

how we kept learning going.

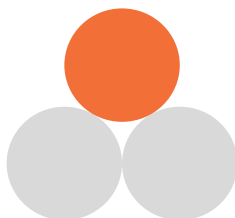
A guided reflection toolkit helping
school leaders assess 2020 and
plan for 2021



We've tried many different things in 2020 and we've adapted to change like never before.

Whether your school was remote learning for three weeks, three months, or most of the year, a lot has changed in schools around the world this year. It's incredibly important to reflect on the year that was - and consider what opportunities it presented us and what positives we can take into 2021.

This toolkit takes you through a step-by-step process to guide reflection with your team with six 45 minute reflection activities. Combine all six for a PD day at your school, or use the ones you want in your executive and whole staff meetings. In this toolkit you'll find reflection activities for:



Teachers and School Leaders

This section will guide your school leadership team in reflecting on how you managed change, staff well-being and how you worked together.



Students' Learning

This section will guide you through your reflection on your students' learning, student well-being and how you delivered the curriculum.



Our Reflection Template

At the end of the toolkit you'll find a worksheet that you can use to guide you through the reflection process.

teachers and school leaders.

How we manage change

School leaders have faced unbelievable challenges in 2020. Suddenly, many of us had to deal with schools being locked down (almost over-night), a whole new curriculum delivery and assessment system, new collaboration methods with other staff and new communication systems with parents and other stakeholders. The change was vast - and it was rapid.

Yet while things have been challenging, our inner optimists have seen some real silver linings. We worked with a school in New South Wales who told us that the experience of lockdown, and the staff response to the pivot in curriculum delivery and assessment, was perhaps the best staff morale booster and culture building activity they had experienced in years! In fact, many schools have told us that enforced changes back in March brought out the best in their staff, with an incredible willingness to go above and beyond to ensure students' learning could continue.

Not only did staff work hard and produce brilliant online modules for their students, many also collaborated more and developed a real camaraderie and can-do culture sometimes not seen before at the school. Of course, schools also told us many staff found the process stressful and difficult which we engage with at other points in this toolkit, but there was an underlying positivity and drive to push through the necessary changes successfully and quickly.

reflection



So as school leaders, how can we bottle this positivity? Why was this experience of change so different to normal change initiatives at school? Next time, when there is a teaching and learning project that requires staff to consider changing their practice, how can we draw on the lessons we learnt in 2020 to better introduce change? Staff saw these changes as necessary - but does that mean they've seen other changes as not being necessary? And they also got to lead many changes themselves.

activity



You could organise a circle meeting with your staff (or a video call). What aspects of the change process did they find effective? What didn't work so well? Talk through exactly what happened, their recollections and feelings. You could create a mind-map on the board of all their ideas. Take a photo of it and try to identify some of the consistent trends with the Senior Leadership Team and plan tangible actions for how you're going to embed your teacher's ideas into your school's new systems.

Well-being: teachers and leaders

The well-being of our teachers and leaders has been a massive issue this year.

When we spoke to James, a middle leader in a regional high school, he was exhausted and close to tears. Every word he spoke was full of stress and the obvious strain from his workload was dragging him down each day. James was not the person you would typically imagine struggling. His colleagues love working with him, students want to be in his class, and he is an exceptionally talented young leader. So why is he, of all people, feeling like he would rather be anywhere other than school?

James talked about all the little things that kept adding up. In 2020 he had been forced to change the timetable so many times and finding relief teachers was increasingly difficult, which meant he had covered classes himself. The constant desire to see his Year 12's succeed in the midst of COVID was always on his mind. In short, James was spending most of his time looking after everyone else, but he had forgotten to look after himself.

In 2020, perhaps more than in recent years we have plenty of educators like James in our schools. We think Term 4 is the time to take a breath, and check in with ourselves and with how our teams are going.

reflection



Perhaps reflect on what your school is currently doing to support the well-being of your leaders and teachers. What changes have you made in 2020 that could be kept in 2021? How are you feeling and where can you get support if you need it?

