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Back to School: Teaching & learning

It is clear that the priority this autumn must be pastoral support. However, this doesn't mean that teaching stops – and we know that the lockdown has worsened educational gaps. Continuing our back to school series, this guide considers how we should approach teaching and learning in order to support pupil progress and begin to close the gaps



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How will teaching change?

As we prepare to re-open fully from September, schools have an opportunity – and a duty – to think differently about what education and teaching should look like...

As we watch the country take more steps into the sunny uplands over the next few weeks, doing “normal” things like shopping and eating out, it feels like pupils, parents and many staff too will be hoping for something that feels normal in school in September.

School staff are busy planning as if full return will happen, assessing safety risks and trying to work out how to teach while managing distancing and bubbles, knowing that everything may have to be rethought before September.

But it can feel as if the government just wants to carry on from September as if almost nothing has changed.

What this pandemic has demonstrated is that government education policy is creaking and showing its vulnerabilities. We know that England has become world-beating in rote memorisation. Accountability systems have led schools to focus on passing tests and exams, leading to a gradual decline in deeper learning and engagement.

Pupils have found it hard to learn independently, and many do not see the point in what they are learning. It has become painfully clear that our system of terminal exams is fragile, our primary testing system is purely for measuring schools, and our syllabuses are overloaded with content.

Government education policy for the next academic year is reminiscent of using a Sat-Nav, with the destination of SATs and GCSEs pre-programmed. In this picture, progress is simple to measure as miles covered towards the destination.

Teaching is straightforward – deliver the curriculum, manage behaviour, keep pupils moving along the road, and everyone should arrive next summer.

The minor delay of four months’ lost schooling can be easily managed with a quick recalculation, a bit of flexibility in September, catch-up tutoring, and

perhaps a couple of extra weeks next summer before exams start.

The problem of course is that Covid-19 is a major snarl-up. We have had to pull out the road map from the glove compartment and work out where we are. And worse, the pupils have taken lots of different routes, and we need to work out where they are too.

In fact, many schools see education as an ordnance survey map, which explains in part the mismatch between government policy and the reality on the ground.

“ Schools have choices to make: to implement old ways of working in new and difficult circumstances, or to rethink what is important ”

The destination is still clear, but school staff see the terrain, the hills to climb and the rivers to cross, the reasons why pupils won’t tick off the miles in an ordered and regular fashion. This picture shows the villages pupils can visit along the way; the places of interest some could explore while others are coming along more slowly. Pupils can see where they are on this map and can learn to manage their own routes.

Assessment is about course correction. This is deep and sustainable learning, where pupils are engaged and can see how things fit together. Teaching is about reaching the destination, but it is also showing pupils how to move beyond the map and use what they learn in the real world.

While this is not the time to throw everything up in the air, it does seem to be a good time to question this mismatch. It has an impact on everything that happens in classrooms.

However much we want things to be normal when schools re-open in September, there will still be many restrictions on movement around buildings, on mixing across bubbles, on particular types of activity including physical and creative.

Schools have choices to make: to implement old ways of working in new and difficult circumstances, or to rethink what is important.

And as pupils return in September, with their individual experiences, losses, failures and successes, we face another choice: to spend a quick couple of weeks talking about feelings and then back to emphasising appropriate school behaviour and punishment for those who don’t conform, or to spend time supporting pupils to grow from where they are, and building school communities where everyone belongs.

As schools plan for possible resurgences of the virus, local lockdowns or self-isolation of class bubbles, there are further choices about blended learning.

The move to remote lessons has already led, for some, to a rethink of lesson sequencing and new choices of resources. This is also a good time to consider which aspects of the curriculum are vital right now and which can be moved or even dropped.

It has also become very clear that some pupils need much more support in how to learn independently, how to motivate themselves, and how to manage distractions.

Schools will need to choose whether to spend the time matching their curriculum to available online resources, or to harness the creativity of staff in rethinking what is best for their pupils.

Opening up thinking in these ways gives the profession an opportunity to reflect on what is important in what we do. It is an opportunity to consider whether the curriculum as taught is properly diverse, whether there are places to weave in issues of

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sustainability, to think about how pedagogy can include pupils who find it hard to engage, instead of isolating them.

In 2020, the profession has risen to the challenges of a pandemic. In a crisis, schools have managed very quickly to recreate themselves online, to operate without SATs, to award qualifications without sitting final exams, and to keep teaching without Ofsted or league tables.

As we rebuild our education system, it is time to consider each of these things and decide what is really necessary. There is more than one way to envision education, but the government is struggling to think differently. We have the opportunity, the knowledge, and the duty to change things. If not now, then when?

FURTHER INFORMATION

The NEU is offering a range of advice to teachers and schools on learning during the pandemic, all based around the five Cs of Care, Context, Create, Connections, Community. Visit: <https://bit.ly/SecEd-NEU>

Specific resources include:

- ▶ Managing learning appropriately in September: <https://bit.ly/NEU-Sept>
- ▶ Making sense of school belonging: <https://bit.ly/NEU-Belong>
- ▶ The importance of play for children’s social and emotional wellbeing: <https://bit.ly/NEU-Play>
- ▶ Developing a culturally responsive pedagogy: <https://bit.ly/NEU-Cultural>



Assessing lockdown learning

The gaps in your classes just got bigger – but not necessarily in the way that you think. Alongside crucial pastoral support, schools and teachers must take the time to find out about the learning and experiences of all pupils during lockdown...

As teachers and school leaders, we instinctively know about the difficulties that children from different backgrounds have faced at home during lockdown, and we know about the emotional and academic challenges that many will face as they return to us at school.

We know it because we already see it happening even in normal circumstances, on the first and last day of the week and term. We fear it will be more profound after so many weeks of lockdown.

We are not surprised when we read reports about pupils’ experiences. For example, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) found that the most advantaged students have been spending 5.8 hours a day learning at home, compared to 4.5 hours for children in the poorest households (Andrew et al, 2020).

Indeed, recent analysis from the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2020) suggests that the lockdown could undo the progress made since 2011 to close the attainment gap between poorer students and their peers.

Of course, you don’t need me to tell you about the impact on disadvantaged pupils. But we must not make the mistake of thinking that this is the only gap we will see.

