



Global Teaching Insights during COVID-19

Takeaways from the webinar series

April 2021

Around the world, teachers have responded to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic with ingenuity, flexibility and professionalism. In late 2020 and early 2021, the OECD, UNESCO and the International Task Force on Teacher for Education 2030 asked teachers, teacher educators and school leaders to submit videos documenting their innovative responses, as part of the Global Teacher Insights initiative. The idea was to inspire teachers facing similar challenges, to shape efforts to build stronger instruction, and to recognize teachers' dedication to the profession.

With their videos, these teachers showed us that teaching and learning have been transformed. In particular, the way we think of the teacher-learner relationship now stretches well beyond the traditional boundaries of the classroom.

The information and poll results presented in this document were taken from the four webinars held in April 2021 as part of the OECD-UNESCO-TTF Global Teaching Insights series. More information is [available on-line](#).

Introduction

Innovation in teaching defined education delivery in 2020 in many ways. As schools closed across country after country, teachers, education systems and the global education community innovated to ensure that learning continued. From bottom-up teacher- and community-led initiatives to more top-down education stakeholder responses, the school closures accelerated some changes that were already under way.

The teachers, teacher educators and school leaders were asked three questions:

- What innovations in your teaching are you most proud of?
- What new forms of collaboration with your peers have been most helpful?
- What have you learnt and what will your teaching look like in the future?

Over 100 videos were submitted from 25 countries in 11 languages. Four main themes emerged:

1. Managing the classroom differently to ensure **learning continuity**.
2. Providing learners with **socio-emotional support** and building resilience.
3. Developing new **instructional practices** and tackling **learning gaps**.
4. Putting into practice new ways of **collaborating with peers**.

The videos reaffirmed the critical role teachers play in developing new approaches. Teachers have made sure that learning continued through innovative methods; they have provided socio-emotional support to students, families and colleagues; and they have strengthened collaboration with peers to build a stronger profession and “community of practice”.

These three overarching topics – continuity, socio-emotional support and collaboration – were highlighted during three webinars co-hosted by OECD, UNESCO and the Teacher Task Force team. The webinars put the spotlight on these innovations and created a space for sharing and dialogue among teachers from around the globe.

Dialogue 1: Learning continuity and innovative pedagogy

During the first webinar, teachers from Ghana, India, Indonesia, the Maldives and Surinam shared their experiences of ensuring that learning carried on, and the innovative methods they used. Speakers revealed how they have put students back at the centre using technology that allows self-paced learning. Teachers have engaged students with creative teaching methods to maintain social connection and to stimulate their interest. They have also used mixed subjects and tools and promoted new activities and programs to ensure that students carried on learning when schools were closed.

Distance education and technology were used to strengthen personalized learning and make learning more student-oriented.

One innovation that I'm proud of is being able to use technology to allow self-paced learning. [...] Being able to have the time and being able to utilise the Internet and technology really helps me to make learning more personalized and make learning more student-oriented. (Teacher from Indonesia, Vice-principal and teacher, Sihanoukville, Cambodia).

Technology has also provided a platform for teachers to incorporate computer science in subjects such as mathematics teaching.

One thing which I innovated with during the lockdown was incorporating computer science with mathematics. The whole idea was that students should visualise geometry with the help of coding. The one thing I learned during the pandemic is that a teacher with a 20th century mindset cannot teach students of the 21st century. So, it is very important for educators and teachers to upskill themselves so that we can build 21st century skills in the students. (Secondary school teacher, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India.)

Beyond curriculum content, if learning is fun, enjoyable and stimulating despite the circumstances, it can help maintain social connections.

Enabling students to find pleasure in learning activities can play a key role in keeping them engaged and protecting their mental well-being.

When lockdown happened, all I could think of is how my children would miss the fun learning of the [Primary Years Programme] [...] During the lockdown, I felt that we as teachers need to be as innovative as we can to make learning more fun for the students, especially the primary students. (Primary Years Programme coordinator/ leader, Accra, Ghana).

The [reading] programme aimed to provide kids with different stories together with some activities they could enjoy at home. This would develop their literacy skills, motivate them to read books and give a love for reading. (Principal from the Seenu Atoll School in Addu City, Maldives).

