

Foreword

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the closure of school buildings in most countries around the world and has interrupted the school attendance of at least 1.5 billion students in 2020 and 2021. Although the pandemic has shown that countries' current learning infrastructures are highly vulnerable to external shocks, many education systems have been able to adapt in some way. Schools and educators have shown great resilience in trying to compensate for the crisis, and while they need to be better prepared for similar challenges, they have demonstrated leadership, initiative and an innovative spirit that we can all learn from, both during and after the crisis.

When the Harvard Global Education Innovation Initiative, HundrED, the OECD and the World Bank came together to start this project, it was with this in mind: that in every society, amidst the crisis created by the pandemic, there were individuals and organisations, in government and in civil society, that against the odds were creating ways to sustain educational opportunity. We decided to join forces to document a variety of examples of what education stakeholders could do. We anchored our approach on two premises. First, when practitioners solve problems, they gain knowledge that can be used to help others who may be experiencing the same issues, while also becoming more equipped to face future problems. Second, some insights and nuances about how programmes and policies are implemented are best understood by those who participated in their design and implementation. For this reason, we decided to identify innovations and document them by working alongside those who led them.

It was an audacious proposition to design and execute a global study of innovation at a time when we were all in lockdown and relying on digital technologies to communicate, and when we also knew it was obviously too soon to know what was working, for whom and with what results. Our goal was simply to try to offer inspiration to those who, like us, were determined to prevent the complete shutdown of education. Over time we learnt – from our virtual conversations with colleagues in a range of jurisdictions – that many education leaders were on the edge of giving up, and that governments were sometimes ready to focus all their energies on the public health emergency, leaving their education efforts on hold. We were guided by the ethical imperative that education should continue against all odds.

To achieve this goal we sought to identify and disseminate examples of how this was being done, however imperfectly, as schools were shut down. We also had another motive: to describe and document the variety of approaches tried during the pandemic so that later we can look back on this period with qualitative information, and perhaps new ideas to reshape education in the future.

This report compiles the 45 education continuity stories that were published on the OECD and World Bank websites. They documented in real time the innovative initiatives undertaken to keep learners (or teachers) learning during the first wave of the pandemic (March to December 2020). Coming from the five continents, these initiatives were implemented in low, middle and high-income countries, by central or local governments, non-governmental organisations and private companies. They cover early childhood through to tertiary education, including examples of comprehensive initiatives from government, as well as initiatives targeting one specific population (e.g. students with special needs) or learning aspect (e.g. students socio-emotional skills or teachers' professional learning). As almost all of them involve some kind of technology as part of their contingency plan, the stories not only give examples of how online platforms,

radio, TV, etc., were used, but also an interesting snapshot of where countries' digital (or remote) learning infrastructure was at the beginning of the pandemic. An Index capturing the main dimensions of these innovations will help readers navigate them.

The first part of the report draws some lessons from these innovations and looks towards the future. Indeed, the crisis has made the shortcomings of education systems more visible; insufficient learning and unacceptable achievement gaps must be addressed. Some lessons of the crisis can help us build more effective and equitable education systems. Education systems will need the spirit of innovation and quick experimentation that characterised the pandemic, especially at its beginning, with the strong leadership of so many education stakeholders, the widespread willingness to collaborate and establish partnerships across all types of organisations and across countries, the ambition to go quickly for the good rather than slowly for the best, the re-engagement of families and communities in the upbringing of young people, and the willingness to reimagine the use of digital technology tools in education. In spite of their imperfection, the ways technology was used to support remote learning can inspire the upcoming integration of digital tools in education. Financial and human resources will be needed to reshape better education systems worldwide, but they should be invested to build a new future rather than to get back to old practices that did not work so well prior to the pandemic. Reflecting on what we learnt from the crisis will help us to rebuild in a stronger way.

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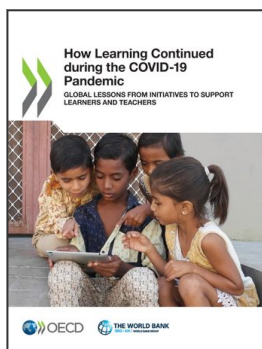
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From:
How Learning Continued during the COVID-19 Pandemic
Global Lessons from Initiatives to Support Learners and Teachers

Access the complete publication at:

<https://doi.org/10.1787/bbeca162-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

Vincent-Lancrin, Stéphan, Cristóbal Cobo Romani and Fernando Reimers (eds.) (2022), “Foreword”, in *How Learning Continued during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Global Lessons from Initiatives to Support Learners and Teachers*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/fa9a9042-en>

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