Alice Leung

Date of Interview: 28 August

00:19

Hi.We are recording the video? Is that fine?

00:23

Yes, that's fine.

00:24

01:11

If you could introduce yourself, like your name, organization for how many years you have been working there, something like that.

01:18

So my name is Alice Leung. So my school is Concord High School, which is a public school in Sydney. In Australia. Yeah. And I'm also a representative of the New South Wales teachers, Federation for my school.

01:39

Okay, so for how many years? Have you been teaching? Since 2007? So that be about I think, 13 years?

01:59

So like, first our class, like, the schools in your location, like closed down during the pandemic? And if it did for how long? And what is the current status of school closure?

02:15

Yeah, so in New South Wales, which is the state where Sydney's in in Australia, in 2020, last years, schools did close. And I think it was about maybe for about two months, last year, and about March and April, in 2020. In 2021, we actually closed down now, so we're in the middle of a lockdown. We were told it was going to be four days initially. But is now How long has it been? There's been seven weeks now that schools in Sydney have closed. I'm in terms of our regional areas in New South Wales. So those outside of Metropolitan Sydney, they've been closed for about a week now a week or two. And we are basically not returning to school until at least late October.

03:13

So was there a transition in the mode of teaching during the pandemic?

03:17

No. Um, so I think maybe last year, like, even though it wasn't official, we sensed that it was coming. So I think schools were more prepared for it as much as possible, like you didn't want to, I guess the stock creating all these resources and, and talking about, you know, online learning for for no reason if it wasn't going to eventuate. But then a lot of schools had a plan. should the schools started on closing? This year, all of our public schools in New South Wales were told to prepare for like a sudden transition to sort of home learning or remote learning should have happened again, based on my experience last year, and it did happen.So I guess there wasn't like a transition. I don't think teachers , our teachers were not given additional time to transition to remote learning. Some of the existing resources were just I guess, reallocated. So we have like professional development days and things like that, at the beginning of each term. I guess some of those time slots were they abandoned the original plan. And then every allocated those times, lots to to prepare for remote learning, but like this year, for example, it was only like, like, like a few hours that was that we got at our school to prepare for remote learning.

04:47

Just to clarify, so throughout the like pandemic,remote learning was happening, right? Yes, that's right. .

04:56

who makes the decision for like when remote learning was decided?

05:05

our New South Wales government made the decision.

05:11

What what new digital learning technologies were introduced in your school system during the pandemic?

05:17

Um, I guess not much was introduced, we utilize our existing technology. So our school uses Google Classroom. And actually, so last year, we use Google Classroom. And I guess last year, we introduced zoom. A lot of teachers would not have used zoom for teaching. They might have used it as you know, to like to call families, overseas, that type of thing, but I guess, like the online live teaching, and that was a new tool. So things like are also Microsoft Teams, and Adobe Connect. We're all sort of like, tried by by teachers. This year. We've done it last year, so there wasn't really anything new that we had to add to it. Okay,

06:07

so I think my next question was connected to this , like, was your school already using these technologies before the pandemic, and as you mentioned, you were using if you could elaborate for what it was being used before the pandemic, and how does changedduring the pandemic?

06:21

Okay, so, our school, all of our teachers use Google Classroom. So every class before the pandemic was expected to have a Google Classroom, every teacher was expected to have a Google Classroom for their, you know, for their classes, their direct supervisors, like their head teachers, all that sort of stuff was added to that Google Classroom. And I guess we used it, it was varied before then, but some teachers used it like, they posted a video, they watched a video in class, they will then post it up after this as a record and for students to reference later. Some teachers post it like if the, if the kids like the students were doing like some online research, the links that they will provide, they'll post it up on Google Classroom, or they'll use like quizzes and things like that. So it was, yeah, it was to do that. And I think some teachers, including myself, we, before we even heard of COVID, we were already posting up every lesson onto Google classrooms, for my classes, they will know that everything we use in that lesson will be on Google Classroom the day before, like in the afternoon, about four or five o'clock if they want to look at it. So it'll be like the learning goals will have been up there. Any videos that we're going to watch as a class will be linked up there any worksheets, even if I gave out the sheet as a hardcopy, there'll be a digital version up there as well. So like, I used it as a way for, like, if students wanted to prepare for the lesson they could. And it worked really well for our students who were who were learning English as an additional language, because sometimes it helps them to actually look at something first, and then come to class with with, you know, some some content already in their heads. They know what it's gonna be about. they've read those words before. So they are more familiar, you know, with the work. So that's how I and a lot of other teachers used it. But some teachers was on the opposite end, they had one, but it wasn't very, like they had a google classroom, but it wasn't used very often.

08:34

So what teaching learning materials were used, was it readily available in digital forms, like, from what I'm sensing it was available even before the pandemic? So do you think like, like, the responsibility for teachers now has increased during the pandemic, to create teaching learning materials and is the responsibility solely for the teachers or are like school administration also involved in this process of creating teaching learning materials?

