



BRIEFING PAPER #01

Motivation and schooling at home

Equity

Parents supporting their children

FROM OUR CEO

During the height of school closures, MCERA ran three interactive Q&As with experts. They can be viewed online:

[Inequality](#)

[Motivation](#)

[Helping parents](#)

EDUCATION AND COVID-19

The last couple of months have been a rollercoaster for the Australian schools system, students, teachers, and parents.

There have been many moments of confusion - and, undoubtedly fear. What is best for my family? Are my children safe at school? Will they fall behind if I pull them out? From the highest levels of government to every individual, we have all been trying to make the best decisions for ourselves and our families while facing a situation no-one foresaw.

During this time, too, we have seen how incredibly dedicated, adaptable, and professional our teachers are. Offering online lessons, providing coursework for students at home, juggling kids in the class and at home, our teachers have shone.

But moving out of schools also demonstrated the inequalities in our community. One in 10 Australian students report that school is the only place they feel safe. Digital learning isn't possible if you don't have access to technology.

For parents, there was questions about how they could possibly balance out working from home with supervising their children in the home environment. Added to that was how to motivate kids to focus on learning when their toys or devices were singing their siren song from across the room.

MCERA compiled a series of expert comments about the implications of school closures during this time. They are collected in this paper, as well as links to additional resources.

- Dr Shannon Schedlich
MCERA CEO

MOTIVATION FOR STUDENTS

SCIENTIA PROFESSOR ANDREW MARTIN, UNSW SYDNEY

Andrew Martin is Scientia Professor and Professor of Educational Psychology at UNSW Sydney, and a leading expert on the psychology of achievement motivation. He says that if students feel overwhelmed by events outside of their control, it is helpful to draw their attention to the things they still can control.

"Uncertainty is one of the most challenging aspects of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic," said Professor Martin. "With so much uncertainty, it is likely that many students will feel little or no control over their learning. Research has found that when students feel little or no control, they are at risk of disengagement: why bother trying when you have no control over events?"

"It is thus important to draw students' attention to three big things they can control: effort (how hard they try), strategy (the way they try to go about their learning), and attitude (what they think of themselves, the task, their situation)."

"The more students focus on these three things, the more empowered they will feel and behave through this time of major uncertainty."

DR KATRINA BARKER, WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

Dr Katrina Barker's research interests include student motivation, self-concept, and classroom management. She points to some strategies to help students with the shift to learning from home.

"Some young people will be challenged by the new way of learning from home," said Dr Barker. "Focusing on the advantages of this approach will be helpful to re-engage them in their learning."

"Some of these advantages are that online learning is non-linear, flexible and self-paced. But these qualities mean it requires self-regulation, including self-discipline, motivation and the ability to work independently."

Dr Barker provided the following strategies for young people to deploy to set them up for success in this new environment.

"First, at the beginning of the school week, create a daily timetable. The timetable should include reasonable study breaks as a reward and motivator."

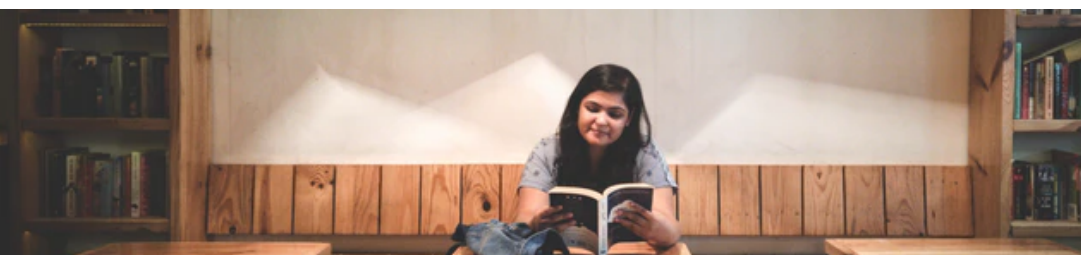
"Second, form a study group by pairing up with a friend and use video conferencing tools to meet. Learning occurs through social interactions, and young people who find it challenging to work independently will benefit from collaborating on school work."

"Third, submit your work regularly and request teacher feedback. This will give you confidence that you are on track and enhance your motivation for learning."

FURTHER RESOURCES

- Collie, R.J., & Martin, A.J. (2019). Motivation and engagement in learning. In L. Zhang (Ed). Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education. New York: Oxford University Press
- Martin, A.J. (2003). How to motivate your child for school and beyond. Sydney: Random House/Bantam
- Martin, A.J. (2020). How to Optimize Online Learning in the Age of Coronavirus (COVID-19): A 5-Point Guide for Educators. In '[UNSW Newsroom](#)'
- Martin, A.J. (2020). The Psychology of Student Motivation. Podcast for Atomi Brainwaves series. Available on [Apple](#), [Spotify](#), and [Google](#)
- [Atomi Brainwaves Podcast S1 E6: Prof Andrew Martin on The Complex Psychology of Student](#)

THE ONGOING PANDEMIC PRESENTS BOTH PRACTICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES TO SCHOOL STUDENTS. A RAPID SHIFT IN THE STRUCTURE OF SCHOOLING AND AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE MEAN THEY NEED RELEVANT STRATEGIES TO STAY MOTIVATED IN THEIR LEARNING.



