St Philip's Chrisitan College DALE and DALE Young Parents

Digital practices to support learning

September 2021

Acknowledgement

Research Team

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Professor Sandra Schuck is Adjunct Professor of Education in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at UTS. Her main research interests are in mobile learning and technology-mediated learning in K-12 and teacher education contexts, retention and attrition of teachers, teacher professional learning and mathematics education. Prof Schuck has earned over $1,000,000 in research funding for collaborative research projects and has over 70 research publications, including 6 co-authored books. Professor Schuck was the winner of the inaugural UTS Research Excellence Award for Researcher Development and a founder of the UTS STEM Education Futures Research Centre.

Dr Jennifer Fergusson began her career as a school teacher. She has been a professional development provider for teachers in the use of learning technologies and a director of a digital learning centre. Her PhD research was in the area of science education. She currently conducts both quantitative and qualitative educational research in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at UTS.

Associate Professor Paul Burke is a leading expert in the field of applied market research, particularly quantitative methods utilizing experimental design, choice modelling, and best-worst scaling. Dr Burke designs primary research projects using experimental design techniques and innovative survey approaches, such as best-worst scaling, as well as standard methods integrating hybrid choice, structural equation modelling (for attitudinal models), cluster and discriminant analysis (for segmentation), and regression analysis (for predictions). His work involves models of consumer and human behaviour, including applications to product and service evaluation, social wellbeing, and forecasting, with numerous projects involving mix-methods including those in health and wellbeing, education, employee, stakeholder and community preferences, and issues around rural and remote workforce participation.

Suggested Citation

Introduction to the research project

The 2020 remote teaching period highlighted the need for educators to develop a broad and inclusive set of digital practices to support student learning. Their approaches needed to enable learning across formal spaces (physical and virtual) such as classrooms and learning management systems, as well as home learning environments. Educators also needed to cater for the needs and circumstances of all students, including those with additional needs, and those with home technology access or connectivity limitations.

This case study is part of a broader research project seeking to understand teachers' effective and inclusive digital pedagogies, as well as emerging digital practices during and after the period of remote teaching. It is seeking to uncover effective digital practices, and the factors that influenced their successful implementation. Together these will assist in informing next practices with digital technologies across a range of diverse school contexts.

The research is guided by the following key question:
What digital learning practices have teachers used to support learning practices, in ways that are flexible, accessible and promote student agency and wellbeing?

Methodology Overview

- **Case Study approach** – five NSW independent schools.

- **Data collection** – Term 4, 2020 and Term 1-2, 2021.

- **Data sources:**

  - interviews with school leadership, lead teachers, and teachers from various disciplines

  - focus groups with small groups of students

  - short online survey of students across at least one cohort in each case school (min. 100 students).

- Ethics approval: UTS HREC ETH20-5354 - Parental permission was sought as part of the formal research ethics process.

- Data collected through a mixture of remote and face to face connections.

In addition to the qualitative data collected, the research also utilises a quantitative survey instrument across AISNSW schools to gain additional insights into teachers' digital pedagogies, and other AISNSW priority areas: supporting student wellbeing, digital equity and inclusion during the remote teaching period.

St Philip's Christian College DALE and DALE Young Parents

St Philip's Christian College (SPCC) spans six schools and caters for students from Pre-Kindergarten to Tertiary Learning. This case study concerns two of those schools. **SPCC DALE** is a Dynamic Alternative Learning Environment for students with disabilities in Years 3 – 12. This *special needs school* is located in Newcastle and caters for students who have a diagnosis of anxiety, depression, PTSD, or autism. **SPCC DALE Young Parents** is an accredited special assistance school for young parents. It has two campuses located in Newcastle and the Central Coast, NSW, providing flexible learning environments for stages 4 to 6 to any young parents. There is onsite early learning and care for their babies whilst they study.

This was the fourth case study in this project, with data collected during Term 2, 2021. Data were collected through virtual interviews and focus groups. Artefacts, including student work samples and school policies, were also collected.