Research from the National Foundation for Educational Research (Lucas et al, 2020) found that teachers believe certain groups to have been less engaged with remote learning, including those with limited ICT or space to study at home (81 per cent), vulnerable pupils (62 per cent), SEND pupils (58 per cent), Pupil Premium pupils (52 per cent), and young carers (48 per cent).

So poverty is a key factor, but it is not the only factor. Overall, the study found that only 71 per cent of primary pupils and 63 per cent of secondary students are getting involved in remote learning activities.

But we must also be careful about equating “engagement” with “learning”. Coming back to the IFS report, its survey of 4,000 parents found that, on average, their children spent five hours a day “learning”. But for how much of that time was the child actually learning, rather than just “busy doing something”?

Many children have been doing their school work in their bedrooms or in shared family spaces where there are other online and offline distractions. Many children are in families where parents have more than one child to attend to and so supervision has been challenging. Many families have had to juggle working from home alongside their child’s schooling.

One single parent (who would count as “more affluent”) told the IFS researchers: “The children’s school is providing online lessons from 9am to 4pm so the children (aged seven and nine) are in their bedroom doing their thing all day, and I’m in the living room doing my work. I don’t get involved.”

The point for us to consider is that children might have been busily occupied during their parents’ working hours, but was actual learning taking place?

In addition, there is the huge impact that safeguarding and mental health issues will have had on children and young people. A report from Barnardo’s (2020) has warned that many children returning to school will have experienced safeguarding threats

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such as neglect, abuse, domestic violence or parental alcohol abuse. They may be experiencing grief, anxiety about catching the virus, separation anxiety and other pressures. It warns that its practitioners are already supporting many young people with mental health problems caused by Covid-19, including symptoms of anxiety, stress, sleep dysregulation, depression, reduced self-esteem, OCD behaviours, paranoia and self-harm.

Again, the point is that we cannot assume any child’s learning and wellbeing has not suffered during the lockdown. So what to do?

Well, as Barnardo’s said, the priority for September must be on yet another gap – the “trauma gap” – and meeting pupils’ pastoral needs. Our approaches to this might include a more flexible curriculum,

time for children to “resocialise with friends”, and a change to the school day to focus more on pastoral care, outdoor activities (see page 7) and creative tasks (SecEd, 2020a).

So, accepting that schools must not simply return to “business as usual” post-lockdown and that pastoral priorities are key (for more on student wellbeing, see SecEd, 2020b), what should teaching and learning look like from September?

I would suggest that we first need to find out where learning is at for all our pupils.

Formative assessment

We all know that learning takes many shapes and forms. Consolidation and retrieval is part of learning. Exploring and thinking is part of learning. Being exposed to new information and stimuli is part of learning.

It is critical that we do not make assumptions based on the child’s home life that children can or cannot do things, or that learning has or has not been taking place, online or offline, during lockdown.

Indeed, children from families who have been using online resources or materials very little may well have made more progress than those who have been online all day.

We need to undertake rigorous and responsive formative assessment of what individual children know and can do in each and every lesson as we move forwards (see Wiliam, 2017).

Using carefully worded and targeted questioning, it has never been more important to ask a child – “tell me about...” and “how do you know that...” – and then listen properly in order to get to the bottom of what they really know and can do. And then we move them on from where they actually are, rather than from where we assume they are.

Now is the time to make sure your teaching staff revisit their questioning skills (see McHugh, 2019; Bromley, 2017; Wiliam, 2016) – never has it been more important to phrase our questions right so that we understand where our children are at.

Changing expectations

A generation of children now have different expectations of what learning is. Parents responding to the IFS said that children during

lockdown have had access to home learning packs (65 per cent), an online platform (55 per cent), online live lessons (40 per cent), and online real-time conversation (18 per cent).

The NFER research (Lucas et al, 2020) also found different approaches, with differing levels of impact on engagement. While VLEs and telephone or video calls are positively associated with pupil engagement, the use of school websites to deliver home learning was negatively associated with engagement.

Between the different styles of remote provision, most children had access to some form of consistent, planned learning materials or opportunities provided by you at school. Many children will have engaged with this.

However, in addition, lockdown has opened children’s eyes to other learning opportunities provided by people further afield. Family members have taught children about areas of shared interest during video calls, there have been a wealth of free curriculum resources on offer, and YouTube subscriptions to live lessons have been in the millions – the village has been educating the child! But what does this mean for schools?

First, children’s expectations about who can provide their learning experiences and who can help them have been fundamentally shifted. They may now have ideas and opinions about different subject areas and styles of teaching and learning. As one seven-year-old said: “Lockdown learning is better. There are no people distracting me in class. I can just get on with my work at my own speed. As long as I finish the tasks by the end of the day I can do it in any order. If I get stuck I can look it up or ‘go to chat’. It’s much better. I don’t really want to go back to normal school.”

What is really interesting is this child’s view on the role of other people. First, class peers – and sometimes even their own teacher – are seen as preventing them from getting on with learning.

Second, when asked to clarify who they went to for help (the “go to chat” comment), the child replied that it might be a peer in the class if it was about instructions, or a parent in another room or family member in another household (via short bursts of video or text chat) if it was a subject/content question.

Whereas normally a child would have directed these questions to their teacher, they were now in the position of being able to think about who else was available to help them – thinking beyond physical classroom walls.

Most notable is that the child was concerned that a return to normal school would restrict his learning by putting an end to his independence. That is a powerful thought and one we all need to reflect on.

So, what can children in our class do now that they could not do before (e.g. independent learning, confidence with technology)? We must find out about these new skills and incorporate them into our planning for September. It is about knowing the children in front of us and responding to their skills and needs. It would be a mistake to assume that the child above is unique (or more able than most).

Two priorities

In conclusion, I would prioritise two things as we recover from our lockdown experiences. First, ask your children (and staff) what they can now do that they could not do before lockdown. Too many discussions about remote learning have assumed a deficit model which then ignores the opportunity to learn from, and build on, new insights into children’s learning.

Importantly, have this discussion before September if you can, as you need to re-engage children from day one to avoid disengagement – and you need to know about their experiences rather than what you assume their experiences to have been.

