

Importance of building self-efficacy in uncertain times

By [Adri Marais](#)

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With the national energy around the matric results starting to settle, it is a good time to stand back and reflect. For us as educators and civil citizens, 2020 was a year like no other that any of us had ever experienced. This time last year we started learning about the novel coronavirus, and its disease, Covid-19. We learnt about living in uncertainty and we learnt about new social contracts, like not hugging. We also saw a world morph into working from home without a hiccup - the successes and pitfalls of which have been hotly debated for decades. We saw job losses, food insecurity and we saw hardship and suffering. At our school, about 10% of our staff reported contracting Covid-19, and virtually everyone experienced trauma in their immediate or augmented circles.



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Such was the environment we found ourselves operating in. As a non-profit organisation, a school and a key building block in the communities we serve, we had many challenges to face. As individuals, and members of our school, we buckled down, educated ourselves and tempered our fears. We worked on becoming more comfortable with uncertainty, we worked on focussing on what is in our control and on being adaptable moment by moment.

We consciously made a choice to view the year as an accelerator of our plans, as opposed to a disruptor, whilst continuing to make decisions with empathy through our #PeopleFirst lens.

We hopped on to Zoom, started building Ziva (our customised learner management system) and like all the other schools with the resources to do so, dived into the deep end of blended learning and asynchronous teaching and learning. The learning curve was steep and we made many mistakes but it sharpened the edge for us to create an ambitious set of goals for 2021 by pushing two things forward:

- (a) focussing on activities that can widen our impact as we saw again what difference resources make to your ability to perform; and
- (b) consciously building self-efficacy – a crucial character trait highlighted during the lockdown.

When the matric results were released, we were over the moon! Whilst most people tweeted and posted about our remarkable 100% pass rate on social media channels, it was the 80.5% Bachelor's pass, the 100% Math Literacy pass and the 92% Mathematics pass that deserved the accolades as these results are true enablers of social mobility. This is what our students, all of whom come from impoverished areas on the Cape Flats, need to craft a place where they can live self-sustaining lives as full contributing citizens of our country.

We were very uncertain about the level of attention our learners would give to their classes and it highlighted the importance of self-efficacy as a key character trait of success to us. We learnt that every cloud had a silver lining – our teachers were on the steepest learning curve we could imagine, morphing from an in-person modality to virtual learning literally overnight, having to keep a full class engaged and motivated when it was all too easy for the learner to not engage, to cite tablet problems, data problems, reception problems or to hide behind the no-video-no-sound option. Our learners had to figure out how to stay motivated, dust off the self-efficacy skills without a teacher standing behind them, a bus contractor seeing that they get on the bus, a canteen ensuring a balanced meal throughout the week.

During this time, many of our top students asked to be allowed continued increased independence as blended learning has given them the opportunity to self-pace and self-direct. They managed it in a way our intent by itself could not.

Professor John Hattie from the University of Melbourne in Australia has been advocating a more asset-based approach to the educational fall-out of the pandemic. He believes that, rather than the deficit approach of focussing too much on the learning loss, teachers should sit up and take note of how learners self-regulated, self-directed and self-motivated during this time – because they could, because they were not under the thumb of the teacher in the classroom all the time.

So let's not despair and focus so much on learning loss that we neglect the beautiful buds of self-efficacy our children proved that they have. We should celebrate what we achieved with blended learning that brought out the best in our teachers and our learners and focus our resources on what we saw makes a difference.

With this, 2021 started with a focus on the future of education in a blended, self-paced space where the innate ability of children to drive their own goals will continue to be noticed and nurtured. We are hopeful that our students will continue to learn and experience the benefits of a blended learning environment. Here, on the one hand they can self-pace and build self-efficacy, while on the other hand, they know that the nurturing, safe, social side of the school, the teachers, the games, breaktimes and friendships still matter.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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