Webinar Report

THE FUTURE OF LEARNING

Panellists from:

[

Doon School, India
Pallavan School Jhalawar, India
Paradise Valley Private School, Oman
The Scindia School, India
The Royal Academy, Bhutan

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Wednesday, 27 May 2020, 4:30 pm IST

The second webinar hosted by Pallavan Learning Systems aimed to continue to connect and draw on the expertise and experiences of practitioners to design learning experiences to help learners actualise their potential. The focus of this webinar was to explore ideas around the question 'What is the future of learning?'

We don't get to choose when and how we are affected by external events such as a pandemic but we do get to choose how we deal with it. The response and proactive measures taken by our educational community in dealing with the unprecedented nature of events this year has been amazing. Participants of the webinar were keen to share their ideas on not just how their educational institutions were ensuring the continuation of learning for all their learners during the pandemic but also some of the practices they have adopted due to the pandemic that could be integrated into the future of learning in the coming months and years.

The 90 minute webinar was fortunate to have five engaged and experienced educational panellists from schools across India, Bhutan and Oman. We would like to extend our gratitude for their participation and the wealth of ideas and experiences they shared.

- Mr Kamal Ahuja from The Doon School, India

- Mr Mahtab Alam Sidique from Pallavan School Jhalawar, India

- Ms Julie Shaffer from Paradise Valley Private School, Oman

- Ms Smita Chaturvedi from Scindia School, India

- Mr Penjor Ghaley from The Royal Academy, Bhutan.

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The webinar was moderated by Mrs Joella Lynch-Hemant, a former teacher at The Royal Academy, Bhutan and currently a secondary science teacher in the UK.

The webinar was split into two discussion sections with time for Q&A at the end. The first discussion was based around the panellists' thoughts regarding the article titled 'The Future of Learning' and touched on their general ideas about the future of learning. The second discussion section was more focused on the practices and strategies that panellists have found useful during these unprecedented times and any suggestions they thought may be worth exploring further to integrate into the future of learning. The participants of the webinar were very active throughout the webinar and shared their ideas, thoughts and questions using the chat function. These questions were collated and two recurring themes became apparent - relating to the mental wellbeing of learners and the role of parents as collaborators. These questions were put to the panellists towards the end of the webinar.

The discussion led to the emergence of a number of key ideas and themes for further research. The key points and questions within these themes have been outlined below.

Themes that emerged from the webinar:

- **Creating and Developing Community Learning Centres**
  - The panellists highlighted the opportunity that re-evaluating learning methods and pedagogies has for creating and developing community learning centres. The suggestion that these communities can be both physical and online was deemed worth exploring in great depth. The needs for these communities to not only share knowledge but also experiences and emotions were also highlighted.

- **What is Online / Blended Learning?**
  - There was a brief discussion around what the phrases 'online' and 'blended learning' mean and what type of activities and strategies fall under them. The term 'home-school' was also used by the panellists. Developing a coherent definition and understanding of these ideas within the learning community as well as delving further into the idea of 'augmented learning' would be beneficial for future discussions. With the recent rise in online and digital learning platforms it may be beneficial to create a database of the type of instructional strategies and learner

interaction required on each of these to determine their suitability and how they might or might not fit into the pedagogical framework of 'blended' learning or 'augmented' learning.

- **Teacher Development - Capacity Building**
  o The need to help build the capacity and skill set of teachers in order to utilize online learning was mentioned by a number of participants and panellists. It was shared that a number of teachers had found that the transition to online learning had brought unanticipated challenges. These challenges were not only confined to the use of different technologies but also affected their relationship with learners and raised practical issues such as giving assessment and feedback. As the panellists discussed the plans within their schools for the coming few months in anticipation of the partial return of some learners, there was a sense that some form of 'online learning' was here to stay and that some attention needed to be given to helping teachers adapt to this learning medium. How this training or development could be rolled out was not discussed and could be an area for further research and discussion.

- **Parent Involvement**
  o There were a lot of comments from both the participants and the panellists regarding parental/family involvement in learning. It was mentioned that the pandemic has created an opportunity for educators to connect with parents on a level that has not been experienced before. The level of parental support or capacity to support was a topic of great interest. There was a worry that many parents were feeling overwhelmed or unable to support their children due to circumstances such as having to work from home themselves, and the stress of loss of livelihood. However, the opportunity to re-engage parents as co-learners or co-teachers with their children was seen as a unique opportunity and one that the panellists and participants felt was worth exploring. Moving forward it was felt that exploring the different strategies that could be used to support and co-create learning experiences with parents as collaborators would be worthwhile and would help support learners in the coming months and years ahead. Trying to co-create a pedagogical approach that encircled families (as it was mentioned that it may not just be parents but grandparents or other relatives that were supporting

learners), educational institutes and learners could be an approach worth undertaking.

