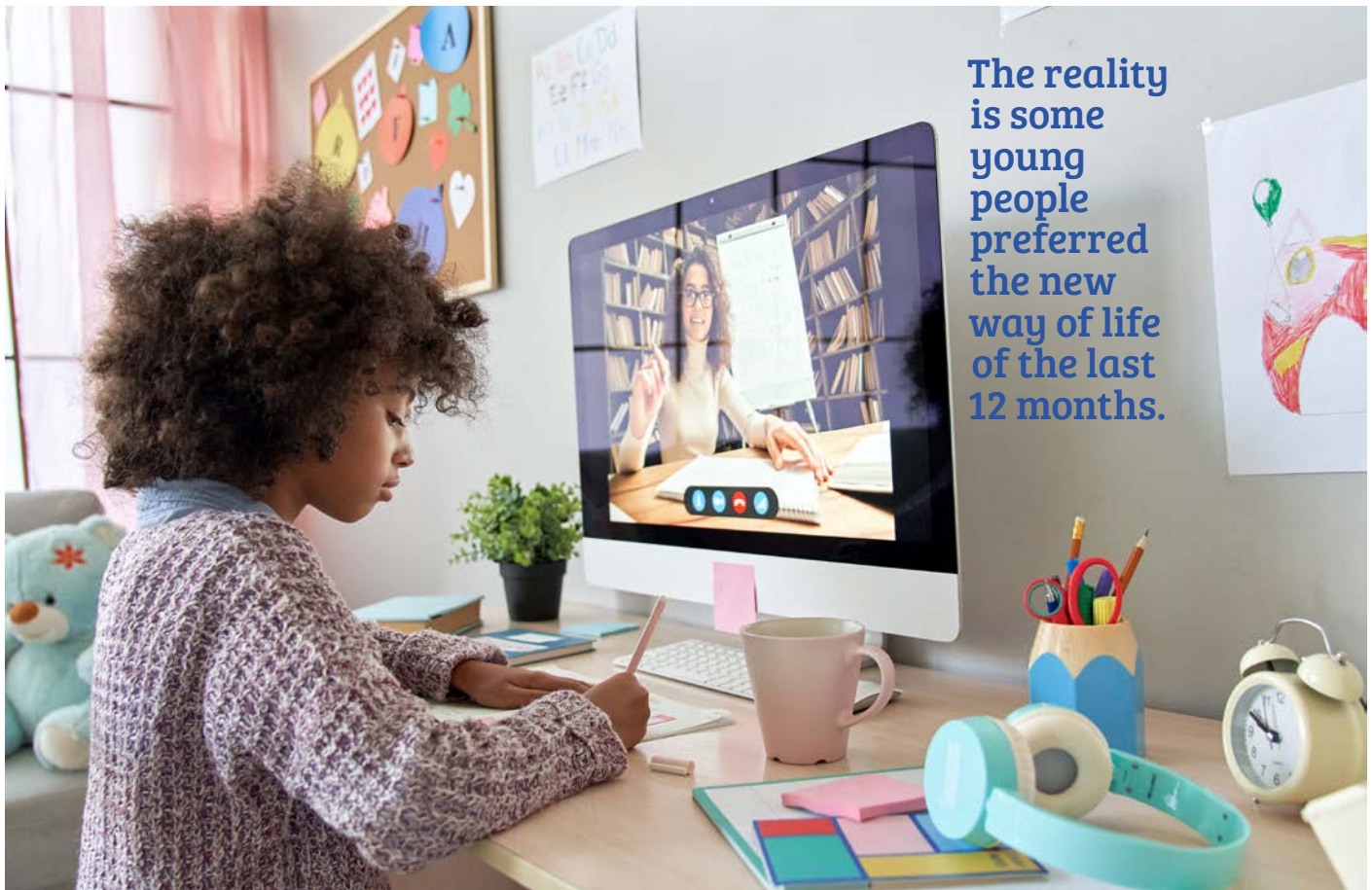


# The Effects of Lockdown on Education



By Gemma Bailey



If you turn on any talk radio station in the morning you hear all sorts of intelligent people raising their concerns about the academic impact that missed schooling has had on children. Yet some children and young people may have flourished in this year of absence from the classroom.

It would be easy for me to say that lockdown has had an overall negative impact on children because the majority of parents I'm speaking to are reporting this. Currently, they are contacting me because they have a child who is struggling with the transition back to school. The reality is that some young people preferred the new way of life they have lived over the last 12 months.

Undoubtedly there has been a huge number of young people who did not properly engage in their schooling when it was delivered online. Kinaesthetic learners missed out on science labs, art materials and PE. This had a really big impact on them. I spoke to a parent recently whose son has lost all motivation. He was a swimmer, wanting to be Olympic games level good. He hasn't been swimming in a long time and now he feels lost. I wonder at what age we decide that what we do defines who we are?

