# Online Learning at St Pius X College – The Research behind our Practice

Dear Parents and Carers of St Pius X College

As we now enter the third week of online learning, I offer the following research-based principles that provides the foundation for our online learning plan.

Teachers are aware that the following have demonstrated evidence that benefit student outcomes and well-being:

1. The importance of teacher presence in online learning
2. Variation in activities
3. Creating a supportive, online community for collaborative learning

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at the college.

Your sincerely

Alex Damo
Assistant Principal – Teaching and Learning

# Using an Evidence Based Approach to Online Learning

**The following are key principles for quality online/distance teaching supported by research**

**Terminology**


**Synchronous learning** is the kind of learning that happens in real time. Students and the teacher interact in a specific virtual place, through a specific online medium, at a specific time. It is not any time or anywhere. Methods of synchronous online learning include video conferencing using Microsoft TEAMS.

What are the advantages of synchronous learning?

- Classroom Engagement
- Dynamic Learning
- Instructional Depth

What are the disadvantages of synchronous learning?

- Rigid Schedule
- Technical Difficulties

**Asynchronous learning** is the idea that students learn the same material at different times and

locations. Asynchronous Learning is also called Location Independent Learning and is opposite to synchronous learning where students learn at the same time by activities such as attending a real live classroom or an online lesson through Microsoft TEAMS.

**Methods of asynchronous** online learning include self-guided lesson modules, streaming video content, virtual libraries, posted notes, worksheets and handout, and exchanges across discussion boards or social media platforms.

What are the advantages of asynchronous learning?

- Flexibility
- Pacing

What are the disadvantages of asynchronous learning?

- Isolation
- Risk of Apathy

**The importance of teacher presence in online learning**

Evidence from a study investigating outcomes in MOOCs (massive open online courses) demonstrated that "The teachers' presence during the course, his or her interactions with students and the quality of the videos presented are significant determinants of course completion" (Gregori, Zhang, Galván-Fernández, & De Asís Fernández-Navarro, 2018). Many guides for online/distance education describe the importance of ongoing and meaningful teacher presence and support for students. As online learning can include both synchronous and asynchronous activities, it is vital for students to know when and how to access support from their teacher.

**We ask our teachers to provide variation in activities**

Evidence supports that online/distance education operates best as a system of dynamic, interrelated components, which may vary in terms of implementation by context (Holmberg, 2005; Picciano, 2017). Together, these components (Figure 1) foster a learning community that is driven by pedagogy and incorporates a range of activities, which enables flexible delivery (Picciano, 2017).

**Figure 1**

When developing activities consider implementing the following range of learning metaphors.

| **Campfire** | **Watering Hole** | **Cave** | **Mountain Top** |
|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |
| ***One to Many*** | ***Many to Many*** | ***Independent Work*** | ***Sharing to Many*** |
| Explicit Teaching.<br>Utilise Microsoft TEAMS and sharing your screen to present power points, lectures, podcasts. | Provide opportunity for group discussion or group work through collaborative spaces such as breakout rooms, channels and shared documents | Allow time for Reflection, deep work and critical thinking | **Celebrate student achievement**<br>Provide opportunities for students to share responses<br>Award 'emojis' |

## Creating a supportive, online community for collaborative learning

Evidence indicates collaborative learning in online environments enhances student learning more so than individual learning (Means et al., 2010 cited in Cherney, Fetherston, & Johnsen, 2018), and that interaction is essential (Simonson et al., 2011). However, the quality of the interaction is crucial as evidence indicates that student interaction (with each other or with the teacher) is not a panacea, rather a tool to be used appropriately and as the specific learning activity dictates. That is, forced or overuse of interaction in an online/distance format can be perceived negatively by students and therefore, interactive activities and teamwork/collaboration should be well integrated into the delivery of learning content (Simonson et al., 2011). Though there are many technological options for fostering collaboration and promoting interaction among learners (and with the teacher), it is important to utilise technological options that are best suited to the needs and capabilities of teachers and students (Simonson et al., 2011) and to consider what is already available and in place within a school community (NSW Government, 2020).

### References


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