

Meriden Anglican School for Girls

Digital practices to support learning

June 2021



About the Case Studies

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.

About Meriden Anglican School for Girls

- Non-selective, independent school for girls
- Pre-Kindergarten to Year 12
- Enrolment: approx. 1300 students
- 1% indigenous students and 67% from a language background other than English.

Source: www.myschool.edu.au.



Data Collection

Meriden Anglican School for Girls was the first case study in this project. Data were collected during Term 4, 2020 through:

- interviews with four key members of the leadership team
- five focus groups (3 with teachers and 2 with students)
- student survey of 150 Year 8 students
- artefacts were also collected, as well as sample student work and school policies.



MERIDEN
AN ANGLICAN SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Key Insights

“We were conscious of not too much screen time but we did want to be able to see the girls and have that personal contact with them.”

(Christine, Head of Teaching and Learning, Senior school)

School priorities for the remote teaching period

Shifting from reassurance to a balance of academic outcomes and student wellbeing.

Initially the aim was to provide a sense of continuity and confidence in Years 7-12 through familiar routines. Over time, the emphasis shifted to provide a balance of maintaining academic outcomes, while supporting student wellbeing.

Maintaining personal connections.

“We were conscious of not too much screen time but we did want to be able to see the girls and have that personal contact with them.” (Christine, Head of Teaching and Learning, Senior school)

Video was used to maintain connections for Year 7-12 students, however adjusted lesson structures were adopted to minimise the volume of screen time.

Adapting routines, providing meaningful work and a sense of stability.

Junior School teachers set daily work that didn't necessarily need to be completed online. This approach **“reduced family stress and that was an important contributor to the wellbeing aspect, that families could take what we were doing and adapt it to suit their particular circumstances.”** (Michele, Head of Junior Schools, Interview)

Minimising disruption through device familiarity.

Using online technologies that the K-6 students were already familiar with, helped to minimise disruption during the remote teaching period. **“Teachers would often record their voices speaking to the child about the work, or the child would record themselves asking a question and the teacher would answer. So, they were still seeing us and hearing our voices, but it just wasn't live.”** (Michele, Interview)

Key factors affecting remote teaching practices

Effective technology support and infrastructure assisted a seamless transition.

Having a strong technologies and digital learning infrastructure in place minimised the impact of the transition to remote learning.

Staff collaboration and autonomy enhanced practice and collegiality.

Effective collaboration between staff was noted as a key factor in the success experienced during the remote learning period. **“Other enablers ... I think freedom for teachers to be able to problem-solve for their discipline. So, we gave teachers fairly broad guidelines and then gave them some room to be able to tweak those for their particular subject areas and for where they were at with different units.”** (Christine, Interview).

Provision of time to develop staff confidence.

Those less confident were provided opportunities to work from school in the initial stages of remote learning. This gave them just-in-time access to support and enhanced their confidence when they were required to transition to fully remote teaching.

“Although we were in lockdown, the teachers really worked hard to make sure it was still an interactive learning environment. So, although we were uploading things, they still were able to respond quite quickly to our questions and give us feedback.”

(Year 7 student from Focus Group)

An agile mindset helped staff to embrace change and enable innovation.

“I think pedagogically the approach that we took was we needed to innovate rather than replicate so we went in knowing it is actually not possible for us to provide the same school experience using technology as if the students are in the classroom. So, the teachers put a great deal of thought into how to adapt planned lessons to an online environment and I think that certainty helped. ...teachers just needed to refine their practice as they went along.” (Michele, Interview)

Early and ongoing student evaluations informed planning.

Teachers connected and sought feedback from students early in the remote learning period, including from those still learning at school. This allowed them to make quick and effective changes to their design of learning and provided valuable information about students' online learning more generally.

New approaches to managing the volume of feedback.

Strategies were put in place to manage the extra workload generated due to the volume of student work being uploaded. This included increasing their use of peer assessment. **“Although we were in lockdown, the teachers really worked hard to make sure it was still an interactive learning environment. So, although we were uploading things, they still were able to respond quite quickly to our questions and give us feedback.”** (Year 7 student from Focus Group)

Clear communication with families enabled positive and effective learning.

Parents and carers became increasingly appreciative of the teachers' work with their children during remote learning, with the online environment providing **“a little window for them to see inside what a classroom might be like”** (Christine, Interview).

Use of pre-recorded video provided flexibility for families.

In recognition that many students needed to share devices, Junior school teachers used pre-recorded videos to provide families with flexibility.

Ensuring a healthy balance of screen time and non-digital activities.

“We were trying to juggle giving them that sense of contact with their teachers but also not too much screen time, we didn't want them glued to the screen all day every day because that creates other problems then. So, that was a little bit of a juggle.” (Christine, Interview)

Different approaches were considered as appropriate to different year groups including asynchronous activities for Junior and Senior students that did not require a device.

Effective digital practices during the remote teaching period

Providing choice, ownership and autonomy in learning.

