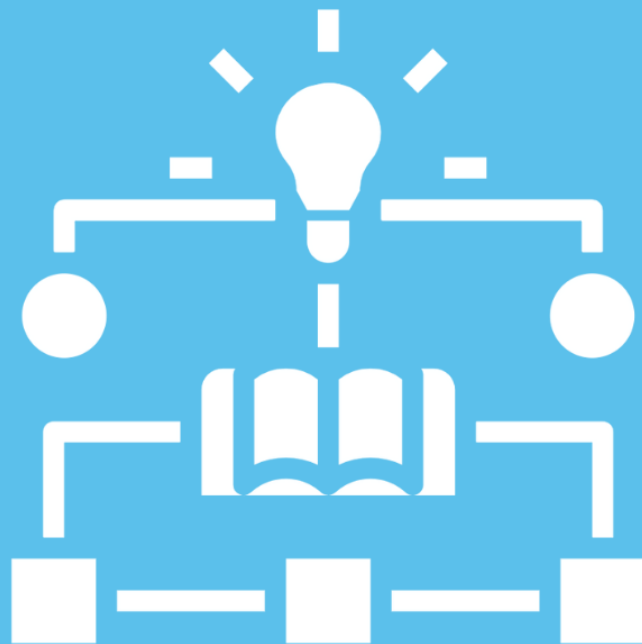


A ROUNDTABLE CONVERSATION



POST-COVID CURRICULUM

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Forward

The following material is a summary of roundtable conversations discussing some of the issues around the curriculum in schools post lockdown. It is not intended to be a final solution but to provide suggestions for possible actions and encourage wider debate.

Huge thanks go to those who participated in the discussion. If you wish to participate in similar conversations then make sure to follow @edroundtables on Twitter.

The conversations took place on 5th & 7th May 2020 with contributions from Angela, Fraser, Jonathan, Nicky, Jenny, Lee, Coral, Chris, Ricky, Lesley, Kate & Ian

Context

In this case, the focus was on what the curriculum should look like when schools are re-opened.

The discussion was broad and covered many areas, most of which are covered in this document.

I have tried to organise the ideas and comments into a more coherent piece than the original transcript and hope that you enjoy reading it.

I apologise to any of those involved if I have misunderstood any of the conversations, these mistakes are mine – don't hesitate to offer clarification.



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New Beginnings

Regardless of when schools return, whether it is June, July or September, the return will be a new beginning. The school building could feel unfamiliar, relationships may be insecure, there will be more than just a social distance for many. From this sea of uncertainty, new beginnings will emerge, evolving once more into a school and its wider community.

It will just take time.

As I type this, the government have announced plans to re-open partially on June 1st and within 2 to 3 weeks have all children back in school for the remainder of the summer term, if it is safe to do so.

The partial return to school does place a significant strain on the ability of schools to meet the needs of all pupils, including those who will be learning at home. Bear this in mind as you read the rest of this article, the conversations happened just before this announcement.

The two conversations touched on similar themes and concerns, which are developed below. There was unanimous recognition that despite all the hard work on curriculum development over the last 12 to 18 months, a new curriculum for the new start was required.

The question is “What should that look like?”



Wellbeing

Everyone agreed that the new curriculum had to be one that promoted wellbeing. It could not be a case of business as usual, and that to try and restart the school in this manner would be foolhardy.

Until children have been given the opportunity to process and recover from their experiences, they will not be ready to move forwards with much in the way of new learning.

The main challenge to overcome this was that every child's experience will be different.

Some will have been sheltered from the news and had a relatively enjoyable time.

Others will have heard the news, heard discussions and may have experienced the death of someone close.

Some will have been cooped up in small spaces with families that have been suffering from extreme hardship.

Others will have been able to play in gardens or other open spaces – reconnecting with their families.

So where do you start with your wellbeing curriculum?