08:58

Okay, I think, in this in this sort of round of lockdown, teachers have been very collaborative. So I know like, so I'm in High School. So faculties like science, math, English, all of those subject areas will be working together to create those online resources for the students. So teachers are not working in, in isolation. Yeah, so and we've got like, I guess, I work in a public school and our employer is the Department of Education in New South Wales. They've been producing like a lot of online resources as well that, that teachers can adapt for their own students, while they release like to have a live video of different guest speakers and things like every every weekday. So that's students can utilize those resources as well? Our public broadcaster so we've got something called the ABC, which is The Australian Broadcasting Corporation. So that's our public TV broadcaster. They've had like an education branch for a while. And yeah, like long before the pandemic with like a lot of video clips of documentaries. And it's not as though that they have like resources for teachers as well. They have some questions that you can ask your class before you view. This clip, here are some questions that you can ask them after they view that some reflection questions like worksheets are already available, interactive activities. So a lot of those things were there beforehand. And then when the pandemic started last year, and again, now that we're in lockdown, they've gotten like now it's like, like a tv schedule. That is like mapped to different curriculum outcomes. So in the worst case scenario of a teacher just doesn't know how to change the existing teaching into an online teaching environment, this, there's so much backup available everywhere, for them to just go, you know what, let's do this for today, or a few days while you get your, your resources and train yourself up.

11:11

So if you could like briefly explained, what were your roles and responsibilities in preparing to teach during the pandemic.

11:19

yeah, so um, I, I guess my title at my school was head teacher secondary studies, and one of my responsibilities is homeschool technology. So I guess my role is, I guess it was significantly more complex in a pandemic than it is when it's normal. Because like, not all of our students have laptops at home, or they might have a computer at home. But they've got four kids at like four children in the household, and like they can't all be expected to to share the one computer for remote learning. So things like making sure that those families can borrow the school laptops, some of our families don't have sort of sufficient internet data at home, they might have very limited data plans. So we had to work with the Department of Education to make sure those sort of 4g 5g data dongles were available for those families that are up for them. Yes, I guess that I guess that resourcing aspect I was I was involved in, I was also still am, I guess responsible for like a consistent approach to, to remote learning. So at the start last year, it was just like, it happens suddenly, last year, it was literally like, our premier, who is a leader of the state had a press conference and go schools are closed the next day. So it was a very rapid transition. So basically, in the first couple of weeks, or first few weeks, it was teachers doing whatever they can like as individuals. So some of our teachers at school, were using Microsoft Teams, some were using Adobe Connect different ways of using Google Classroom. So I was the person who was responsible for, like surveying all the students to see how they going, what they found was working, what wasn't working. Same thing for teachers, like a survey for teachers, a survey for the parents and their carers. And then sort of like get like a consistent approach, like after like about three weeks of doing whatever,we decided that we are all going to use zoom, because it's very confusing for students, if they have like six different subjects a day to be with a one subject zoom, one subject is Microsoft Teams, one subject is Adobe like is too hard. So we made the decision, like, you know, based on this survey results, that everyone is going to use zoom. And the kids were also saying that teachers did all sorts of different things in Google Classroom. So the layout was all different. It was very confusing for them to be at home by themselves that they can't just go and look at the person next to them to find out what to do. They were isolated at home. So they were like, it was very confusing. So we had like, now a consistent way of how we upload our work on to Google Classroom. Like we had to tell teachers how to post up the work, how to organize the work, so that at least there's some consistency between like the eight different subjects that the that the students will be. That was the students will have. Yeah, so yeah, I guess that was my role. And I guess as a classroom teacher, in the beginning, it was to make sure that that their well being was the priority at the beginning. And then once we were settled into what it will be a couple of months, three months of lockdown. You got to make sure that the learning can still continue.

15:26

So what are the main challenges faced by the teacher in the transition to the new mode of teaching ?

15:35

I think time and resources, resources and time was what's the most what's the most challenging.So it's, um, these things take time. So a lot of teachers had to learn how to use zoom properly, and how to manage their classes behavior on zoom takes time. So I was lucky, because I just, I like technology. And I'm quite versatile and adaptable in my use of technology. But other teachers have like a lot of issues with students and writing themselves when they're not supposed to, or changing their names or screen sharing when they're not supposed to. And it's to learn all of those security settings. And I can know, for example, that takes time, and to learn even Google classrooms and learn how to use it effectively. Like when do you use a doc? When do you make a copy for each student? When do you not do that? How do you use Google Slides effectively with zoom breakout rooms, and to monitor things like all of those things, takes time and trial and error and practice. And because we pivot so quickly to online learning, and there was a time given, it wasn't like, oh, let's give you a day or a couple of days to get yourself set up. It was go teach just as normal. So my school just followed our usual face to face timetable, and just expected that to be replicated in an online format. That was really challenging for myself, and also for a lot of teachers, because I think it's not just the time, it's also assuming that a face to face context can be replicated online is a huge assumption. And like I often say, I can lessons the whole day, like we have six periods, six lesson days, I can take the lessons the whole day, but to actually replicate that six zoom lessons back to back is exhausting. So I think that's that's the most challenging thing.

18:00

what was personally your experience teaching in this time? How was your experience, like, positive and negative?

