Learning Renewed
A safe way to reopen schools in the Global South

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Introduction

Policymakers in low-income countries face an apparently impossible dilemma: keeping schools closed will create catastrophic learning loss, while reopening may be highly dangerous and unacceptable to parents and teachers.

We argue that there is a way of dealing with this dilemma, and that the choice is not, in fact, quite so binary. There is a middle way. The flexible opening of schools offers a chance to restore and recover learning while operating schools safely, thereby minimising the chance that schools will spread the virus in local communities.

Our recommendations are grounded in both our practice and our research. We have been working on the ground throughout the pandemic in partnership with practitioners and policymakers to respond to the crisis in a diverse group of countries: Kenya, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Jordan, the UAE and the UK. Our views here reflect this diversity of experience. Meanwhile, we have also produced a series of research-based reviews of global policy response on behalf of the EdTech Hub, a new partnership with a mission to explore the role of technology in the context of the global learning crisis (with funding from the UK government, the World Bank and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation).[1]

Both our experience and our research confirm the view that the period of school closure caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has been a disaster for the world's children, with those from disadvantaged backgrounds suffering the most. Academic progress has been stalled. Mental health and wellbeing have been harmed. Without doubt, safeguarding and child protection risks have been increased.

However, while the scale of the catastrophe is beyond dispute and of historic proportions, we should not forget that many students were learning little of value when they were attending school before the period of school closure. The pre-crisis situation for many students has rightly been described by some researchers as 'enrolment without learning'.[2]

As the world considers how to respond to the global pandemic, we should not aspire to 'get back to normal'. For millions of students in low-income countries, the pre-Covid 'normal' was far from ideal. New thinking is required, that is both creative and is grounded in the reality of school systems in low-income countries.

At the same time, policy relating to the reopening of schools must be realistic. Some of the rhetoric around the recovery of learning and the possible transformation of schools seems to us to be lacking in substance and practicality. Here, we propose that schools in the Global South should reopen – at least temporarily – in a way that is different to pre-crisis provision. We refer to this approach, which features flexible opening, as a 'learning renewed' model. This forms part of our wider thinking on meaningful improvements to education in the wake of the pandemic. As part of this approach, primary school students attend school part-time, but the reduction in instructional classroom time is combined with improved teaching quality and supplemented by community learning opportunities and home learning. Class sizes are substantially reduced, ensuring not only increased safety in a public health sense, but also improved teacher-student interaction. Such improvements, incorporating more focussed tutorial-style engagement between students and teachers during face-to-face school time, is of course desirable – but it is insufficient. Learning outside of school must complement this higher quality, compressed instructional time within school. Home learning, with support from parents and caregivers at

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[1] The EdTech Hub (2020). Coronavirus Resources: Evidence, research and advice. Available at: https://edtechhub.org/coronavirus/covid19-evidence-research-advice/
[2] Bold, T.et al. (2017). "Enrollment without Learning: Teacher Effort, Knowledge, and Skill in Primary Schools in Africa." Journal of Economic Perspectives, 31 (4): 185-204

household level, has a key part to play. However, this will be insufficient in itself. We therefore highlight the important potential of neighbourhood learning as a way of significantly supplementing face-to-face school time. At neighbourhood level, trained facilitators can coordinate the learning of groups of students, complementing in-school learning (possibly overseen by in-school teachers) in a potentially powerful combination.

Technology is an important component in our vision for flexible opening, but assumptions about the power of technology must be realistic.

Many households lack even the most basic technology. If home learning relies heavily on technology, we automatically exclude the most underprivileged students from learning. We need to make imaginative use of technology, but we also need a 'no-tech safety net' with accessible hard-copy learning resources available to all students who cannot access digital materials. We call for a 'low threshold/high ceiling' approach that recognises the exciting potential of technology where it exists (the high ceiling), but assumes the worst levels of access (the low threshold) when planning to best ensure universal engagement.

The continued closure of schools in the Global South constitutes a catastrophe of historic proportions

Schools in much of the Global South have been closed since March as an entirely understandable response to the need to limit the spread of the pandemic. While temporary school closure was justifiable, the unintended result has been massive harm to the life chances of a generation of young people.

Robust academic studies have shown that even brief periods out of school during summer vacations lead to learning loss. The level of regression currently taking place will of course be much greater.[3] Loss of learning will be particularly substantial for the many millions of students unable to engage with effective alternative learning modalities, such as online learning or radio/TV broadcasting. In addition, isolation, anxiety, and potential loss of family members during the pandemic are likely to negatively affect students' mental health for the foreseeable future.

