



Bilingualism Matters Edinburgh

Summary of Parent Consultation for UNESCO Futures of Education Initiative

Education in a language other than home language

This situation applies to pupils whose home language is a heritage or minoritized language and differs from the mainstream language of instruction at school. It also applies to children attending immersion schools where the language of instruction is different from the home language, e.g. Gaelic-medium education in Scotland.

- Parents feel they cannot provide the amount of exposure to the language of instruction that their children need. They use cartoons and music to provide more exposure and, in the case of immersion schools, they try to learn the language themselves, but worry that they may be teaching it incorrectly. Often, they give up supporting the school language and teach their children what they can using the home language.
- The new tensions between home and school languages expose the effects of different home language learning strategies when parents, not able to support children in the school language, often struggle to support them in their home language as well, since they lack the vocabulary and are not used to talking about school subjects in their language. As a result, many parents feel guilty and worry that their children will be left behind in the curriculum.
- In this situation, many parents also decide to rethink their strategies to maintain their home language.
- Despite these challenges, home languages benefit from increased use at home. Communication in the home language was found to be vital to families' well-being and resilience.
- Resources that rely on music, art and the internet and provide children with more exposure to the school language become essential. On the other hand, the huge availability of online resources creates a challenge for parents in terms of finding the most appropriate ones and keeping up with them.

Understanding of the wider role of school in children's lives beyond academic teaching

Learning takes place in many places and not only in school, but schools are places where many important things happen in children's lives, not only academic learning. For many children, their school is a safe and happy place where they meet their friends, and learn important social and other life skills. The life skills educational role undertaken by schools was taken for granted and underestimated. There is concern that school closure has created big gaps for children who have no other interactions outside the school, and no extracurricular activities such as music, art and performances that would complement school attendance. Lack of contact with friends, compounded by missing distant family members, is taking its toll on mental health.



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Appreciation of the new and old ways of learning and teaching

Face-to-face contact cannot be replaced by the best online resources. Real-time feedback and interaction are essential for learning. Despite the availability of digital teaching in real-time, unequal access to the internet and online resources means that some children can't benefit from them.

Resources:

- The emergence of new online resources has been shown to significantly improve access to education by groups for whom traditional school education is not possible, such as pupils affected by certain disabilities. In this sense, online digital teaching democratizes education.
- The home-schooling community, which is used to this form of learning, has benefitted from the enriched availability of resources that were made available for children in mainstream education.
- Online resources, when selected carefully, can be a valuable source of creative, engaging learning and teaching tools, boosting motivation, inspiration and self-learning. New tools such as YouTube or other platforms offering instructional videos offer children opportunities to learn topics that are of interest to them, in a format that is engaging and captures their attention.
- Materials and content that expose children to different cultures and languages via music and art have become essential.
- Online learning has different impacts at different ages. Younger children seek more attention and often cannot operate equipment; they prefer action and do not enjoy static online instruction, also because of their short attention span. Older children can better engage with technology, but are more affected by lack of social interaction.

Re-evaluation of the role of teachers, parents and children in education

The roles and expectations regarding teaching and learning have changed.

Children

- Motivation, attitude and ability to learn and self-learn out of interest have grown in importance.
- Access to age-appropriate resources, relevant to skill level is instrumental to these changes.
- Children's role as active agents in their own learning has grown in importance.



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Teachers

- The roles and skills of teachers, which are often underestimated and taken for granted, have become more visible and appreciated.
- Teachers often lack prior experience and training regarding online teaching and engaging children of different ages via online sessions. The ability to include games, video, and generally teach in more creative ways has become essential.
- Parents fear that teachers may not be able to properly support and assess children who are in situations when they do not understand the language of the digital classroom instruction, and are unable to ask questions to their teacher because of a lack of vocabulary or confidence. Teachers may miss the fact that children, due to language limitations, have more to contribute.

Parents

- Parents' direct involvement in their children's education has become essential. Parents have found themselves navigating curricula, teaching methods, resources and language skills with little or no professional guidance. The large variation in parents' abilities to find or create resources, and in the skills to support their children, has become a factor that generates increasing inequalities.
- The pandemic situation has created a massive learning curve about how parents adapt to change and has led to reevaluating the strategies and importance of home language maintenance.

Innovation and adaptation

- Parents and educators have had to adapt to change: while new innovative strategies were found, inequalities have been widened.
- It has become clear that simply adapting old ways of running classroom teaching to online mode does not always work because the pedagogy is necessarily different. Both teachers and parents need to accept that certain activities can be done well and others cannot. Flexibility is important and there should not be a fear of change.