- **Capacity Building for Learners**
  - A need to help learners adapt to shifts in learning practices was also mentioned by the panellists. It was noted that some learners had adapted very well to more online learning practices but there was a worry that some learners were missing out as they didn't have the functional or life skills in order to best utilize online learning. In the coming months and years as the potential for more digital and online learning strategies are used, just as teachers may need some assistance in adapting their practices, some learners may also need this scaffolding. In this scenario, looking at the different ways schools or teachers are supporting learners to adapt to the different platforms or online/digital strategies being used would be worthwhile. Also useful would be the development of support guidelines or a course itself to help learners assess their ability to adapt to the use of more online learning and support them in developing their skills further.

- **Inclusivity - SEND and Access Issues**
  - The inclusivity of online or digital learning formed a large part of the discussion. There were two main threads to this discussion. The first was the access to the physical resources learners need in order to access online or digital learning resources successfully. Depending on the personal circumstances of the learners, for example, the location of their home or the type of or number of electronic equipment they have access to, their ability to consistently access online or digital learning platforms will be different. This means that not all learners will have the same access and therefore these individual differences need to be accounted for when planning and setting online work. It would be worth researching the different ways this can be achieved in order to help both educators and learners to adjust if needed.

  - The second thread to this discussion links in with the point above with regards to the ability of learners to access online or digital learning platforms. Learners with very specific educational needs may struggle to engage with specific technologies or online platforms. Therefore, not being physically present in a classroom or with

a teacher or learning assistant may severely reduce the learner's ability to engage. The amount of support available at home will also play a large part in this regard. It was mentioned that providing support for carers and parents at home was playing a huge role in trying to ensure that these learners were not missing out on learning experiences. Again, more ideas regarding how to ensure we can help all learners access learning opportunities during periods of remote or online learning are worth exploring.

- **Learning Processes - Immediate Feedback - Assessment Online**
  - This was a particularly interesting discussion for both the panellists and the participants. The question of how assessment is being carried out during periods of online learning was raised numerous times. There were discussions about the practicality of receiving photos of work completed by students to the limitations of not being able to give instant feedback to help students progress while they were carrying out a task. There were questions regarding how we can best develop assessment practices for the current scenario and beyond in order to ensure learners are able to take ownership of their learning and progress. It was felt that these practices needed to be developed across all areas of a learner's development - not only their academics (cerebral development) but also their social, emotional, physical and spiritual developments.

- **Learner Well-being**
  - For many learners educational institutes provide not just a place where they 'learn' things but also a safe environment in which they can develop emotionally and socially. The interactions between learners and their peers and teachers can often help with ensuring that learners are not overwhelmed by their current circumstances at school and at home. There was strong concern among the panellists and participants regarding the well-being of learners and how both the current circumstances and a move towards more online learning in the future may impact this. This question was regarded as an area that needed further research and the sharing of experience and strategies being used currently was seen as significantly helpful.

- **Wholistic Development**
  - There was concern by many participants that the attention at the moment was too heavily focused on academics and cerebral development and that the wholistic development of learners was at risk of being neglected if online learning was to continue. The question of how to successfully ensure that online or distance learning creates opportunities for the wholistic development of learners was asked. As we move forward with looking at a more augmented learning pedagogy, this is one of the key areas of development required that will be vital to ensuring augmented learning pedagogies are viable options.

- **Utilization of Technology**
  - There were a number of different online and digital learning platforms discussed during the webinar. It was suggested that the suitability of the different platforms available needed to be looked at in detail. There are so many factors that will influence which digital learning platform is used and we may find that there is not one that suits all purposes and all learners' needs. Therefore, as with any tool we may use as educators, we may need to vary what tool we use depending on the needs of the learner and the requirements of the task or activity. In order to do this successfully as educators we need to have a good understanding of these tools. Therefore, looking into the development of teacher training specifically focusing on the use of online or digital tools could be useful and help bridge the gap for learners and educators alike.

Takeaways:

➢ This is a great opportunity to help learners take ownership of their learning and help them understand how they can craft their own successes.

➢ There is a need to prioritise those students who need more face to face contact; each learner is different and having staggered reopening of schools may necessitate that we scaffold our processes to help them overcome their challenges.

➢ It is very important to maintain a sustained dialogue between teachers, parents and students to ensure wholistic development of all learners.

➢ To make parents co-creators does not mean involving them in every single decision but rather playing to their strengths and making use of their expertise to leverage the child's learning journey.

➢ In the classroom, teachers are actively improvising to improve learning outcomes and this is difficult to do with a group on a digital platform. What new processes and practices can we think of to improve the future of learning?

➢ It is of utmost importance to form a learning community where we can not only share best practices but also craft new ones and share experiences and emotions too.

➢ The process of self assessment and how to help students refine this skill is crucial for the way forward.

➢ How can we help learners be more agile, adaptable and resilient so that they can not just adapt but thrive in an ever changing world?

➢ How can we leverage the expertise of the community to which a learner belongs so that they are well positioned to serve the needs of their immediate and wider community?

Any good discussion should generate as many questions as it sets out to answer. We feel this webinar did exactly that. The webinar produced such a depth and range of discussion based on the future of learning both in the coming months and years ahead. The summary above by no means captures everything that was discussed but has hoped to summarise the main ideas, thoughts and points of the discussions.. From this summary the hope is that as educators we may use these discussions as springboards in the coming months and years as we continue to develop and co-create the future of learning.

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