Focus on asking them about learning skills, independence, technology, collaboration and communication. Make sure they have the scope to be truthful with you about what they really think – ask open and probing questions and really listen carefully. Consider a quick online survey, asking children:

- What helped your remote learning that you do not normally have access to in class? (Think about what you did indoors/outside, resources and websites you used, people who you talked to at home and online, online chat and video communication, organising and pacing activities yourself).
- Which of these aspects of remote learning do you think it

would be helpful to bring into class?

- Thinking specifically about learning, what did you enjoy most about remote learning and why? Use these insights to inform planning about building future learning and schooling. How can you incorporate their new skills into future provision? How can you take the best of remote learning and keep it going when all children return to school, rather than just reverting to what you were doing before?

Second, be explicitly aware of your wording when you question children about what they can and cannot do in their curricular learning over the coming months. Revisit your questioning skills and be careful not to assume that children who have been “busy” have been busy learning. Do not assume that the gaps in learning are only a problem for particular groups of pupils or that the children who have been conforming and quiet were so because they were learning, or they might have been learning. They might not have. We don’t know unless we ask them...

FURTHER INFORMATION

- ▶ Andrew et al: *Learning during the lockdown*, IFS, May 2020: <https://bit.ly/2XeCUCz>
- ▶ Barnardo’s: *Time for a clean slate*, May 2020: <https://bit.ly/38EnluE>
- ▶ Bromley: *Dialogic questioning*, SecEd, 2017: <https://bit.ly/31VVudH>
- ▶ EEF: *Best evidence on impact of school closures on the attainment gap*, June 2020: <https://bit.ly/3h3DnHC>
- ▶ Lucas, Nelson & Sims: *Pupil engagement in remote learning*, NFER, June 2020: <https://bit.ly/30ljCzL>
- ▶ McHugh: *Effective classroom questioning strategies*, SecEd, 2019: <https://bit.ly/2XRjNao>
- ▶ SecEd: *The ‘trauma gap’*, May 2020a: <https://bit.ly/2TGhFQ7>
- ▶ SecEd: *Back to School Guide: Student wellbeing*, July 2020b: <https://bit.ly/3eTHR28>
- ▶ Wiliam: *Embedding Formative Assessment*, SSAT/EEF keynote, 2017: <https://bit.ly/2KIWXjq>
- ▶ Wiliam: *Hinge questions video*, 2016 <https://bit.ly/2KmuBFv>

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Support for pupils with SEN

The majority of children with SEN dislike change and unpredictability. Knowing this, how can we support their transition back into the classroom?

Pupils coming back to schools after lockdown will present with varied difficulties. Pupils with SEN may be faced with more extreme challenges, both academic and emotional. Their mental health may well be fragile. Being proactive and consciously boosting their wellbeing will help all pupils to make the transition back to school.

Transition back to school

Before they even arrive at the school gate, a number of children will be feeling anxious. At home, routines will need to be in place again as some may experience problems with time and organisation. This can cause a lot of tension within the family and we need to acknowledge this and offer regular support to parents while the children are getting used to the transition.

Their anxiety will be accompanied by excitement at seeing their friends. Sharing their experiences through circle time works well as they may need to talk. However, we know that children with SEN often struggle with making and maintaining friendships and it is vital that we monitor play time and watch out for the resumption of any subtle bullying.

New routines

Before normal teaching can begin there will be new Covid-19 rules and routines to learn and these must be consistent across the school. We need to explain these in a clear, positive and succinct way, making sure that we use the appropriate language level.

Additional support will be needed for pupils with difficulties. Make sure you speak slowly and give sequenced instructions in chunks. At frequent intervals check their understanding and get them to say back to you what they have to do.

Visual prompts, checklists, picture sequences or photographs provide useful reminders which will make them feel more secure. Make sure you tell them whether it is new learning or revision.

Use a multi-sensory approach to

teach the new rules and routines. Wherever possible model them and ask pupils to repeat the rules. Do not assume they will be remembered – repeated revisits will be necessary. Also, be extra sensitive in correcting them if they make a mistake and avoid doing so in front of their peers.

Recall will be improved with thinking and ownership, so involve them where possible in the decisions and, where not, explain the reasons behind the change.

The majority of children with SEN dislike change and unpredictability and can easily become overloaded and panic at the thought of something new. Making as many links as possible to their life experience and interests will make it easier for them.

Self-regulation

Having been away from school for so long, many will have problems with self-regulation and their attention will flit in and out. Increase the number of short learning breaks in each lesson to accommodate this and gradually increase the periods of concentration.

Initially they will get very tired so tell them why they need to listen and how long they have to listen for, let them fidget with something or doodle, seat them as near as you can to a good listener, and encourage them to ask if they have not heard clearly. Make sure that each lesson has a “hands-on” component and that they are not overloaded with auditory information.

Loss of learning

The long absence from school will have caused considerable loss of learning. The KWL model is a useful approach to revisit this learning, helping them recall what they Know, enthusing interest by considering what they Want to know, and revisiting again in the lesson by reflecting on what they have Learnt.

State the structure of the session: “The lesson will now begin. Last lesson we did... Today we are doing... Next lesson we will...” This provides a context for the lesson and enables them to make links with

prior learning and to build categories in their long-term memory so that related information is stored in the same place and is easier to retrieve.

Many of our SEN pupils have a very poor awareness of time – relating to past, present and future and being able to preview time are all challenging skills. Writing up timings on the whiteboard and asking them to come up and tick off each section of the lesson when completed helps to maintain concentration and gives them the opportunity to move around.

Remind them to spend time on thinking about what needs to be done and making a plan to tackle the task and break it into steps. Building an awareness of themselves as learners, while acknowledging their strengths and identifying any barriers, will help them to prepare to be successful and build that vital independence, avoiding learned helplessness.

Question them about any barriers they might come across and initiate class discussions on how they might solve them.

Independent tasks

Encourage self-regulated learning during independent tasks, including planning and setting goals. Model it in your whole-class teaching, asking questions about the steps you are suggesting and involving them in selecting the best options. Metacognition and self-regulation must be taught in context so pupils can see how, where and when to use them as they tackle a new concept.

After completing individual learning tasks, make time to discuss with your pupils what their goals were and how they planned to reach them. This time spent on reflecting will help them to actively recognise the positive impact that self-regulation has had on their work, as well as learning from each other about different approaches.