18:13

I think the positives were that I learned a lot of things like, you know, I never knew about zoom before, that I think my ability to use like tools like Google, Microsoft Teams, has been has been really good in terms of like, evaluate homeschool processes. Yeah, that was the opportunity to do that , there was a lot of opportunities based on online learning. And I think some of the students actually have really thrived in the online learning space. Like they are usually like the quiet reserved students who might be a bit awkward socially. And it's a bit too much for them to be with 30 other people, hour after hour, day after day, like those ones who who are quite self sufficient. They're very independent, they can manage their own time, they are absolutely loving it because I can go well, if I finish my work early, I can then just go on to something else that I enjoy, rather than being forced to sit there waiting for other people to copy this down or waiting for other people to finish this. They can just keep going. And a lot of our teachers, including myself, found out the feedback processes can be more individualized, because it's sort of like the way you're working to get written feedback or audio recorded feedback is very different. Yeah, that's the positives and the negatives, like I said, it's exhausting to be to be online because I think a lot of our processes, a lot of our teachers were not trained in distance learning and online learning processes, we are sort of just making it up as we go trialing things as we go. And I think that could be quite exhausting. And as I'm going to say, teachers who are also parents, um, find it quite difficult to to manage remote learning as well, because like this one (her daughter), her school is not opened. So she does online learning from home. And I think a lot of teachers with young children who are then teaching and also supporting their own child's learning, we've been talking about it, it's it's like, it's, it's actually three full time jobs, you're teaching your parents if you're looking after them. And you also have to teach them their math and whatever, it's, it's there, she doesn't know how to use zoom by herself. So it's, um, I think that doing the three full time jobs simultenosusly, while the school administration, and society expects everything to be business, as usual, that has been, I guess, a negative experience, I think, is a challenge that really needs to be looked at, should we have you know, these sort of like lock downs or school closures in an ongoing manner.

21:26

Do you own or have access to devices for conducting your work?

21:35

Yes. So at our school, every teacher gets a laptop, when, when they first arrive at the school. So whether that laptop is the best laptop is a different story, but they've got a laptop. So that was it wasn't an issue at the start, at least when we transition to online learning. Everyone had a laptop, we're ready. We've also some of our teachers have like iPads as well with Apple Pencil, all that sort of stuff. So in terms of access to the actual digital resources, it hasn't been a problem at my school, like students is a different story. And it depends on which school they go to. .

22:14

So did you have any challenges in accessing internet for your work?

22:19

Not me personally. Some teachers have had issues and they were able to get a data dongle from school that was provided by the Department of Education. So I guess whatever people need it, whatever our teachers needed, the school was able to, to provide that for them. And our school has this one full time sort of technician who was still able to provide ongoing support remotely, or you know, something wasn't working, someone doesn't know, is there some issue with their computer, you can still sort of like, get remote sort of control over their device, and be able to support them with those issues.

23:03

did you require any additional resources, like it could be devices or anything else, which is required for your work, like to work more effectively?

23:13

For me, not really, because I already had most of the stuff that I needed, I guess, because we're also from quite a high income area in terms of our school. Most of our students and most of our teachers had those existing resources at home. So I mean, last year, we did sort of purchased like new licenses with different digital tools. Like, we've got a Cloud Library now where the students can sort of download books from like a digital library, like an online library. We like the department actually, Department of Education actually purchase a lot of like, licenses, in terms of like online platforms for all public school students to use in New South Wales. I like some of our flipped learning, sort of like their their third party digital platforms where they were instructional videos for like our senior students. So the department paid for that. So it was no cost to us. So I guess, overall, in terms of accessing resources, it hasn't been a real issue. Like if teachers have requested it, they would have gotten it in a very reasonable timeframe.

24:27

Yeah, so what about digital skills you learn for teaching you independently, you think you learnt any new digital skills?

24:35

I think the skills I've learned is, I guess like is to engaging students online is different to engaging them in the classroom. And I find that like, the pacing is even more extreme. So you know, in any class, okay, you always have like another students who work really fast and finish everything really early and the students who need like a lot of time, you and I get in the digital space even further, but the kids are growing really, really fast. And the kids who struggle really struggle, and I, so it's about balancing that and making sure that, you know, there is time those life sort of lessons set aside, where it's really designed for everyone to come back at the same pace again, because otherwise, it's just impossible to manage. So that's something that I've learned. I've also learned that like, I guess, the assessment processes, I had to adjust. So in face to face learning, I called walk around, look exactly at what they're doing to know whether they understand or not, in remote learning how to adjust that, like I used to get into take photos of their work and upload it. But that just took forever for me to actually look at it in a very low quality photos on time. In terms of like, if I set them exercises, here's the answers, you check it. But you know, like twice a week or twice a fortnight, you're gonna have short quizzes, so I know where you're up to. So s those practices I had to, I had to adjust. And it was really about identifying what doesn't work in the remote learning space and then re adjusting, re adjusting my practices.

26:20

Yeah, liquid connected question to this question. Like, how did you acquire these skills?

