

PLS WEBINAR SERIES

REPORT

DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY
APPROACH TO PROMOTE LEARNING
&
CREATING A FRAMEWORK
FOR REOPENING SCHOOLS

THURSDAY, 25 JUNE 2020

The logo for Pallavan Learning Systems features the word "pallavan" in a bold, lowercase, green sans-serif font. A yellow swoosh is positioned above the letters "l" and "a". Below the English name, the Hindi phrase "आओ सीखना सीखें" is written in a smaller, black, sans-serif font.

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Introduction

The third webinar was hosted by Pallavan Learning Systems on 25th June 2020 on the topic *Developing a Sustainable Community Approach to Promote Learning and Creating a Framework for Reopening Schools*. Kamal Ahuja, the Deputy Headmaster of the Doon School moderated the session. The panellists were Debasish Chakrabarty from The Doon School, Dehradun, India; Habiba Mohammed Al-Hadi Jaballah from Paradise Valley Private School, Muscat, Oman; Tshering Nidup from The Royal Academy, Paro, Bhutan; and Ashish Arora from The Scindia School, Gwalior, India. In addition, two parents, Suhale Kapoor and Padhmalakshmi Iyengar were invited as panellists for the session. About 50 participants attended the webinar.

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Pallavan Learning Systems

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CREATING A FRAMEWORK FOR REOPENING SCHOOLS

THURSDAY, 25 JUNE 2020, 4:30 PM IST

Moderator:
Mr Kamal Ahuja, The Doon School, India

Panellists:
Ms Habiba Mohammed Al-Hadi Jaballah, Paradise Valley Private School, Oman
Mr Debasish Chakrabarty, The Doon School, India | Mr Suhale Kapoor, Parent, India
Ms Padhmalakshmi Iyengar, Parent, India
Mr Tshering Nidup, The Royal Academy, Bhutan | Mr Ashish Arora, The Scindia School, India

Participants:
More than 50 participants including
Cathedral & John Connon School, India | Mayo College, India | Parents
Pallavan School, Jhalawar, India | Pallavanjali School, India | Paradise Valley Private School, Oman
The Millennium School, UAE | ACS International, Singapore | Sunbeam Group of Educational Institutions, India
The Doon School, India | The Royal Academy, Bhutan | United World College, the Netherlands
The Scindia School, India | Tibetan Children's Village School, India | Educators & Consultants

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Sustainable community approach to promote learning:

Schools are an extension of society and are intricately linked to its challenges and aspirations. The current crisis has given an even more important role for society and community to play in impacting learning and education. The important points discussed in relation to developing a sustainable community approach to promote learning were as follows:

- ***Communities - Potential for learning:***

There are many varied and often overlapping communities – of self, teachers, parents, peers, family members, extended community and digital community. Each of these communities present unique learning opportunities for the learner if they are leveraged in a sustained and contextualized manner.

- ***Parents and immediate family members:***

The community of parents, guardians, caregivers and family members has especially come to the forefront as having an immense potential to impact learning. In the present crisis, family members spend maximum time with the learners, which gives them unprecedented access to understanding how learners function and learn.

- ***Teachers and educators:***

The teachers, who do not have direct physical access to the learners during this time, have learnt to conduct some of the learning experiences using online resources and platforms. This is a time for them to collaborate with parents and family members to design effective learning experiences. At the same time, they need to take this opportunity to consolidate the online/virtual community that they have formed with their learners. Even after the reopening of schools the online community should complement their physical classroom interaction.

- ***Peer network:***

The peer community has a significant role to play in the growth of learners, especially their social and emotional development. Since the current crisis does not allow for physical interaction and socialization with peers, we need to ensure that learners have other avenues, including online and social media platforms, to connect with one another. When

learners are able to come together physically, a good example of peer support could be students in higher grades helping those in lower grades with the course work.

- ***Extended community:***

The learner also interacts with the extended community, comprising people in their local environment. The contextualized situation and the various people in it play a role in the wellbeing of the learner. Therefore, it is crucial that the learner contributes to the wellbeing of the surrounding community. The notion of community service and giving back to society can lead to great learning experiences.

- ***Digital and online community:***

Technology has enabled a vibrant online or digital community that has become an important source of learning. On one hand, we have educational resources such as Coursera, PhysicsWallah and TED-Ed. On the other, we have platforms such as WhatsApp, YouTube and social media applications that help learners, teachers, parents and peers to stay connected. These channels provide the space for learners and their varied communities to come together to collaborate and work together.

