

Covid -19

And its Impact on Learners, Teachers and other Educators

Impressions emerging from a **RAPIDE** Literature Scan.



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| January 2023, On behalf of the RAPIDE project partnersJaap van Lakerveld | Visual Identity |

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## Introduction

In the initial stage of the Rapide project, a European project under Erasmus plus, the project partners brought together academic literature and policy documents from the participating countries, as well as sources that covered the COVID impact on primary, secondary, and teacher education (both pre-service and in-service) in Europe as a whole. The contributing partners together represent the following countries:

* England
* Flanders
* Germany
* Hungary
* the Netherlands
* Portugal
* Scotland
* Slovenia
* And EU countries together

The literature and policy document scan done in this initial stage of the project, is not so much an in-depth study of the state of play in Europe but rather an orientation, needed to set and sharpen the priorities set in the Rapide-Project. This document includes the outcomes of this initial research and policy documents scan. First the research questions of this scan are presented. Furthermore, the results of the search and analysis will be described. Implications for teachers, and trainers will be derived, as well as priorities for policy makers. Eventually issues will be indicated that provide food for thought for those who are professionally or otherwise involved in the development of education and teacher training, and educational policies in the late, or hopefully post Covid era.

## Questions underlying our research

In the collection and analysis of academic and policy documents the search was for the way in which the Covid pandemic had affected education and training, and for ways in which professionals and other involved in teaching had responded to the to the changes imposed to them by the COVID circumstances. So How teaching, learning and training were affected education includes the ways in which practices were directly influence bij the changed working conditions, as well as the ways in which the people included responded to these changes. However, the goal is to get an overview of what those involved in teaching and policy making have done to overcome the consequences of the pandemic in their work. The orientation focused on the following research questions:

1. How did the COVID pandemic affect Teaching and Learning?

* How did it affect the interaction between learners?
* The interaction between teachers and learners
* The interaction between teachers and parents
* Family life
* Equity/equal opportunities/inclusion issues
* Community involvement in teaching and learning
Online, or ICT based teaching

2. How did the COVID pandemic affect teacher-education and learning?

* How did it affect the development of teacher trainees
* The professional development of teachers
* Mentoring coaching and counselling processes
* Co-operation/collaboration of teachers/educators
* Interprofessional learning of teachers across disciplines and levels
* School based (action) research
* Innovation strategies, and implementation
* School, or educational leadership

## III. First impressions

The Covid-19 pandemic affected education in many ways. It had a profound impact on various aspects of education and learning at home, in schools, online, among students, teachers, and school leaders. It affected:

*Family life*. Children increasingly studied at home, had to share devices, needed a quiet place to study, and asked questions and support when necessary.

*Interaction between learners*. The normal interaction in classrooms now was happening online. Peers became small picture on screens, some were invisible on screen because of a lack of connectivity, or in other ways failing infrastructure.

*Interaction between teachers and learners*. Teachers had problems in online classroom management especially in involving or engaging students in the learning processes.
 *Interaction between teachers and parents*. Teachers to some extent now had to reach students through parents. Parents, however, didn’t always feel equipped and competent to play the educative role needed. Teachers increasingly had to provide parents with instructions on how to stimulate their children and how to support and monitor their progress.

*Equity/equal opportunities/inclusion issues*

Not all parents, or families could provide the learning environment needed for their children to study properly and effectively. This appeared to lead to an increased inequality among students. School had to try to find ways to reach every student and to be inclusive.

*Community involvement in teaching and learning*As stated above also other members of the community became actively involved in minding the learning and well-being of pupils/students. Examples of such involvement were found in sports in community work, in libraries, in cultural centres etc.

*Online, or ICT based teaching*

The changes during the pandemic made school rely on online, or ICT based learning and teaching. This took a lot in terms of technical expertise and user skills of teachers, students and others involved.

*Development of teacher trainees*

Teacher trainees usually were being trained by taking part in school practice in internships. This to a large extent was no longer possible so alternatives had to be found or developed to provide trainees with adequate opportunities for initial professional development.