26:28

Oh, that's a great question. I haven't, I haven't thought of that before. Um, I guess I've always been someone who is always learning something new. That's just my personality. Like, even before the pandemic, I'm always looking for ways to improve. And I think, because I've always sort of had those practices had those habits, it has transferred over to remote teaching really well. And it's also about speaking to different teachers. So I use social media a lot, even before the pandemic. So things like Twitter are my sort of professional learning networks. And because, they've got other like minded people, sort of same as me in terms of like, we're always thinking about what can we do better and posting up in our information, or a new tool that I've used, or a new thing that I found, we're always constantly sharing. And it's about reaching out to, I guess, teachers who are not in your immediate school. That's where I pick up a lot of the skills. Because it's always good to actually just learn from teachers who don't know your context. So they offer like a fresh pair of eyes. So I guess whenever I have a question, even if it's like eight o'clock at night, if I posted on Twitter, they'll be like 50 people who want to reply and help. So I think maybe it's because the way that I've worked, always a smart personality. I've been able to learn all of these new skills quite quickly. And for my colleagues who have different personalities, different teaching styles, there has been a lot of professional learning that has been posted by our employer by the Department of Education. So some of them are live. Some of them are recorded. They're quite short, they're bite sized, like 15 minutes, 20 minutes. They're things like, you know, Google Classroom for beginners, Google Classroom for advanced users, a whole bunch of different things that teachers can go, Oh, I actually need help with that. And then like, get on to that have a look. Yeah. And then and now, my guess our union, the Teachers Federation has also posted up a lot of podcasting series in terms of like, how other union member teachers have been adjusting to online learning as I listened to one the other week about how like a drama teacher and another Sydney High School. Yeah, I guess, like creates that sort of remote learning experience for her drama subject, which can be quite difficult as it is practical And is group based , in person most of the time.How do you actually transform that into a remote learning environment? How she stays organized? Yeah, so it's, um, yeah, it's about just I think, just being able to find the time to locate all of those vast resources and finding the time to digest it really understanding and finding it finding the time to actually make it work for you as a teacher and your students.

29:43

You mentioned earlier that like you already using Google Classroom even before the pandemic . I was wondering like, did the teachers create new material for the curriculum during the pandemc and how did you manage to engage students in this new learning mode?

30:06

I guess with resources, teachers are always creating new resources, whether it's because like, there's a new sort of project learning thing that we doing, or there's a new syllabus, um, yeah, like, I don't mean, my colleagues are constantly adapting a lot of our resources. And we always we use old resources as well. There's like things that I've been using for 10 years, but they're good, so I keep using them. So I guess, in the remote online learning, I guess some of the hard copy resources that have been good at global literacy resources where like the students are like, sort of identifying the correct verb noun agreement and things like that. They will hardcopy resources, and it doesn't, if I scanned it, and uploaded it, it doesn't work, like you really have to sort of like transfer to a Google document, you know, instead of circling is helping to highlight. So there's things you have to make adjustments. So I guess the new resources will be adjusting your existing resources for an online environment. And sometimes like a quiz is now you have to import it into into a Google Forms. And I'm writing it up on the board, which takes you like five seconds, you have to spend like 30 minutes uploading it onto a Google form, and things like that. So I guess those things don't take a bit longer to do in a sort of like an online environment. And to the second part of your question, in terms of engaging students is really challenging to do it, when are they not in front of you. So what I found, because a lot of my colleagues at the beginning of this lockdown had a lot of clash and management issues with zoom. Like students were being like, they learned that they very quickly learning these things like young people, like they know how to rename themselves, zoom bomb other classes, I can blast music, and I. So I think those the classroom management practices that we usually use to engage our students, as some of them are threats, like, you know, if you don't do this, you're going to be on detention, if you don't do these are going to be on that. They don't work in an online environment, like what are you going to do at home? If they don't like your lesson, they will leave your zoom. And if they don't, if they don't, they don't want to come, they just don't even join your zoom at all. So I guess that compliance that comes from a traditional schooling structure, all of those things that teachers relied on, they were all gone in that remote learning how to find new ways to engage it. And I think it's about like, I noticed the teachers who had minimal issues with their students are the ones. Yeah, so it was the teachers who have that, I guess, respectful relationships with their students that had the most minimal problems with zoom, an online learning the ones that you know, really had a good rapport with their students and really read them as individuals, and really loved their content and have always presented the content in a really meaningful and relevant way. They had a really easy time transitioning, whereas I guess the teachers who rely on their more disciplinary approach to make sure their students are compliant. They were the ones that had the most challenging transition to online learning because their usual, I guess, mode of operation, the usual strategies, their usual tools, basically don't work in the online environment. So I think is that to engage our students is about building those relationships with them. Knowing each student as an individual knowing what their goals are, knowing what their interests are, like that grabs them and then they will actually want to once it comes to your comes to your zoom lessons. Do your work. Yeah, and so forth. So yeah, and I guess we try to make zoom lessons really interactive, as well. So I think in the beginning, a lot of teachers were just like speaking nonstop on zoom just to the students, which they found really boring.

34:34

So now is like, you know, how do you actually use like the poll function in zoom to get them engaged on how do you get them to, to use the nonverbal reactions that emojis, the chat, the shared annotation functions, I found breakout rooms really good with engaging students because I think a lot of them are quite intimidated in like a Zoom environment when there's like 30 students and the teacher, they quite a lot of our students don't like to turn on their cameras. And then they would rather type the answer in the chat rather than say something. I think some of them are very self conscious in terms of how they might look on the camera, what their home might be in the background, some of them have a lot of siblings, and it's always loud in their house, and there's not their fault. So, yes, I went in the breakout room, and I've been grouping them in their friendship groups in the small group activities. Like I jump into each of them, and they are talking they cameras are on and yeah, that's been really good. I think, setting your online learning environment, that the kids find that comfortable to continue that human interaction has been the best way to engage them.

