

10 lessons for the classroom from 12 months of Covid

By [Stacey Brewer](#)

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It's a date few educators will ever forget. On that day, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced the closure of South African schools to try and curb the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was more than two months before children set foot in a classroom again, and then only on a part-time basis.



Almost exactly a year later, we're still navigating the new reality of teaching and learning. Here are my top 10 lessons learnt over the past 12 months:

1. Technology will never replace great teachers

At Spark Schools, we've always seen technology as an enabler to support committed, engaged teachers. The pandemic has simply underlined the fact that sound relationships between teachers and scholars are the single biggest contributor to a lasting education. Technology can deliver content and enable access; teachers develop life skills, like adaptability, emotional intelligence, the ability to learn, and the ability to deal with crises and uncertainty.

2. We must build greater resilience

When Covid-19 struck, many people thought it would be a three-week lockdown, and then we'd be back to normal. A year later, we've tapped into reserves of resilience we didn't know we had. Not every teacher or scholar is naturally resilient, and it's up to us as educators to find ways to help them develop this life skill.

3. It takes a village to educate a child

We've re-learned the importance of engaging with families and school communities. Families are equal partners in their child's education, and it's vital that we walk this road together, and establish open lines of communication. If we understand individual families' needs better, and what community resources are available, we will be better able to

ensure that our scholars get the best education they can.



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4. The importance of mental health

The past 12 months have been turbulent and traumatic. Thankfully, this has meant that we're learning to talk about mental health more openly, and how we deal with our challenges. Regardless of what education looks like in the future, we must continue to find ways of looking after the mental health of scholars, academic staff and support staff alike.

5. In a time of crisis, leadership is everything

Leadership gurus often talk about the difference between 'war time' and 'peace time' leaders. In the past year, we've seen why we need both. While the 'war time' leaders have come to the fore, by being able to adapt quickly to the unknown and be flexible, we will always need the 'peace time' leaders, who take a longer-term view and see the bigger picture. Either way, we've seen a greater emphasis on leadership in education than ever before.

6. It's time for transparency

The coronavirus has taught education leaders the need to be transparent in times of crisis. We must celebrate the good times, and be open and honest during the bad times to keep everyone on the same page. A year ago, someone said to me: 'The name of the game is to stay in the game.' The only way to do that is to bring your people on the journey with you.

7. Blended learning is here to stay...

The growth in our ability to deliver and use remote learning as an additional channel has been one of the biggest positives to come out of the pandemic. The face-to-face model we return to should include blended learning and opportunities for collaboration among and between classes, schools, and entire systems. More than ever, we must have a digital strategy to deal with the realities of technology and find better ways of serving our scholars in the future.



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8. ...but sometimes paper works just fine

While students and teachers can use digital tools and platforms to continue learning, collaborating and communicating, not every learner has access to the internet and devices. During lockdown, we developed offline methods of facilitating learning through low-tech and offline solutions, including traditional printed packs and WhatsApp resources and videos – and that need won't go away any time soon.

9. The value of stakeholders who care

The business of education goes far beyond merely being a business. Spark Schools for example is privileged to have stakeholders who understand the sector and share their vision of ensuring that underserved communities get access to high quality education. Their commitment, and ongoing value-add, has been instrumental in carrying Spark Schools through this most testing of times.

10. We must bridge SA's digital divide

During the pandemic, we've seen the need to be able to serve scholars and their families with high quality education at an affordable cost, whether online or offline. As a nation we must build robust partnerships to serve as many South African children as possible, and give them the opportunities they need to improve their quality of life.

Covid-19 has shaken us to the core. But it's also given us the opportunity to rethink the way we've been doing education until now and find ways to move forward in a way that uses technology better, reaches more young people, and focuses on the well-being of scholars, teachers, and support staff. It's a learning moment we can't afford to waste.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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