To help your pupils with SEN, recall the times they altered their approach in order to be more successful. Discussing the ways in which we think about our learning brings it into our consciousness and

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making a record of it makes it more memorable. For example, encourage them to write on alternate lines and use a specific coloured pencil to makes notes on their work. In maths’ books divide the page in half – one side for recording thinking and the other for the calculation, which should include their estimation in addition to their answer.

Improving memory

Memory, a fundamental element of learning, is so often an area of deficit in our pupils with SEN. A few simple techniques can increase pupils’ recall. Beginnings and endings are important as these are more easily remembered. Pay attention to the first and last moments of a lesson and build in learning breaks, as previously mentioned, to provide more starts and finishes. Keep learning relevant and inspire curiosity; intrinsic motivation is the key to learning. Use as many senses and emotions as possible to generate reaction and links to the episodic long-term memory.

Watch for signs of memory difficulties, such as problems following instructions, processing demands, keeping their place in a complex activity, coping with simultaneous storage, or retaining learning from one lesson to another. Ask them what works best for them.

Conclusion

Home schooling will inevitably have been varied in content and application, so be responsive and adapt your teaching to the various ability levels. Helping pupils to cope in new situations and with new concepts is especially critical, given the new way in which schools will be working.



A note on remote learning

While all students are set to return from September, schools are being asked to have in place contingency plans should a return to remote learning be necessary...

As our schools start the long and difficult process of re-opening their doors to all pupils, we might wish to embrace the spirit of “build back better” by rethinking the way we operate in order to learn lessons from the lockdown.

I am not suggesting that we abandon our traditional ways of teaching, but it would be wise to give pause and reflect on what we have learnt. If nothing else, we have to accept that schools will not return to “normal” for a long time.

In the classroom, this is likely to mean the continuation of a blended approach as schools embrace the technological advances we have made in recent months and perhaps incorporate them into normal teaching practice.

But also, the Department for Education guidance on full re-opening (DfE, 2020) obliges schools to have in place contingency plans for local lockdowns or a second spike. And so we need to be prepared for a possible return to remote education in the months ahead.

What worked well for you?

First, we might wish to consider which aspects of remote teaching and learning worked well for our school and should be embraced as part of our teaching and learning practice going forward.

Could we, for example, make better use of digital resources and platforms for homework and independent study?

Could we “front-load” some teaching by providing instructional videos for pupils to watch outside of lessons and therefore dedicate more class time to interactions with pupils in the form of discussions, questioning, redrafting work in response to feedback, etc? The recording of such videos seems to have been one of the success stories during the lockdown.

Could we provide more retrieval practice activities online or in learning packs to aid long-term learning but without losing too much curriculum time?

Principles of home learning

In an article for *SecEd* and *Headteacher Update* in April, I said that, when planning remote teaching activities, we should remember the basic principles of home-learning. It should be:

- Related to what pupils have been doing in school.
- Varied and manageable.
- Challenging but not too difficult.
- Designed to encourage individual initiative and creativity.
- Designed with a mechanism for pupils to receive guidance and support, and for recognition or reward for work done.

I set out five tips for making a success of remote teaching. Four of which might form a key part of your longer term contingency plans:

Explain it: Pre-recorded video can be used effectively to deliver teacher explanations. These videos usually work best when they are short, focused on a small amount of information at a time, given in clear steps, and when the explanations are concise.

Note it: Once pupils have watched a video, they should be required to write about what they have learned. We might support this by providing a knowledge organiser. Writing about your learning is a form of self-explanation, which is an effective study aid.

Model it: We might share models of excellence, perhaps in the form of worked examples. These can be shared via video, say by us producing a model on a virtual whiteboard or as additional written resources. Good models show what works and/or what does not.

Revise it: We need pupils to practise the learning and we can help by giving chances to engage in self-quizzing, elaboration and generation activities.

Effective home learning

A study from the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2020)

looked at evidence from 60 systemic reviews and meta-analyses to help identify what makes remote education effective. It outlines five key findings:

- Teaching quality is more important than how lessons are delivered.
- Ensuring access to technology is key, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.
- Peer interactions can provide motivation and improve learning outcomes.
- Supporting pupils to work independently can improve learning outcomes.
- Different approaches to remote learning suit different types of content and pupils.

The review says we must focus on the elements of quality teaching rather than mode of delivery – such as clear explanations, scaffolding and feedback. Importantly, it finds “no clear difference” between teaching in real-time and alternatives such as pre-recorded video explanations. It is the quality of the teaching that counts.

Peer interaction is identified as one way of increasing the impact of remote education, such as peer marking and feedback, sharing good work, or live discussions.

A planning checklist?

Paul Kirschner and Mirjam Neelen (2020) have published a series of blogs (inspired by the book *Lessons for Learning: Twelve building blocks for effective teaching*) on how to use technology effectively in online learning. The 12 building blocks could be used as checklist for planning or as a chronological process to follow:

- 1 Activating relevant prior knowledge.
- 2 Give clear, structured, and challenging instruction.
- 3 Use examples.
- 4 Combine words and visuals.
- 5 Make learners process the subject matter actively.
- 6 Check whether all learners have understood the content.
- 7 Provide scaffolding for challenging tasks.

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- 8 Spaced learning.
- 9 Variable practice.
- 10 Testing.
- 11 Feedback.
- 12 Teach learners how to learn more effectively.

Questions to consider

If we are to consider continuing with some form of remote learning in the longer term, asking and discussing the following questions may be helpful:

- What level of access do our pupils have to devices and connectivity?
- How much can we ask of our parents and families?
- How much can we ask of our staff and how will we balance the provision of online learning with classroom-based lesson planning and teaching?
- Do we want remote learning to consolidate pupils’ existing knowledge or do we teach new content?
- Is some form of remote learning desirable and sustainable for everyone over the longer-term?



FURTHER INFORMATION

- ▶ Bromley: *Five steps for home learning*, *SecEd*, April 2020: <https://bit.ly/3dFef8d>
- ▶ DfE: *Guidance for full opening – schools*, July 2, 2020: <https://bit.ly/38tdOfd>
- ▶ EEF: *Best evidence on supporting students to learn remotely*, April 2020: <https://bit.ly/3autoH1>
- ▶ Kirschner & Neelen: *12 building blocks to use learning technologies effectively*, April 2020: <https://bit.ly/3eZBuKo>



Taking learning outdoors

When outdoors, the risk of contracting Covid-19 is greatly reduced. What’s more, outdoor learning is good for our wellbeing. So, how can we make the most of taking learning outside?