36:00

how do you feel about your work during the pandemic? And like, Is it different compared to the pre pandemic, period? And like, do you feel like the amount of work is same? Or like, do you feel like there's more now?

36:12

Definitely a lot more is like 10 times more. And I think every teacher I speak to, will say exactly the same thing. If it was like, you're just continuously work. And I think there's, , there's a few factors that contribute that to that. I think some teachers have commented to me, like those informal face to face conversations that you have in the staff room, in the corridor on your way to the car, or that sort of stuff, they're now gone. And everything is by sort of like emails, and like they take longer to, you know, instead of getting that immediate feedback, like, you know, do you have this is like, if you ask someone you call them in the staff room is like, yes, done, then now you're emailing waiting for their reply, and it just takes takes a bit longer. Yeah, and also, I think this like, just different things to actually transition to an online space, it takes, it takes longer. So I think, and I think it's just the exhausting level of constantly being in front of a computer screen is contributing to teachers feeling like they're doing a lot more work now, because I think, you know, we just had online exams, because, you know, we weren't able to go back to school. And our year 12 students who were in their final year of school, they usually have something called like a trial exam. That is like the three hour exam before they sit there proper one. So they weren't able to do that in person. So we sort of had to, like, modify our exams. So that is an online format. And that took a long time. Because look for for subjects like history it is easy , an essay question. And they could type it in the Google doc or turn it in, or whatever, in science, and math is like, Well, you know, when you do chemical equations, I how do you do that on a Google Doc, he takes it 10 times as long like we had to really think about, like, what sorts of questions we can sort of ask the students in an online test, but then also maintain the integrity of that subject, because you can't have a chemistry exam with no mathematical calculations and no chemical equations, because the online platform doesn't allow you to do it effectively. So that took a really long time. And I think marking online like this, using the exams as an example, teachers already have existing processes to mark on paper, it just know how to do that they've done it all their life is easy. And to move it into an online format, it is very difficult to mark things online, I've heard you may comment on the Google doc. If you have an iPad, you use your Apple Pencil, there's like so many different ways, and it depends on that on different teachers level of confidence and competence for technology. So that has been um, yeah, that's why it's been taking, like know, so long to do that, as well. And we're, we had zoom invigilator exams and our school, so we have all the kids on the camera on zoom, that that meant that a lot more teachers had to supervise the exam. Because if there was 60 chemistry students, you could just have one person really, to supervise those 60 students, but because of zoom you had, you could have only like a certain number of people on your screen at the same time, you end up with, you know, two or three teachers supervising that zoom exam. And I think then that adds on to the workload of teachers as well. .

40:03

I how how did you personally feel about your work during the pandemic? Did you have any major concerns regarding your work during the pandemic?

40:20

Personally, not really. So I was able, I guess, I'm not a person who would just sit back. So like, you know, if I don't feel like something is working, I'm quite confident in telling the people, I guess, who directly supervise me that is not working. So on my timetable, for example, there was like every second Thursday, it was the way that the lessons were arranged, as some of the meetings were arranged, it was already challenging in a face to face normal environment. And when we changed to like an online learning environment, it just became almost impossible to keep up to that schedule. So I just say, you know, what, like, I can't keep doing this initiative, if like, our meeting times, are not adjusted to another day in our proposal alternative days, and that was, you know, there go yet, that's fine. We'll just change it to that. For our school. You know, as a union rep, I did say look like to the principal, the work intensity of this, you know, how will we arrange our exams and things, the workload, the work intensity was massively increase? And I said that, you know, instead of forcing everyone to go to the staff meeting every Thursday, why don't we just change it to like a faculty meeting, and then the faculty can just decide how they want to do it. If they don't need to meet, they don't have to meet people can just do their marking, or whatever, if they need to mock exams at that time, they will all get together. our union is quite active in our school, I guess, as the leader of that I've made sure that we are, and I think because we've been active and quite vocal, I wouldn't say pushy, I think we were like, what is is called , We're confident, I guess, like, yeah, we were not scared to say what we need to say. And, you know, be be ready to sort of negotiate what we need and compromise with, with the school leadership. And I think because we've always had that culture of our union being quite a strong presence at the school, we were able to do, I guess, like, get a lot of wins in in this online environment. So every Tuesday now, the school has agreed to do flexible tuesday.So there's a day where there's no online classes, no new work is going to be posted up for the kids. The parents know, that is a day for everyone to catch up. So that was part of our sort of negotiation to do that. So I guess personally, like, besides having to look after the kids and and doing three jobs at once, it's it hasn't been a okay,

43:09

Were there any advantage of being a union member during the pandemic?

43:16

Look, I think that's like a lot. But the ones I've described at a local workplace, like a really strong, organized sort of union presence is really needed. it is not enough just to have membership, density. So I know that some schools have a lot of members. So density is good, but because it's not an organized, they find it quite hard to actually speak as a collective. And that's where like a union strength is, and doesn't matter how many of you are members, like, if you don't have a collective voice in the local workplace level, then it doesn't really get you anything. And I guess a bigger level, because our union is quite vocal. And, you know, we have a lot of members. It is like a very dense union, and we work quite closely with like the Principal Association as well. So we're quite collaborative, because we understand that we need to work closely with sort of other associations and the parent community as well to sort of get what you need. We were able to sort of like see, the government was gonna send us all back to face to face learning with the numbers was so high and vaccination rates were so low that we had no vaccines.