*Professional development of teachers*

Under the circumstances also the professional development of the teaching force changed. Priorities changed due to the changed context, and regular professional development was under pressure of the grown workload as consequence of the changes required.

*Mentoring coaching and counselling*

Also, the mutual support among teachers, to between experienced and newly qualified teachers suffered from the workload on one side, and the other side it became more urgent under the circumstances. Practical support and exchanges increased, reflection and professional development were under pressure.

*Co-operation collaboration of teachers/educators*

Among teacher- educators similar processes evolved. Lack of time, lack of face-to-face meetings and a heavy workload in order to cope with the circumstances affected the co-operation. It became more practical, pragmatic.

*Interprofessional learning of teachers*

In the struggle to cope with the challenges of the lockdowns and its consequences, collaboration grew. Expertise was exchanged and help was offered. However, the focus was the solution of problems rather than professional learning itself. Nevertheless, a lot of learning was reported.

*Research*An amazing amount of research was initiated and carried out to find ways out of the crisis and to learn from it. Our own project (RAPIDE) is an example of this.

*Innovation*
Never back to normal was a phrase often heard during the pandemic. Throughout the COVID years lots of initiatives were taken and implemented and still are being developed. Still the inclination to return to the old normal popped up again. The challenge remains to transfer the experiences during the pandemic into structural improvements for the future and to enhance the resilience of education and schools.

*Leadership*

Some complained that it was teachers who had to cope with the circumstances first, and that leadership was lacking at first. Others felt support and leadership in the crisis. There is a consensus that leadership is necessary, yet at the same time there must be room for improvisation and decision-making among teachers. Leadership is needed for immediate support and backing, and long-term perspectives solutions. Teachers in this context can do what is needed to solve the ad hoc problems they are confronted with.

## IV. Three waves

From the consecutive documents we gathered and studied, we derived an overview of the Covid situation and its impact. The picture shows a lot of variations. Patterns that could be derived didn’t always show the same speed, or the same details, but the overall pattern still surfaced as a common way in which the pandemic was perceived and how countries responded accordingly. In the sections below we describe the developments as a set of consecutive waves of problem perceptions, and responses.

### 1. Technology

Wave one included the technological response to what was perceived as basically a technological challenge. When the pandemic proved to be so serious, that lock downs had to be proclaimed, schools were facing situations in which they instantly had to adapt by turning their teaching into online teaching and learning. At first this demanded a lot of improvisation. Teachers and school leaders were searching for the right tools and platforms to guarantee continuity of education. They were facing problems. Not all students had access to computers, laptops, tablets, mobiles, and cameras. The same applied to schools, also school were short of such devices and settings such as recording studios. Infrastructure, Networks, Wifi-Capacity, were among the first obstacles to be overcome. Once these problems were tackled, a next set of problems, or challenges arose what platforms to choose (Zoom, Webex, Teams, Mahara, Moodle,.), whom to involve as experts and with what specific expertise. Many schools all over Europe managed to find solutions by an enormous investment of time and energy and what’s more a lot of improvisation. When the technology had been put into place and been made accessible, some things appeared not to be solved still.

### 2. The second wave: Methods, and Didactics

Things are not as consecutive as they may seem in this document. Of course, the waves, like real waves, overlap, accumulate, or interfere, but the overall pattern still was visible and implied that after the technological issues were sufficiently tackled, new challenges to be coped with arose. Among these challenges were issue like how may the quality of the online offer be optimized? Teachers were searching for ways to manage the online learning environment in such a way that it would engage students. Monitoring progress in the learning processes of students as well as how to assess their performances in a valid, and reliable ways, and what’s more not prone to fraud, were examples of methodological and didactical issues teachers and schools came across. Apart from the assessment of learning outcomes at the end of learning processes, similar issues were seen at the start of these processes in identifying learning needs or diagnosing deficiencies and choosing proper ways to overcome them.