Online platforms have diverse spaces with distinct functionalities. For example, while WhatsApp is primarily used to keep in touch with people known to you, Instagram and Facebook allow you to connect with people who are not known to you directly. Learners need to be able to differentiate between private and public platforms and assess associated risks. While building a digital community, learners need to be able to negotiate multiple spaces and understand which platforms are used for what purpose.

Communication:

- In ensuring we build sustainable learning communities, the key ingredient is communication. The channel of communication needs to be transparent and honest, that is built on mutual trust and understanding. Only then can we proceed to strategize and co-create learning experiences that are aimed at nurturing children and enhancing their learning.

Formal learning process:

- In many cases, learners have been able to learn not only academic content but significant skills, processes and values from these varied communities during this period. When we reopen our schools, we need to ensure that the role of these communities finds a space in the formal learning process.

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Creating a framework for reopening schools:

The salient points discussed under creating a framework for reopening schools were as follows:

- ***Why the need?:***

Schools are more than spaces where students co-exist physically and imbibe domain knowledge; it is a place where learners develop friendship, discover areas of interest and form a unique identity. While strategizing a framework for reopening schools, it is time that governments, policy makers, educationists and medical professionals shift from a preventive approach to a proactive one so that schools are able to resume in the best possible manner.

- ***Contextualization:***

Depending on the severity of the pandemic and other local conditions, countries are in different stages regarding how and when they plan to reopen schools. These decisions are usually taken by national or state governments, often in discussion with local authorities. Their decisions are primarily guided by public health considerations and the benefits and risks of opening schools. While there are generic frameworks, most notably the United Nations document for reopening of schools, it is necessary for individual schools to create contextualized structures, processes and systems that uphold the best interest of the child. These processes and systems need to be effective as well as sustainable.

- ***Sharing of guidelines:***

One of the main points that emerged was the importance of transparent communication and trust in the process of reopening schools. Parents and guardians need to be assured that proper guidelines regarding physical distancing, hygiene and emergencies are in place.

The school needs to have detailed contextualized guidelines on:

- Physical distancing – How is it being practiced? For example, is the school adopting staggered opening, separate morning and afternoon classes, or reorganization of the time table?
- Sanitation and hygiene – How is the school ensuring constant hand-washing and sanitizing? How is the food distributed? What regulations are put in place regarding the cleanliness and seat allocation in the school bus?

- Emergencies – What is the level of coordination with the authority and health workers to deal with a crisis? What is the ongoing method of contact tracing and isolation?

- ***Wellbeing:***

Another important discussion revolved around what needs to happen after the schools are reopened. What headspace and mindset will our learners be in after having been through a tumultuous time? There may be many cases of isolation, neglect, stress, boredom and abuse during this period that come to the forefront as schools reopen. We need to ensure that teachers are sensitized and prepared to deal with these issues. The wellbeing and the socio-emotional care of children should be the utmost priority as schools move forward with the new normal.

- ***Management style:***

As schools reopen, one of the things that may occur is the micromanagement of work spaces in order to ensure safety and effective transition. The educators and administrators need to be aware of this reality and work together with a sense of shared responsibility with a conscious effort to uphold the highest standard of safety, wellbeing and meaningful learning.

- ***Efforts to bridge the gap:***

We need to learn from this pandemic and utilize it to make our approaches, systems and practices better than before. The utmost focus should be on the child and our ideation and strategies need to take into account each and every one of them. We need to be cognizant of the fact that not all students are able to access learning in the same way during the lockdown; learners from disadvantaged backgrounds do not have the resources or opportunity to participate in online learning effectively. Although we seek to employ an egalitarian approach with regard to our learners in a classroom setting, the same cannot be said about digital learning and learners' contextualized realities. While designing how to proceed onward, we need to develop supporting or scaffolding strategies for children who may have additional learning needs. We should use this opportunity to bridge the gap between learners rather than leaving some behind.

Strategies for parents and teachers to collaborate and create a conducive environment to promote learning

Due to the current crisis, we have witnessed a whole new level of mutual respect, admiration and partnership between teachers and parents. Parents have not only understood the importance of education and learning but also witnessed firsthand the amount of effort and dedication put in by teachers to help their children learn. Teachers, on the other hand have realized the immense potential of parents and family members to impact learning in children. These were the points highlighted regarding effective collaboration between teachers and parents:

- ***Communication and trust:***

Ensuring clear communication and fostering trust are key to the success of this partnership between teachers and parents. Teachers need to maintain an open channel of communication and be enthusiastic about sharing their lesson plans, intended outcomes and learning framework with the parents. Only then can they collaborate to plan lessons appropriate for the current situation and create impactful learning experiences. Communication would also bring to the forefront unique expertise of parents that could be leveraged to elevate learning experiences.