44:43

And they were going to send us all back so that our senior students can can do exams and because our union is strong, we were able to push back like we did a lot of coordinated with like, our president , you know, there was a there was political strategy. There were communication strategies, and there was industrial strategies all ready to go. And we smashed all the media like, you know, so I think I was, I was on a few nationals and TV to really, like gonna bring that point across to the general public that it is not safe for school communities to return. Yeah, so we basically hit all the mainstream media, we had our parents on board, the parents or the community or parent associations on board. So we were able to push that back and they had to they had to back down on time. another example. Like that, they've now announced like a roadmap back to school. So even though we're in lockdown, the aim is to get certain groups of students back to face to face learning in about October 25. So the kindergarten you ones and you 12 to go back first. And then like a week after is another group and then the week after will be everyone. So to get that clear, and the Department of Education has said it properly. That has been a big push from our union to do that. Because last year, they didn't do that. They were just like, just get 25% of your school population back how you want to do it is up to you. And the school was all like, well, how am I meant to do that? Do I bring a year back? And then, like the younger primary schools were like, but the families need to send the siblings back together. What if I had a kindergarten student and then they had a sibling in year three, you know, parents want to send them both back so they can go back to work. So schools are like, you know, you need to give like a some schools are like, oh, let's return by alphabetical order. And it was just a mess. So I think this year, because of our sort of pressure that we've constantly placed on them, l like staggered returns to school. Yeah, and our teachers being placed in Priority access groups for COVID, vaccines, all those things, I don't think would have happened without our really strong union presence at all levels. ,

47:28

Did you feel stressed during the pandemic? Whom did you apporach for help ? Did you have ay difficulties in finding support?

47:44

I think everyone is feeling stressed, the whole online teaching is stressful, being isolated from your colleagues is stressful, like, you know, no amount of emails and zooms, and online meetings can replace that sort of face to face connection. And I think, you know, just the the stress of even going out, like, you know, we've got, like, I'm in like an area of concern, where the COVID cases are quite high in my sort of local area. So we are restricted to like five kilometers, you know, from our house, we can only go out for an hour a day, once a day, that type of thing. And I think that's, that's quite stressful. And I think our teachers are also feeling stressed, like, I know, for my students as well, they're, they're feeling quite stressed, like, they really want to be with their friends, like not at 12-13 years old. It's not fun to be with your family all the time. And I think they're quite bored of going on bike rides, and going for walks and being forced to do things because that's all you can do. And I think that's stress that everyone can feel that in a very sort of subconscious way. And I guess, where do I go from, I guess, support. I think our school works together quite well. So our faculties and our teams support each other quite well. Like, I'm lucky to have like, a really supportive sort of family, like me and my partner work really closely together to make sure that we both can stay sane while we're working our full time jobs and, you know, support our children, as well. I know there's a user has been quite good in terms of, like, we have our organizer for our sort of patch of schools, and, you know, I've got, like her phone number I can texture or call her, you know, like during a reasonable hour, I guess, and she'll respond quite quickly. I do the same thing for my teachers. So I think there's different levels of support, like yeah, the best that you can be in a very challenging time.

49:59

How have your students adapted to the changes to remote learning?

50:04

I think some have adapted really well. So I, you know, because I do the student surveys thing, I have the privilege of reading like hundreds of them. So I think a lot of them, some of them are finding it very difficult, but a lot of them, a lot of them are loving it. Like they like things like not being not having to wear school uniform, being able to sleep in that that's one of the top things they love, especially some of the older students who have classes that start at eight o'clock, usually, they can still go to that eight o'clock class, but they can get up at 7:30 rather than like 6:30. So they they really like that, they really like how they can go to the toilet anytime they want. That was one of the things that was reported , at school, you know, you have to ask teachers get like, give you a hard time ,at home, I can just go to the toilet whenever I want, I can get a drink of water whenever I want, I can eat whenever I want. A lot of people who come from more privileged backgrounds, we say that you know the the food at home is better than the canteen food. Yeah, but there's some other some of our other students are struggling. So I think this is where social disadvantage comes through. The more advantage you are, I think, the more positive your experience is, with remote learning. I know some of our families, you know who live in like public housing, they often have very large families as well, there might be three or four children who live in an apartment, they don't have a backyard to get fresh air. It's loud all the time, like, you know, you have four kids, even with their own laptops with own headphones, it's very hard for all four of them to sit at the kitchen table and be able to sort of focus in or they might have younger siblings, like three four year old brothers and sisters who, who are also at home. And you know, don't know how to how to say quiet. So I think some of students have really struggled with that. I know some of the students that I teach, like my chemistry students, the ones who already lacked self confidence, for whatever reason, are finding it really hard. You know, the self doubt is increasing. Some of them are not able to keep up with sort of the pace of online learning. So they sort of feel like they are falling behind. Or they don't and like if you don't understand something, you can ask him as a live zoom lesson. But you know, like back in school, they can just sort of like I sit in the library, they will just coming down to the library and asked me something. Now, it's like, you know, like a very long Google Classroom post. And this is hard to explain some things by sort of like an asynchronous written manner, that he needs to just do all verbally, especially I was like, trying to explain how to do some, like, calculations of chemistry and I'm like, Oh, my God, this is taking me like 30 minutes to type up this response, when it would have been just a two minute conversation like with the kid even though I was at school. So I think, like, yeah, some of them are finding that aspect, like, you know, challenging, and I think for a lot of our vulnerable families, like school was the safest place. There might be, you know, they can be in homes where the parents have now lost their jobs. And they're quite stressed about it. And yeah, it's this, like, they some of our kids came to school, not for, I guess, the academic of school, the academic side, but they came for the social aspects, they came for the safety net. You know, we used to, like we do give food out to some kids that come with no food, they had no breakfast, that sort of social service, I guess, is now gone. And we don't know how they're doing like this. as you leave a message, email the parents no response like this. There's only so much you can do remotely without seeing the student.