It is almost certain that girls are suffering disproportionately badly. We know from the experience of school closure during the Ebola epidemic that girls are likely to fare worse than their male counterparts, with significant increases in early marriage[4] and teenage pregnancy.[5] Past school closures have also led to increases in gender-based violence, while leaving victims unable to report the abuse and seek help through ordinary support channels.[6] Anecdotal evidence suggests that similar patterns are emerging from the 2020 phase of school closure.

In addition, increased financial pressures during school closure will force some teachers to switch jobs and leave the profession. In many countries, the low-cost private school sector faces collapse as proprietors cannot continue to employ teachers in the absence of income from school fees, which may not have been paid for many months. Again, this is likely to have a disproportionate impact on disadvantaged students.

[3] Slade, T., Piper, B., Kaunda, Z., King, S., & Ibrahim, H. (2017). Is 'summer' reading loss universal? Using ongoing literacy assessment in Malawi to estimate the loss from grade-transition breaks. Research in Comparative and International Education, 12(4), 461-485.

[4] UNESCO (2020a). Preparing the reopening of schools. RESOURCE PAPER. 5th May 2020. [Online]. Available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373401

[5] UNDP & Irish Aid (2015). Assessing Sexual and Gender Based Violence during the Ebola Crisis in Sierra Leone. [Online]. Available at: https://www.sl.undp.org/content/sierraleone/en/home/library/crisis_prevention_and_recovery/assessing-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-during-the-ebola-cris.html

[6] UNDP & Irish Aid (2015). Assessing Sexual and Gender Based Violence during the Ebola Crisis in Sierra Leone. [Online]. Available at: https://www.sl.undp.org/content/sierraleone/en/home/library/crisis_prevention_and_recovery/assessing-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-during-the-ebola-cris.html; Akmal, M., Hares, S., O'Donnell, M. (2020). Gendered Impacts of COVID-19 School Closures: Insights from Frontline Organizations. Centre for Global Development. Policy Papers. 27th May 2020. [Online]. Available at: https://www.cgdev.org/publication/gendered-impacts-covid-19-school-closures-insights-frontline-organizations
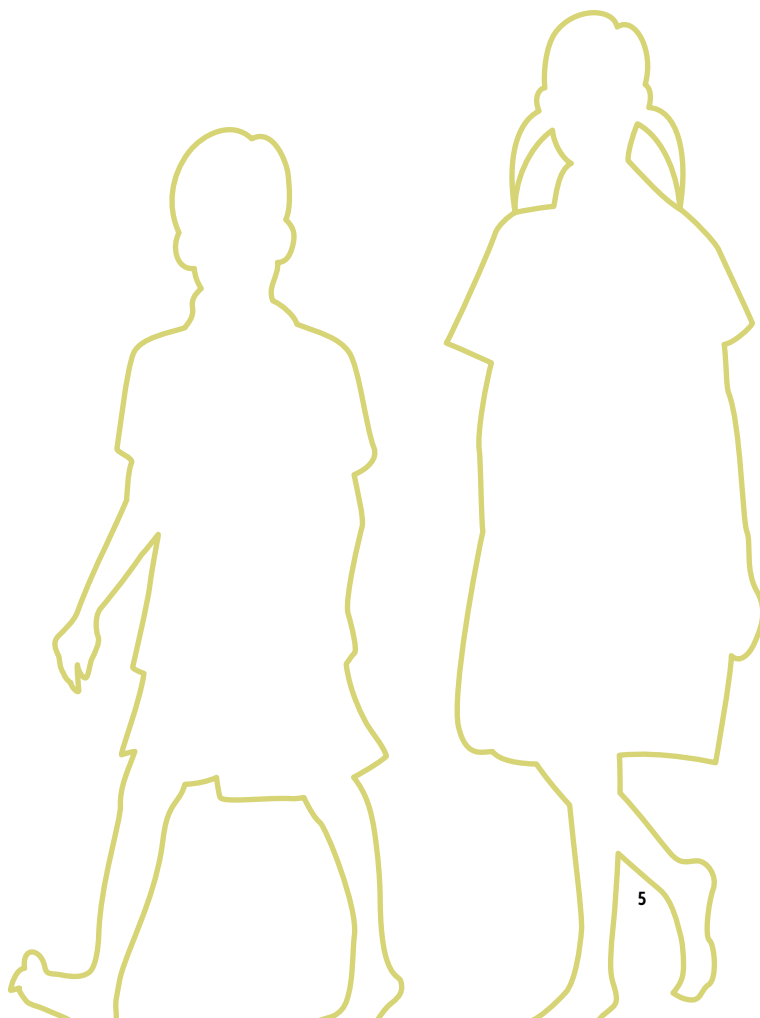
The full reopening of schools is highly problematic in the Global South