One article published that drew the attention of several members of the roundtables was “A Recovery Curriculum: Loss and Life for our children and schools post-pandemic” authored by Barry Carpenter, CBE and Matthew Carpenter. (link at the end of the report).

This was used as a prompt for some areas of discussion and is useful for additional reading.

One member of the roundtable @NicolaCforster5 is working with several agencies/specialists to create a recovery curriculum based on this that will be freely available to schools, once completed. Give her a follow for updates.

Challenges ahead will include catering to everyone's different needs, a starting point for managing this would be

developing more trauma-informed practice. Developing the conversational skills needed to help staff and pupils make sense of what has happened.

One head was already speaking to wellbeing specialists regarding group work that can be done with small groups of children to identify and

alleviate some of the issues that may result.

An examination of the school's hidden curriculum may be in order, are there opportunities to make some of what happens in schools more explicit as part of the wellbeing process?

What is your hidden curriculum? What has it meant in the past?



Relationships

Relationships are hugely important in schools and their surrounding communities. It will be the relationships that children have that will support them through the transition from home learning back to more formal education.

These relationships will need rebuilding, so giving children the time to re-establish their connections will be essential.

This starts with how they are greeted at school. Being positive and upbeat without forced levity will reassure them that school is a safe space and allow them to relax a little.

There was plenty of discussion about the importance of working in groups and the use of outdoor spaces and play to

foster the return of children's normal relationships.

Other suggestions included the use of vertical grouping across year groups within the school to develop families of children.

These vertical families would work together on group and whole school projects for the early part of any return.

The use of circle time and other SEMH pedagogical strategies are likely to be essential for some, and certainly useful for others to rebuild the trust needed to re-establish relationships with staff and other pupils.

Without the development of these relationships, children would be unlikely to be ready to focus on more formal school work.



Community

It isn't just the school that has been affected by the long-term absence, the community's connection to the school will have changed.

In some cases, where the school has gone above and beyond to support families through the crisis, bonds may have strengthened.

In others, where contact with the school has been limited, it may have been damaged.

Many members of the community may have been completely isolated and will be very nervous, if not petrified of returning to social interaction.

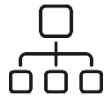
Regardless of the situation, the curriculum is an opportunity

to bring the community together.

Although this may be challenging with social distancing in place, there were suggestions from roundtable members that could be implemented.

Perhaps a focus on a community project, such as an art exhibition, a recorded concert beamed out over Facebook or a charity campaign in support of a cause close the hearts of people in the community would support some reconnecting.

Further conversations on reconnecting the community are planned and should provide more detail regarding how to do this.



Structure

This will be important to re-establish; many children need it and thrive on it.

During the lockdown, new structures and routines will have been established. Breaking new habits will be hard for some.

The main issue is that any new routines and structures will by necessity be different from normal.

This may cause issues with the children who need it most. They want a return to the old normal, not the new normal.

The question will be, how much formal structure at each stage will support children as they redevelop their learning behaviours and relationships?

There is no simple answer to this, as heads will need to assess their staff and children's wellbeing throughout the process of returning to school.

Although it would be preferable for schools to be running as normal as soon as possible, this is unlikely to be

the case in the short term and a careful balance will have to be maintained.

The fact that many children will have been cooped up inside for days on end is also important to consider.

Making use of outdoor spaces for learning will allow them to reconnect with the outside in a safe environment and should be part of the structure of the day, where possible.

As an addendum, schools may return on June 1st with very strict policies regarding health and safety, what impact this very structured routine will have on any curriculum being provided is unknown until schools have had the opportunity to plan for the return.

The government guidance released on 14th May recommended updating the school behaviour policy to reflect the new rules and routines with some examples in the annexes.

The policy should also include rewards and sanctions for not following the regularly and rigorously reinforced

behaviour rules. The guidance did not suggest appropriate sanctions.



Curriculum Gaps

One of the biggest challenges with any curriculum devised for the return to school will be to identify where the gaps in knowledge are.