Schools were not built for social distancing, so it makes sense to take as much learning as you can outdoors, where it is easier to stay apart and healthier for everyone.

Research has found that spending time outdoors has a range of benefits for pupils (Sheldrake et al, 2019), and some local authorities have been exploring how outdoor learning could offer a template for socially distanced schooling (Brooks, 2020).

Of course, not every school has huge grounds or woodlands on its doorstep, but you can still use small outside spaces to provide meaningful learning experiences for your students.

Assess your available outdoor space

You might just have a playground or sports field, but consider whether there are any other outdoor spaces you can repurpose. Get creative – could you close your car park to cars or use gardening areas?

Use cones or chalk lines to divide up larger spaces so that more than one class group or “bubble” can be outside at the same time. Make sure

you complete a risk assessment for any areas you are planning to use. Remember that pupils and staff need to be able to access toilets and hand-washing facilities from the outside area. If needed, create a hand-washing station outside with a small table, a water butt with warm water, a washing-up bowl, soap, paper towels and a bin.

A classroom extension

Think of outdoor space as an extension of the classroom and maximise the amount of time all pupils are outside.

Ideally, every bubble would have a dedicated outdoor area to use whenever they want – but this will not be possible for all schools. However, having a timetable that maximises the amount of time each bubble is outside is the next best thing.

Do not worry that you might be limiting pupils’ learning by timetabling them outdoors – this will be more than just “playtime” if you make it structured and focused.

Having said that, let it be more open-ended and child-led than classroom learning too – it cannot be exactly the same as indoor

learning. Outdoor learning works in almost all weathers, so do not let this put you off either.

Adapt your spaces

Adapt your outdoor spaces so they are better suited to learning. Previously, your outdoor spaces might have been primarily for playing or break times, but now you need to make sure that they are suitable for learning too. Consider what you can do to make these spaces fit-for-purpose. Here are some ideas:

At primary level, take inspiration from your EYFS team: Can you replicate how they deliver continuous provision in their outdoor area in a way that is age-appropriate for all your pupils? They are the experts on this, so talk to them first and ask for their ideas.

Create different areas: Do this just as you would in the classroom, e.g. set up a quiet corner area for reading/independent work, choose an appropriate space for a whole group to sit together and listen to the teacher, and use open areas for group work or play.

Create shade/shelter: This is key to keeping your outdoor area working in all weather conditions. Hang a play parachute or tarpaulin between walls or railings to create shade from the sun and shelter from gentle rain showers so that students can stay outside for longer. Make sure you and the students have the right gear (e.g. a warm coat or sun hat/sun cream).

Create displays to recreate the classroom environment: Use waterproof duct tape to put up laminated displays, similar to displays you might have in the classroom (e.g. number lines, times tables, hundred square, key words or spellings).

Sitting down: Make sure pupils have something to sit on and write on. Children can sit on grass or wood. If the ground is hard, use

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jumpers or coats or invest in some easy-to-clean outdoor waterproof cushions. Alternatively, bring classroom chairs outdoors if it is safe to do so, but make sure you risk-assess this first. Buy each class group a set of clipboards if you can (they will get plenty of use and can be cleaned regularly), or use mini-whiteboards or hardback books with a bulldog clip on the top to attach a piece of paper.

Nature: Bring the natural world into your outdoor area as much as possible. Nature provides lots of opportunities for learning and you can seek it out even in a concrete playground. If you can, try to:

- Create spaces to plant seeds and grow plants (in pots or raised beds).
- Observe wildlife (put up bird feeders or bird boxes).
- Measure the weather and changing seasons (make weather vanes, sundials or wind-catchers).



FURTHER INFORMATION

- ▶ This article is an extract from The Key’s resource *School reopening: Providing high-quality outdoor learning*, which has been compiled with Kate Brown and Roger Chapman, experienced Forest School and Woodcraft Folk practitioners. Visit: <https://thekeysupport.com/>
- ▶ Brooks: *Scotland eyes outdoor learning as model for reopening of schools*, *Guardian*, May 2020: <https://bit.ly/2Z2QCRP>
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BACK TO SCHOOL

As we consider what teaching, curriculum and lessons will look like in September, there is a lot we can learn from the time-travelling adventures of Marty McFly...

One of my all-time favourite films is *Back to the Future* – the 1985 science-fiction classic telling the story of Marty McFly as he accidentally travels back in time from 1985 to 1955 in a DeLorean.

Marty must become accustomed to a new way of life in which he befriends younger versions of his parents, responds to the challenges of surviving in a different period, and solves the problem of how to return his world to normal. You can see where I am going with this...

While teachers may not be struggling with accidental time travel, they have been thrust into a new reality. A period in which virtual classrooms and flipped learning have become the norm and whereby socially distanced bubbles have replaced the normal gatherings in the school yard.

As we consider a gradual back-to-the-classroom sense of normal, what are the strategies we need to consider when turning the flux-capacitor of pupil learning and progress back on?

'You've got to come back with me!'

The evidence suggests that pupils should encounter new concepts or content on at least two to three occasions in order to learn it (Karpicke, 2009).

Barak Rosenshine in his *Principles of Instruction* (2012) notes how the

most effective teachers in the studies of classroom instruction understand the value of practice, and would start lessons with a five to eight-minute review of curriculum or content that had been covered previously in lessons: "Some teachers reviewed vocabulary, formulae, events or previously learned concepts. These teachers provided additional practice on facts and skills that were needed for recall to become automatic."

In *Back to the Future*, Marty clutches onto fading photographs of his loved ones as he realises that his actions in the past have an impact on the future. Your pupils may struggle clutching onto the facts and knowledge that you taught them during lockdown, despite your best virtual efforts. So we must review this prior learning.

The impact of revisiting prior learning rests in the emphasis we place on it and how effectively this is built into our planning as teachers.