As part of this project, two Teacher Task Force member organizations provided further insights on the innovations presented by the teachers: the Inter-American Teacher Education Network (ITEN), and ENABEL from Belgium. The ITEN is an initiative of the Organization of American States (OAS) that works with governments, teachers' education institutions and classroom teachers to advance the teaching profession in the Americas. ENABEL is Belgian Federal Government agency that promotes international sustainable development. Both organizations have expertise on teachers and programmes that promote learning continuity.

A teacher from Surinam, representing the Inter-American teacher Education Network, highlighted **the importance to involve teachers in policy making, giving them more autonomy and recognizing their positive impact to spread change**. In this regard, according to her, to ensure the sustainability of innovations, governments must invest in teachers and in education, as education and income are correlated.

Policy makers should give school leaders more autonomy to try out their own innovations and that of their teachers (Teacher expert reviewer, Surinam, ITEN-OAS).

Surveys during the webinars showed that assessing student learning has been one of the greatest challenges during the past year of distance education (Figure 1) and is the aspect of teaching that teachers changed the most (Figure 2).

This view was shared by speakers as well as participants. Similarly, engaging and encouraging students' participation was discussed among teachers, who questioned how the pandemic disrupted the traditional relationship between students and teachers. Nevertheless, students have been the greatest source of inspiration for teachers to keep innovating.

Figure 1 – Greatest challenges in keeping learning going

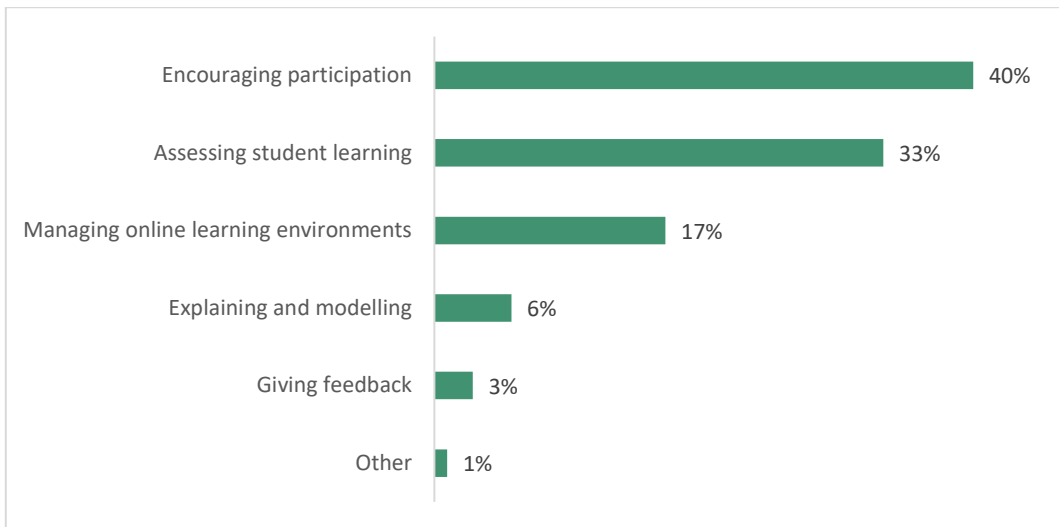
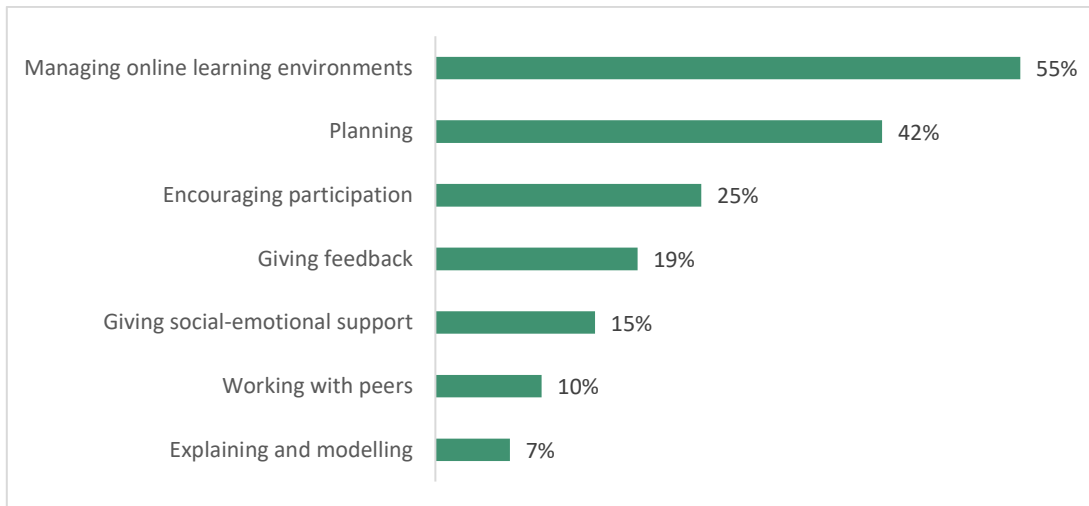


