strength of the flexibility of our curriculum. The stories also revealed the inequalities in the education system, working with parents as partners, the strength of teaching independent learning and the importance of upskilling in digital technology.

The pandemic experience brought many lessons learned which have been highlighted in this paper. No-one should underestimate the impact of the pandemic on the well-being and development of young people and the additional demands placed on the educational system, staff and families. It manifests a commitment and resilience worthy of note. It has resulted in an increased capacity across the system to respond to identified issues. Practices have been reviewed. The need to ensure close scrutiny of the actions required to address issues and evaluate the impact of strategies launched is central to going forward. Lessons learned within the Scottish context and supported through international findings provides educationalists with a strong platform on which to build. This may now be the time to start discussing the role of education. Chapman et al (2020, p.7) reinforced this:

“It is our belief that while the pandemic is a global disaster that has claimed many lives and caused much misery, the disruption caused by COVID-19 offers an opportunity for education systems to do things very differently.”

The World Bank (2020, p.5) again as has been illustrated in this paper encourages us to co-operate and work together:

“everyone in the education systems needs to work together to learn from dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and build back better.”

It is hoped that the ‘What Scotland Learned’ publication and this professional learning paper will support us building back better.

Forthcoming webinars on the themes- To help us build back better, join the 2021 professional learning webinars which will each discuss one of the six themes relationships, leadership, health and wellbeing, learning and teaching, community and successes and achievements. A sketchnote has been produced which brings out the key findings under the six themes (Appendix 3).



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- Young Minds (2020) [Coronavirus: Impact on Young People with Mental Health Needs.](#)

Appendix 1 Questions for semi-structured interviews

The questions below for the semi-structured interview were devised from the OECD report 'A framework to guide an education response to the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020' and themes from 'How Good is OUR School?'. The interviews were recorded, with permission from the interviewees, transcribed and analysed into themes. A synopsis of the interviews was written and published in What Scotland Learned (2020).

Questions

1. How are countries responding to the Pandemic?
(‘relationships’, ‘learning and teaching’, ‘our school and community’)
2. What needs do you identify as most critical for the education system at this time?
(‘health and wellbeing’)
3. What are the features of effective system leadership during this time?
4. Is there an education silver lining to this crisis?
(‘successes and achievements’)

Appendix 2 Stories used in the Professional Learning Paper

Stories from the semi-structured interviews

- Andy Hargreaves, Research Professor, Boston College
- NG Pak Tee, Associate Professor, Singapore University
- Chris Chapman, Professor, University of Glasgow
- Gayle Gorman, HM Chief Inspector of Education, Education Scotland
- Janie McManus, HM Inspector, Strategic Director, Education Scotland
- Graeme Logan, Director, Learning Directorate, Scottish Government
- Kit Wyeth, Covid-19 Education Recovery Group (CERG) Secretariat, Scottish Government
- Derek Brown, Executive Director of Education and Families, North Lanarkshire Council
- Laurence Findlay, Director of Education and Children's Services, Aberdeenshire Council
- Ian Munro, Rector, Dollar Academy

Stories from the field

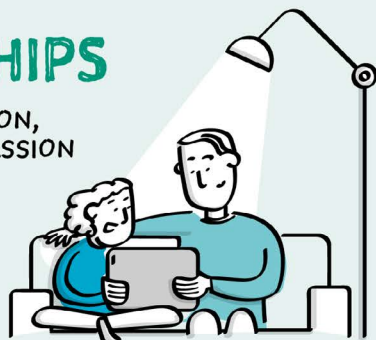
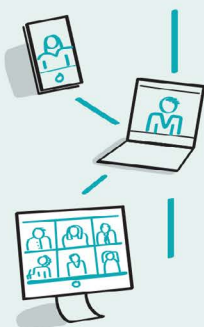
- Aberdeen City Council Youthwork Team
- Allan's Primary School and Nursery, Stirling Council
- Anchor Early Action Project, Shetland Council
- Ardler Primary School, Dundee City Council
- Aspire Education, Kilbirnie
- Balnacraig School
- Bazooka Arts, Old Strathclyde Area
- Camuirs Primay School, Falkirk Council
- Claypotts Primary School, Dundee City Council
- Connected Communities, East Lothian Council
- Comely Park Primary School, Falkirk Council
- Community Learning Development (Literacy), South Ayrshire Council
- Dollar Academy, Clackmannanshire
- e-Sgoil
- Falkirk Council 'Break, Create, Transform' and 'Leading Well
- Falkirk Council, Community Learning and Development
- Frisson Foundation, National Choral Project
- Gaelic Language, Outdoor Learning & Cultural Awareness Films, Highland
- Glasgow Improvement Challenge Team, Glasgow City Council
- Gracemount Community Campus and Partners, The City of Edinburgh Council
- KEAR Campus, South Lanarkshire Council
- Kibble Education and Care Centre, Renfrewshire
- Laurencekirk School, Aberdeenshire Council
- Linwood High School, Renfrewshire Council
- Manor Park School, Aberdeen City Council (online)
- Nature Nudge, Shetland Council
- North Ayrshire Council, Community Learning and Development
- North Lanarkshire Youth Work, North Lanarkshire Council
- Scottish Centre for Children with Motor Impairment
- Stirling Council, Youth Participation Group
- South Lanarkshire Council, Youth, Family and Community Learning Service
- St Andrew's RC Primary School, Dumfries and Galloway
- St. Francis Xavier's RC Primary School, Falkirk Council
- St. Joseph's RC Primary School, Fife Council
- St Luke's High School, East Renfrewshire Council
- Strings n Things, East Ayrshire Council
- The Good Shepherd Centre
- The Donaldson Trust
- The Highland Council
- Vertigo Youth Theatre, South Lanarkshire
- Workers Educational Association (WEA) Scotland Scotland
- Wick High School Youth Workers, The Highland Council