Rosenshine outlines a number of ways in educators can build effective review of prior learning into their regular planning as teachers. These include:

- Asking pupils to highlight points where they have difficulties understanding content or where they think errors were made.
- Reviewing concepts or skills that were practised as part of

homework or out-of-classroom learning.

- Reviewing material and content that needs to be overlearned (i.e. newly acquired skills should be practised well beyond the point of initial mastery, leading to automaticity).

'You built a time machine? Out of a DeLorean?'

Marty questions Doc's taste in choosing a DeLorean as his time-travelling wheels of choice. Reviewing the knowledge of pupils is one step, but forensically checking the understanding of your pupils is equally important.

There are a range of tools at your fingertips. First, we must be uncompromising in our use of questioning as a teacher.

As part of his work for the SSAT Embedding Formative Assessment programme, Professor Dylan Wiliam (2015) notes that "hinge questions" are critical: "It should take no longer than two minutes, and ideally less than one minute, for all students to respond to questions; the idea is that the hinge-point question is a quick understanding, rather than a new piece of work in itself."

See also Matt Bromley's article on hinge questions for *SecEd* (2017) and *SecEd's* recent Best Practice Focus download on formative assessment, featuring both Prof Wiliam and Mr Bromley (2020).

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Roger Purdy is director of the Teaching School at St Bede's Catholic School and Sixth Form College in County Durham and also works alongside the University of Durham delivering teacher-educator programmes to North East schools. He offered me two further insights ahead of September.

Get into the retrieval habit:

Low-stakes tests and quizzes should be short and make sure that they encompass pre-lockdown content. It will be important to swiftly and efficiently assess student learning gaps to support your medium-term planning. Make sure that this informs the next sequence of your learning curriculum too.

Concentrate on key content: You won't address the gaps all in one go, so think carefully about the content that you need them to know before journeying further into the curriculum. Focus on the core concepts that underpin each area or topic. Remember ED Hirsch: "Knowledge begets knowledge."

'1.21 Gigawatts!'

An exasperated Doc clutches his head as he realises that 1.21 gigawatts of electricity will be needed to power the flux-capacitor on the DeLorean. This single most important truth is what puts him on a quest to harness the power of lightning to send Marty on his road to the future. Too little and it won't be enough to make the change occur, too much and they will destroy the DeLorean.

In 2017, Prof Wiliam told Twitter: "I've come to the conclusion that Sweller's cognitive load theory is the single most important thing for teachers to know."

Cognitive load theory says that because short-term memory is limited, we should plan students' learning so that it does not overload limited working memory (Sweller, 2016).

Over time, pupils will have developed schemes of knowledge that enable them to process learning activities and tackle classroom problems without over-loading the flux-capacitors in their brains.

There may be a tendency to get somewhat excited about a return to normal and many of the creative activities we were less able to implement during lockdown may come flooding out. However, when planning learning activities, be mindful of the cognitive load:

- Present new information in small steps.

- Craft your explanation of key concepts in advance and as part of your planning. What analogies, exposition and media will you draw upon to help illustrate your explanation?
- Be mindful of how much content is presented to pupils in PowerPoint slides.
- An image or flashing word-art title may look creative, but be mindful of how these graphics can also distract pupils when they are attempting to process new information.

Finally, according to cognitive load theory, as the difficulty of content increases our individual learning is diluted. However, group learning, if implemented correctly, can spread the cognitive processing burden (Kirschner et al, 2009).

SecEd and *Headteacher Update* have published a range of best practice articles on cognitive load theory and metacognition in the classroom (see further information).

'If you put your mind to it, you can accomplish anything'

In 1955, Marty tries to convince his father George to ask Lorraine to the Enchantment Under the Sea dance. Chris Mitchinson, a participant on the Ambition Institute Teacher Education Fellows programme, was worried that teachers under lockdown would go it alone with their digital CPD.

A leader on teacher development at Laidlaw Schools Trust, Chris added: "My biggest concern was that teachers may be tempted to go fully digital, capitalising on their newly acquired software packages. But we wanted our teams to think carefully about the research they were accessing and how this could be best implemented in classroom settings."

With this in mind, Chris and his colleagues have been compiling lists of road-tested CPD and research. He added: "While Twittersphere may have some useful tips and links, we wanted to ensure that staff were able to understand working examples of how some of these theories of learning operate in practice – and understand the credibility of the research behind them."

Chris and the team have been putting on "sense-making clinics" facilitated by leaders in the school to help "circuit-break" some of the ideas and consider how best to implement them in virtual and physical classroom settings.

Ambition Institute has published a free guide entitled *Remote teacher development* (2020) which shares insights from Chris and other Teacher Educator Fellows to support colleagues. Their stories show the value of maintaining a focus on the principles of learning and teacher education, while also exploring practical ways to help school

communities consider how to act on them.

'So make it a good one'

Doc restores hope in Marty at the end of the trilogy by reminding him: "Your future hasn't been written yet. No one's has. Your future is whatever you make it. So make it a good one."

Amid the recent crisis, there has been a great deal of talk about recovery curriculums, lost learning, further disadvantage and an economic impact that will last for a generation. It would be easy to lose faith.

Remember, above all else, you are in the business of helping to inspire and generate futures. Pre-Covid we prioritised good teaching and that remains our number one goal. You don't need a DeLorean to put your pupils on a path to a good future...

FURTHER INFORMATION

- ▶ Ambition Institute: *Remote teacher development*, Fletcher Wood (ed), 2020: <https://bit.ly/3fMWUe8>
- ▶ Karpicke: *Metacognitive control and selection*, *Journal of Experimental Psychology* (138), American Psychological Association, 2009: <https://bit.ly/370vguo>
- ▶ Kirschner, Paas & Kirschner: *A cognitive load approach to collaborative learning*, *Educational Psychology Review* (21), 2009.
- ▶ Rosenshine: *Principles of Instruction*, *American Educator*, 2012: <http://bit.ly/2Zpb1qW>
- ▶ SSAT: Embedding Formative Assessment programme: <https://bit.ly/3gwrcCe>
- ▶ SecEd: *Formative assessment: Five classroom strategies*, Bromley & Wiliam, April 2020: <https://bit.ly/2W818Gv>
- ▶ SecEd: *Hinge questions*, Bromley, 2017: <https://bit.ly/2VYoJ1J>
- ▶ SecEd: For articles on cognitive load theory and metacognition, visit <https://bit.ly/2V7E4q5>
- ▶ Wiliam: What is a hinge point question? YouTube video, 2015: <https://bit.ly/207zy72>
- ▶ Sweller: *Story of a research program*. In *Acquired Wisdom Series*, *Education Review* (23), 2016: <https://bit.ly/2B0kfKz>





There is no magic bullet

From September, we must maximise the impact of face-to-face teaching time with pupils, including the effective use of technology, a focus on reading, and intelligent interventions. Here are some practical reflections and general principles...