54:09

how did the parents and community react to the remote and online learning?

54:15

Yeah, overwhelmingly, our parents have responded quite positively. So a lot of parents really, like the live online lessons on the zoom. I think a lot of parents feel that because a teacher is there explaining answering questions. That's what real teaching is like, even though it could be other things. Yeah, so our parents have been have been very supportive, like you know, in our surveys, you know, they they're saying that they're very happy with with how the school is approaching online learning. There's always parents who will you know, complain about there's too much of these and too less of these and you can't ever, I guess, satisfy every single family but Overall, it has been very positive feedback from our parents,

55:13

in what ways have the terms and conditions of your employment change due to the pandemic.

55:20

Because we have a very strong union, a lot of our teachers are permanent. So that hasn't really changed. Our temporary teachers, we've got a quite a strong contract system, like the engagement process. So our temporary teachers have stayed employed. I think it's been our casual teachers who have been impacted the most. I know a lot of our casual teachers now have a lot less work, or no work at all due to the pandemic.

56:10

So what support did you get from your school?

56:15

In terms of employment? Um, our casual teachers? none, I guess, I think we employ one casual teacher a day, to just supervise the very small number of students who come to still come to school because their parents are essential workers. Yeah, I will say that is like the biggest flaw of our school will be not looking after our casual teachers, we will usually be employing maybe like, some anywhere from like three to five casual teachers a day. And we now employing one

56:53

with respect to your teaching, like what is working for you now? And what is not working for you?

57:02

I guess what's working? I think our technology is working, because we've always had a really strong technology process that has been working really well. what's not working for me, is to balance you know, because me as a parent of young kids, is that is becoming almost a breaking point. I think for a lot of teachers, including myself, yeah, that's the only thing I think, is not working. And I think it's also my school, and a lot of schools still insisting a business as usual approach. Now some schools have changed it, they've adjusted their timetables, so that teachers are really teaching only like maybe like two hours or three hours per day . to sort of compensate for the complexity of online learning. My school has not done that. And they've chosen not to do that. We are running our usual timetable. So is that business as usual approach, when the school is aware that teachers have vastly different circumstances. So I think what, I guess what's not working for me, is the school. not consciously I think being aware, that is not a level playing field for our teachers anymore. But we are still being I guess, judged against the same performance criteria. If you go for promotions positions, you still have to go through the same interview process. And I was going the other day going, Oh, how is that a level playing field, if someone like me, with two young kids will burst through that door at any time trying to do a job interview, compared to someone else, you might have older children with no children, or just a different family and home circumstance? Like I think that's what I'm not okay with it. That's not what I'm I'm not happy with is just that lack of recognition that people are now working in vastly different working conditions, that is beyond their control, because we are forced to be working from like our garages, working with, you know, five people at the same time and on the kitchen table, because of public health orders. And our performance is going to be impacted by that, whether we pretend like you know, what they were or how hard we try is going to be impacted. And I think it's that lack of recognition and that lack of proactiveness from the school. That has been the most disappointing for me, and that's not working for me.

59:34

Do you want to mention any challenges that you've been able to resolve during the pandemic?

59:49

for me, it will be I guess the return the sort of slow return to normal I think that is part of the pandemic. The pressure to to reopen schools as quickly as possible, because we know that schools are essential to the economy, you know, being reopened against I think it is. It is that, like, you know, that is, I guess the challenge, like, we've been told that when kids return staggered groups, they're going to be maintaining physical distance, I'm like, that is not realistic. And apparently not going to be mixing with other year groups in the playground, that's not realistic, they're going to be mixing and playing with each other .they're not going to be keeping a physical distance from each other. Because that's not what kids and young people do. That's not what kindergarten children do. Um, so I think it's that sort of unrealistic health guidelines that the government and the employ will say what schools are safe, because we say this, this, this and this, but then in reality is very different, like classroom windows don't open, how do you maintain ventilation? Yeah, so it's just the logistics of being safe is very different, no, to what we have been solved.

1:01:08

Do you thingk this current mode of online learning will continue in the future. And what do you will happen to digital learning technologies, when schools reopen eventually?