This will be particularly true where schools have continued to deliver new content that not all pupils have engaged in.

These gaps could be further exacerbated by poor attendance resulting from fear of returning to schools.

Any curriculum planning needs to consider this.

Initially, it was suggested, schools should focus on basic skills to add a routine to the day and also allow consolidation of understanding. Enabling children to grasp more complex ideas more quickly once they are introduced.

This would not be time wasted.

Further discussion followed regarding children who did not attend school.

Continuing to support these children is essential, but could prove challenging for some school, particularly if teaching staff are required in schools to teach a larger number of smaller classes.

There could not be an expectation that teachers teach both groups of pupils, although if a school had staff who were not in school, they could support children.

Using remote learning platforms such as that provided by Oak National Schools, or Robin Hood MAT online learning projects

It was recognised that there hadn't been a "loss of learning" just that different things had been learned and exploring this may prove useful.

Teachers would continue to use their professional judgement to backtrack and support students as individual gaps were identified.

One area where there may be a significant gap in the health and fitness of children.

Ensuring that they have access to high-quality opportunities to exercise could be a great use of the outdoor spaces that schools hopefully have available to them.



Assessments & Baselines

There was some discussion of the use of assessment, it was widely agreed that formal assessment was not appropriate at this point.

Children were very unlikely to be in a position to cope with the added stress of this kind of assessment.

The use of low stakes quizzes and challenges to identify starting points for recapping and reteaching aspects of numeracy and maths could be useful.

Mark Anderson presented some excellent material on this at a recent online BrewEd event – This may be useful to watch.

[Click here for the video](#)

Some heads expressed real concern about the government baseline tests being introduced at the start of the new year.

Boycotting these is an individual headteacher's choice, but there was some support for this from some members of the roundtable conversations.

They believe that wellbeing and reconnecting students and the community was a much greater priority for their schools.



Technology

The lockdown has been a huge learning curve, but there has been some good come from it. EdTech has had a baptism of fire and sorted some of the good from the bad.

The following list is just some of the technology that schools have found beneficial:

1. Purple Mash
2. Times Table Rock Stars
3. Spelling Shed
4. Numbots
5. Juniper

6. Seesaw
7. Tapestry
8. Zoom
9. Microsoft Teams
10. Facebook Page (for communicating with parents).

Take the time to check them all out, they can be real time savers, and many of the heads said that they will continue to use them once lockdown is over.

Summary

Sometimes events can overtake us, the conversations took place before the government announced that schools were likely to reopen on 1st of June.

There had been hints of this from the media and various other sources, but the focus of the conversations was very much on September when it was predicted that it would be safer for all to return.

Children returning before then was a possibility, but the focus then would have been on wellbeing and transition.

Following the announcement, schools spent days planning how to make the seemingly impossible work, before further guidance emerged frustratingly late.

Despite these changes and my struggling to reframe the conversation in light of the changes, there is much in the conversations to still consider. Hopefully, it will either provide reassurance that others are thinking along the same lines as you or suggestions for issues that you hadn't yet resolved.

I am going to paraphrase the words of a blog by one of the roundtable members. The teaching profession has tackled the challenges that have been thrown at it, delivering online learning within 48 hours, feeding the needy and providing a safe space for key workers children. They have kept their communities safe, made PPE and continued to safeguard children.

Continue to do this great work with the curriculum that you provide. You know how important your choices are and you will continue to make the best ones you can for your school and it's community.

The link to the recovery curriculum article is below, please take a look, it may help you focus your thinking.

<https://www.evidenceforlearning.net/recoverycurriculum/>

If you have had experiences of the issues discussed and have found potential solutions, then get in touch @edroundtables on Twitter.

If you have an educational topic you would like to discuss with your peers in a confidential space. Then contact @edroundtables or visit www.edrt.co.uk



Ben Brown