St Philip's Christian College (SPCC) Case Study Data Collection

School leader focus group:

- 30 minute focus group with Brant Maslen, SPCC DALE special needs school, and Wendy Gerakios, SPCC DALE Young Parents school

Teacher interviews:

- 30 minute interviews with four teachers - 2 teachers from each school

Student focus groups:

- Two 30 minute student focus groups - 1 group from each school (5 students per group)

Research Findings & Insights

Key research insights

As special needs and special assistance schools, student connection and wellbeing were core priorities underpinning the schools' decisions during the remote teaching period. Another priority was adopting personally tailored approaches to learning, adapted to students' unique circumstances. Although these priorities underpin the schools' everyday practices in normal times, the challenge was to adapt digital practices that worked for the remote teaching period.

A range of digital approaches are outlined in the report, though many practices are context-specific to each school. There was a balance of guided and self-paced activities, and staff noticed an improvement in students' independent learning skills. Given the complex student needs in both schools, and the frequent necessity for some students to work at home, there are plans to build on the experiences of remote teaching to support more autonomous off-campus learning, as the need arises.

A range of strategies were used to support student wellbeing, and many of these have become ongoing practices. There were frequent student and family wellbeing check-ins, providing individualised and targeted support. Teachers were aware of the importance of students maintaining their social networks and used different strategies to encourage peer interactions. Teachers designed and implemented enjoyable, collaborative interactive games to support learning and maintain student connection, and reduced their normal student workload expectations. Students at SPCC DALE Young Parents had limited digital access, so staff were creative and adopted multi-faceted approaches during the remote teaching period to maintain engagement and wellbeing.

School contexts

Prior to the pandemic, both of the St Philip's Christian College (SPCC) schools had been planning to implement a learning management system (LMS), badged as iLearn (using Schoolbox software). Adoption and implementation of this new system was expedited, with staff being upskilled in its use two weeks prior to lockdown. The teachers spent that time learning the system, transferring their programs to the online environment, and learning to use Zoom to be able to facilitate learning at school and at home. The school IT support team helped develop short training videos to help staff upskill in the new LMS, and these were emailed to families for assistance.

Students' digital access differed markedly between the two schools. SPCC DALE students had already been assigned their own laptops before the pandemic. Previously laptops were only used at school but were able to be taken home for the remote teaching period. Some SPCC DALE students still came to the school campus during the remote teaching period. This was primarily children of essential workers, or of parents who were not able to care for their children at home. To cater for this, some teachers worked from campus, while others taught from home. A typical daily routine involved three Zoom sessions, usually starting with a literacy session followed by a numeracy session. Timeout was given for recess and lunch, and for transitions. As an example, in the Year 8 morning session, students and teachers would be in Zoom sessions for two hours, and then teachers would be available by zoom or email if students needed to ask follow-up questions.

Students at SPCC DALE Young Parents are not assigned computers. During the period of remote teaching a difficulty for these students was limited access to the internet and digital devices at home. The school used a range of approaches to support and communicate with the students: use of emails, phone calls, zoom session and systematic 'drop-offs' of packs containing hard copies of paperwork and resources to their homes. These students were on individual timetables based on their subject choices and their modes of study. They usually bring their babies to school, with relatively high absenteeism quite common due to childhood sickness. Subsequently, adjustments are made to each student's program. The school has a policy of no homework so that students can focus on their parenting when they are at home. Making home a learning space during the remote teaching period was new and challenging for many of the SPCC DALE Young Parents students.

School priorities for the remote teaching period

Maintaining student wellbeing.

"Our core values, and what underpins what we do as specialist assistance schools, didn't change. If we tried 'to be something that we weren't' in that remote environment, it wouldn't have worked" (Wendy, School Leader Focus Group).

As special needs and special assistance schools, the main priority for the remote teaching period was connection and wellbeing. Caring for the students, their families, and combatting isolation was the focus in both the DALE and DALE Young Parents contexts. One of the school leaders stated that the main goal was **"maintaining connection with the school, and ensuring ongoing wellbeing for the students and the parents"** (Brant, School Leader Focus Group). This priority on student wellbeing was already a core value of both schools, and underpinned the schools' decisions and strategies during the remote teaching period.

