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Inspir.ed

### **RESET, RECOVER, REBUILD- a September 2020 think piece for leaders in primary schools.**

With the new school year on the horizon, schools are looking ahead and planning how best to start what will be a unique academic year for all pupils, given the fact that the majority will have missed much of the previous year in school, learning what had been planned, because of the C-19 Lockdown. There are many and varied needs to be met before things in schools return to anything near “normal”.

#### **The need for safe environments:**

Of course, there is an overriding need to ensure the safety of children and staff, and those best placed to plan and organise the changes required are those leading the schools who know the limitations of the accommodation and the nature of the community served. Schools will need to **reset** for safety. However, there is also a need to recognise that there has inevitably been a psychological impact of C-19 on all children and adults in the community, and that this will affect all children’s learning in school, wherever they spent their time between March and September 2020. Some will have “lost” more than others, so meeting a wide range of needs in September is imperative. An understanding of the need to take wellbeing into account when planning for the academic year 2020/21 is crucial, as it is on this that effective future learning will depend.

#### **The need to address mental well-being:**

Much more than learning time has been lost during lockdown, and any planned curriculum for the coming year will need to take account of this and recognise that profound change will be needed, both to daily practices, and indeed to the very nature of the provision, to enable the community to fully **recover** for well-being, and **rebuild** effective strategies for learning deeply and retaining that knowledge as well as to regain lost ground and catch up.

Barry Carpenter (Oxford Brookes University) identifies 5 levers of a RECOVERY PLAN that should shape the curriculum intent for a holistic return to a sense of a new “normal”:

- **Relationships**, (children need to rebuild relationships with teachers and peers);
- **Community**, (the experiences of each will be different, and transition back to formal education will be along different paths);
- **Transparency**, (many will be all too aware of the gaps in their learning and need to co-construct their own recovery);
- **Metacognition** (relearning how to learn formally will be a priority for most);
- **Space** to just BE, (TO EXPLORE and ENJOY as well as to catch up).

The Anna Freud Centre for Children and Families at Reading is a huge source of wellbeing support materials for schools at this time. The link below is for a particular Toolkit that has been designed to help schools plan an effective September INSET based upon wellbeing issues.

[https://mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/resources/planning-a-wellbeing-inset-day-toolkit/?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=inset&utm\\_content=toolkit](https://mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/resources/planning-a-wellbeing-inset-day-toolkit/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=inset&utm_content=toolkit)

Within the toolkit, one excellent resource is designed around Barry Carpenter's work to help frame leaders' approaches to **resetting** routines and structures, **recovering** friendships and social interaction **and rebuilding** life and learning for whole communities post pandemic. I highly recommend it for its thinking and practical suggestions and for recognising the need to meet the needs of *all* pupils and staff, *some* pupils and staff and also for *the few* who will require a longer, deeper, period of recovery.

This document is invaluable across all aspects of the notion of a re-designed curriculum. The practical activities suggested to help recovery for well-being include ideas for assemblies, Classroom Charters for Learning, Circle Time based upon friendships and emotions, mindfulness, creative activities rooted in the arts, as well as promoting pupil talk as a self-help therapy.

### **The need to accelerate and improve learning:**

The rest of this paper seeks to specifically expand on the ideas in the resource above for **rebuilding for learning**, and draws on Di Pardoe and Tom Robson's work as well as on the recent work of Mary Myatt and Tom Sherrington.

Whilst "catching up" will undoubtedly be a priority in-year, the immediate pressure of this needs to be removed in the early part of the new term and a carefully planned and extended "induction curriculum" put in place that provides a wealth of activities designed specifically to enable staff and pupils to feel safe and secure in a formal learning environment, and has the explicit intention to re-engage learners.

Pupils exploring with a new teacher in a different classroom how to function as a successful learner should be central to this induction programme, firstly because "school is no longer the safe, constant place we thought it was" and secondly because teachers need to take their pupils "through a process of re-engagement that leads them back to their rightful status as fully engaged, authentic learners." The process needs to be made transparent and highly explicit.

It is well documented that learners demonstrate increased self-esteem, greater independence and ultimately higher achievement when they are involved in the development of understanding of their own learning experiences (metacognition). The post C-19 Lockdown classroom climate needs more than ever before to be embedded with the belief that ALL pupils can learn and improve, and that whatever has befallen individuals since March 2020, catch up and keep up is possible for all. Concentrate intensively on creating and developing optimum conditions for, and positive attitudes to learning, and progress will naturally accelerate.

I cannot recommend too highly the work of Di Pardoe (Towards Successful Learning, 2005) as a basis for this type of re-engagement early in the new school year. Exploring collaboratively what helps learners to learn well, and what might prevent them from doing so, will be instrumental in agreeing what behaviours will support good learning in the classroom, in the school and beyond, as well as re-establishing their understanding of their own responsibilities within the process. Whilst

this type of activity will be invaluable in the first two weeks of term, it is not something that stops there. Building on this throughout the year using Di Pardoe and Tom Robson's "Think Like a Learner" materials will give pupils the power to become better, more powerful learners and should be built into any revised curriculum for recovery.