### 3. The third wave: Social-emotional Well-being

The third wave was again at an other wavelength. This time the concern was that online teaching and learning affected the social and emotional well-being of students in a way teachers might have underestimated in the beginning or have not had the time for since other challenges dominated the scene. the A social emotional wave, to cope with the social emotional well-being impact of online, and/or blended education. Throughout the lockdown periods during the COVID pandemic it became clear that significant groups of students, felt isolated and lonely. Teachers increasingly were concerned about this and tried to find ways to improve the social emotional aspects of teaching and creating a sense of a school, and class community. Related issues that teachers came across were how establish a sense of respect in web communication (behaviour), and how to prevent stress and health problems related to intensive computer-based work, often in suboptimal circumstances. Motivational problems led teachers to invest more energy into how to promote and maintain a sense of purpose among students.

So, basically the Covid pandemic led schools to respond in three ways throughout time, beginning with solving al the technical issues related to online teaching and learning, flowed by attempts to optimize the new approaches as for the didactical/methodological quality and eventually by trying to see to it that student would still feel, or feel again motivated, and committed to learning, to each other and to the school community.

## V. Extending Learning Environments

Throughout the CIVID pandemic and its lock downs, it becomes clear that the learning environment changes. Learning is taking place at home, online and besides also others become actively involved in facilitating the learning processes. The students increasing attend classes online, study at home, and may connect to peers online as well while studying at home. Teachers therefore become more managers of online, or distant learning processes. The time for instructions was reduced and self-study promoted. In order to promote this home-based learning increasingly parents were involved and instructed to help them to stimulate their children in their home-based learning processes. Apart from parents also other players came into the learning community. First of all other relatives (for instance grandparents), but also libraries, and media who contributed by providing learning resources, such as books, video’s, data bases, quizzes, and other learning materials. In some instances also schools exchange materials to collaboratively enrich their offers.

## VI. Rapide-Priorities

Based on the outcomes of our research and the analysis of the collected sources we further sharpened the project priorities. Parallel to the identified waves we determined issues to focus in the RAPIDE projects.

The first wave inspired us to focus on support to teachers in preparing and providing online, or otherwise ICT based, or blended quality teaching and learning in schools.

Furthermore, related to the second wave, we decided to focus on providing teachers with tools and strategies to support them in processes of mutual coaching, and professional learning and development.

And thirdly, derived from the third wave we decided to work on offering resources to help schools engage all partners involved in the educative process, including home learning, and, or actors in other relevant educative settings.

## VII. Implications

Apart from the priorities for further development of the project, the study also led to the identification of several implications for teachers, for teacher-trainers, for other educators and for policy makers.

### 7.1 Implications for Teachers

 For teachers the COVID crisis revealed the necessity of finding a balance between the issues as they came with the three waves sketched above. That is in times of crisis it is important to be aware that crises affect the three distinguished areas, and therefore require a balance between technological, didactical and social-emotional aspects of teaching and learning. In future it is important to realise things may seem to come in waves consecutively, these aspects parallel each other and always come together and each demand attention, whenever possible.

When teaching is moving towards online teaching it is important not only to meet challenges ad hoc, but also to anticipate the next moves, so to store developed course ware, resources and tools in order to be able to re-use them again for next classes in next periods, in next school years.

The crisis taught us that special attention needs to be paid to reaching the most vulnerable pupils and students. Furthermore it revealed that online work requires codes of conduct on how to communicate and interact online. This often is referred to as web etiquette to avoid misunderstandings, bullying, and other things that jeopardise adequate communication and learning.

### 7.2 Implications for (initial) Professional Development

Problems in times of crisis are complex and per definition multidisciplinary. Single teachers often do not have the broad range of expertise and competences to solve problems in every respect. However, together they cover the required range of competences needed. That is why it appeared to be important, to first analyse problems and related teachers’ tasks, Then divide and allocate tasks, promote working together, learning together and work on what is needed to facilitate these co-operative /collaborative endeavours and learning processes. Actually the collective efforts to work on the solutions of problems people are confronted with together, has a learning effect as such anyhow. Hen organised in a systematic way this learning may turn into building knowledge together and may turn schools in to knowledge productive learning schools. Quality, intellectual and professional growth as well as grown resilience may be the outcome.

