

UNLOCKED POTENTIAL DURING LOCKDOWN

Dr. Deborah Chadwick



LTI

- What have I been doing on Wednesday.
- What I intend to do next term.
- Why out learning is important.



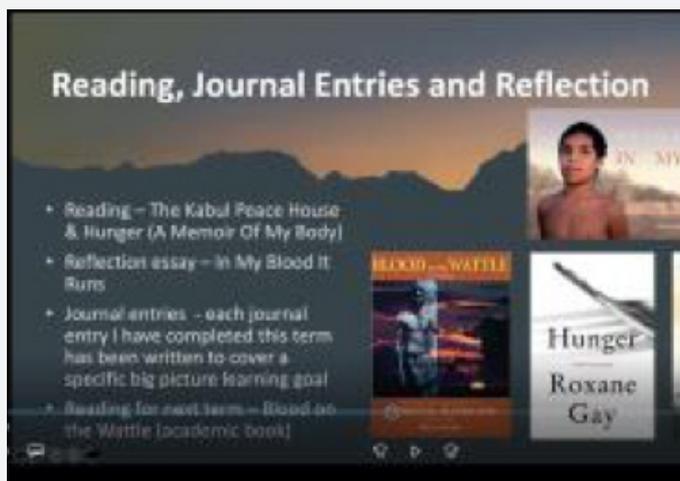
Preface

The current world dynamic surrounding COVID-19 has resulted in unprecedented changes to our lives. With our schools under lockdown, we were presented with a unique opportunity to examine Learning From Home arrangements for students. We felt that Big Picture students were well placed to adjust to the changes and transition to the “new normal”. To investigate this, students, advisors and parents were consulted via surveys to determine the impact on student learning outcomes and well-being during this time. This report suggests the Big Picture Design for Learning and the dedication and support provided by advisors for our students were instrumental in the success of students adapting to the situation. It has been wonderful connecting with the Big Picture Community and examining their assessment of Learning From Home.

Dr Deborah Chadwick (June 2020)

The current situation has provided a unique climate to investigate the ability of Big Picture learning design, and Big Picture students, to adapt to change when required. The aim of this project was to determine the impact of physical distancing and social isolation associated with school closure during the COVID-19 pandemic. 218 students (156 from NSW) from 14 schools nationally responded to our recent 'Learning From Home' survey. 38 Advisory teachers from across Australia responded to our 'Making A Difference' survey. Both of these have provided incredible insights into the transition required during COVID-19 physical distancing measures for Big Picture students across Australia. The survey investigated:

1. The learning design, including learning outcomes and student engagement,
2. Feeling connected and the relationship between students, advisors, parents and the broader Big Picture community, and
3. Student and advisor well-being.



An interesting and important distinction needs to be made between the terms “**Online Learning**” and “**Learning From Home**”. These terms have been used interchangeably in the media etc., while they are in fact different approaches. There is a sense that many students have actually been engaged in online learning which involves minimal face-to-face interaction, often relies on poor online instructions, uses learning platforms (such as Google Classroom, Microsoft 365 and Canvas), and requires self-discipline and self-direction from students. The challenge in this situation is maintaining connectedness with the students and as a result, the learning experience of these students may be affected. Conversely, the Big Picture learning design has been able to be transformed into a true “Learning From Home” experience. It is not limited to technology, learning platforms or online tasks but rather involves a continuation of working on tasks as students would in their advisory. This could be anything from personal projects, reading books, doing an artwork or using your hands to build a shed. Learning outcomes, student engagement and well-being seem to have been sustained throughout the pandemic.

STUDENT SURVEY

Students were surveyed regarding their learning outcomes, engagement and well-being. It is worth noting that over 90% of students had reliable access to the internet and digital platforms required for participation in Learning From Home. However, this may have been a restrictive factor to respond to in the survey and therefore indicative of the experience of only those students who participated in the survey, which may differ greatly from the experiences of students without suitable technology to learn from home effectively.