One of the teachers summed up her school's approach to the remote teaching period: **"Our focus here is just wellbeing, wellbeing, wellbeing, and I think that's what we always have to default to, keeping ourselves and each other safe"** (DALE Young Parents English and Art teacher, Interview).

Providing flexibility and individualised approaches.

Another priority for both schools was flexibility, and personally tailored approaches to learning that are adapted to students' needs. This priority underpins everyday practices at the schools in normal times: **"I guess it's quite organic here, because of the nature of who we're working with"** (DALE Young Parents English and Art teacher, Interview). This approach continued during the remote teaching period: **"Fundamentally, the fact that we are individualised, we are flexible, we adjust to the students that we have - this didn't change"** (Wendy, School Leader Focus Group). A Year 8 DALE teacher stressed the importance of tailoring her approach to meet the needs of individual students: **"I teach to their strengths. So, identifying what it is that they want to achieve, and then trying to work out a way that I can support them to do that"** (Year 8 DALE Teacher, Interview). Teachers at DALE Young Parents also created individual learning plans and solutions based on their students' level of digital access: **"We would see a student had a problem, and then ask, 'how are we going to adjust to make the curriculum accessible to them'?"** (DALE Young Parents Visual Arts Teacher, Interview).

"Our core values, and what underpins what we do as specialist assistance schools, didn't change. If we tried 'to be something that we weren't' in that remote environment, it wouldn't have worked."

(Wendy, School Leader Focus Group)

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(DALE Young Parents Visual Arts Teacher, Interview)

Ensuring core values informed whole-school decisions.

Whole-school decisions during the remote teaching period were informed by the school's core values. An early decision was made by school leaders to modify the school day. Mindful of being special needs or special assistance environments, the staff realised that if they tried to duplicate a 'normal' school day through remote learning, with the same expectations at home as at school, they were only going to cause stress for students, families, and staff. Teachers quickly modified what the school day looked like, with schools becoming primarily a 'check-in point', before providing learning sessions. Teachers at both schools adjusted their programs to suit remote learning. They switched around the scoping and sequencing of their programs, so that they were teaching material that was relevant and able to be completed at home. The teachers at DALE Young Parents were flexible, working around their students' needs and not having an expectation of attendance from 9am until 3pm, as was required during face to face on-campus learning.

Key factors affecting remote teaching practices

Staff collegiality enhanced staff wellbeing and provided support.

A key factor in the school's success with remote teaching was the staff collegiality. Staff met daily over zoom to share experiences, reduce any anxiety, and solve unexpected challenges. A teacher at DALE Young Parents explained her thoughts on the key to her school's success: **"It has everything to do with the communication, the problem-solving. I think good team collaboration was the key for us. It happened daily, so it wasn't just a once a week check-in, it was 'alright, what are we doing today'?"** (DALE Young Parents Visual Arts Teacher, Interview). A teacher at DALE shared similar sentiments: **"I think we maintained connection between all the staff and supported each other. … we have a very united team here and I think we all supported each other"** (Year 8 DALE Teacher, Interview). Pre-existing bonds between staff were also seen as important: **"I think that the strong relationships that we'd already built before this all happened just carried through. We were still there, and we were still making contact, we were still doing all of those things. I'm super-proud."** (Wendy, School Leader Focus Group)

Staff collaborative problem-solving enabled positive solutions to challenges.

Staff collegiality led to effective sharing of ideas and collective problem-solving. Teachers shared ideas and resources for their sessions during daily debriefs, as well as possible approaches for engaging students and parents online. School leaders were proud of this aspect of their success: **"We realised what it was about, and how we worked on solutions was the thing we should be most proud of"** (Brant, School Leader Focus Group). Peer learning amongst staff was subsequently enhanced: **"There was collective learnings and 'collective sharings' as a professional learning group"** (Brant, School Leader, Focus Group). One teacher emphasised this collective staff approach to problem-solving. **"So many of those challenges came up, but we just would try and find solutions around them"** (DALE Young Parents Visual Arts Teacher, Interview).