Appendix 3 Sketchnote

WHAT SCOTLAND LEARNED: BUILDING BACK BETTER

RELATIONSHIPS

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION, CONNECTEDNESS, COMPASSION



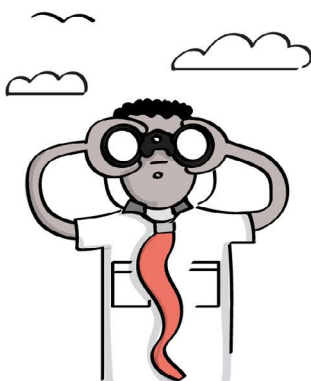
People built strong collaborative relationships which led to a sense of "all hands to the pump" leading to fast decisions. To work, learn and achieve success in dealing with COVID-19.



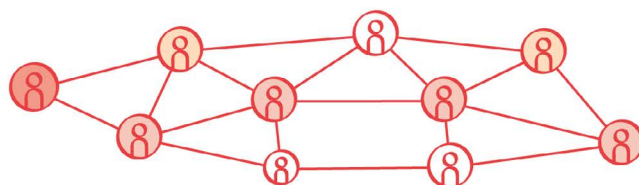
* The OECD identified maintaining effective relationships as only second to supporting learning.

LEADERSHIP

CRISIS and CHANGE MANAGEMENT ARE ESSENTIAL SKILLS.



Relevant professional learning for those in formal leadership roles post-pandemic.



Collaboration with a range of partners to provide the most robust support for learners and their families.

Leadership is not just about a promoted position or title; We need to respect the professionalism of all our educational staff.

Support senior leaders' wellbeing is needed.

HEALTH and WELLBEING

FUNDAMENTAL to LEARNING.



Schools are important in meeting children's non-academic needs.

We need to promote wellbeing all of the time in our educational settings not just in a crisis.

* We need to create 'more equitable education systems' by identifying and supporting all 'vulnerable' learners for as long as that support is needed.

WHAT SCOTLAND LEARNED: BUILDING BACK BETTER

LEARNING and TEACHING

EFFECTIVE and INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY and ASSESSMENT APPROACHES to support learners through recovery and beyond.



PROMOTE INDEPENDENT LEARNING SKILLS IN PUPILS to become self-directed learners.

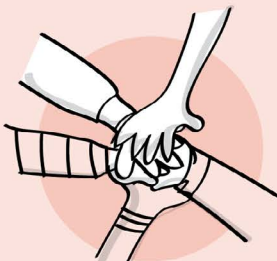
BUILD ON DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY, to develop progressive skills in digital literacy.

COLLABORATION AT ALL LEVELS, with peers, parents and a range of partners will support practitioners to share effective practice and develop evidence based approaches.

REIMAGINE EDUCATION FOR THE FUTURE – what will our learners need to help them flourish and achieve in a post-Covid world?

COMMUNITIES

BUILD BACK BETTER-SCHOOLS, partners and the wider community need to work in collaboration.



WORKING RELATIONSHIPS HAVE BEEN STRENGTHENED.

SCHOOLS HAVE HIGHLIGHTED THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WIDER COMMUNITY made up of individuals and groups that can support each other.

The pandemic brought about a COLLECTIVE URGENCY TO WORK TOGETHER AT PACE.

SUCCESSES and ACHIEVEMENTS

RECOGNISE AND CELEBRATE these to realise hope for the future.



Educators are more skilled in using digital technology, and authorities make digital technology accessible to all children and young people.

TEACHING SKILLS/CONFIDENCE to support effective self-regulation.

FLEXIBLE CURRICULUM that supports change is clearly evidenced in actions taken in response to the pandemic.

AGILITY AND INNOVATION of staff to collaborate and support one another – clear focus on children and families.

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