The first phase of the global reopening of schools has been almost entirely concentrated in high-income and middle-income countries. This partly reflects the pattern of the spread of the virus, which first hit east Asian and western European countries. Having flattened and reversed the curve of infection through 'lockdown', it was possible for these countries to initiate the safe reopening of schools.

Some western countries – such as France, and more recently the UK – have reopened schools and are now operating in a way not dissimilar to before the crisis, with enhanced hygiene and some social distancing in communal areas but full classes.

However, as we are seeing in countries in which we work, policymakers in lower-income contexts face a dilemma. The multiple contextual differences between their systems and contexts such as France make a 'full reopening' of schools to pre-crisis provision potentially dangerous. Four key factors exist which, in combination, will create major health risks if schools in low-income countries attempt to return to full pre-crisis provision models. These are:

1 High student-teacher ratios and crowded classrooms

2 Insufficient sanitation facilities at school level

3 Multi-generational households in which school-age children frequently interact with elderly relatives

4 Crowded housing with poor sanitation

A key challenge for lower-income countries' capacity to respond to the crisis relates to class size and teacher-student ratios. The demographics are often very different. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, there is a large, youthful population and a drastic shortage of qualified teachers. The result is that classrooms are often severely overcrowded and understaffed. African primary schools have, on average, one trained teacher for every 60 students, compared to the global average of one primary teacher to every 27 students.[7] For example, compare two countries: Malawi and Austria. The primary level teacher-student ratio in Malawi is 1:59. In Austria, the equivalent figure is one teacher to ten students. If we assume that infection is more likely to spread in crowded indoor settings, it is manifestly much easier for the Austrian government to provide a safe reopened school environment than it would be for the government of Malawi.

UNESCO data also illustrates another dimension of the policy challenge facing governments in low-income countries: the frequent lack of basic amenities. Across Sub-Saharan Africa, only a third of primary schools have electricity, and fewer than half primary schools have basic handwashing facilities and on-site drinking water.[8]

Not only are the chances of catching an infectious disease are increased when schools are crowded and lack sufficient sanitation facilities, but common intergenerational household living patterns in many low-income countries further increase the chances of infected school students spreading the infection to elderly adults at home. Esteve and colleagues (2020) have highlighted the

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[7] UNESCO (2020). eAtlas of Teachers. Available at: tellmaps.com/uis/teachers/#!/tellmap/1117625584
[8] UNESCO (2020). eAtlas of Teachers. Available at: tellmaps.com/uis/teachers/#!/tellmap/1117625584

Average teacher/pupil ratios in primary schools vary greatly across the Global South and the Global North

59 PUPILS PER TEACHER in MALAWI

10 PUPILS PER TEACHER in AUSTRIA
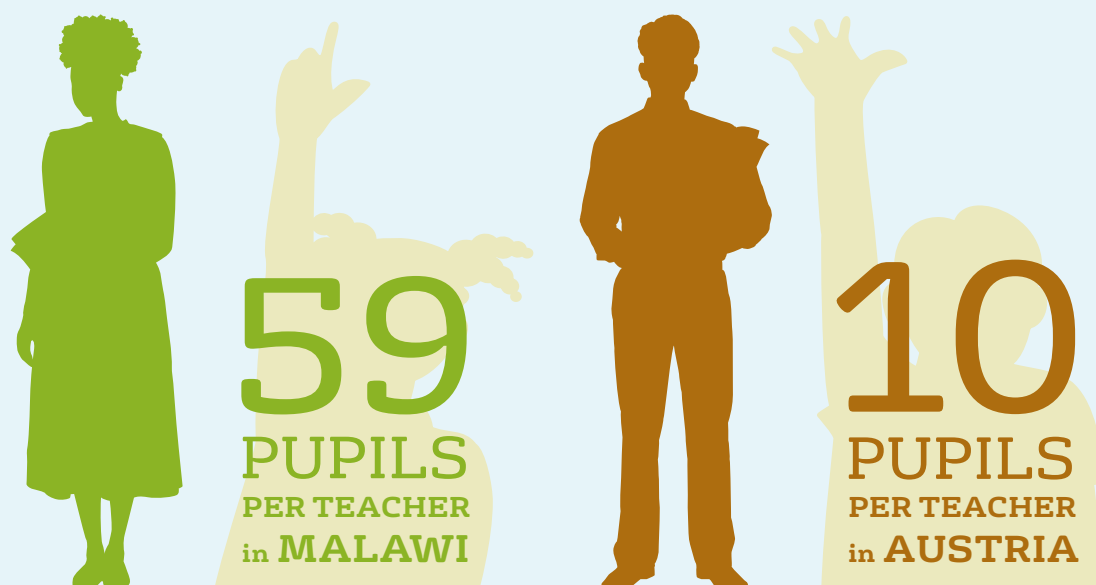
relative rarity of multi-generational households in countries such as France and the frequency of such households in countries such as Bangladesh. The result is much higher risk of transmission between children and elderly adults in some countries in the Global South. As Esteve highlights: 'The coresidence patterns of elderly persons in Africa and parts of Asia increase these countries' vulnerability to deaths induced by within-household transmission of Covid-19'.[9] The role of schools in disease transmission is therefore likely to be greater in those lower-income countries where there is a high level of intergenerational co-residence.