Innovative hybrid teaching approaches supported simultaneous on campus and remote teaching

For various reasons, some students at DALE special needs school needed to be on campus during the remote teaching period. The teachers worked under a rotating roster system; some worked at home, some worked at school, and then they swapped. The staff at DALE special needs school team-taught the students who were at school, as well as teaching via Zoom: **"So essentially we were offering dual learning, but 90% of the kids were at home"** (Stage 6 DALE Teacher, Interview). The school had to quickly acquire cameras and microphones for this hybrid 'dual delivery' approach. Doing so allowed staff to walk around the classroom and have the camera follow them. The teaching became more interactive than just using a computer with a camera pointed to a whiteboard, which the staff felt would lead to disengagement by remote students. Their hybrid approach also provided peer interactions between students on campus and at home: **"So even though they were at school, they were still looking at the screen and catching up with their friends and vice versa. So we really needed it to work both ways"** (Brant, School Leader Focus Group).

Effective digital practices during the remote teaching period

SPCC DALE SPECIAL NEEDS SCHOOL

Providing continuity of learning through effective use of the Learning Management System.

Students at SPCC DALE could access all their learning and assessment tasks through their iLearn class page and upload their work there as well. The literacy and numeracy support staff set up breakout rooms to work with the students that they normally worked with. As one teacher observed: **"it was actually continuity of education, there was no break in their education"** (Year 8 DALE Teacher, Interview). Many students were quite 'tech-savvy' and as one teacher put it, **"it just became second nature for them"** (Stage 6 DALE Teacher, Interview).

Assisting students through explicit teaching practices and scaffolded instructions.

Teachers ensured that instructions for students on their LMS pages were well-structured and student-friendly. This included the use of a daily blog within iLearn: **"We would explicitly outline what was on in the day, and when their subjects were scheduled in their daily blog. They'd have all their weekly tasks submitted to iLearn and they would access their calendar and their due dates"** (Stage 6 DALE Teacher, Interview).

Teachers also embedded instructive YouTube clips into their class iLearn pages. In a similar approach to flipped learning, they would instruct the students to watch these videos, or click on a hyperlinked image, prior to explicit teaching: **"So, almost flipping the classroom is probably what we'd call it if we were in class"** (Stage 6 DALE Teacher, Interview). Visual cues were used as a supplement to verbal and written instructions and explanations on the LMS as an additional support for students with autism: **"We obviously have students that are on the autism spectrum, so we'd use it [iLearn] to put visuals on there to show them what their day looks like"** (Year 8 DALE Teacher, Interview).

Using participatory online class discussions to support learning and connection.

Teachers found that students gained confidence in online class discussions. Being physically located in their more familiar and secure home environment, DALE students felt more comfortable participating in class discussions. Students participated in these virtual discussions with more enthusiasm because they could turn their cameras off, reducing attention to themselves and feeling 'safer' to discuss and share ideas. A teacher recalled a literacy lesson where they had to read a passage. The teacher was reading the passage aloud, but then would share the screen and the students would take turns at reading.

"I feel like we got more discussion in that particular lesson than what I probably would have got if we were in the classroom setting. Whether they just felt a bit safer being behind their screens, and being able to talk, I don't know. In class they wouldn't want to be that focus of attention so wouldn't talk. Over Zoom, they could talk and still not be the focus of attention." (Stage 6 DALE Teacher, Interview)

SPCC DALE YOUNG PARENTS SPECIAL ASSISTANCE SCHOOL

Using technologies to enable practical lessons.