The results indicate that students enrolled in Big Picture generally made the transition to Learning From Home effectively. This appears to be largely due to:

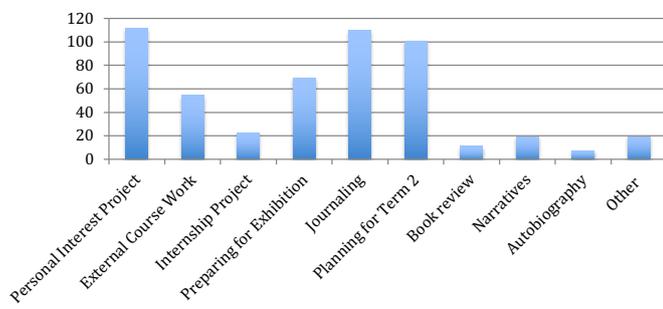
- **The nature of work students are engaged in**, with over 90% of students progressing with their personal working plan from home (98% of students in NSW).

"I think that I have an advantage being a part of Big Picture because I enjoy what I'm doing and what I'm learning so I can get through this setback quite easily"

"BP work is really all I have progressed with unless I had an assessment task due for other subjects".

- **Very few modifications to student learning are required.** The Design provides students with a level of consistency that truly allows them to smoothly transition to learn from home productively. Learning expectations are clear and have realistic timeframes, allowing students to continue with tasks as they would in their advisory. 80% of students had a daily plan of tasks to complete, including tasks as indicated in Figure 1. Over 60% of students completed their exhibitions in Term 1 (over 80% of students in NSW).

Figure 1: What work are you doing this week?



"The self-directed BP learning style is very compatible with home learning as it doesn't require constant input from teachers"

"It's all really the same, you are your own project manager at school. And at home you're still your own project manager".

- **Big Picture students are not restricted by a prescribed curriculum.** The lockdown presented unique learning opportunities which students have been encouraged to explore. Initiatives such as the "Give It A Go" project created by Big Picture Education Australia is one example of the framework provided for creative learning experiences.

"I can look at things a different way",

"Staying at home is a great chance to learn new things and set goals, that I felt like I've never fully been able to do before",

"Learning stuff from Nana and Pop",

"I love being able to explore the farm and be connected with my family a lot more"

"I am surprised by how much fun I can have with my younger siblings".

- **The sense of connection students feel with their advisory.** 90% of students responded that they still felt connected to their advisory with 95% of students participating in daily check-ins if available (99% of students in NSW).

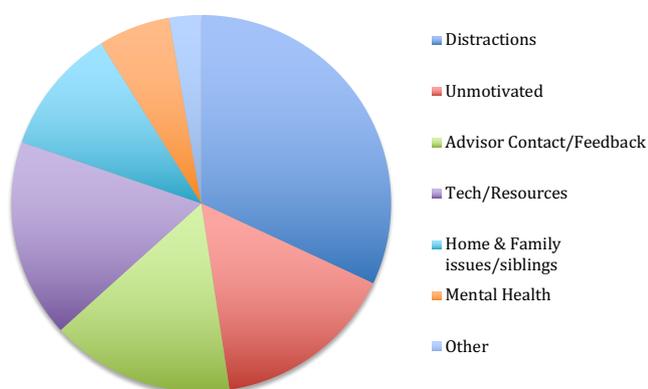
"It's easier because my advisor is there to help me when I need a hand".

- **The ongoing personalised relationship from their advisor**, with 75% of students still having weekly one-on-one contact with their advisor.

"I feel the exact same as I would at school because I'm doing the same work and I can still keep in good contact with my advisor".

- **Big Picture students are organised and prepared.** It has been widely reported that student success at this time has been dependent on their organisation and ability to learn independently. 70% of Big Picture students continued to feel engaged with their projects while Learning From Home. Big Picture students have insight into the design and this prepares them well for the maintenance of successful learning during such changes. Half of all students reported their learning was completely unaffected by the closure of schools and only 25% of students reported doing less work at home than they would do in their advisory.

Figure 2: Challenges Faced



"A bit overloaded, but lots of support once I got organised - it helped",

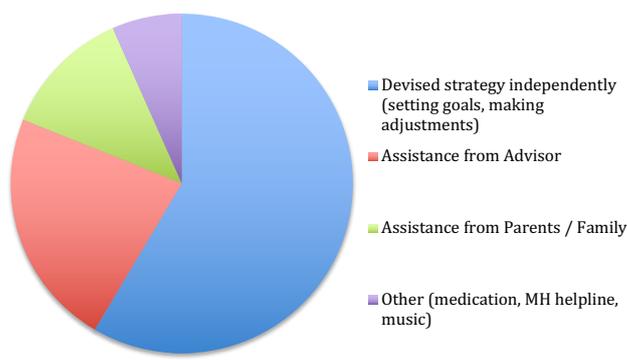
"I don't mind working from home as I can run my own schedule and timetable" and

"I surprised myself and feel as though my time management is good".