There is further a heightened potential for children to transmit disease acquired at school when their families live in informal slum settlements where sanitation facilities are inadequate and housing is crowded. These high-risk informal settlements are common in many low-income countries. Despite many notable examples of community response to mitigate the risks in such settlements, they remain a high-risk context for virus transmission.

School reopening is therefore much more risky in the Global South, a fact that policymakers there understand. Indeed, the scale of the gap in the capacity to reopen safely has recently been highlighted in a report by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) in the USA.[10] This important study models the epidemiological impact of different policy responses to Covid-19, including school closure, comparing the situation in the world's high-income and low-income countries. The NBER analysis draws upon previous epidemiological studies that have shown that the number of contacts between school-age students and adults aged over 60 is significantly greater in low-income countries compared with high-income countries. Put simply, the NBER model – in line with our own experience working in such contexts, and analysis here – suggests that reopening schools in the Global South constitutes a much higher level of epidemiological risk because of the characteristic mix of overcrowded classes and poor school-level sanitation, together with the greater prevalence of multi-generational households and crowded, housing lacking adequate sanitation.

[9] Albert Esteve et al. (2020) National age and coresidence patterns shape COVID-19 vulnerability; Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences Jul 2020, 117 (28) 16118-16120
[10] NBER (2020) How Should Policy Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic Differ in the Developing World? NBER Working Paper No. 27273

Flexible opening offers an alternative to full closure or full reopening

As we have seen, large class sizes are a major barrier to safe reopening of many schools in low-income settings – since social distancing is not physically possible in crowded classrooms, there is an urgent need to reduce class sizes. One means of doing so would be to insist students go to school on a part-time basis, rather than five days per week.

This may sound counterintuitive to encouraging learning, but is it inevitable that reduced contact time will lead to reduced learning? Or is it possible that, paradoxically, this could be an opportunity to improve the quality of education in the classrooms of the Global South?

It is important to remember that there was a learning crisis before the pandemic. Tessa Bold and colleagues have tracked academic outcomes across seven African countries over several years and have documented just how little learning was taking place in many schools in the pre-Covid world. As they argued: 'School enrolment has universally increased over the last 25 years in low-income countries. Enrolling in school, however, does not assure that children learn. A large share of children in low-income countries complete their primary education lacking even basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills.'[11]

In many schools in the Global South, the current dominant pedagogy has been shaped by the reality of overcrowded classrooms and high student-teacher ratios. Students learn little in crowded classes when the teacher simply talks them through the content of a textbook and their own work receives little diagnostic assessment.

For instance, imagine a class of 60 nine-year-old students studying mathematics before the crisis. A typical lesson might begin with the teacher addressing all 60 students with a textbook-based lecture on a particular mathematical concept and then directing them all to undertake some relevant calculations. Whole-class instruction at this scale provides limited scope for teacher-student questioning and the teacher is unlikely to understand fully which of (or how many of) the students understand the concepts, misunderstand the concepts and are confused, or already understood them before the start of the lesson and are therefore learning nothing new. While the students work on the problems, the class size requires the teacher to concentrate on managing behaviour and encourage 'on-task' focus. In such contexts, teaching can end up being little more than crowd control.