One of the SPCC DALE Young Parents teachers described a practical art lesson via Zoom as really challenging but also enjoyable for students:

"So I had my laptop set up on my kitchen bench and I'm at my dining table and I'm showing them … now I wanted to really push a colour and they're trying to follow on at home, and their kids are jumping in. It was comical but it was actually quite fun, trying to do a practical art lesson via Zoom. I had 15 students and there were 15 little children in the screen as well. I was proud of that lesson because I think all the students at the end of it were laughing … That was probably the way I looked at 'success' at that time: if my students were able to engage and laugh in a very bleak time." (DALE Young Parents English and Art Teacher, Interview)

In a subject called Exploring Early Childhood, the students created their own storybook and then read it to their children at home. The students and their teacher would then **"discuss that [experience] either in person or in written form"** (DALE Young Parents Visual Arts Teacher, Interview). The students were given options of how they would create the book. They could either physically create it using packs of colouring in pencils and resources that the teacher sent home, or digitally if they had access to that technology and they were comfortable using it.

BOTH SCHOOLS

Providing a balance of guided and self-paced activities.

Teachers at DALE Young Parents worked on building their students' capacity to learn more independently, as they were accustomed to having one-on-one support. Initially the teachers devised a timetable where the students were to complete certain activities during a session, and the teachers would check in with them at the end of the session. They soon realised that with toddlers or babies at home, that was not going to work. So they set work for the day, and then students would send their work, or photos of any work they had completed, to provide evidence of their learning. Teachers were able to adjust the task for each student's differing circumstances. Staff felt that many students benefited from a more self-controlled environment and felt **"empowered that they could take control of their learning"** (DALE Young Parents English and Art Teacher, Interview).

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DALE Teachers were conscious of excessive screen time, so they also emphasised more self-paced, 'off-screen' activities. For Science and PDHPE, the DALE teachers put together kits and sent those home. They also tried to utilise materials that students would have in their homes. Students were encouraged to engage in active, outdoor activities, including during 'morning movement' sessions using videos from YouTube. Students remembered this as a positive: **"We still did our – we call it morning movement - so we still did exercise and everybody would have to get up on the camera, do jumping jacks, stretching"** (DALE student, Focus Group). One teacher guided the students in practical activities via Zoom demonstrations, making sure her hands were high enough that they could be seen. The teacher noted: **"it was a bit of a learning curve for not only students but for staff"** (Year 8 DALE Teacher, Interview).

Strategies to improve digital literacy and confidence.

The students became more digitally literate and confident due to the period of remote teaching. Because the students had to rely on themselves more while learning at home, for instance through the self-paced activities mentioned previously, teachers noticed that they were more willing to work things out for themselves, rather than relying on the teachers to show solutions. One of the school leaders believed: **"Young parents just grew in their computer skills, absolutely"** (Wendy, School Leader Focus Group).

Teachers also became more confident in their digital skills, and their ability to find solutions to technical problems: **"Technology-wise I think we [staff] feel more confident. I'm more than happy to have a bit of a click around and go 'you know what? I think I can work this out!' "** (Year 8 DALE Teacher, Interview).

Practices to support student inclusion

Offering a clearly structured dual delivery mode.

With one or two students on campus at SPCC DALE school, the teachers used the digital technologies to help keep them connected with their peers. So even though they were at school, the students were still looking at the screen, and catching up with their friends and vice versa. A school leader said: **"We didn't call it remote learning, we called it, for DALE, dual delivery, so that those students could be here, and the dual delivery mode could still keep them connected"** (Brant, School Leader Focus Group). Like SPCC DALE, SPCC DALE Young Parents remained open, and while they had one or two students on campus, most students chose to learn remotely.

Adoption of creative strategies to address digital access challenges.

Students at SPCC DALE Young Parents had limited digital access, so staff had to be creative and adopt multi-faceted approaches during the remote teaching period. Because few students had computers at home, teachers were reliant on the students using their phones. They ensured that they spoke to the students by phone each day, as well as contacting them and sharing lessons via email. Teachers also sent home printed work packs and would record Zooms because synchronous learning was often challenging for parents with young children at home. Some students did the work at night, or when their children were asleep.

Adoption of strategies to assist families and carers.