- **The ability of Big Picture students to deal with challenges.** It seems reasonable that the current scenario is not without challenges (for 63% of students) and 43% of students surveyed consider that school closure has affected their learning. Challenges include distractions associated with focussing on work when Learning From Home, including other siblings, chores and technology, problems with technology, and maintaining motivation to complete work. Importantly, 90% of students reported they had effectively dealt with the challenges they faced, with over half of them able to devise a coping strategy independently. This demonstrates evidence of resilience and persistence in Big Picture students that contributes to their ability to transition to Learning From Home successfully.

Students also relied on assistance from their advisor to deal with challenges, a consequence of the strong relationship between advisors and their students and the dedication of advisors to the ongoing learning and support of their students. Figure 3 illustrates the strategies students used to deal with challenges overall.

Figure 3: How did you deal with these challenges?



- **Students recognise the need to maintain balance for their physical and mental health.** Understandably, approximately half of the students felt school closure had affected their mood. However, more students felt anxiety related to life in general, rather than their schoolwork.

"I like that I can keep my fitness up as I am now getting over 10,000 steps a day and when I was at school would be under 5,000" and

"Learning from home is working to my advantage being a Big Picture student, I still have leisure times as well as work times".

- **Students have strategies to seek support** regarding their learning and well-being. 79% of students reported they had support networks available with over half of students seeking support from their advisor. Details of who students seek support from overall are shown in Figure 4.
- **Personal qualities of Big Picture students** enable them to successfully adjust to Learning From Home. These include:

Gratitude: *"Everyday I'm just wanting and wishing that I can go into the gym. It is something I took for granted and I realise all the positive affects it has on your mental state, so when this virus has been dealt with, I'll be back to what I love",*

Self appraisal: *"I have to motivate myself way more than usual which will translate into my 'Big Picture' learning",*

Self-regulation: *"You have to be disciplined to do things yourself with no guidance",*

Empathy: *"I think the changes are necessary for everyone's safety",*

Resilience: *"Right now I'm feeling good with how I'm going",*

Positive self-concept: *"I am very proud of my exhibition", and*

Humour: *"I have toilet paper", "I have got access to this glorious fridge" and "You can do work in your pyjamas".*

Student areas of concern

1. There was concern surrounding the cessation or interruption of LTI's (Learning Through Internships) and outlearning aspects of the design. For some students, these represent essential components of their learning experience and significant proportion time, and were unable to continue during COVID-19.

"It is hard during a time like this to do internship related things and I know others are struggling as they can't currently meet and accomplish some requirements for their cert/qualifications".

2. Additional concerns may arise for students in their final year (77 students in NSW). The uncertainty surrounding how the year will unfold as well as disappointment surrounding what they had anticipated their final year to be compared to what is now the reality pertaining to COVID-19, confounds the situation for some.

I feel tired and worried about university admission",

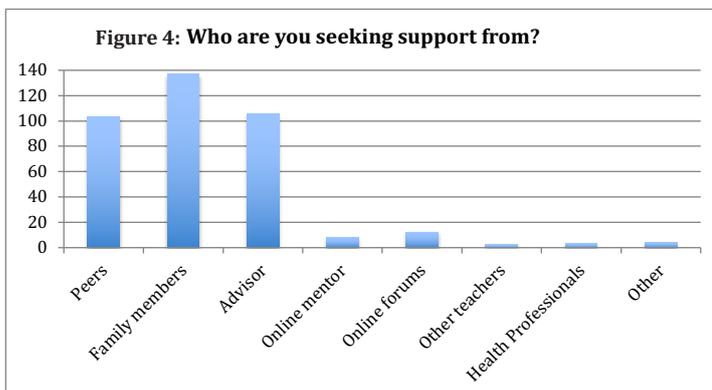
"I'm missing seeing my friends at school and it is my final year as well"

"I will miss my class when I graduate".

3. Each student's personal home situation may have an effect on his or her enjoyment of being at home for long periods of time. This in turn impacts how conducive to learning their home environment may be. The current circumstances have been challenging for some families experiencing financial hardship and mental health problems. Some students have been required to engage in additional paid or unpaid work (such as household chores or looking after siblings) to support parents, making it difficult to participate in Learning From Home.