Imagine instead that 30 students come to school for two days each week and study in an uncrowded environment. The teacher can provide them with a higher level of personalised feedback and guidance. The teacher's marking burden is reduced, because some marking can be done in real time with the student. This form of assessment is much more powerful than written comments or ticks and crosses in traditional marking. The work set for out-of-school study can be adjusted to students' individual learning levels, and students are motivated by the more personal attention they get during their time at school. Moreover, reduced class sizes are also more able to accommodate social distancing requirements designed to limit the spread of infection in the community.

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[11] Bold, T.et al. (2017). "Enrollment without Learning: Teacher Effort, Knowledge, and Skill in Primary Schools in Africa." Journal of Economic Perspectives, 31 (4): 185-204

It is possible to envisage a more radical version of the model whereby students only attend school for one day a week, but during this one day receive intense tutorial support and highly personalized guidance. Students in a class of sixty could be divided into groups of 12 to 15, with each group receiving one day a week of high-intensity face-to-face instruction, with an emphasis on assessment and diagnostic feedback.

The benefits of reduced class sizes depend, among other things, on the extent to which face-to-face time in school is enhanced by purposeful learning outside school. This will present considerable

challenges in resource-poor settings, but also introduces greater possibility of students acquiring knowledge and practicing skills outside the classroom, using the guidance and feedback received at school to deepen their learning.

Our model has some similarities to the concept of 'flipped learning', as pioneered in a higher education context. However, as discussed below, our approach to flexible opening is different from conventional flipped learning because we make no assumptions about students' access to technology at household level, and we propose an additional community dimension to learning.

Beyond binary thinking: school reopening options

FULL CLOSURE ✗

The risk of virus transmission at school is removed but learning is severley disrupted, particularly for disadvantaged students.

FLEXIBLE OPENING ✓

Virus transmission at school is restricted by reducing class sizes. Students benefit from increased teacher attention when in school and structured learning out of school.

FULL OPENING ✗

A return to pre-virus class sizes makes school a focus for community transmission. Teaching quality remains unchanged and the learning crisis continues.

Neighbourhood learning within the flexible opening model

One obvious challenge in implementing flexible opening is the high probability that many students will lack adequate home support for their out-of-school work. Disadvantaged students often lack access to a literate family member who can act as a mentor and working alone in a home without basic amenities can be demoralising. Moreover, at household level, students will often lack the necessary technology for effective learning. One way of mitigating this risk is to emphasise the potential of the neighbourhood or community, as well the home, as a site for out-of-school learning.

We advocate the use of non-formal learning opportunities at community level as a way of supplementing the teaching and learning provided at school. Small groups of between five and fifteen students can meet outdoors – or, if available, in well-ventilated, hygienic rooms – under the supervision of a literate facilitator educated to at least secondary school graduation level. The facilitator could be a community volunteer or paid a modest wage. For core subjects in the primary grades, the facilitators would deliver scripted lessons to these small neighbourhood learning clusters to supplement in-school lessons and interaction with fully trained teachers.

This is not a hypothetical model. For many years, international bodies such as IIEP-UNESCO have promoted the idea of non-formal education as a supplement to formal education in the context of emergencies.[12] There are many practical examples of students benefitting from learning in organised non-formal settings coordinated by trained facilitators in emergency contexts. In Bangladesh, for example, Save the Children has recently used this method to successfully support the learning of vulnerable Rohingya girls whose families have been displaced from neighbouring Myanmar. The girls met together for 12.5 hours per week of facilitated instruction, where the facilitators were equipped with instructional materials via smartphones, which supplemented hard-copy textbooks. A study of the girls on the programme in 2018-2019 showed statistically significant improvements in learning in core academic subjects, as well as improvements in their wellbeing and self-esteem.[13]

Another promising example of non-formal provision comes from the work of Education Development Trust in Kenya during the current period of school closure. In this period, we have facilitated groups of five-to-six girls coming together to form 'reading camps' and working together on their out-of-school learning assignments. The camps are supervised by a community health volunteer (CHV) who ensures that social distancing and hygiene protocols are observed. The girls' ability to work well at home has been enhanced by this face-to-face engagement with their peers.

Our proposal takes the potential of non-formal community learning and connects this to formal school-based instruction. The result is a new approach to flipped learning, in which the community serves as a place for learning alongside the school and the home. We propose that teachers should be trained to oversee the work of community facilitators to ensure the seamless integration of formal and non-formal learning opportunities. In the proposed model, the qualified teacher would provide four days of instruction to classes each week, with a greatly improved teacher-student ratio, and would spend one day per week coordinating and quality assuring the activities of the community facilitators.

