

EDUCATION: THE NEED FOR A RECOVERY CURRICULUM

There is no higher return on investment than that which protects the health and wellbeing of future generations.



As we come out of the COVID situation, schools in England are being asked to open to children and this is a hugely important phase for us to get right. The Flourish Project supports the call for there to be a recovery curriculum in place before this happens.

“It would be naive of any Headteacher/Principal to think that the child will pick up the Curriculum at exactly the same point at which they left it on the day their school closed. Too much has happened. Listen to what the children are saying. Look at what the children are experiencing. None of this follows the usual pattern of a school year with all of the annual cycle of events. It feels like a period of true social disorder. Compassionate Leadership is crucial at this time.”

A Recovery Curriculum, Loss and Life for our children and schools post pandemic.

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We believe that COVID should be treated as a profound and potentially life-changing Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) and that schools will play a hugely important role in ensuring that children and young people come out of this period in as positive a way as possible.

Any move back to school should therefore honour the developmental and emotional needs of students and should clearly identify what needs to be done **to protect their health and wellbeing beyond the needs of academic timetables**. From the perspective of the Project these needs are:



Security and relationship need to be at the core of such a curriculum, as without these children cannot learn and grow. And it is these two elements that have most been compromised by the virus.

Security All students will have experienced a sense of extreme dislocation when the predictable adult world that they knew and trusted suddenly changed in such a drastic way. All the normal rules of social life will have changed, their families will have been disrupted and fragmented and, for them, nothing may ever really feel the same again. Schools, therefore, have an extremely important role to play in restoring a sense of safety and stability to children’s worlds. And that includes teachers themselves feeling fully supported and safe.

Flourish Project 2020

Schools could be experienced as safe havens, away from the restrictions of being confined at home with confused, anxious, fearful or aggressive adults – or, if insufficiently prepared, they could perpetuate the chaos and fear of an unpredictable and dangerous world. Some children may have loved being at home with their siblings and parents, or may have developed even stronger connections with their teachers. Some may feel unsafe in what may now be unfamiliar school environments. The most vulnerable and disadvantaged children will need particular care and attention if they are to recover from periods of extreme chaos and neglect.

Relationship Children's friendships will have been disrupted and their normal routines and social interactions greatly changed. Some will have experienced being with adults that are fearful, out of control and possibly deeply upset and bereaved. Others may have loved spending more time with their siblings and parents, away from the normal stresses of school life. The restoration of stable, open and loving adult relationships, within ordered and predictable environments will be an essential element for children's healing and wellbeing. Children will need the time and space to share their stories and express their feelings, before being pressurised to focus on academic curricula.

Independence Most children will have spent time being asked to learn in profoundly different ways to normal. In fact, some aspects of their learning may have been the complete opposite of how they have been asked to learn before. Some may have experienced more freedom, choice and spontaneity, whereas others may have experienced increased pressure and confinement. It will be vital that schools honour children's individual experiences and questions, so that they can reskill and rebuild their confidence as learners. The most vulnerable and disadvantaged children, in particular, will need the time and space to feel fully supported and confident in their learning.

Engagement All students will have had their normal routines disrupted and many will feel a sense of profound disengagement. Some may have enjoyed the more informal and blended forms of learning that they have experienced at home, but many will have had very stressful and chaotic experiences. Children will need time to adapt to any new forms of teaching and to be reassured that they can catch up on areas of learning that they may have missed. The importance of recovery from loss, trauma, anxiety and grief must be equally prioritised with that of restoring levels of knowledge and skills.

Fulfilment Many students will be fearful about the future and how the total disruption of their learning environments will impact on the skills, capacities and achievements that they need to feel good about themselves and confident about their activities. All children will need to be able to express their thoughts, feelings and emotions about this, with participation in music and the arts playing a particularly important role. Schools will need to ensure that success is as much associated with students' levels of wellbeing as it is with that of academic attainment.

Contribution Students will have spent a considerable amount of time being immersed in the importance of family and community, with many experiencing new levels of belonging and contribution within their local neighbourhoods. It will be important for schools to acknowledge and celebrate this and to further discussions around active student participation beyond the school walls, and particularly for the creation of a more caring and connected world. Children need to feel that their voices are important and can be heard.

Growth Students may be deeply worried about how the pandemic has affected their futures, and whether the world itself is now sustainable. They may have lost their personal sense of belief and purpose and feel angry or disassociated. Schools will play an important role in restoring a sense of meaning to the global experience and in enabling students to explore the positive aspects that are coming out of it. Children need to be given a sense of optimism and hope.

In a post covid world, teachers and schools must be supported in providing environments that nurture the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual wellbeing of the students in their care