What are the things that you think your school is currently doing well and where can you improve? Were there successful mechanisms you started in the pandemic that can continue into 2021?

activity



Meet each team member individually for a well-being check-up. Perhaps encourage your team to commit to some habits that they could add to their personal practice in 2021 under these headings:

Your Head. What can you do to help you see things with more clarity?

Your Heart. What can you do to keep yourself feeling motivated and energised?

Your Hands. Write down the things you want to do to get better at your job, with a focus on the things that you love most about your role.

Your Feet. What can you do to stay fit and healthy?

Communication and collaboration

This year posed some massive questions to us as school leaders about how our teams of staff collaborate and communicate effectively. Maybe you were forced to try some new ways of communication, and the experience actually opened up some doors you hadn't noticed before. Maybe your staff suddenly realised the value of collaboration when their informal corridor meetings stopped in March, and they were left on their own to design and plan learning.

We've all started reflecting on everything we discovered during this year of disruption. We worked with schools across Queensland who brought forward a plan to introduce Microsoft Teams to every school in the state. There were massive challenges - not least helping all the staff just to understand how the platform worked!

Other schools we've talked to said that being forced to learn and explore new technological platforms meant they discovered new and more effective ways of communicating with their staff and students. Certainly, getting acquainted with Google Docs, Canvas, Teams, Google Classroom and Zoom has been a huge learning curve for staff. And these sorts of online platforms can have huge benefits for effective staff collaboration. But we're sure that during these processes you discovered things that worked really well for your team, and things that didn't!

reflection



So you could start by auditing the communication and collaboration online tools your staff used in 2020. Look at all the platforms and decide on what were the most effective. Make sure you get around to all the staff - some departments may have used something a bit different (like WhatsApp) and found it really effective, and you then can then look at sharing that effective practice with other parts of your school.

activity



Use a Start / Stop / Keep model to make a decision about which platforms to use going forward. Obviously, it will be unsustainable to use ten different tools in a school! We'd recommend that you'll need to settle on just 3 or 4 - then you'll also need to clearly plan exactly what each system will be used for. So decide (for example) that Sentral is used for behaviour management issues, whilst Teams is used for staff collaboration. Make sure we don't get confused about which systems we use for what - draw these lines with your Senior Leadership Team really clearly and communicate them to your staff.

students' learning.

Our learners

2020 has taught us all a lot about how we view our learners. One of our favourite comments came from a Year 8 teacher who said that the best thing about remote learning was that she now knows who the really effective learners are; and these were not the ones she would have necessarily expected!

With the move to remote learning we quickly found that students with skills such as self-regulation, agility and critical thinking were the ones who were thriving. It's not that any of this is new, it's just that these skills are now squarely in the headlights. The students who can plan for, and monitor their own progress, are much more likely to succeed than those who are looking for someone to guide them through the next step, or just focussed on covering the course content.

Our Year 8 teacher found that she quickly moved away from a heavy focus on content because her students were becoming increasingly disengaged with yet another thing that they felt no connection with. Content was just something else to tick off the list! So, she made sure that the focus was on the person and not content coverage.

reflection



What have you learnt this year about your students as learners and as people that we could take into 2021? Were there elements of online learning that engaged your students, and how can you bottle these elements even though you're back in a more conventional format? What worked well and how could this impact on our learning design and assessment going forward?

activity



Perhaps you could set time aside in your next department meetings to talk about the different ways teachers approached this in 2020. Share stories and celebrate successes. Talk about the things that were brilliant and the things you definitely wouldn't do again! Make a mind map of all the awesome ideas, then, make sure each department shares their ideas throughout the school.

Well-being: students

Our students have been under huge pressure this year. Suddenly all their learning routines changed - during the initial lockdown and even afterwards when other social distancing measures had to be put in place. Changes like this can have a massive impact on our students' well-being.