Approaches were designed to leverage student autonomy and lead students to more independent learning.

As no synchronous online teaching took place in the Junior school, families were able to have control over their daily routine. Video resources were essential to support the learning for students of all ages.

“I think putting videos online was really good because you could slow them down, you could re-watch them, you could pause them and that's something you can't really do in real life without disrupting the class.” (Senior School Focus Group student)

Using new media for explicit teaching and support of flexible learning.

Instructions and key learning were provided to Junior School students through video instruction and a detailed day plan. This built on existing technology skills from the classroom environment, boosting independence. Evidence of learning allowed teachers to then follow up directly with individual students requiring additional support to meet lesson objectives.

Designing learner-generated video projects to enhance authentic learning.

Educators felt that it was important for students to engage with activities that were relevant and current during this unprecedented time. For example, digital activities in Creative Arts aimed to harness the students' lived experiences of remote lockdown. Students also made use of photographs and videos to document their learning across a range of science experiments.

Providing timely and purposeful multimodal feedback.

Timely and regular technology-supported feedback processes were adopted across the school. This included sharing video or audio feedback as well as setting individual check-ins to enhance personalised connection.

Promoting interactions and collaboration through deliberate learning design.

Teachers found that the 'quieter' students were more comfortable contributing to lessons during online learning, especially in Years 7-12.

"They felt like they could ask something and they weren't going to be drowned out by the students who were more confident." (Science teacher, Focus Group).

Students appreciated the opportunities to connect and ask questions as needed. **"Teachers did stay on Teams and if you had any questions it's really easy to just turn on your microphone, ask them about something and they would explain it really well to us."** (Year 8 student, Student Focus Group)

Practices to support student inclusion

Continued focus on **differentiation and individualisation** of learning.

Flexible approaches and on campus learning were offered to targeted students.

Preparation minimised issues arising from reduced or inconsistent technology access.

Learning was explicitly designed to **minimise reliance on technologies**.

Approaches to support well-being

Clear expectations and boundaries were set for staff regarding start and finish times, and for student feedback.

Policies were essential in to ensure **privacy** for both educators and students.

Creative strategies were explored to support engagement and student wellbeing.

Informal **check-in** by teachers assisted in supporting student wellbeing.

Physical activity and connecting with a range of students were prioritised.

Practices continuing beyond the remote learning period

Use of an electronic plan.

Students continue to access an electronic schedule which assists with planning, and supports students when absent.

Timetable adjustments to enhance student agency.

Secondary school teachers saw increased productivity during the remote teaching period when there were fewer interruptions. Year 12 students now learn from home one day a fortnight. This offers the opportunity to bring groups of students onto campus for smaller group work, and for students to have sustained blocks of time to complete major works.

“That’s a positive that’s come out of the remote teaching experience and it would not have happened without that experience.” (Michele, Interview)

Enhanced use of video for explicit teaching.

To enable students to work at their own pace, teachers make use of co-created, pre-recorded videos. This growing collection supports students working at their own pace, and continues to build a resource repository helping educators be more aware of their practice as they reflect on clarity of content and presentation.

Increased use of e-portfolios and targeted online feedback.

Due to the recognised benefits observed during remote learning, educators continue to use technology to enable peer feedback. Educators are more adept at engaging with digital portfolios, designing learning and providing personalised feedback in the online space.

“Teachers really learnt to use targeted feedback effectively and to give clear descriptive feedback rather than evaluative feedback. I felt in terms of professional growth in giving feedback I saw more progress in four weeks of online learning than exploring that topic at other times.” (Michele, Interview)

Contemporary thinking about authentic, purposeful learning design.

Educators continue to think creatively about homework tasks, designing them to be more purposeful and authentic.

“I think the number one thing that we realised was that we needed to accept that there would be things that we couldn’t do and to work around that, so to plan, knowing those limitations.”

(Michele, Interview)

Lessons learned

School context and student need informs pedagogical choices.

Knowledge and understanding of individual school context provides direction and support for learning that is respectful of unique student cohorts.

Capitalise on existing knowledge and skills development.

School leaders’ advice was to **“work with what you have, with what you know works for your community... start small and then grow what you’re doing”**. (Michele, Interview).

Begin with what teachers are familiar with, rather than introducing too many changes at once.

Bring diverse skillsets together through collaboration.

Although collaborative work may require more meetings, the experience at Meriden was that effective teamwork and a sense of community made a significant difference to the quality learning outcomes of the students during the remote teaching period.

Promote open and flexible approaches.

Having an agile mindset, and realistic expectations, supported flexibility and problem-solving.

“I think the number one thing that we realised was that we needed to accept that there would be things that we couldn’t do and to work around that, so to plan, knowing those limitations.” (Michele, Interview)

“Teachers were prepared to be flexible and problem-solve, not just say this is the problem but make a suggestion as to how we might go about fixing it.” (Christine, Interview).