### 7.3 Implications for the Involvement of other Educators

Teachers and school leaders will seek to involve parents and try to connect to other educative services (broadcasting companies, sports clubs, social work, educative courseware developers). At the same time these other players in the educative field will wish to do the same thing from their perspective. They wish to connect to teachers to ask them how they can be supportive to their own children, or how they may have a contribution in other ways (from their professional background, or their availability for supportive actions). Some teachers even start to train parents to optimize their role in the collective efforts to deal with the circumstances. Teachers will have to consider ways to support/direct these partners to guarantee educative quality. Teachers must be aware that they professionally are supposed to direct and manage the educative process, involving others respecting the teachers’ professional responsibility.

### 7.4 Implications for Policy makers

Policy makers must be aware that situation like the COVID-Crisis require a policy to guarantee a sufficient availability, and accessibility of ICT equipment and infrastructure.

Furthermore, they must analyse the legal regulation and explore the conditions these laws provide for solutions. If this space is not sufficient they must connect to relevant political channels to initiate discussions of how to adapt legislation to make necessary things possible. Legislation on absenteeism may need to be revalidated. Involvement of unqualified adult in teaching may have to be re-considered, to name a few examples. Under the circumstance it may be necessary to raise Funding from other sources than from the authorities only. The changing circumstances may require Investments in teachers’ competences development. It is important to be aware of issues of privacy, copyright, data protection, now that so much teaching and learning takes place online. In order to cope with the crisis it may be necessary r helpful to involve other such as broadcasting companies, industry, churches, software developers to help schools to maintain the level of services they provide in regular circumstances. Issues on monitoring and assessment (fairness and fraud) need reconsideration. Most important it seems to be to avoid returning to the old situation. Never fail to benefit form a crisis some people say.

## VIII. Food for thought

Looking back at the years of COVID, it appeared hard to reach the vulnerable. It took a long tom before it became clear or was acknowledged that too little attention was paid to mental well-being of pupils and students.

European wide it showed that countries differ in the extent to which they seek to solve things centrally, or de-centrally, both seem to have advantages and disadvantages, so it seems wise to find a balance there.

Different positions and roles arose in schools (ICT, communication, courseware development, online counselling, etc.). In stead of assuming teachers all can include all of this in their tasks, it is recommended to systematically identify tasks and competences needed and allocate these tasks to those who do have the required competences and see to it that teams of teachers together have team profiles allowing them to cope with the sum of the tasks together.

It is obvious that crises may return, or new ones may pop up, so it is recommended to try to upgrade the level of preparation for such crises. Simulations /exercises may be helpful to prepare for the unexpected (power failure, internet down, school shooting, food poisoning, floods, school administration hacked etc.)

From the documents-analysis it has become clear that too little was done to make schools and teachers and other educators learn together and from each other. It is strongly recommended to approach this challenge systematically. Moreover, schools may work on their resilience and level of professionalism by strengthening the sector by involving a wider variety of competences and expertise form neighbouring disciplines and sectors.

Now that the crisis to some extent seems to be under control or at least less alarming, we see the inclination to drop back into the pre Covid practices. This indeed is a risk. The world is full of things to be prepared for. Preparing for the specific risks is too demanding and expensive, that is why the challenge is to optimally prepare for the unexpected in order to develop strategies and competences to allow for adequate performance under circumstances not yet known.

Now that the crisis semes to be less alarming and to some extent overcome, it becomes clear that to the three waves sketched in this document, a fourth may be added. Increasingly it becomes clear that the crisis has been heavily demanding for teachers. Their availability online was expected to be almost permanent; they were facing many individual issues they would normally have coped with in classes. They worked for months/year at a level of intensity beyond their workload capacity. Some left the profession. More workload was its consequence, lateral influx was stimulated but that required additional mentoring and training, workload increased again. After the technological, the didactical and the social-emotional wave, a fourth wave became visible, a wave of the professional work (over)load.

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