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[12] IIEP-UNESCO (2010) Guidebook for planning education in emergencies and reconstruction
[13] Australian Government (2020) How Save the Children is using self-learning digital content to provide educational opportunities to young Bangladeshi and Rohingya girls. Available at: https://ixc.dfat.gov.au/how-save-the-children-is-using-self-learning-digital-content-to-provide-educational-opportunities-to-young-bangladeshi-and-rohingya-girls-in-the-worlds-largest-refugee-camp/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=how-save-the-children-is-using-self-learning-digital-content-to-provide-educational-opportunities-to-young-bangladeshi-and-rohingya-girls-in-the-worlds-largest-refugee-camp

Flexible opening:
A typical week of primary instruction

LEARNER PERSPECTIVE

Two days in school for tutorials
Assessment learning

Two days in neighbourhood learning
Tech-enabled content

One day home-based practice
No-tech exercises

TEACHER PERSPECTIVE

Four days teaching reduced size classes
Diagnostic feedback and target-setting

One day coordinating and training community facilitators
Review assessment data from out-of-school exercises and plan community/home learning packages for following week

FACILITATOR PERSPECTIVE

Three days delivering structured lessons

One day marking home exercises

One day of preparation under the direction of the school teacher

Using appropriate and available technology

There is a need to be both ambitious and realistic about the enabling power of technology. In most countries in the Global South, only a minority of households have internet access and some families also lack smart phones, radios and TVs.

Blended learning methods which assume access to these forms of technology will inevitably fail to reach all students. We therefore recommend a 'low threshold/high ceiling' approach. The starting point should be the 'low threshold': a 'no-tech' assumption about student access to technology at household level. Students are entitled to learn even if they live in disadvantaged circumstances where there is no radio/TV, no mobile phone and no internet access. This foundational level of 'no-tech' provision can be enriched with resources requiring access to 'low-tech' resources, such as radio/TV, and 'high-tech' devices, such as smart phones and internet-enabled computers.

In most low-income countries, the need for a 'low threshold' accessible to all leads, logically, to an approach to homework that uses hard-copy workbooks. To ascertain whether there are tech-enabled enrichment opportunities, schools should audit the tech capacity of every student and their household. If, for example, specific parents can confirm that they have mobile phones, they can be sent SMS prompts to help them to understand what they can do to help their children with their studies. This is the 'low threshold' and 'high ceiling' in action.

As discussed, our flexible opening approach emphasises the potential of neighbourhood learning coordinated by community facilitators. This has implications for the use of technology in this reimagined approach to teaching and learning. While it is difficult to ensure that children can access educational broadcasting at the household level, it is much more feasible to imagine comprehensive provision of radios or TVs at the level of neighbourhood learning clusters. Using the technology at this level, rather than within the home, also makes the mediation of the broadcast content by a literate or educated adult possible, which cannot be guaranteed at household level.

We recommend that neighbourhood-level facilitators should have access to tablets with preloaded explanatory video lessons and software supporting 'game-based' adaptive learning activities. Students can take turns using the 'game-based' adaptive learning, which will generate data on individual learners' attainment, progress and characteristic misconceptions. Facilitators should also be equipped with smart phones which can be used to communicate training materials and can enable teachers to communicate regularly.

Establishing the conditions for successful flexible opening

Our renewed learning model offers the prospect of quality instruction and effective health and safety in low-income settings. However, the approach is not without challenges. Certain conditions need to be in place to maximise the chances of success. We identify the following necessary steps:

1. Provide training to teachers on the pedagogy of flexible opening

Our recommendations require teachers to use instructional time in new, more effective ways, and to support learning at neighbourhood level. We propose that schools should reduce face-to-face instructional time but at the same time increase the quality of school-based instruction. In theory, greatly reduced class sizes (from say 60:1 to 30:1) make an approach based on assessment for learning much more feasible, as opposed to textbook-based lecturing. However, such changes in pedagogy will not take place in practice without adequate training and support. In the absence of appropriate training, it is likely that teachers will simply lecture small classes in a very similar way to their previous practice of lecturing large classes.

2. Select, train and monitor community facilitators

The use of community facilitators requires careful management. Police checks will be necessary to ensure that children are not exposed to safeguarding risks. There will be a need for ongoing, systematic monitoring of safeguarding issues and hygiene issues relating to community learning. Neighbourhood facilitators will need

careful training to ensure that they understand their role and are able to use technology effectively in the flexible opening model. Facilitators will also need to be carefully trained in important topics, such as safeguarding and child protection. We recommend that teachers and school leaders should monitor their work to ensure academic consistency and child safety.