Many DALE students had access to, and were familiar with, digital devices. Despite this, some of the families found the remote learning period very difficult due to their differing levels of digital literacies. The DALE school put together short training videos that were emailed out to families. These videos helped parents to navigate the new Learning Management System (iLearn) with their children. An IT support person was available on the phone for parents to talk them through technical aspects, including access to Zoom meetings.

> "We didn't call it remote learning, we called it, for DALE, dual delivery, so that those students could be here, and the dual delivery mode could still keep them connected."
>
> (Brant, School Leader Focus Group)

Approaches to support wellbeing

STUDENT WELLBEING

Wellbeing assistants provided important additional support for students and families.

DALE school usually has a wellbeing assistant in each classroom, as well as a teacher. During the remote teaching period, wellbeing assistants co-facilitated learning in the classroom with the teacher, but also focused on supporting families. Each day, the wellbeing assistants used phone calls, text messages or zooms to check-in with the students, and once a week checked-in with families. Initially, the family check-ins were related to managing the online learning environment, but over time the wellbeing assistants also did a lot of work to build parents' confidence.

Regular wellbeing checks provided individualised and targeted support.

Regular wellbeing check-ins with students were conducted, often up to three times per day. These individual communications with students were designed to check on their wellbeing and gauge how the students were progressing with their work.

DALE Teachers incorporated Zoom links into their class iLearn pages. Students would click on the Zoom link for wellbeing check-ins, which would happen two to three times a day. This took place regardless of the student's age. Because they were working with students with special needs, DALE teachers or the wellbeing assistants would also conduct personalised one-on-one Zooms with their students. One teacher described how they managed difficult student cases: **"We had one student in particular, with whom I spent an hour on Zoom just chatting; just talking through stuff. And then our wellbeing assistant spent extra time as well, because obviously their wellbeing was our priority"** (Stage 6 DALE Teacher, Interview).

When DALE Young Parents teachers dropped off learning packs, there were further wellbeing checks: **"When we were able to do drop-offs we were delivering food as well as lessons, hard copy lessons and sometimes little care packages we were delivering to them, just in hopes of lessening anxiety"** (DALE Young Parents English and Art Teacher, Interview).

Activities were designed for learning and maintaining student social networks.

Teachers were aware of the importance of students maintaining their social networks and used different strategies to encourage peer interactions. As a Year 8 teacher at DALE said in her interview: **"Their social networks were cut off. For teenagers that's really, really important."** Apart from regular check-ins, teachers often designed enjoyable tasks that students could do together. A teacher recalled: **"We tried to make those connections consistent and fun. … the wellbeing side of it was probably more important, because we wanted to keep them engaged and we wanted to keep them mentally well"** (DALE Young Parents Visual Arts Teacher, Interview).

The DALE Young Parents students valued communication with friends and teachers during the period of remote teaching. As one student explained:

"As a mum you're already isolated, … your whole life revolves around being a mother. So being able to keep in touch with people, and getting your mental health on track, … just keeping in contact with your teachers and friends would be the biggest part of my experience." (DALE Young Parents Student Focus Group)

DALE teachers often left class zoom calls 'open' after classes, to allow for social networking, so **"they had that opportunity to connect with their peers"** (Year 8 DALE Teacher, Interview). They saw this as similar to the students being in the playground under normal school circumstances.

Engagement was supported through incorporating games and fun activities.

The teachers incorporated enjoyable, interactive games such as '20 questions', 'Pictionary', and 'Guess the sound' over Zoom. They felt it was important to **"make sure that we had those elements of fun in their day as well, that it was keeping them connected to each other"** (Year 8 DALE Teacher, Interview).

"We would do fun things for their wellbeing. We did a Zoom bake-off, and craft activities - we'd drop off craft, and then we'd all make it together. We had 'show your pet' and 'bring your favourite toy' sessions, and we'd do scavenger hunts." (DALE Young Parents English and Art Teacher, Interview)

Part of the DALE teachers' rationale for implementing enjoyable activities was also to help their students feel comfortable with remote teaching, so they could stay motivated and come back the next day.