Overall, working online has meant young people's exposure to technology has increased profoundly – something that, 13 months ago, we were all warning them about doing too much of!

Many parents went through a period of feeling like hypocrites because the week before lockdown began, they were telling their children they were spending too much time in front of the computer. Fast forward a few months and they're telling the young person to spend more time in front of the computer because they need to do their school work.

There is a percentage of young people who hated school. Those young people found lockdown to be a respite. It gave them space away from their social anxiety; time away from the bullies. In some cases this has allowed them to come back having wiped the slate clean and reinvented themselves as a new, confident person.

Others who were anxious before are even more anxious now because school seems foreign to them. It's like day one of nursery school, aged three years old, all over again. Those who were never anxious before have become anxious because they're out of practice. They're not used to the volume of the corridors, the slamming of the lockers or the rowdiness of the playground. Having so many people around them makes them feel self-conscious and nervous. Going back to school and performing a lateral flow test two or three times a week further embeds the suggestion there is still that virus to worry about.

For other children, the disruption to their routine has caused mental health issues. Some relied on the structure of school to provide them with a grounding. It was where the rules were clear; it was where they had discipline. When that was taken away, they had to adjust to the discipline at home, or perhaps no discipline at all. Some became king of the castle and now they've got to listen to someone else's rules again after a year of living how they wanted. When parents were also busy working, it proactively highlighted the missing boundaries and, in some cases, disrupted the entire family.

### What should our children be learning?

Often, the quality of education children received whilst being at home relates directly to the level of persuasion and engagement from parents. I word it in this way because I distinctly remember having a conversation with a primary school teacher who could not homeschool her child. I'm not sure if she was more frustrated at him for not doing what she wanted him to do, or at herself for being a competent and qualified teacher who, in this particular environment, found herself unable to teach.

It would be easy to assume (although I'm sure there is something to be said of the generalisation) that disadvantaged children suffered the most during lockdown. Those from poorer families who did not have access to technology, or children with learning difficulties whose parents were not equipped to be able to help them, will undoubtedly have gaps in their learning.

I'm cautious of concluding that all children have suffered. I know of cases, too, where young people have learnt the value of having human contact and are glad to be returning to school to resume those normal human habits.

John H. Wherry wrote in *Parent-Institute* that the percentage of time children spend at home compared to the amount of time they spend at school (excluding the hours they are sleeping) is 86.64% of their overall awakened time. What this tells us is that school didn't have the advantage of the number of hours to influence them in the first place. I believe we constantly overstate the importance of schooling – or, at least, we misunderstand what school teaches.

Some children benefitted from having a better connection with their parents. Family members learnt to appreciate each other more. They enjoyed spending time together. They made friends with people they've lived with their entire lives. They became creative; started to listen more. They helped each other more and they bonded in a way that put their family first.

Some parents have reported to me that their children have benefitted from a reduction in what I call 'club loading'. I fully understand why parents are keen to give as many opportunities to their child as possible. They sometimes don't realise when they're exhausting them. "But they like having an activity seven days a week!" They might *like* these clubs – but we're the adults here, so maybe we should pull rank? I see bags under children's eyes that could have carried my grocery shopping (back in the days when I went to the



### Perhaps the greatest tragedy is that children have fallen behind on interpersonal skills.

shops). Not only are their children exhausted, but they're never spending time together as a family. They weren't learning how to be together because there was this quite conscious effort to always be distracted. Lockdown has given parents a chance to evaluate what's more important. Horse riding, swimming, football, Japanese lessons, art, piano – or maybe a couple of nights off when we all get to be together?

Children have fallen behind. They have fallen behind on the syllabus they should have spent the last year following – but perhaps the greatest tragedy is that they have fallen behind on interpersonal skills.

Professor David Perkins, of Harvard University, said in an interview with Shaw Nielsen for *Harvard.edu.news*: "We teach a lot that isn't going to matter," and he spoke of how schooling involves mastery of a large body of information.

In getting back to school, the goal should not be to cram this large body of missing information into our children's minds. Let's redevelop their social skills, their confidence levels, their ability to share, their ability to interact with other adults and children who live outside of the household they have been locked in for the last year. These are the skills that make good people. ■



**Gemma Bailey** is the creator and director of NLP4Kids, ([www.NLP4Kids.org](http://www.NLP4Kids.org)), a children's franchise that also provides training to those who want to help children with mental and emotional wellbeing via NLP skills. The organisation works with schools and charities in addition to each practitioner operating their own private practice. Gemma delivers NLP4Kids training and provides mentoring and CPD for the franchise team. She also creates podcasts, videos, books and other products for mental wellbeing.