3. Get buy-in from parents

Many parents will be disconcerted by the proposed model. They may feel cheated when they learn that schools are only available for their children on a part-time basis, and they may be sceptical about the benefits of neighbourhood or community learning. If the school is used for essential feeding programmes, arrangements will need to be made to ensure that students do not miss out on food on the days that they do not attend school. There is a need, therefore, for an engagement plan that addresses parental concerns and establishes effective communication channels to parents and the wider community about flexible opening.

4. Support teachers through the centralised development of learning resources

Teachers need to be freed up from the burden of lesson preparation to enable them focus on their tutorial and assessment relationships with students. They should not spend time designing worksheets: instead, workbooks with assignments pitched at different cognitive levels should be produced centrally and used locally. Teachers should be given as much help as possible in accessing existing, quality assured curriculum materials – for example, those curated on the internet or preloaded on

devices. Teachers are likely to find Open Education Resources particularly helpful, as they have the potential to provide both high-quality resources and scope for modification for specific local contexts. Centrally developed resources should be integrated with the content of educational broadcasting.

5. Emphasise the importance of school leadership

The capacity of each school to provide good, safe provision through flexible reopening will depend upon leadership at all levels of the education system, including school leadership. This new model for education provision presents an opportunity for principals to demonstrate the power of instructional leadership. School leaders will need to champion new ways of teaching and to monitor the quality of provision, providing staff with developmental feedback, both on the new tutorial/assessment style of teaching and the neighbourhood outreach work via community facilitators. Our proposal depends upon the harnessing of resources and commitment at neighbourhood level, and the school principal has the potential to be the key interface between school and community.

6. Gather data relating to student participation

Information about the engagement level of individual students will be required in order to ensure that disadvantaged students thrive during the next phase of the health crisis. Without data from the frontline about students from different backgrounds, we will be in the dark about the effectiveness of learning in reopened schools and the extent to which the blended learning offer is successful. In the context of flexible opening, data should be gathered on student enrolment, attendance, engagement and achievement. Disaggregated data is particularly important for identifying and tracking the engagement of vulnerable groups of students.

7. Quality assure teaching

Education authorities need to check the quality of provision at school level. The accountability of professionals has received relatively little emphasis worldwide since the start of the pandemic. School inspectors – or their equivalent – should act as advocates for students and their families, checking that education professionals are doing a good job.

8. Use available, appropriate technology

There is considerable potential for blended learning that uses both face-to-face instruction and remote learning enabled by technology. 'Low-tech' solutions using radio broadcasting will in many cases have much more reach than 'high-tech' online learning which requires internet access and internet-enabled devices. If radio or TV broadcasting is used, it needs to be carefully integrated with classroom instruction. Community facilitators can be trained to mediate broadcast content as part of the neighbourhood learning offer, linking the broadcast material to school-based learning. At the household level in many disadvantaged communities, it is best not to assume that students have access to technology and to provide textbooks and paper-based workbooks.

Conclusion

Until a vaccine for the virus is discovered and distributed, the schools of the world must adapt to the challenge of Covid-19. Here we present some practical ways of responding to the health emergency. We also believe that it is possible to go beyond crisis management. This is a time for the education community to tackle today's problems but also learn lessons that will endure. The flexible opening model is not without challenges, but it offers the real potential to ensure higher quality education provision for some of the world's most vulnerable children.

To find out more about our work and research in this area, please contact us:
researchanddevelopment@educationdevelopmenttrust.com

LEARNING RENEWED: HOW EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT TRUST IS SUPPORTING POLICYMAKERS WORLDWIDE WITH FLEXIBLE SCHOOL OPENING

Education Development Trust has the privilege of partnering with policymakers and donors worldwide to support their response to the current crisis. Our support ranges from practical local solutions to ensure learning continuity, to working with international agencies on new evidence to underpin effective multi-country responses.

As a not-for-profit education company, a key part of our charitable mission is to contribute to the global education knowledge base. During the current crisis, we commit to sharing our collective thinking for the benefit of the wider international community and we invite colleagues to join us in sharing insights and progressing global thinking on 'what works' for school re-opening.