Before Covid-19, leaders had plans in place for serious or critical incidents, managing asbestos and even flooding, and the term lockdown typically referred to procedure for a terrorist attack. We did not anticipate a situation like this!

However, within the first couple of weeks, we managed to set up Google Classroom for all classes and teachers began to get to grips with online learning, signposting activities and resources and engaging with pupils and families.

Over time, we moved to a more coherent offer of blended teaching and learning, which I discussed in a brief article for *Headteacher Update* (June, 2020).

So, now comes the planning for September. At our schools, we made the decision to bring back all pupils before the summer holidays part-time. It meant that we could provide an equitable offer to all families. It also meant that we have been able to provide meaningful teaching and learning to all pupils.

Looking towards September now feels less daunting because our systems and procedures are ready to cope with having all pupils back.

There is no magic bullet

Much of the national conversation has focused on how we “catch-up”. However, I have spent many years as a leader chasing the next game-changing strategy or “wonder drug” intervention. Now, with all

this talk of “catch-up” and “recovery”, it is easy to fall into this same trap.

Will an army of tutors across the country save the day? Or teachers running maths boot camps in August? Will this make-up for four months of missing teaching or is this a new section in the Emperor’s wardrobe?

We need to wake up and smell the coffee – there is no magic bullet and there never was!

Let’s stop and think about it for a moment: if there was a way to close the gaps in learning so readily then why were we not doing it before the lockdown?

The answer is under our noses: the evidence-based programmes that we have carefully chosen to

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follow in our schools within the core curriculum are those designed to close the gaps. Progress has been slow nationally but in the past decade we have been heading in the right direction. We must continue down this road. In our case, our use of Read Write Inc, Mathematics

Mastery and Mastery English are the active ingredients of these programmes – for us they have been proven to increase pupils’ progress.

Where there are gaps or when a child is not keeping up, we use same-day interventions with a highly experienced teacher. These principles of effective teaching and learning have not changed during this pandemic and it would be foolish to think otherwise.

It is important to stress that my schools will, of course, engage with initiatives such as the Department for Education-funded National Tutoring Programme (NTP). However, we will play a role in the coordination of the planning because it is important, for example, that the correct strategies are taught in order to align the NTP with our approach.

A focus on reading

Supporting children’s mental health played a big part in our planning for the re-opening. I do not underestimate for a minute the impact on the lives of many families across the country, especially those

who are now living in poverty or who have lost loved ones.

In terms of our children, we were worried about how they would view the new-style school with two-metre signs, footsteps on the floor to control movement, and separate desks. However, it was immediately obvious that coming back to school was the best thing that we could have done for them. They seemed to thrive on the structure and routine of school life and have settled back in really quickly.

There have been suggestions of a year-long nurture curriculum or extending continuous provision into year 1 because of what the children have missed.

However, I have concerns about this way of thinking about the problem. Our plan is to deliver our really well designed and broad curriculum to the best of our ability. It is going to be important that we prioritise reading, as it is the key to the whole curriculum (and to life) and we also intend to go back to basics with the core subjects.

However, it has also been suggested that schools prioritise the core subjects. But narrowing the curriculum does not improve outcomes – and developing a strong vocabulary through exploring what the wider curriculum has to offer is also likely to help the children in their English.

Education technology

Technology has played a crucial role during lockdown and it has been heartening to see how teachers have adapted to teaching through (in our case) Google Classroom, delivering both asynchronous and synchronous remote teaching and carefully selected independent learning activities.

This blended approach is an area that is worthy of further research and I am sure that research proposals are now being written across the world!

The penny-dropping moment for us came when we discovered that remote learning was actually about re-imagining how a teaching and learning sequence should be built upon.

On the surface, it appeared that we simply needed to do some teaching and learning online – and of course this was the short-term solution after March 23. But that is not the key.

The key is much more subtle. It is something that happens to teachers when they shift their thinking from a traditional sequence of learning in a classroom (with the teacher delivering some input, the children having a go, then some sort of feedback), towards a more flexible model where careful consideration is given to the key learning point and a range of tools and strategies are selected that are bespoke to it.

In the past, I may have judged a teacher quite harshly if they showed a video of some teaching input. However, two things occurred to me recently. The first realisation happened during a webinar on dual-coding theory and the second was when I saw the power of being able to rewind and replay a really well prepared teaching explanation.

There is a genuine beauty to five minutes of well delivered teaching with both audio and visual elements. In September, one of the ways that we plan to help the pupils to catch up is to use short pre-recorded teaching explanation videos as part of same-day intervention, for home learning, and even during lessons where appropriate.

Having less face-to-face time with the children has made this time more precious. We really must focus on using this time to do things that we cannot do during other parts of the teaching and learning sequence. A great example of high-quality recorded teaching is the daily phonics lessons on YouTube from Ruth Miskin and we have recently assessed the children as they returned to school and found that they have generally continued to make strong progress in this area during the lockdown.

Ready for a second peak?

Department for Education guidance on full re-opening (DfE, 2020) obliges schools to have in place contingency plans for local lockdowns or a second spike.

Indeed, during a governors’ meeting recently (on Zoom of course) we were asked what we would do if there is a second wave and what we had learned from this period.

Although our staff responded well under the circumstances, if we were to do this again it would be essential that we move to a fully planned and sequenced blended teaching and learning offer as quickly as possible.

This means ensuring by September that all children have access to suitable devices and that our teachers have both the equipment and the required skills to deliver this offer.

To ensure consistency of remote provision, it will be important to establish core expectations. During lockdown, the variation between approaches of individual teachers has been a challenge, either because there has been too little or too much. Some parents have fed back that they would really like to know what the priorities are – or at least which work is essential and which work is optional – as this would enable them to plan their children’s days more creatively.

