

RISING — to the — CHALLENGE

Stories from the Covid-19 crisis



The Education Hub director Dr Nina Hood in her lockdown bubble with her 21 month son WJ.

THE EDUCATION HUB: PIVOTING TO HOME LEARNING IN THE COVID-19 CRISIS

By Nicholas Moody

When the Government signalled New Zealand was heading towards a Covid-19 lockdown, effectively closing all schools, The Education Hub director Dr Nina Hood knew her team had to move swiftly. Its online teaching resource was going to be a valuable tool amid a national crisis.

“We could see the move to home learning was going to create a huge demand for our resources,” she says.

“A week before the lockdown we switched our 2020 strategy to focus almost exclusively on supporting home learning. We thought about how we could best help teachers, school leaders and parents, in these extraordinary times. We wanted to be certain about our advice in a period of great uncertainty.”

Dr Hood set up The Education Hub in 2017 to provide teachers with high-quality, reliable resources and information drawn from research, on a whole range of topics. It aims to improve opportunities and outcomes for early childhood education and school level students in New Zealand and is supported by NEXT Foundation, Cognition Education Trust, The Fletcher Trust and The Aotearoa Foundation.

There were two immediate challenges with the unexpected move to home schooling, she says. The research on home learning/online learning was limited and it was difficult to pick out the tools that worked from the sheer volume of online resources available.

“We are trying to be a place where people can come and rely on our resources as high-quality, practical and sensible, and not to overwhelm them,” says Hood.

These new resources include topics like [how principals can help with teachers wellbeing during the lockdown, home learning – developing a structure to your day](#) and [how parents can support their child's learning](#).

As expected, the data reflects a huge spike in engagement with The Education Hub resources.

“Between the first and second week of lockdown there was a 240% surge in new website visitors with a similar hike in the number of sessions. The number of individual resource views jumped 300%,” she says. “This is in addition to the sky-high spike in Facebook engagement which has seen a 570% increase in page follows and 214% increase in post engagement.”

“By far the most common comment is ‘Thank you for what you are putting out, it’s hugely appreciated at this time.’

“A bonus has been the number of parents seeking support – parents now make up about 50% of users on the site. They are embracing their new roles supervising home learning.”

Andrew Poole is NEXT’s kaihautū representative and a foundation trustee of The Education Hub. He says it is providing a vital resource in a time of increased stress and strain on New Zealand’s teachers and parents.

“Nina and her team have done a great job repurposing themselves to provide best-practice home learning tools in this unforeseen crisis. We are delighted to be able to support this important work which ultimately benefits New Zealand children,” he says.

While teachers, parents and children have adapted well so far, the holidays have given schools some breathing space to prepare for home learning. Dr Hood believes the big challenge will come mid-April, when the school holidays finish.

“Schools will suddenly be thrust into this new way of working – so there is an ongoing role for us to support them with that transition - whatever that may look like,” she says.

Hood says while the lockdown has presented unique opportunities, including researching home learning at a nationwide level, one of the positive outcomes is how it has underlined the importance of in-person teaching in schools.

“The crisis has shown the value of schools in a range of different ways, from developing a community among children, to providing socialisation and extracurricular activities,” she says.

“What most people are going to realise is that in-person connection with a teacher is absolutely vital to the learning process.”

“But in the meantime, while schools are closed it is humbling to be able to support teachers, parents and ultimately New Zealand children in this period of great uncertainty.”