Our current programmes are generating new learning in the following areas:

1. Translating the latest education evidence and research to inform adaptive policymaking

Education policymakers currently face a high volume of crisis-related research papers and publications on school re-opening. It is critical that policymakers are supported to make sense of the noise in a rapidly changing context, and Education Development Trust has been partnering with FCDO and the EdTech Hub on ways to make this possible. For the EdTech Hub, for example, we produced eight high quality rapid evidence reviews for policymakers, with practical recommendations for implementation. The topics covered areas such as learning from past crisis response, the efficacy of global policy responses, girls' education, distance learning, remote pedagogy and provision for children with special education needs and disabilities.

2. Supporting teachers to deliver remote, blended and accelerated pedagogies

Teachers face significant new challenges in the context of school re-opening. Whilst there have been many well-intended initiatives to support high-tech remote learning solutions, evidence shows that teachers in low-income settings benefit from access to well curated resources, including low-tech materials. In Jordan, we are working with the policymakers and UNICEF to design a series of online and face-to-face teacher development modules to support teachers with the key skills they will need for flexible school re-opening, in priority pedagogical areas. In Rwanda, we partner with the Rwanda Education Board and FCDO on wider education reforms and have found that teachers nationally have treasured the opportunity to continue with teacher-led communities of practice and coaching during the crisis to develop key instructional skills and resources, and to prevent professional learning loss ahead of school re-opening. We have learnt significant lessons from pivoting this teacher support from 100% face-to-face to a blend of 'low-tech' support via mobile phones, as well as high-tech online communities. Our approach is enriched through an emphasis on data.

3. Mobilising and training community learning facilitators to support out of school learning

Education Development Trust has developed innovative community-based models to support learning continuity during the crisis. In Kenya, we have mobilised and prepared a network of Community Health Volunteers to ensure that girls in the most remote contexts have access to learning resources and teacher feedback. We are experimenting and researching the ways in which these community volunteers can work together with teachers and instructional coaches to provide high-quality learning experiences in the context of social distancing. Our research in this area is due for publication in autumn 2020.

4. Engaging parents and families in learning support

Education Development Trust's technology centre of excellence, London Connected Learning Centre, has specialist expertise in parental engagement in schooling. The centre has provided practical support to parents and caregivers to support children's learning in the London area. This includes parental guidance and tips on how to engage children in learning, using a variety of tools such as online blogs, social media messages, posters and slots on local radio. In Rwanda, we have worked hard to solicit ongoing feedback from parents on remote learning solutions, to inform the ongoing improvement of interventions. For example, we have used mobile phone surveys to gather parental feedback on the quality and reach of radio lessons, to inform future design and parental communications.

5. Supporting school leaders so that they can offer adaptive, instructional leadership to teachers and school communities during re-opening

School leaders have a dual role in Covid-19 response that includes the logistical planning and management linked to school reopening, as well as a need to focus on being leaders of effective accelerated or blended teaching and learning that supports all children, including the most vulnerable and marginalised. Our international evidence reviews show that promising policy responses during this crisis offer role clarity for leaders at school and district level, as well as training and support networks which help leaders navigate uncertainty. Education Development Trust has been working hard with partners internationally to support school leaders in this way. In Ethiopia, we are designing a range of modules suitable for remote as well as face-to-face delivery, and professional learning networks where leaders can share their practice. In a context where no one school, district, or nation has the "right" answer to the Covid-19 crisis, these kinds of networks are a key opportunity for local leaders to step up and offer peer support, and to build local resilience.

6. Quality assuring school provision to gain a national view of 'what works' in a rapidly changing context

In a constantly changing crisis context, the rules on 'what works' for whole school effectiveness suddenly become less clear. Education Development Trust has been partnering with ADEK in the UAE to help policymakers gain new insights into effective school-wide practices. We mobilised and delivered school evaluations for over 200 schools over a period of two months, generating precious new data and learning on what it takes for schools and students to thrive in the current context. Policymakers now have a deeper understanding on success factors for school leaders and teaching and learning, and promising practices which can be shared nationally.

7. Building ongoing evidence through strong data and monitoring systems on student learning, to plan responsive solutions, particularly for the most vulnerable

As a research-led organisation, we have invested significantly in ongoing monitoring, analysis and new evidence generation on our programmes to inform our response. In Rwanda, for example, our rapid research into access to technology for teachers and other key education actors was critical intelligence in informing our crisis response, including how to reach teachers in more isolated settings. We are now working with partners on a new inequality assessment instrument, which will help us understand differences in how students have been affected by the crisis, and identify the most vulnerable students, so that we can tailor our response and track the impact of our support on mitigating the impact of the crisis over time.