



Journal Entry

I woke up on Wednesday morning, 18th March, with the best intentions in the world – to be Deputy Principal, Maths teacher, Primary school teacher, Montessori teacher and a mother – all at the same time. I thought I had it all figured out and that I was well prepared. It became overwhelming very quickly and I imagine this was a feeling felt in most homes up and down the length and breadth of the country.

Our school had spent a week preparing for the event of a possible school closure. We ensured that students were able to access their Microsoft 365 accounts; passwords were reset; teachers upskilled through workshops delivered at lunchtimes by the Digital Strategy Team; a Staying Connected document was distributed to each student so that they could gather their teachers' email addresses in a central place and document the work that they should be completing at home in the event of a school closure; Registration each morning focused solely on all of the above for the full week. So, when An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar announced the closure of all schools, we felt as prepared as we could be in a short period of time.

We encouraged our students to follow their timetable each day but as both teachers and students grappled with distance learning it was successful for some and overwhelming for others yet determination and resilience prevailed. Teachers are supporting each other in creating shared lessons and video demonstrations in using features of Microsoft 365 for teaching and learning. Others are leading the way with online classes and video conferencing. There are so many resources and websites out there and many would advise – 'do not reinvent the wheel' and yet it takes time to explore these websites. Keep it simple.

Remember, some students do not have access to the internet and so it is important that these students remain connected in a different way. When assigning work to students, keep it manageable for both them and you and easy to follow in particular for junior classes. Collaborate with colleagues and share lessons. Take time out of your day for exercise. Why not try a Drop Everything and Exercise or Dance or Sing or Read with your school!

My experience of the first three to four days has highlighted that, above all, the health and wellbeing of our students, their families, ourselves and our families are most important at such a challenging time. It is important to remember that students and families are struggling, they may have been struggling long before this and those struggles or complex issues do not disappear during this crisis. Indeed, they most likely will be heightened. It is important to connect with these students and families. Some of our students and families have lost parents and grandparents during this time. We are deeply saddened for them and we are limited in the support we can provide them at this time, but we support them through prayer and remembrance.

I begin Week 2 with renewed energy and more realistic goals for myself, my students and my family and I am thankful that the weather is good!

Stay safe and keep well.

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