So, to conclude...

Go back to basics with the core subjects to ensure that the evidence-led programmes are being taught effectively and that the active ingredients are more present than ever. The quality and precision of the teaching is key.

Prioritise the teaching of reading so that all children can access the whole curriculum and further develop reading for pleasure.

Continue to develop a blended teaching and learning approach to maximise the impact of face-to-face time and to enhance same-day intervention through the use of recorded teaching videos.

Continue to offer a well-designed wider curriculum so that pupils acquire powerful knowledge, develop a strong vocabulary, and we can address social disadvantage.

Engage with funded initiatives like the NTP, but ensure that the school is in the driving seat and that any teaching is aligned to the evidence-led approaches within your programmes.



FURTHER INFORMATION

- ▶ DfE: *Guidance for full opening – schools*, July 2, 2020: <https://bit.ly/38tdOfd>
- ▶ NTP: The National Tutoring Programme is being hosted by the Education Endowment Foundation. For details, see <https://bit.ly/3291sbb>
- ▶ Truby: *Reimagining teaching and learning*, *Headteacher Update*, June 2020: <https://bit.ly/3eM0llg>

Preparing for exams in 2021

How can we support year 11 students from September to ensure they have the best chance of doing well in their examinations next summer – whatever these end up looking like?

The big question we are all trying to answer at the moment is how we approach teaching and learning for our year 10s as they move into year 11 this September.

Focus on key subject skills

First, highlight the key skills that need to be covered in the remaining time before exams. Teaching and refining skills is of paramount importance. Whereas knowledge can be topped up intermittently, skills often require explicit teaching.

Take the time to identify the most important aspects of your subject area and ensure that these skills are interspersed throughout the year to ensure that any which have been missed are revisited and then revisited.

Modelling, scaffolding, questioning are all of paramount importance and although knowledge is critical for success, the time in class, which may be more limited than normal, needs to focus on the practical application of that knowledge to ensure that the students are able to articulate themselves effectively.

We need to build skills to ensure that students are resilient, and then we can top-up knowledge using low-stakes quizzes, audio lessons, and other interventions.

Being able to identify the non-negotiables within your subject's programme of study is imperative – and it is a trickier job than it sounds. Some points to consider:

- Which key skills are essential in order for students to access the curriculum and achieve their potential?
- How will you teach these key skills and do the students have enough prerequisite knowledge to be able to apply them?
- How will you assess these skills and check for understanding?
- When and how will these key skills be revisited?

The forgetting curve

Students need to be continually revisiting previously taught material,

their grasp of which is likely to have significantly degraded during their time away from school.

Admittedly, a lot of teachers have managed to combat the forgetting curve during the closures by focusing on retrieval practice and recall exercises – but how many students have engaged with these activities (see pages 3-4)?

To effectively plug any gaps that have arisen from forgetting, teachers must ascertain where these gaps lie. The most effective and least intrusive way to assess this is through regular low-stakes testing. Multiple-choice questions, general questioning and phased recall tasks are all ways in which teachers can understand what their students remember. With low-stakes testing, gaps can be identified and then planned for, making teaching more targeted and efficient.

Spacing practice is another way in which we can help students' recall. By ensuring we revisit skills regularly, the application of knowledge becomes more natural for students and it should become easier for students to complete tasks. It also ensures that you have a chance to check for understanding of skills, which low-stakes testing does not allow for.

Teach study skills explicitly

Given that class time may be limited or disrupted, it follows that teaching students how to learn more effectively in their own time is of more value than ever.

I have been banging the self-efficacy drum for some time. Teaching students study skills from the start of year 11 will make them better learners. They will be more efficient, they will spend their time more effectively and, in turn, your lessons can focus on the gaps and other requirements that arise.

By teaching students how to take notes, how to organise ideas, how to access other sources of information, you are making the time they have in lessons more valuable. The work they produce will be better and they will understand how they learn best.

Study skills could be the saving grace for knowledge too. If students are given the resources, taught how to use them, a couple of hours targeted extra study, undertaken regularly, soon starts to make up for some of the time lost.

Online provision

Hours and hours and hours have gone into online provision. Do not close the door on it. If you have had the foresight to archive the materials carefully, you will now have a bank of resources that are ready to be disseminated. Couple this with subject-specific skills and an increase in study skills and you have got a rich revision concoction.

Online resources can be accessed outside lesson time and this hugely increases their value. Especially as schools must have contingency plans in place in case of local lockdowns or a second spike.

Careful setting and tracking of online resources means that you are able to track the progress of your students' knowledge incredibly efficiently. With workload in mind, self-marking multiple-choice questions and short-answer questions can really reduce the strain.

The other advantage of lockdown has been that it has made the students more literate with online learning. They are now more used to working online. The format is far from ideal when it is their sole source of education, but as a classroom supplement it could be high-impact.

Of course the digital divide will need to be addressed, but this is where additional study time and space in school can come in. Online provision does not need to be accessed at home, it can be accessed outside lessons at school. Make sure those who do not have the means at home have the opportunity to study at school.

Keep up-to-date

Frustratingly, the landscape is ever-changing. Advice from official bodies and the government often changes with little notice. At the time

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of writing, Ofqual has published its proposals for 2021, which include minor tweaks to free up teaching time, sampling of subject content, and the possibility of exams beginning later (on June 7). But this could change yet further.

As such, it is of paramount importance that you keep up-to-date with announcements around terminal exams. These may require you to be more responsive than usual with your planning, especially in the medium or longer term.

Adapting will mean that you best prepare the students for the exams, so be ready to move away from the rigidity that we sometimes insist on during the final year.

The key is to ensure that your staff are informed and that everyone is on the same page. Collective efficacy is a massive factor in success and everyone pulling in the same direction is crucial.

Keep it real

We are tired, things have been tough, we need a break. Make the most of the time before summer collating your plans and then try to get some rest during the break. September will bring a fresh set of challenges, but what will count the most is quality first teaching and well-thought-through curriculum design. Nothing has really changed in that sense.



FURTHER INFORMATION

- Ofqual: *Proposed changes to the assessment of GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2021*, July 2020: <https://bit.ly/31yigrP>