"We found that the games really helped for the kids to want to tune in. They knew that we were going to probably wear a silly hat or something in the morning session, so they knew that they wanted to check in, so that then they could all have a good laugh at us. My wellbeing assistant that I work with often showed up in a banana costume like a giant banana" (Year 8 DALE Teacher, Interview). These games also had considerable benefit for the young parents' wellbeing and teachers felt it helped to sustain them through the remote teaching period.

Setting realistic workload expectations

Although the school was using a LMS (iLearn), the majority of the SPCC DALE Young Parent students couldn't access this platform on their phones. When this is coupled with significant anxiety around the school lockdown, their ability to learn new digital skills was reduced. The teachers created safety plans for all their students based on the fact that anxiety could be escalating. Workload expectations were lowered, as one teacher explained: **"Sometimes that meant that our expectation of workload was very much secondary to working on their wellbeing"** (DALE Young Parents English and Art Teacher, Interview Interview).

STAFF WELLBEING

Frequent communication between teachers was important for enhancing staff wellbeing.

Irrespective of whether teachers were working at home or at school, the staff had daily meetings. The staff at DALE Young Parents would Zoom in the morning just to touch base, and they would often have informal Zoom meetings during the day. This frequent communication about their students was considered important to supporting students: **"So that was very fluid, and it was very frequent and that was probably a key to the success of it: the communication between all of us"** (DALE Young Parents Visual Arts Teacher, Interview).

The DALE staff would debrief every afternoon via Zoom. The staff at home appreciated the connection with colleagues and there was often a fun element to the session, such as meeting themes like 'bring your favourite cup of tea', or 'dress in formal wear' or 'dress in holiday wear'. One teacher said, **"It was a bit more light-hearted, a bit more fun, about connection-building"** (Year 8 DALE Teacher, Interview).

Staff confidence was boosted by early digital upskilling.

"The staff learning was immense and actually one of the things that came out of it was their fear became 'a confidence' that they can 'do stuff'. So that was big" (Brant, School Leader Focus Group).

The school decided to expedite implementation of their LMS (iLearn). They ended the school term a week early for students and used that week as professional learning time for teachers to explore online learning issues and learn to use the new system. The operations manager and IT support person were coaching and mentoring teachers and talking them through putting their lessons online. The teachers found this very effective, as one teacher remarked: **"The support that they offered made us feel confident that we could do it"** (Year 8 DALE Teacher, Interview).

Practices continuing beyond school lockdown period

Continued use of learning management system to support a hybrid (dual delivery) approach.

Use of the school's new LMS (iLearn) for teaching is now an embedded practice at the school. Since the 2020 remote teaching period, those teachers who struggled have been upskilled so they can seamlessly use the platform. Staff post daily blogs and lesson plans, so the volume of student email correspondence has dropped dramatically. Students have also recognised this change: **"Now that I know iLearn better, I think it would be a lot easier. If there was another pandemic, really it'd be a little bit easier"** (DALE Student Focus Group).

The LMS (iLearn) is now particularly useful for students who need to be learning at home, for whatever reason. This is a frequent occurrence in both schools due to a variety of complex student needs. Absent students still typically want to engage in learning because: **"they still want to keep some kind of routine and normality for them. So that's probably the biggest thing that we would take from it [remote teaching period], how we can still help those students"** (Stage 6 DALE Teacher, Interview). When students are absent, for either short or extended periods, teachers are able to direct them to iLearn rather than sending them individual emails with all the work attached. This more efficient process saves a lot of time.

The DALE school is still using a dual delivery process, which suits their students. If a student is going to be away, they still check-in online at 9am each day.

"Their routine at school is replicated at home. …a visual timetable goes up on the board and that visual timetable comes through the learning management system on their course page. So any students at home know to get online at 9am, and find out what's happening for the day. The teacher will have conversations with them about what their learning's going to look like in a variation because they're at home and then there's a check-in again at the end of the day with their wellbeing assistant. That's been a real positive." (Brant, School leader Focus Group)

The DALE students reiterated the usefulness of the hybrid, dual delivery mode that has continued since the period of remote teaching.