Many Big Picture students assert that they feel advantaged to be part of Big Picture during this time. Big Picture students appear to be self directed adolescents; see themselves as autonomous individuals, with responsibilities, resources and purpose. This trait has been found to be strongly associated with physical, mental and social well-being . Furthermore, Big Picture students importantly, recognise the valuable contribution made by their advisors,

"Thanks for all the effort you put into making learning at home work for us".



Social engagement is a key component of adolescent development. Emerging personality traits of adolescents related to patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving rely on social connectedness. Students' personality may impact their capacity to adapt to Learning From Home and their enjoyment of the experience. While Learning From Home, students are generally missing their friends and face-to-face contact with the advisory. Some students, however, will enjoy the opportunity to work alone and find themselves more productive. Furthermore, for some more reserved students, the use of digital platforms such as Zoom provided valuable opportunities for them engage more freely with their peers. "Some of my friends who are quiet, are talking more on zoom" and "I really like Zoom it helps me be a bit social".

ADVISOR SURVEY

The advisor survey, Making A Difference, was designed to capture the qualities and dedication of Big Picture advisors. Results confirm the ability of The Big Picture Design to build and maintain relationships between students, parents, advisors and the Big Picture network. The graphs in Figure 5 indicate levels of contact for advisors during the lock down.

These relationships provide the basis of a supportive and connected community. Advisors adopted a number of strategies to sustain the sense of community, including technology and digital platforms, group check-ins, phone calls and emails, peer-to-peer contact, fun activities and social media. Of significant importance was the increased communication with families to create a collaborative learning environment for each student. “Trying to adapt to a new learning environment means making more connections with students and their families” as “many of our families use us as a sounding board and safe place. I wanted to make sure everyone knew how to contact the school and other support agencies”.

In order for advisors to effectively manage and support their students while Learning From Home, it is important for them to address their personal well-being. Advisors “need to be positive for students and for our own well being. No choice but online which has limitations but helps us stay connected with our students. Our work in BP allows for this kind of learning. As long as we create something new for them to do each week, I think they will stay inspired and on task”. 82% of advisors felt what they were doing was important and worthwhile, which contributes to their mood during the lock down. Figure 6 represents the responses of advisors indicating a mostly favourable reaction to transitioning to Learning From Home.

The sentiments identified demonstrate a willingness of advisors to adapt to the situation, whilst simultaneously supporting others (students and colleagues) to adapt effectively. Feedback from advisors suggests a lot of time, energy and creativity are required to ensure connection and engagement is maintained.