INEQUALITIES AND LEARNING FROM HOME

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR SUE NICHOLS, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

"Now more than ever, recognition of educational disadvantage must come to grips with digital exclusion"

Sue Nichols is the Associate Head of the University of South Australia's School of Education. Her areas of research include literacy, school-family partnership, and inclusive education.

She underlines that the present crisis will make it urgent to deal with unequal access to digital resources. "Now more than ever, recognition of educational disadvantage must come to grips with digital exclusion, associated with differences in families' access, knowledge, use and networks." said A/Prof Nichols.

"The most disadvantaged Australians are those who rely solely on a mobile phone and the group most affected are single parents. With no common approach to schools' uptake of digital platforms, and a proliferation of commercial providers, parents struggle to understand what kinds of technological resources and knowledge they need to interact with schools, or should access to support their children's learning."

"Schools need to be supported to implement principles of digital inclusion as they work with parents to maintain children's learning at home."

"THE DAMAGE TO EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES COULD BE IRREPARABLE."

PROFESSOR VAILLE DAWSON, UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Professor Vaile Dawson is an expert in science education and Deputy Head of School, Education, at the University of Western Australia's Graduate School of Education. Her research has focused specifically on science education in disadvantaged schools.

"Children from disadvantaged families face many issues in the transition to learning from home. The social, psychological and technology issues will mean that the damage to educational outcomes could be irreparable."

"Disadvantaged children already lag behind their peers. According to PISA and NAPLAN data, children from disadvantaged families are, on average, 2-3 years behind their more advantaged peers in literacy, numeracy and science."

"The cohort most at risk are those in their final years of schooling – those about to graduate and enter the workforce or further education. For these young people, and their families, transitioning to learning at home poses a critical risk to their educational aspirations."

"One solution is for Year 10-12 students to be able to continue to attend a school or a learning centre (with hygiene and social distancing) and use individualised online learning and maintain practical work, while providing mental health support."

PROFESSOR JOHN FISCHETTI

Professor John Fischetti is Pro Vice Chancellor of the Faculty of Education and Arts of the University of Newcastle, and President of the NSW Council of Deans of Education. He is an expert on equity issues in education, and on educational leadership. He points to the safety, care, and learning that many students will now be deprived of.

"In one month, schools around the world have transitioned from a predominantly face-to-face to a predominantly school-at-home mode, said Professor Fischetti. "This hyper-speed transition has exposed a series of profound equity issues."

"Nearly 2.5 million Australians do not have internet access. Many families with access often have only one computer or laptop to be shared with several users, including a parent working from home. It is much more complex for teachers and schools to provide support for students with special needs or personal learning differences."

"And physical schools provide safety, caring and nurturing that is sometimes missing at home. This places vulnerable students at risk of loneliness, isolation, hunger and a loss of self-worth. Schools are the one place in our society where young people can count on adults looking out for them."

PROFESSOR JULIAN SEFTON-GREEN, DEAKIN UNIVERSITY

Julian Sefton-Green is Professor of New Media Education at Deakin University. Much of his research focuses on young people's informal learning, on their use of digital technologies, and on social inequality. Professor Sefton-Green says we must act rapidly to address the unequal effects of the shift to learning at home.

"Australia's unequal childhoods have been brutally exposed by this present crisis," he said. "Private schools work with families and have good technological infrastructures and can rely on parents, teachers and equipment to maintain the continuity of children's education."

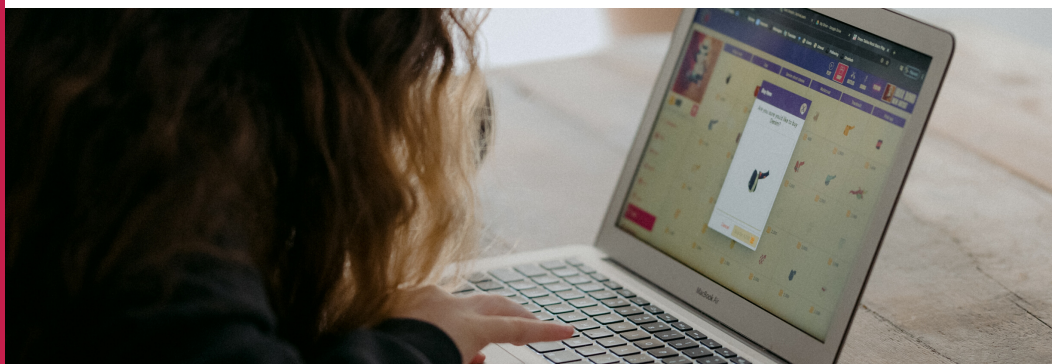
"Children and families without broadband or even those without access to phone tariffs need speedy infrastructure and support as part of an overall relief and rebuilding effort to at least keep these children in touch with a basic right to an education."

"The consequences of this crisis are going to hurt all of us. It will hurt these children's futures in cruel and entirely avoidable ways unless we do something about it."

