CHANGE THE NARRATIVE

Taking back control after Covid

Despairing talk of 'catching-up' after Covid is self-defeating, argues Al Kingsley. Better to target necessary interventions using new assessment techniques and move on postively.

Knowledge gaps

Despite the incredibly hard work and stellar efforts of teachers and parents alike, extended periods of school closures have inevitably led to varying levels of learning loss for children working at all attainment levels. At its peak, the pandemic led to school closures in 190 countries, impacting 90 per cent of the total enrolled students – almost 1.6 billion children and young adults across the world. Further, from an international school perspective, recent figures estimate that 5.6 million students and 576,000 teachers around the world were affected by Covid-19.

The problem with the 'catch-up' narrative

Although knowledge gaps are a cause for concern, many experts fear the pervasive 'catch-up' narrative has only served to mount unnecessary pressure and stress on students, at a time when communities should be doing all they can to alleviate student mental health issues. In fact, the British Psychological Society issued a warning back in February that notions of children being 'behind' at school reinforces the notion that students only receive 'one shot' at their education, putting them under pressure to perform academically after an immensely challenging time. Additionally, a report by ISC Research into the impact of the pandemic on the wellbeing of students and staff in international schools found a link between school closures and increased mental health issues, with school leaders pointing to other challenges like cancelled extracurricular activities and a lack of socialisation.

Accentuate the positive

In addressing these challenges, we must boost student development and reignite engagement whilst also celebrating the progress children have made, ensuring they feel proud of their achievements and equipped to tackle future challenges. Throughout each stage of the pandemic, EdTech has been pivotal in ensuring the continuation of learning globally and taught many schools an important lesson about the positive impact technology can have. But what role might it play going forward in helping address the challenges posed by the pandemic, without adding to the harmful 'catch up' narrative?

Pinpoint areas for development and keep track of progress

One of the most significant benefits of EdTech is its ability to allow teachers to pinpoint areas where students may need to bolster their knowledge and provide targeted intervention. Many classroom management platforms have inbuilt tools which allow teachers to quickly check in with learners through polls and quizzes and provide them with a clear picture of the varying levels of attainment in their class.

Precisely planned interventions

EdTech affords teachers greater flexibility in utilising different methods which can help them find a style and pace that works best for each student's individual needs. Subject knowledge and understanding will be at different levels within a classroom and therefore, individually tailored lesson plans tend to be effective for students' progression. Harnessing the power of EdTech, teachers can assign specific tasks to individuals based on their ability in an easy and efficient way that doesn't add to their already burdensome workloads. Additionally, by supporting teacher workloads, staff can spend more time where they want to – in providing hands-on support to students who need it most.

Many EdTech platforms also allow for a digital record of progression to be kept and regularly updated for each student, helping make it easier to set individual goals and make sure a student is on track to meet them. Furthermore, EdTech allows parents to be regularly updated on their child's progression, as opposed to waiting for annual parent-teacher meetings. Having access to digital records of their child's progression allows them to raise concerns at a much earlier date and join-up home learning with that which is being instructed by their teacher.

Offers varitation in teaching methods

Technology enables teachers to diversify their teaching methods by offering variations of traditional learning techniques such as quizzes and competitions to challenge their students whether they are at home or in the classroom. This includes introducing games that require students to build on their maths skills or encouraging online communication to help refine language ability and increase collaboration among classmates.

Furthermore, EdTech also enables teachers to include a range of modern teaching techniques such as video learning, AI and algorithms and even immersive VR experiences. These new and unique learning methods will be an exciting way for students to jump into a new subject and help teachers bring their learning to life.

Showing the way with smart assessment

The team at Deira International School in Dubai (which won the ISC's 2021 Digital Technology in Learning award) is a brilliant example of how schools can embrace digital change. Having embedded artificial intelligence into school assessments including English, maths, science and Arabic, the school has embraced the fast-paced EdTech landscape as a key part of the school's approach.

In speaking to the agility this has brought their school, Director, Simon O'Connor has said that "part of our digital strategy includes the readiness to adapt to the ever-changing opportunities that are available to us. This means that whilst we have various integrated apps and processes, we are always looking at how to make this even better".

Accelerated uptake

Whilst many international schools were already at the forefront of the EdTech revolution prior to the pandemic, the rapid switch to remote learning has accelerated uptake around the world and instilled a new appreciation for its full potential. With most countries now having more than a year and a half of experience with technology-based learning, now is the perfect time to fully cement EdTech's long-term role in education. However, at the same time, it's vital educators avoid fuelling potentially harmful narratives around student 'catch up'.