Figure 2 – Aspects that teachers have changed the most during the past year (top 2 options)



Dialogue 2: Social-emotional support in a time of crisis

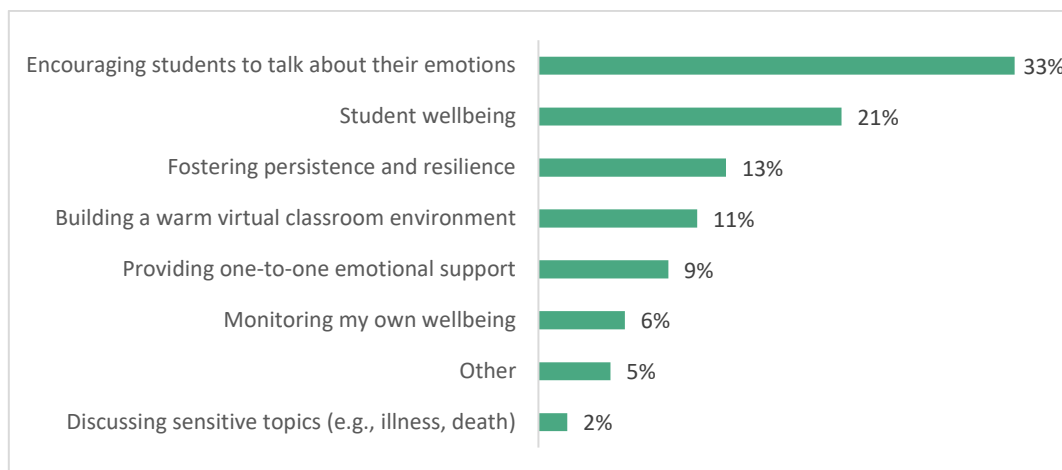
During the pandemic, it became increasingly important for teachers and other education personnel to provide socio-emotional and psychological support to students and their families as well as other teachers. Teachers have innovated in their teaching methods to include socio-emotional support during their lessons and strategies. In this second conversation, teachers from Colombia, Croatia, Hong Kong and the Philippines shared the ways they have innovated to provide socio-emotional support.

Teachers have guided students to identify, label and express their feelings in positive ways.

This has proven to be a useful strategy, as teachers identified getting students to talk about their emotions as one of the greatest challenges in seeking to provide socio-emotional support (Figure 3). This was also highlighted by Stuart MacAlpine, an expert from the Lego Foundation, which reviewed these videos along with Save the Children. Both organizations are TTF members with expertise in addressing the socio-emotional aspects of the learning process.

Teachers implemented a variety of innovative strategies to provide socio-emotional support to students. These included methods to encourage students to talk, activities for students and their families, and projects to develop social skills.

Figure 3 - Greatest challenges in providing socio-emotional support to students



Teachers recognized that naming emotions is tremendously powerful, and therefore developed resources to help students verbalize what they were feeling.

So, I started developing digital materials that can help students label and normalize their emotions and helped them learn coping skills (Primary school teachers and youth worker, Rijeka, Croatia).

After identifying emotions, students and teachers can work to process them. Similarly, another strategy presented was the creation of **“affirmation cards” to help students to focus on positive thinking**. These cards included engaging pictures and a simple sentence, which parents were invited to discuss with their children.