"There is the option if you are away, like to Zoom call if you do need help, or need to talk to the teacher. We didn't do that before." (DALE student focus group)

"I broke my ankles and I was off school for a little bit, so it was good to be able to have that option to Zoom in with the teachers whenever." (DALE student focus group)

"We care about students' wellbeing because if they're not in a good place right now, they're not going to learn well. So it was about ensuring their physical and emotional needs were met before we focused too much on their academic needs, particularly in their return to school"

(Principal, Interview).

Future planning to maximise beneficial effects of remote learning for some students.

Some DALE students worked more effectively at home during the remote teaching, and the school is planning how to better cater for these students' needs. This was acknowledged by both staff and students. Some students felt that they found it easier and less distracting to work at home. **"I just like staying alone because that's how I focus"** (DALE Student Focus Group).

Teachers found that a number of students whose attendance was quite low prior to COVID, were more engaged than what they were previously.

"We identified some students who were able to do a lot more Maths work at home because they didn't have the distractions of a clicking pen or someone else writing next to them. We've also got lots of students that are hypersensitive to sound." (Year 8 DALE Teacher, Interview).

The teachers are now considering how they can use these observations to benefit the learning of these students post-pandemic.

Improved wellbeing systems maintained.

The DALE schools have kept many of the wellbeing check-in procedures that were a feature of the remote school lockdown period. One of the school leaders reflected on the improvements to their wellbeing system: **"being able to carry that over has been a great benefit"** (Wendy, School Leader Focus Group). Staff at both schools believed they were more united as a staff, and benefited from the opportunity to collaborate in new ways with colleagues: **"we created connections with people that perhaps we hadn't really had the opportunity to create connections with before"** (Year 8 DALE Teacher, Interview).

Ongoing use of virtual teacher professional learning opportunities.

The period of remote teaching was seen as having a beneficial effect on teachers' professional learning. Staff members now take advantage of virtual professional learning opportunities that otherwise would have been impossible to access due to time or travel costs. Teachers are far more likely to access professional learning that is being conducted via Zoom, or asynchronously online at a time that suits them. **"It's had a huge impact on staff being able to improve their knowledge and their ability to engage students in the areas that they are interested in"** (Year 8 DALE teacher, Interview).

Participants' recommendations and lessons learned

Maintain student connection and engagement through enjoyable activities.

It was very important to the teachers to maintain student engagement. They believed that if students stayed connected to their learning and peers, that when they came back to school they would still feel connected to their class. During the period of remote learning the staff realised that the students could easily choose not to connect. As they believed this connection was important, they tried to keep the sessions light-hearted and fun.

The DALE Yong Parents teachers also targeted the students' babies and toddlers, which had amazing benefits for the young parents' mental health. The teachers found that having the ability to connect with the students, in whatever way they creatively could, both sustained the students and the teachers as well.

"We didn't panic, and we understood the value of learning that's not just on a written page, all the different learning that goes on in life, and just kept to seeing the bigger picture." (Wendy, School Leader Focus Group)

Separate work and home life to support wellbeing

Teachers found that when they were working from home, there was no clear end to the school day. Sometimes they found themselves making phone calls and doing check-ins far beyond normal working hours. There was no clear distinction between work and home. The advice from the teachers was that, should they be in that situation again, they would put more structure into their day to provide a delineation between school time and family time.

Ensure effective training to elevate staff confidence.

During the remote teaching period in 2020, there was an air of uncertainty that created worry and stress. Being well trained in the technologies and systems to enable effective teaching was viewed as countering this to some degree. Should schools have to return to a period of remote learning, the staff feels that they would approach it more confidently as a result.

"If this was to happen again, we would all feel much more confident being able to go into lockdown or go into teaching via iLearn, Zoom. I think that we would feel much more upskilled to be able to do that" (Year 8 DALE Teacher, Interview).