Figure 5: Advisor contact levels

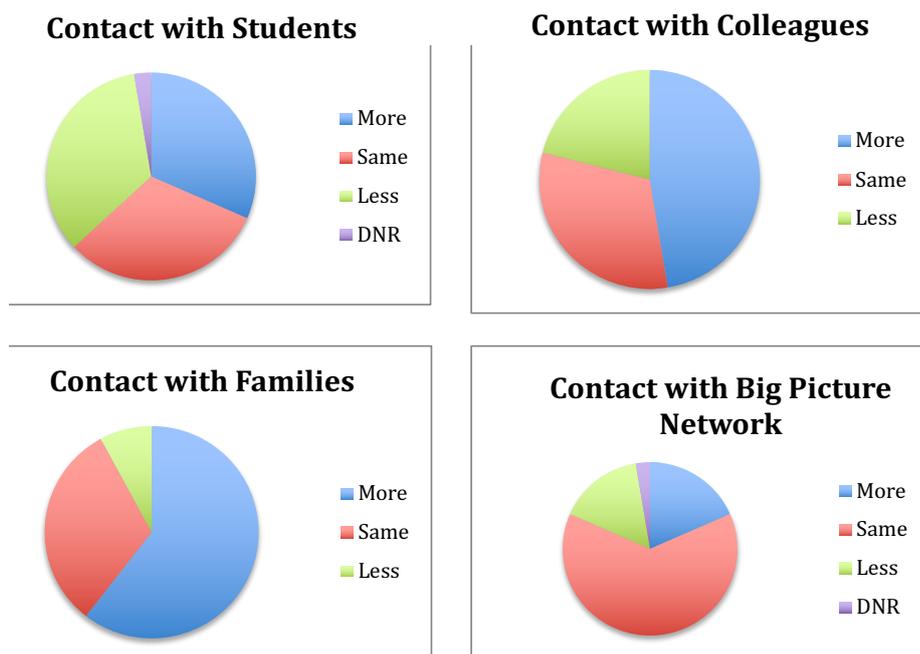
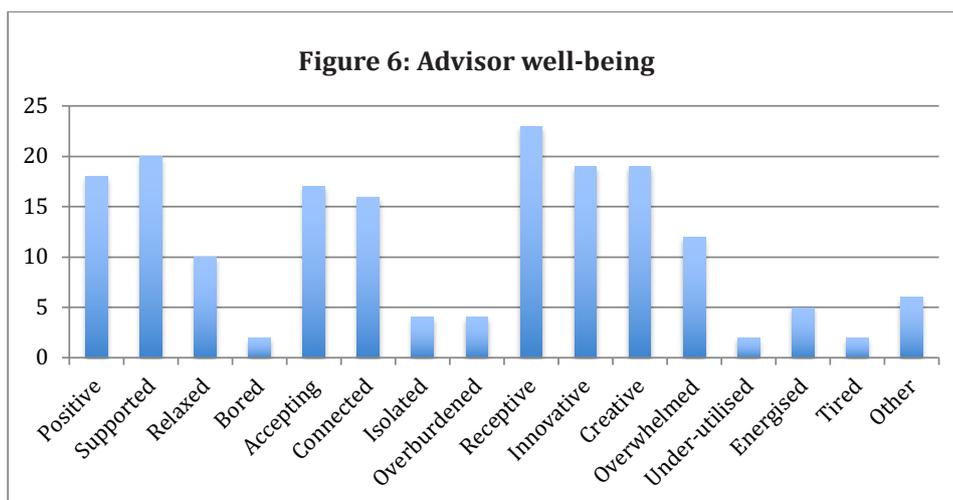


Figure 6: Advisor well-being



The success of the transition was attributed to the following:

- **The Big Picture design for learning.**

"I love the advisory / Big Picture design. I use cross-curricular priorities in all my classes but having the ability to work with the same students too has highlighted the fact that I can actually teach everything they need";

"I think that our system of developing termly learning plans and using CANVAS to upload assignments made the transition to online learning smooth. I'm proud that we have been able to continue learning";

"Big Picture adapted well as a whole to supporting students, remaining connected and ensuring continuity of learning. Our students love being in their advisory groups, and maintaining this was essential to us moving forward".

"Big Picture Education has put us in the best possible space to make it (Learning From Home) work. BP gave us the culture, processes and tools that helped us to be confident we had what we needed to be successful (during the transition)".

"It's given me even more of a chance to show my creativity, foster the students' interests, connect with them and create a lasting bond (advisory teacher / students and families)".

- **Understanding what works best for each student to learn.**

"I know my students and how they learn best, so that has helped in these conditions";

"I've been working in an innovative way to meet the needs of all my students";

The aspects of Big Picture design for learning that made the transition to Learning From Home manageable are shown in Figure 7.

The learning tasks that advisors considered were transferable to Learning From Home without difficulty are shown in Figure 8.

- **Established connections with students.**

"If anything, I think we are in a better position as advisors than mainstream class teachers who may be trying to respond to students from several classes and develop connections with students who they may not have in the past. As advisors we are super connected already";