That's why I have created a set of affirmation cards. These resources are now available online for free download. These affirmation cards [have] positive words and positive sentences, which can encourage parents to [use them] with the children every day. (Teacher from Hong Kong, China)

Socio-emotional support includes also the relationship between teachers and families, which have played an important part in students’ learning at home. Teachers have developed innovative ways to support families and have involved them in children’s learning through music and other activities at home, promoting wider and more effective channels of communication.

The development of creativity was carried out from the construction of sound instruments with kitchen utensils and recycled items. The second part was the collaborative creation of songs where the families gathered together, wrote the lyrics and gave melody to the songs. This was done by reflecting on the problematic emotions and experiences lived during the time of lockdown. (Music teacher, Bogotá, Colombia)

Finally, **developing students’ social skills and social awareness was found to foster better socio-emotional well-being**.

Teachers promoted projects focused on developing social skills. The PIGEON project—an online newspaper committed to global citizenship education—was developed by a secondary school

teacher at Malabon National High School, in the Philippines. She invited students to imagine living in a world where people are interconnected, conscious of their local and global role and promoting values of peace and love. As a global citizenship education programme, it was rooted in learning socio-emotional skills and developing social awareness to develop positive relationships and work together to achieve common goals.

Teachers have been described as a lifeline for many young people, offering them a degree of stability and a safe space during this difficult period. Acknowledging and paying attention to emotions is increasingly seen as important for teaching. Empathy, teamwork and collaboration have emerged as central skills, not only for coping with the COVID-19 crisis but also for looking forward into the future (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Skills related to socio-emotional learning will be increasingly important in the future



Dialogue 3: Building a stronger profession together

During the third conversation, teachers from Indonesia, the Maldives, Mexico and Moldova came together to discuss peer support and peer learning. When school doors shut last year, teachers' work and lives were disrupted. Collaborating with peers became essential to find ways to ensure learning continuity and support students and the school community – whether by exchanging resources, sharing insights around their common obstacles or simply supporting each other through their demanding work. This resulted in stronger teacher communities and discussions about building a stronger profession.

As with the previous webinars, two non-profit organizations contributed expert reviews of this topic: *VVOB-education for development*, based in Belgium, and Global School Leaders. Both organizations are TTF members working for sustainable development, in quality education and school leadership respectively. A representative from VVOB joined the discussion with teachers.

Teachers highlighted the importance of collaboration to build bridges between disciplines and between and within countries. Such collaboration has enhanced teaching and learning. As teachers share materials, practices, strategies and support, they are creating local, national and international communities that allow them to improve their teaching.

I'm thankful that my colleagues [...] had a collaborative spirit that leads us to share ideas, to ask for another perspective. I have done this not only with teachers in my school community but we have created an online platform for teachers in Indonesia, now around 800 teachers are involved. In the platform we meet and share experiences and best practices. (5th and 6th grade private school teacher, Kupang, Indonesia).

The forms of collaboration, that helped enormously to connect with peers and teachers across the country and globally of course, were all in the videoconferencing platforms that offer us to connect and to share all the expertise and all the knowledge that we have. (English teacher and the head of Global Education and hybrid learning coordinator at Heritage International School in Moldova).

Peer collaboration can also **promote inclusive education**, as happened in Thaaajuddeen School in the Maldives, where the school created a whole-community approach to special educational needs that included parents and teachers.

So Thaaaj Holhuashi was expanded, and online sessions were held for teachers and parents separately. Thaaaj Belenivering Holhuashi (parents' forum) opened up opportunities for parents to share their concerns and learn different techniques they can use to help the kids. It was also a way for them to release stress and find out ways to self-care. Feedback obtained from parents indicated that 67% of them were inspired to join the sessions and 73% of the parents were satisfied by the sessions. Feedback acquired from teachers specified that they were overall satisfied by the sessions and gained a lot of information. (Leading teacher of the School Inclusive Support Unit, Thaaajuddeen School, Maldives).