One of the many stories of remote learning came from Anna, a Year 9 Maths teacher. Anna had a tricky class of boys who, well, really just didn't want to be in a Year 9 Maths class! When the school moved to remote learning, Anna noticed one of the boys started taking much more of an interest in what was happening in lessons. He was self-regulating his behaviour and was happy to adapt and change as things were rapidly changing around him. The most interesting thing was that, for the first time all year, he started asking questions. He even opened up about where he was struggling and where he wanted to improve.

When Anna talked to him about the shift in his attitude, he said that in class he felt anxious and embarrassed speaking in front of the other boys. When online he felt like he could concentrate better and was much more comfortable asking questions because the other students weren't going to give him a hard time.

Anna would be the first to admit that she probably learnt more about this boy through remote learning than she had all year.

reflection



At your school, what ways have you made connections with your students in 2020 that have been different to previous years? What can you take away and develop from these experiences and how can you check in with your students to find out more? What can we learn and take into 2021?

activity



Have a conversation with your students to hear their stories about life in COVID. Select a group of students from different year levels and talk with them about their experiences. Get them to tell you their stories, good and bad (don't make it an interview!). Ask what worked best for them, what didn't work and did they show initiative to look after their own well-being. Choose a variety of students: not just your usual student leaders! Perhaps in your leadership team, make sure you use what you've learnt to plan out better well-being initiatives in 2021.

Delivery of curriculum

Throughout 2020 we've found loads of new and interesting ways to deliver the curriculum to our students and to assess their learning. Suddenly back in March we were all asked to move to an online model and even if we only locked down for a couple of weeks, the ramifications of those changes and developments have been felt in every school in the country!

And some of the facts that have emerged from our students have been a little scary. We've had feedback from loads of schools that a significant amount of students actually enjoyed the online delivery of the curriculum. Research conducted here and overseas has shown both extremes - some students have fallen way behind, but others have actually performed better outside the classroom!

Loads of academics are now talking about a blended learning model, where students have face-to-face learning complemented with effective online learning systems and processes. Before this pandemic certain schools were further ahead with this than others - but really we were only playing around the edges. Now our new wisdom has given us an awesome opportunity to dive right in and see what works best, and what could be binned!

reflection



It's important to reflect on the experience at your school - and you could get pretty granular in your analysis. Which students found the online learning model beneficial? Have they got any common traits? Were there particular learning platforms or routines that seemed to work well? What did you start back in March, and then continue even when you went back to face-to-face learning?

activity



Get a small team together to start looking at your student performance data for this year. You will have data sets of assessment results and reports. But maybe don't just look at grades - make sure you also interview teachers and students and look at how data was collected. Don't be afraid of data that doesn't make sense - or doesn't look 'good'. When something doesn't add up, it's not saying you've failed as a school (or the teacher has failed), it's posing a question that needs to be answered.

our reflection template.

Use our template to help you guide your reflection conversations with your team.

When you're having your conversations with staff or collecting information, it's all about finding out as much as you can about what worked really well this year, and what can be discarded. You don't have to form complete plans of initiatives for next year, but it's great to start thinking about the changes you could make after everything you've learned. It's all about seeing the challenges of 2020 as an opportunity: what do you now know about your students, teachers and school leaders that can help you make your school an even better place?

So we've used a Start / Stop / Keep model on the template. First, share stories about successes and disasters, and the way you measured the impact of your successes. Then, discuss with your teams what you learned in 2020 that has shown you what you need to start; what you tried this year that you now know you should stop; and what awesome projects you now know you need to keep.

What area are you focused on? _____



Our Stories and Experiences	Impact	Taking the next step
<p>1. What new initiatives worked brilliantly this year?</p>	<p>3. How did you measure your successes? What was their impact on student engagement, learning or well-being?</p>	<p>4. START: now you know what you know, what do you want to start?</p>
<p>2. What was a disaster?</p>		<p>5. STOP: What do you need to stop?</p>
<p>7. What does success look like in this area at the end of next year?</p>		<p>6. KEEP: What have you introduced that you know you need to keep?</p>