Figure 7: Manageability of transition to Learning From Home

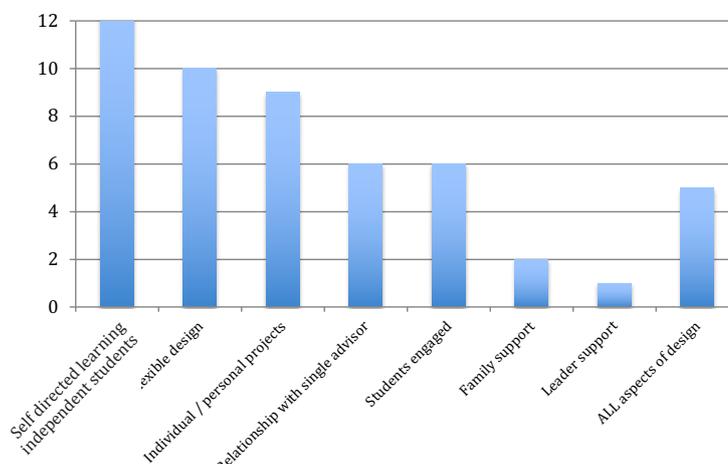
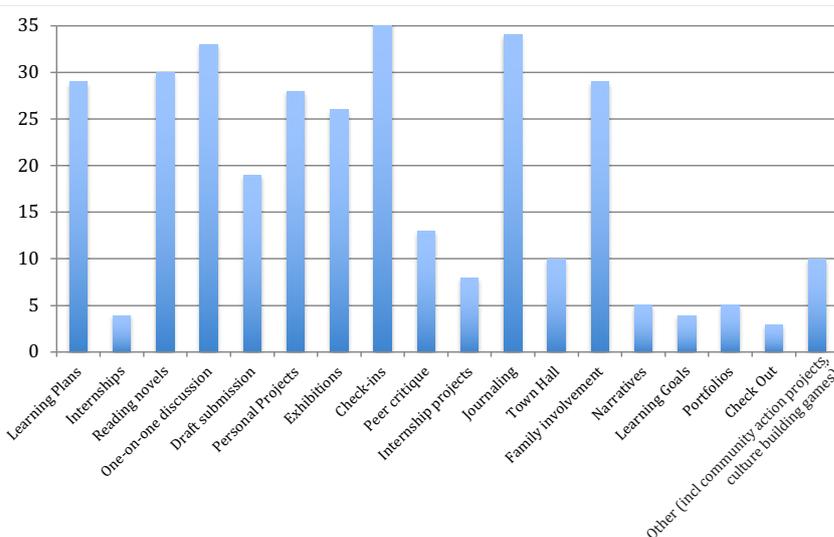


Figure 8: Transferability of learning tasks to Learning From Home



"I feel that overall the two weeks of full advisory has been a very strong model of learning for my class. I feel the relationship is getting stronger and there has been a much better chance to create interest-based learning opportunities and for my students to have a go at directing their own learning, tweak their learning plan and to fulfil the essentials of advisory class work".

• **Great leadership and support from colleagues.**

"I am surrounded by an amazing team who have been empowered by great leaders throughout our BP journey. That journey has ensured that we understand the BPE design intimately and so can see the opportunities that this kind of situation affords us. We stay connected as a team and the sense is that everyone has each other's backs here. The BP distinguisher of 'Teachers and Leaders are Learners too' is being lived out pretty publicly and we have embraced that and learnt a little more in order to keep growing. We also use humour a lot - to debrief, to lighten the mood and to hold onto the fact that none of us are alone in this!";

"Ensuring students are getting the same level of life-long learning means looking at innovative and creative ways to apply this learning. It has been a challenge to try to adapt to changes. To help with this, collaborating closely with my team, we are creating structures and methods to help all of us".

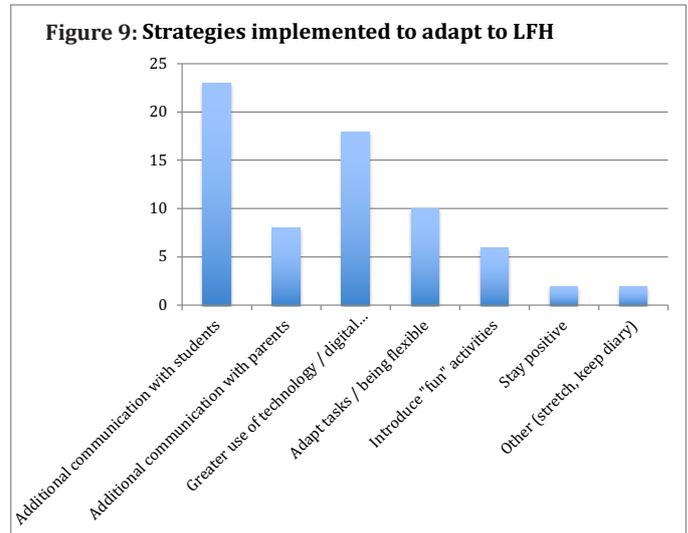
• **Dedication of advisors**

"I feel very excited about the way we have been able to innovate. I haven't felt the major effects of online learning as much as some other teachers have in terms of engagement as Big Picture students have the ability to self-direct, set a task for the day and get to it. However, it has been draining trying to check in with each student individually and as a whole advisory constantly online. It is also difficult to keep track of work. As a BP advisor, I am naturally inclined to accept new ideas and different ways of motivating and engaging students in their learning";