FURTHER RESOURCES

- [COVID-19: Resources for the higher education sector](#)
- [Stone, C., & O'Shea, S. \(2019\). Older, online and first: Recommendations for retention and success. Australasian Journal of Educational Technology, 35\(1\).](#)
- [Australian Internet and Social Media Statistics 2019](#)
- Fergus Hunter, "'Digital Divide': 2.5 million Australians with no internet connection", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 March 2020

INEQUALITIES AND LEARNING FROM HOME cont.



PROFESSOR CAROL REID, WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

Professor Carol Reid of Western Sydney University is an expert on education for students from a refugee background. She says the loss of contact with school communities will be especially hard for young people who are refugees or have recently migrated to Australia.

"There are certain conditions that soften the impact of living in a new country and the key ones are language and access to other young people. It is through these networks that cross-cultural communication occurs."

"Moving to online learning and social isolation means that young people's language skills will no longer be improved by interactions that occur in schools, youth groups, sport and at places of worship. Hardly any of the young people who are refugees or recently arrived migrants meet with locally born friends outside of these places and activities."

"Losing the chance to meet people in person and form networks will disrupt both students' language learning and their developing ideas about living in Australia."

DR CATHY STONE, UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE, AND PROFESSOR SARAH O'SHEA, CURTIN UNIVERSITY

Dr Cathy Stone and Professor Sarah O'Shea are both experts in online learning and equity in higher education, and have undertaken joint research on these subjects. In their joint statement, they say the challenge of the shift to online will bring a lot of existing inequalities to daylight, and believe it is a great opportunity to address them.

"COVID-19 has literally instigated a 'pause' in our busy lives," they said. "It has challenged educators to move totally to the online environment in a matter of weeks."

"At some institutions this movement has been rudimentary but it has achieved what many HE institutions and schools had been advocating for years. Yes we do have gaps/divides in terms of technology, infrastructure and also, importantly material support. Yet this is also an opportunity to address and recognise the huge divides in our educational systems between state and private / regional and remote."

"These gaps are no longer hidden by band-aid solutions. Online learning, in which so many equity students participate, can no longer be seen as the 'poor cousin'. Suddenly, it will be core business with more attention paid to it. This situation foregrounds the inequities in online learning and will, we hope, force a cohesive response to address them, now that this is no longer a minority issue."

HELPING PARENTS HELP THEIR KIDS

PROFESSOR ANDREA REUPERT, MONASH UNIVERSITY

Professor Andrea Reupert is a prominent expert in education psychology and family mental health at Monash University. She says the first thing is for parents to "go easy on themselves and their kids."

"You can schedule your days around certain activities but at the same time be flexible and forgiving of yourselves and your kids if the schedule falls away," she said.

"Spend some quality, enjoyable time with your kids every day without phones to help kids feel secure and then (hopefully) happy to entertain themselves.

"When focusing on paid work, you may need to work in short, productive bursts and 'snatch' time when you can – for example, during kids' nap time. Even in isolation, it's a good idea to still socialise with other parents online, to vent, debrief and pick up useful tips."

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR PENNY VAN BERGEN, MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

Penny Van Bergen is an Associate Professor in education psychology at Macquarie University; her research has a strong focus on emotion and memory, young people's relationships with teachers, parents, and peers, and the kinds of interactions that best support learning and development. A/Prof Van Bergen is a working parent herself, and acknowledges that juggling work and children's school demands is extremely challenging.

"This is especially so with younger children and those who aren't yet independent learners," she said. But there are ways of making it more manageable.

"The more successfully you can help children adjust, the more successfully you are likely to cope yourself. It helps to set a weekday routine, and build in time for school, work, exercise, and free time. But be willing to adapt if everyone is having a tough day.

"This provides a sense of normalcy, and communicates to children when you will and won't be available. If you have important meetings coming up, explain this to children too. A break from learning is okay – think Cosmic Kids Yoga, bootcamp... even a little Netflix.

"Finally, acknowledge your own feelings. It's normal to feel unsettled, but remember that emotions are contagious. Consider ways to meet friends virtually, exercise, and rein in work. Take a breather if needed. To manage the next few months, it is important to look after yourself! "

DR ELIZABETH ROUSE, DEAKIN UNIVERSITY

Dr Elizabeth Rouse is a senior lecturer in early childhood education at Deakin University, with a particular interest in partnerships between schools, parents, and their wider communities. She acknowledges that parents "are understandably concerned and may be feeling challenged in how to support their children while they are learning at home."

But she wants overwhelmed parents to know they don't have to take on everything on their own, and that professional teachers will be doing all they can to continue teaching their children.

"My best advice is to always remember that you are a parent and not your child's teacher so your role should not be in teaching your children but in supporting them as they try to make sense of this new world of school that they are now facing," said Dr Rouse.

"You also need to acknowledge that as parents you are also trying to work from home, to deal with financial challenges, isolation, worrying about family and loved ones who are far away and you cannot be with, you have to put what you can do for your children into perspective.

"The teachers are working very hard to support the children and to make learning at home fun and engaging. What they want from parents is to know that you are working in partnership with them so they can do their work better and you are working as a team."





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