1:01:20

Look, I think with online learning, it has given like, people like a window into what it can be like. So in terms of like, some of our students said, you know what, when we go back to normal again, I would like to have more flexible learning, you know, I don't know how it will work. But they're like, no, maybe there'll be one day where we can just, you know, stay home, and just do what we need to do. And some kids are like, I really like how, you know, it allows me to go at my own pace. So if I'm ready to go on to the next thing, I don't have to wait for the five people who are not ready in the class. If I need more time. I take more time. Like it's okay. If I want to work an extra 20 minutes into lunch and take my lunch 20 minutes later. It's also fine. It's that flexibility. And I think and I know, some other, I guess, overseas jurisdictions like Alaska, I've heard that they sort of like have a mixture, like some of the kids will go to school in person for some subjects, but they'll do online learning for other subjects. So I think that will eventually, you know, come because people will have seen that possibility. So yeah, but I guess in a more realistic perspective, like we've been told that, you know, yeah, we all going back October. But you know, if cases rise again, be prepared to just shut down all of a sudden, and go back to online learning. Look. So even though I want to say this is the last lockdown we'll ever have, like, realistically, I don't think so. And so I think mostly go back in October, we might be shut again in December. So I think online learning will be here to stay for the good and the bad.

1:03:07

so then what are your main concerns with regards to your work in the future,

1:03:13

I guess, is the expectation that as a teacher, we will just rise to whatever challenge that society throws at us with no additional resources. So it was like all COVID cases arising in your local area, you need to close this go to online learning like tomorrow. And you know, even with this lockdown, it was announced during our school holidays. So most teachers had no access to all of this stuff that was at school in their on their desks. And a lot of teachers were not even able to go back because their areas are too many cases, and they were not allowed to leave. So you know, if this expectation that this is going do it, just make it happen? We're not going to give you much extra time, not extra funding. Yeah. And I think my main concern just for myself, and also my profession will be that this pandemic will be like a breaking point for some teachers to leave the profession forever. I think it's like, what is it is like, you know, yeah, we're always being told how essential we are. But then we always get thrown under the bus that like, you know, that the first thing is like, Oh, just go back. It's safe now, even though it's not like, you know, just risk your health for the greater good of society. I think a lot of teachers this, like the lack of respect for our profession that's been shown by politicians, like making announcements about our working conditions in the media before we get told about it by our employees has been seen quite negatively by teachers. So I think you know, also we now know coming up to like a pay negotiations, and our pay has fallen dramatically compared to other similar professions. that require the same qualifications and professional accreditation, all that sort of stuff. And I think this pandemic going on while we're working like an average 60 to 70 hours a week, you know, made worse by this pandemic. You know, the government don't really care. There's like, No, we just glorified babysitters to a lot of people think. So I think it could be the turning point that there's some teachers will go, you know, what, enough is enough?

1:05:32

what ways will the pandemic bring changes to teachers every day more in terms of my contract hours of work terms and condition?

1:05:47

Um, look, I think, because have, we have a pretty tight sort of employment agreement, like a lot of our teachers are permanent. So I think at the moment in the near future, it should be okay. But I know a lot of the casual teachers like we experiencing, like a teacher shortage, even like before the pandemic. And I think it has been now made worse by the pandemic, because those casual teachers no longer can access work. So they've just taken the opportunity to move to other fields. So I think there will be workforce planning implications that were already coming, but will be made worse by the pandemic. But for me, personally, it won't really impact on my employment that much. But I think for the profession, you know, I think realistically, it will make it worse. But I can also sort of think that this is our opportunity to, you know, really take advantage of this situation and go, you know, parents have seen how difficult teaching your own children is, you know, now you know, how how complex the work of teachers are, how essential we are to society, not as academically, the social and emotional well being of our children, how essential we are to the economy, it's time that you recognize that through like pay and working conditions.

1:07:20

given the context where you work, like, what kind of support do you will need for your work in the future, and also students, what kind of support do they need to adapt better to learning in the future?

1:07:31

I think for both teachers and students, we need more time as in like planning time. So in terms of our face to face teaching hours, our contact hours, for high school teachers, that hasn't changed since the 1950s, for primary school teachers there hasn't changed since like the 1970s and the 1980s. And I think schooling has changed a lot since the 50s. And, you know, to actually meet the needs, the more complex needs our students, there's now more students with disabilities, more students with like, with sort of like welfare issues, more students with different needs, like refugee students, more diverse backgrounds. When we come back from the pandemic, and everything is normal, again, those things are still going to be there. And to be able to actually teach properly and to do our jobs properly. We need more time to do that. So we need like a reduction of face to face teaching hours. And I think Australia has one of the highest face to face teaching hours, like in the OECD, sort of list of countries. So I think that needs to definitely change. Yeah, so that's definitely one of the support that will benefit both students and and teachers is more time to actually plan your teaching more time to to collaborate with your colleagues more time to do professional learning. So at the moment, all of those things are being pushed out of school hours. Thank you so

1:09:06

Do you want to add anything else?

1:09:22

add, um, I guess the thing I want to add, will be I think, I think the community and society really sort of need to use this opportunity to recognize teachers, for the complex work that they do, we are professionals. And it's time that they supported us and they respected our profession, because in Australia is one of those sort of countries where we're teaching is not a respected profession is not something that a lot of young people aspire to, and I think we need it take this opportunity and go You know what, like, our work is complex. Our work is important, and it's time that we are recognized for it.

1:10:08

Thank you so much.