### **The need to assess where pupils actually are NOW in their learning as a result of Lockdown.**

Inevitably teachers will need reliable and valid means of assessing effectively where pupils are in their learning as soon as possible, so that provision made takes account of the lost time and the missed opportunities, whilst celebrating what HAS been achieved, despite the break in formal tuition.

I personally favour the use of standardised tests (such as NFER in reading and in maths) administered early in the new school year, marked and analysed appropriately to provide information that is reliable and relates to previous national norms. Not everyone agrees with me- some feel this increases the trauma and stress of school returns. They warn against such early baseline testing but teachers need *reliable and valid information* so they can plan their curriculum to match the learning needs and most importantly in a post lockdown context, to determine the nature and the extent of the catch up required at individual level. James Bell (Renaissance Learning) says "Teachers could spend weeks and weeks working out where those kids are: our tests can do it in 20 mins.....and can pinpoint which skills children need to learn next."

Of course, teacher (formative) assessment is important, but that should always be built into quality, daily teaching and learning, and it will, of course, supplement and further inform what is learned from the standardised test outcomes ***whose sole purpose is to provide a baseline (summative) snapshot in time upon which to build solidly.*** These are unusual times post Lockdown, and very focused approaches that balance the need to de-stress with the need to match educational provision to actual learner need as quickly as possible, will be crucial. As Daisy Christodoulou says in defence of testing, "If you want fairness, progress, equality and reliability, then human judgment may not be the best method."

Teachers MUST NOT at this initial stage rely on guesswork and gut feeling, they cannot be sure that what was true of these children before Lockdown is still as true in September given the varied experiences they will have had. Nor can they afford to waste more time in this academic year, when time will be at an absolute premium, and must be used most effectively. It is this point that brings me to the work of **Mary Myatt and her ten suggestions for getting teaching and learning back on track. ("Back on Track", Myatt, 2020).**

### **The urgent need to stop doing things that make little or no difference to pupil learning.**

More than at any other time in history, the current situation has underlined the fact that teachers are people first and professionals second and when leaders return in September to their staff, some of whom are very vulnerable, they will need to balance the robustness of their professional demands with kindness, to create a culture in which they care about individuals personally, whilst challenging them directly in ways recommended by Kim Scott (Scott, Radical Candour , 2019)

With time for learning at an absolute premium, Myatt suggests that **what should happen in schools is ONLY that which is known to make a difference to pupil learning. There is not enough time to**

**do everything so teachers should stop doing the things that are not having a positive impact on pupil learning- the things that get in the way.** She suggests that “80% of what teachers do in schools has an impact of only 20% on pupil learning” and cites the work of McKeown on “Essentialism- the disciplined pursuit of less” and Kondo on “The Magic Art of Tidying” to support her point. A new approach to curriculum planning must ask “Why are we doing this?” and “What should we cut? ” Planning a post C-19 curriculum will of necessity involve doing less but better. Myatt strongly suggests that things must change and identifies key time consumers that have to be re thought.

Meetings need to be made more purposeful, and during those that do take place, matters of admin must be drastically reduced to enable an increased emphasis on acquiring professional knowledge through directed reading assignments, followed by specific professional dialogue. Myatt asserts what we all know about written marking, that it has little effect on learning and should largely be replaced by whole class feedback, and that the internal collection of data is neither reliable nor valid so the notion that progress is linear, and can be measured and recorded in numbers, should be dropped.

Just as Siegfried Engelmann believed that “The curriculum will largely determine the extent to which pupils are smart.”, like Christine Counsell, Myatt feels that the curriculum is the new progress model, and that in terms of teacher assessment, the question to be asked should be “If I have taught them that, have they all got it?” Assessment for Learning should essentially comprise looking at pupils’ work, listening to pupils talking and explaining, and observing their responses. Myatt is also a strong supporter of comparative judgement in terms of the assessment of writing for accountability purposes. She is most definitely not a fan of internal tracking now levels are long gone.

Having had the discussions with regard to what to stop doing, Myatt suggests identifying things that add MOST value to learning so that future energy is clearly focused upon the quality of the education and the quality of the curriculum, with the key question being “Is it ambitious enough [for all]”.

Myatt says that higher expectations of *all* pupils, with a ban on setting tables and differentiated worksheets, would be more effective than current practice. She also cites a need to increase the time spent with pupils reading demanding texts and teachers using direct instruction (DI) methods, as described by Engelmann, Sherrington and Rosenshine to support her views. Similarly the emphasis on task completion should be abandoned in favour of an increase in thinking and talking time, and a strengthening of mastery, insisting that all learners are capable of so much more demanding work. Time spent using inferior often differentiated worksheets and material from the internet is, for Myatt, a particular bug bear, and to this end she has herself provided high quality links to real resources on her website. With a clear instruction to “dump the rest and use these.” <https://marymyatt.com/resources>

The advice from Myatt is resoundingly clear. We have an opportunity now to rethink what we do and ***plan a future curriculum rich in experiences, but with a strong instructional focus and sound formative assessment, where practice is varied, and students learn to evaluate their knowledge for themselves.*** This reinforces the need to look very carefully at the methods used in classrooms to ensure that pupils learn what is intended and retain knowledge over time.