"Opportunistic, suitably challenged and well equipped to deal. Inspired by the young people's agility in dealing with the quick change";

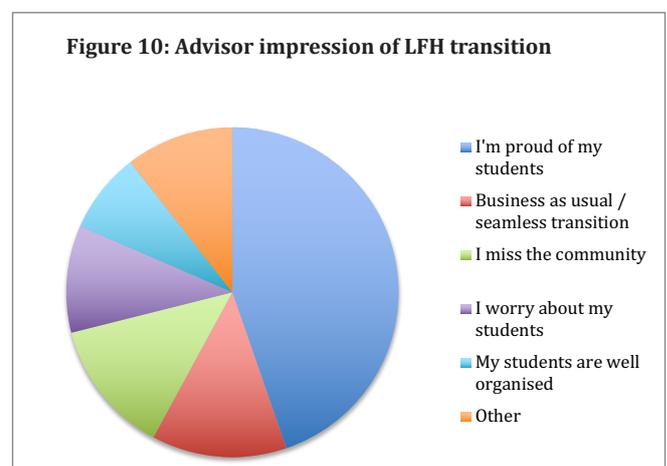
Maintaining connections with students and families and adjusting to changes obviously presented challenges for advisors. Using technology and the associated upskilling to incorporate digital platforms involved many hours in front of a screen with students in Learning From Home. Additional challenges arose from some advisors having

students at home and at school resulting in dual modality learning strategies, and the necessity to address the needs of both groups concurrently and effectively. Strategies implemented by advisors to adapt to the challenges posed by the lockdown are shown in Figure 9.



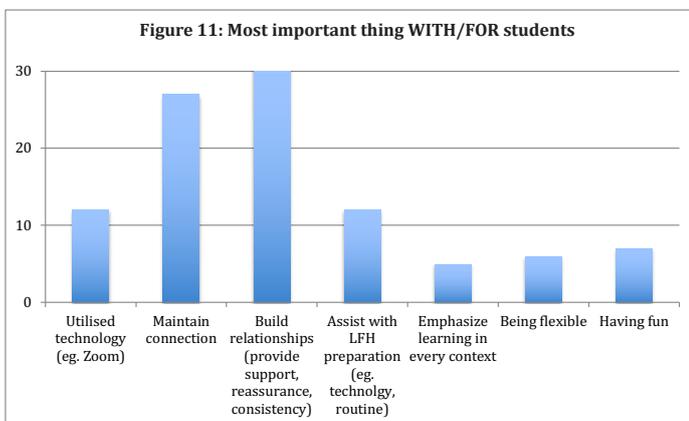
Important to note are the specific concerns related to:

- Students being unable to participate in internships and outlearning commitments,
- Balancing academic engagement for students experiencing challenging home situations, and
- Engaging students new to Big Picture who “were just forming a positive habit and relationship this term with staff and their peers” and ensuring “they would not slip into old habits”. What is most evident in responses from advisors is the authentic and genuine commitment they have to their students. When asked to choose one phrase to describe working with their advisory during the lockdown, almost half of all advisors stated they were proud of their students. A breakdown of all responses is shown in Figure 10.



The strong, established relationship between advisors and their students obviously has a significant impact on the well-being of students. Advisors reported in most instances that students were faring well during the lockdown, adapting to the situation (20), appearing content (11), engaged (11) and energised (5), and demonstrating resilience (11) and gratitude (3). Less than 20% of students appeared disconnected (6) or anxious (5).

As shown in Figure 11, the building and maintenance of these relationships was considered the most important factor while Learning From Home. Providing support, reassurance and consistency for students in order to maintain connections while utilising technology, was shown to be valuable and essential to ensuring students' well-being.



The insight of advisors into the important aspects of the Big Picture design for learning and the impact of their practice is clearly invaluable. They demonstrate dedication to the ongoing provision of learning and support for students.

"I just want my students to come out the other side proud of themselves and the way they rose to meet this challenge" and "I'm glad that I've been able to help my students through this time".