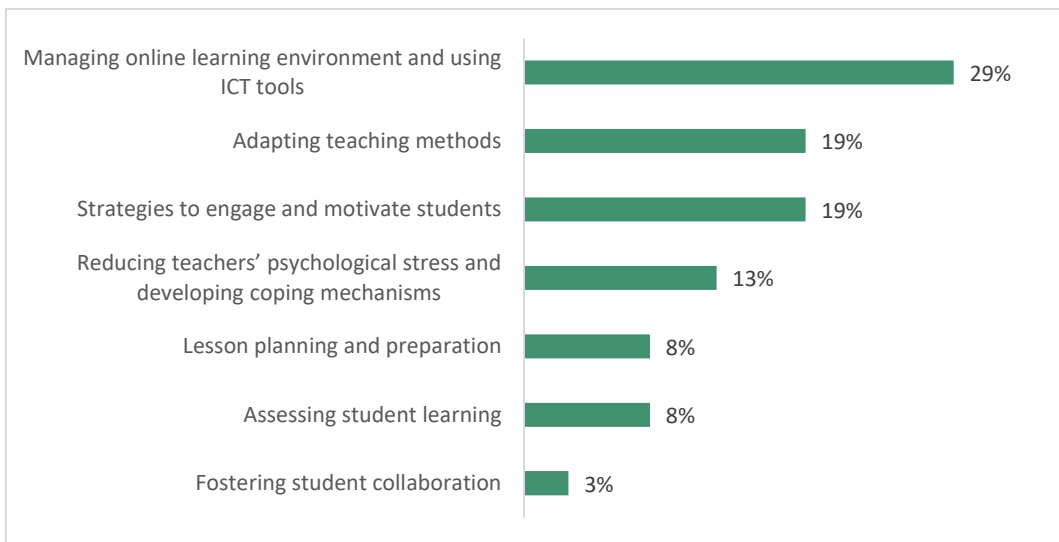
This collaboration and exchange allowed feedback, which is becoming increasingly important as a mutual process of giving and receiving among peers. When teachers had the opportunity to teach and to learn from peers, they become students themselves and this can be a powerful tool to improve the learning environment.

I worked for the first time with a professor of geophysics, two very different areas, and it helped us to plan the classes so that we could put ourselves in the place of the student, because none of us knew the other's content so we could ask the possible questions that could arise in the class. [...] We learned that feedback is fundamental to enhance learning (Colombian professor at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico).

Teachers, including the participants and panellists, unanimously **underlined the importance of carrying on sharing resources and experiences**. This experience of sharing was the best upside of the pandemic as well as a way to ensure that peer learning grows in the future.

Finally, teachers responded that managing online learning environments and using ICT tools are what they have most learned from their peers during this time of crisis (Figure 5).

Figure 5 – Lessons learned from peers during the past year



To foster peer learning, teachers need sufficient time and resources to exchange and collaborate.

International organizations, development partners and governments can support peer learning by promoting safe spaces to interact and providing teachers with tools and training, as the expert reviewer from VVOB highlighted. Teachers need time and platforms to engage with their peers. The pandemic forced them to find such spaces but now they need structured support to keep developing new strategies and exchanging knowledge.

Structured support from governments and organizations will ensure the sustainability of these practices. As teachers identified during the conversation, **the greatest challenge is now to maintain engagement and keep building a stronger profession** (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Greatest challenges in building peer support



Conclusion and ways forward

All the innovations discussed in the webinars attest to teachers' talent and creativity and the importance of their work in enabling education to make a full recovery from the pandemic. To foster teacher innovation, education systems need to make room for the participation of teachers and give them incentives to make full use of their agency and autonomy.

One of the biggest challenges facing education systems is the need to strike a balance between creating channels for the participation of teachers and their organizations in educational decision-making, and promoting and exchanging the knowledge produced in the classrooms, in communities of practice and in pedagogical action. For education systems to become resilient, we must learn from the many lessons teachers can provide.

The broad and deep changes ushered in by the COVID-19 pandemic have taken place against a backdrop of wide societal changes: digital technology, artificial intelligence, climate change, increased migration, violent extremism and transformation of media and information systems. As a result, effective responses to the crisis require innovations in policy, practice, partnerships and financing. To ensure the long-term viability of such innovations, governments and international organizations need to:

- Involve teachers in policy making, give them more autonomy and recognize that their capacity to adapt and innovate is critical to ensure the continuity of learning.
- Support teachers in their role of giving socio-emotional support to students and their families. Provide teachers with the training, materials, time and recognition they need to continue helping their students to cope with challenging times and to process their emotions.
- Provide teachers with time, resources, tools and spaces to collaborate and exchange so that they can give and receive feedback to improve teaching and learning.