**The need for outstanding teaching to effect deeper learning that sticks.**

Educators have been identifying the gaps that exist between groups of learners and trying to close them with little impact for years. The fact that Lockdown has inevitably widened those gaps that existed previously and created new gaps where they did not exist before, as a result of six months of widely variable experiences, is obvious. However, gaps in understanding in all pupils widen in classrooms daily as a result of ineffective methodology! To ignore Sherrington's opinion that *"Our learning safety nets are full of holes, and children are falling through them every day, and sometimes every lesson- that's where the gaps widen."* is to deny the fact that teaching in classrooms today could and should have far more impact on pupils' learning than it has had in the past. The need for all children to "catch up" with the learning they have missed presents us with an opportunity to really improve the understanding of **how to teach so that ALL pupils learn well**, and can remember and use their knowledge to good effect.

Tom Sherrington is a strong advocate of Barak Rosenshine's Principles of Instruction (upon which he has based his excellent CPD materials and "Teaching Walk Thru" , 2020) as well as all aspects of Engelmann's Principles of Direct Instruction **that support the mastery approach (that I advocated and have supported since 2014! ) so essential to 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching and learning, and so critical now to post C-19 Lockdown catch up.**

**Direct Instruction operates on five key philosophical principles:**

- All children can be taught.
- All children can improve academically and in terms of self image.
- All teachers can succeed if provided with adequate training and materials.
- Low performers and disadvantaged learners must be taught at a faster rate than typically occurs if they are to catch up to their higher-performing peers.
- All details of instruction must be controlled to minimize the chance of students' misinterpreting the information being taught and to maximize the reinforcing effect of instruction.

To achieve deeper learning for all pupils, Sherrington himself recommends five key things that teachers could usefully do more of, further supporting Engelmann's research on DI, Myatt's assertion that teachers should do more of the things that are proven to have most impact, and my own concern that time should be used more wisely in classrooms henceforth. This is so important when for catch up post C-19 Lockdown accelerated learning is required, but not at the expense of deep understanding.

**Teachers should routinely:**

1. **Check more frequently for misunderstanding** rather than assuming that the response of one pupil represents the whole group, or worse, assume that because they have explained something well, checking for understanding is not required. Pupils pretend they know things they don't, teachers need to seek wrongness and uncertainty, and ask "Is anyone still unsure about X?" rather than "Can anyone explain X?" (Engelmann: "Planned correction procedures are implemented to prevent errors from becoming learned habits."(1992)

2. **Abandon teasing out ideas** and use explain + check instead. The practice of asking a series of questions, giving hints and clues, teasing out target knowledge from a class, is all too common

practice. It is hugely inefficient and leads to mass insecurity. The process usually drags on and the teacher ends up giving the answer anyway. Because so much time has been used up they move on. Sometimes it is OK to just tell them and then check they understand. (Engelmann on the art of explanation: Specific series of examples lead pupils to understand concepts. Explanation must demonstrate positive examples of a concept, the limits of a concept by negative examples, and minimally different examples. (1992)

**3. Allow pupils to rehearse and repeat:** to practise explaining. No one does things right the first time and learners need to explain again to get better at it. Learners need time to practise explaining in pairs whilst the teacher circulates and eavesdrops, checking for accuracy. This is a useful precursor to a writing task. (Engelmann on the need for practice: “Pupils require far more practice than we think for mastery .....the amount of practice required is five times what teachers expect” (1992)

**4. Provide ample opportunity for short writing practice loops.** Writing practice is too long and too many elements are involved especially for those towards the bottom end of the bell curve.. Short writing practice loops are more effective- a key sentence or a sentence pair in a story or in an analysis that can be sampled by the teacher and critiqued as a whole class, They then try writing another and another for practice. Balancing this with the need for extended writing is the key. (Engelmann on chunking in loops: Instructional sequences have the capacity to make students smart or not” (1992)

**5. Facilitate paired quizzing .** Too often retrieval practice is teacher led; pupils do not check their own learning often enough and tend to develop a kind of learned helplessness. Daily/weekly/monthly review in pairs enables pupils to support each other, rehearse asking and answering questions and cover a wide range of ideas. (Engelmann on excessive teacher talk: “If the teacher talks too much, the pupils will have difficulty identifying what is important.” Interspersed with teacher led review tasks, this develops pupil agency in the learning process and supports Daisy Christodoulou’s approach to paced repetition to improve memory and embed learning in the longer term.

“Poorly designed curricula generate poor performance in both teacher and students” (Engelmann ) Hopefully this Inspir.ed summary will help leaders in schools shape a quality curriculum for recovery that all pupils and their families deserve. We still have the opportunity to create a curriculum characterised by Engelmann’s principles of “sequences of instruction, skills communicated with logical precision in discrete chunks; careful measurement of mastery; rapid communication of mistakes; and incessant review to integrate old skills with new.” Whilst seeking to repair the damage done by Lockdown we just need to establish quickly where we start to provide opportunities for quality learning for all pupils.

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August 2020