PARENT SURVEY

Parent responses to the transition for their child enrolled in Big Picture was overwhelmingly positive. Most expressed gratitude for the care, interest and effort of their advisors. It seems that students adapted easily to Learning From Home due to two main factors:

1. **The flexibility and adaptability of the Big Picture design for learning** made the transition to Learning From Home easy. Students' focus on areas of personal interest makes tasks more engaging and students are more motivated to complete. Students prioritised learning goals with the provision of tasks online, clear and frequent communication and structure.
2. **The relationship of each student and their family with their advisor** provides ongoing support and maintenance of contact with each student. The lines of communication were already established, and parents trust advisors to ensure ongoing learning for their child. Even "as a new Big Picture student, (my child) has shown an already strong connection to advisory" and "my child (was) excited to Zoom to connect and be part of the learning community".

Parents conveyed pride in their child's initiative, focus, willingness to learn and progress, and confidence while working independently. They have been impressed by their child's commitment to maintaining exercise for physical and mental well-being and "their concern about the well-being of friends and the broader community".



A number of Big Picture parents also have unique insight into how children in Big Picture have managed compared to children in other educational settings. Although all children are subject to some obstacles during the transition to Learning From Home, such as distractions, using new digital platforms and issues at home, parents have been surprised by the "level of support from Big Picture". Parents reported their child in Big Picture was "at an advantage" and adjusted easily because "they are more enthusiastic" and their "learning is always self-motivated". The "support and effort to contact students in Big Picture was superior", with other "students experiencing less work, no follow up and no communication regarding learning or well-being".

STUDENT WORK

Below are a number of work samples submitted while Learning From Home.



Abstract painting depicting Marilyn Monroe and her struggle with a suspected borderline personality disorder. Texture through layering, colours and the eye to represent the complex personality and torment the actress faced in her personal life. Amazing detail in the eye reflecting painting techniques Ella's has been learning with advise from her mentor at her LTI (Make Space).

Student, Cooks Hill



Surfboard Rack.

Student, Hunter Sports High School

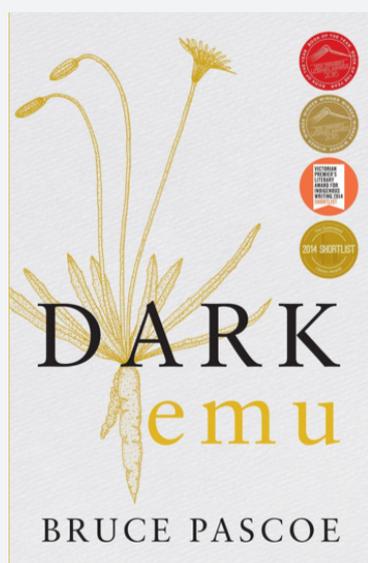
LTI

- What have I been doing on Wednesday.
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- Why out learning is important.

For Wednesday this term I was helping around the pizza shop. Next term I plan to research different businesses and contact professionals. Out learning is important for me because I need to learn real life lessons and learn from any mistakes I make.

Narrative Extract

Student, Tomaree



Dark Emu (2014)—Bruce Pascoe

Reading Response extract

Bruce Pascoe's *Dark Emu* is written with an eloquent but fierce conviction. Pascoe seeks to transform Australia's perception of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a primitive society of hunter-gatherers to an evolved society with ingenious structures and practice, and highlights the way agriculture, housing, hunting, language, law and other essential parts of Indigenous life developed over thousands of years before Australia was claimed by British colonies. Pascoe creates a realistic and captivating perspective of Aboriginal culture and argues against the hunter-gatherer label imposed on pre-colonial Indigenous Australians. He supplies evidence from a wide variety of sources and introduces incredible facts that assert the use of domesticated plants, harvesting, irrigating, sowing and storing from Indigenous people all across Australia. The hunter gatherer label is inconsistent and demeaning, and Bruce Pascoe's *Dark Emu* gives us insight as to why.

Student, Cooks Hill

LIMITATIONS

The main limitation associated with this survey was the disruption incurred as a result of variations in school closures and term dates across Australia. Survey responses were received at various stages of the lockdown and this may have influenced the responses of students according to the length of time they had been Learning From Home.

A follow-up survey is being conducted as students now return to school. This feedback will provide insight into the impact of Learning From Home on students learning outcomes and well-being, and the "new normal".



ONE STUDENT AT A TIME IN
A COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS

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