- ***Resources for parents:***

There is a need for schools and teachers to support parents in terms of resources so that they are able to help their children with their learning. Parents may be in the position to help their children in lower grades with their lesson work. However, they might not possess the content knowledge to support children in higher grades with their course work. In either cases, it may be useful to provide parents with a handbook or workshop focused on the Do's and Don'ts while supporting their children's learning. This handbook or workshop could contain information on:

- Learning strategies to cope with various situation
- Motivating learners
- Addressing learners' needs
- Inculcating a positive mindset
- Celebrating success
- Embracing diversity
- Learning about cyber safety

- ***Lifelong learners:***

This is a great opportunity for teachers and parents to reinforce their notions of being lifelong learners. With the realization that they are also on a learning journey, teachers and parents can make significant progress in reimagining education and the kind of society we want to create. In particular, the current crisis has led to many teachers realizing that they need to unlearn a few things about traditional pedagogical methods and learn to be more creative with online instruction. Parents should also take this opportunity to learn the interface and platform for online learning as well as reimagine their role as a parent or caregiver.

- ***Taking ownership of learning:***

The collaboration between teachers and parents should ensure that they are able to create a conducive environment for learners to take ownership of their own learning. Learners should be motivated to chart their own growth with an individualized learning programme with specific strengths and challenges. Learners should be excited about learning and challenged in numerous ways to sustain their interest. Also, teachers and parents need to realize that they can learn a lot from children. When learners are inspired to learn and grow, they often impart unexpected knowledge and insights to their surrounding communities.



To watch the video of the webinar please [click here](#).

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A Synthesis by Pallavan Learning Systems

The emerging roles of communities in the learning process

Learning is a continuum that takes place through the multi-layered relationship of the learner with the environment. This pandemic has shown that wholesome learning cannot take place in isolation and it is dependent on the learners' relationship with teachers, family, peers, online community and the environment. Often regarded to be outside of the formal learning process, the people surrounding the learners play a big part and possess an immense potential in bringing about learning. It is crucial that we meaningfully engage and support the people surrounding our learners – parents, siblings, caregivers, peers, extended community, and online/digital community – and formally include them in our learning framework. This is an opportunity to reevaluate learning methods and pedagogies in order to create a sustainable community approach to promote learning. These communities can be both physical and online, and can be used to not only share knowledge but also cater to the wholistic wellbeing of the learner.

A child begins learning at home and is greatly influenced by the home environment and the people around that dictate her learning trajectory. Family members need to be meaningfully engaged to create a robust learning community with the support from teachers. Even in cases where parents and guardians may not be able to contribute significantly in the area of cerebral development, they could have a huge impact on the social, emotional and spiritual development of the child. While academics and domain knowledge are important, it is becoming increasingly clear that in order to stay relevant in today's times, one has to develop the qualities of rigour, resilience, independent learning and self-care. The collaboration between teachers and parents with the focus on these qualities could propel the wholistic growth of the child.

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. Since parents and guardians cannot turn into effective facilitators overnight, educators need to work with them closely to design and co-create insightful learning experiences. At the same time, there is a pertinent need to work on a handbook for parents and guardians that can guide them in their endeavour to support learning at home.

Parents and family members are not the only one going through a learning process during this time. With technology increasingly becoming an indispensable tool for delivering learning, teachers worldwide have found the transition difficult. The challenges are not only confined to the use of different technologies but also pertains to their relationship with learners which has raised practical issues such as giving assessment and feedback. The traditional method of instruction, which consisted of textbook, blackboard and lecture, is giving way to innovative slides, interactive chats and various media platforms. This requires teachers to explore online or digital tools and learn how to use them effectively, followed by sharing of good practices amongst colleagues to encourage collaboration and cross-pollination of ideas.

At the same time, technological advances have sprouted a myriad of learning spaces like never before. The focus is now on creating a learning experience instead of simply recreating classroom situations – learning is more of a thought process than a setting, and the process is especially effective when it is contextualized for various learners and settings. Whether it is at home, in the community or online, as long as students are absorbing new information, emotions, experiences and knowledge, meaningful learning is taking place.

This is also a great opportunity to acknowledge learners' goals and sense of purpose – their understanding of themselves, their priorities and their roles in the world. We need to listen to them with sensitivity and open minds so that we are able to motivate them to chart their individual learning growth. When learners are encouraged to take ownership of their growth, they are in the better position to imbibe the process of self-reflection and self-improvement, which enable them to constantly unlearn and learn, and become lifelong learners.

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If you have questions or comments after reading the report and watching the webinar video, please follow [this link](#) to add to the online discussion continued from the webinar.

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