



The Recovery Curriculum

Interim Head of Education at nasen, Michael Surr, speaks to Barry Carpenter and Matthew Carpenter about the Recovery Curriculum.

Q What inspired you to propose and develop the Recovery Curriculum?

There has been lots of talk about filling gaps in young people's knowledge and we were worried about that 'catch-up' process. Our initial embers of concern have become extremely justified because if you think how much education children have missed, if we try just for purely catch-up, we're going to crush some children.

Our expectation was that these children were going to be frail and fragile as learners when they came back, having lost the capacity to learn, because learning at home is different to learning at school.

Children have lived through this pandemic, have been out of school and have heard the statistics around deaths. Even a child who seems unconcerned, may be struggling to process it all. As a profession, we have a responsibility to have these recovery conversations to reassure children and share the facts with them.

In January 2020, one in nine of our children had a mental health issue but we now know that it's one in six.

The Recovery Curriculum is about addressing that collectively. It's a curriculum based on 'heart values' and is about kindness, respect, compassion and compassionate leadership.

Q How have needs changed?

When we reviewed plans for returning to school, the first thing the students wanted to be taught was about the pandemic. Every young person has their own journey and I think their experience of the pandemic has broadened the spectrum of requirements that we need to work with.

We looked at where there might be opportunities to explore the pandemic, but we don't know when a young person is going to struggle with something. I've been amazed by their resilience during this time but every

moment that I'm amazed, I also get an insight into how difficult their experiences have been.

It's about having the capacity to be responsive, easy access to the lessons and information about what the pandemic is. English and maths are the core, but RSHE is the heart. This pandemic has raised our anxiety levels and made us all hyper vigilant. This is not a resting state for the brain and it certainly isn't a good state for learning.

Q Are people concerned about progress and attainment?

The idea of the Recovery Curriculum was always about identifying what you already do and using those things to facilitate recovery. It isn't about recovery versus progress as these two things can co-exist. Those schools with a really strong, knowledge-rich, progress-orientated culture, can use that effectively as a lever to facilitate recovery.

→ LEADERSHIP



BIO

PROFESSOR BARRY CARPENTER CBE, OBE

Barry has a career spanning over 40 years. His appointments include Professor of Mental Health in Education to Oxford Brookes University, and Honorary Professorships at universities in Ireland, Germany and Australia, as well as Principal, Chief Executive, and National Director for Complex Needs at the Department for Education. He has been a Fellow of the University of Oxford and speaks and publishes internationally on special needs issues.

Q What are challenges for recovery?

There is no set timeframe to recovery. Unless we have pandemic-deniers running schools, no one could argue that children haven't been affected, so it's about having some element of recovery that is appropriate to your school.

That said, we are not fully in recovery because some children will inevitably be taken out of school to self-isolate, which is fragmenting children's learning even more. If any of us had been ill, and had surgery, it's only when the surgery is over that we go into recovery; COVID-19 is not over.

We have to consider too, that schools may be forced to close again and that some children may feel a sense of abandonment, particularly those on the autism spectrum, who may find it difficult to understand why their routines are disrupted.

Q Do you have any examples of schools that have implemented a recovery curriculum successfully?

Kingsbury primary school in Lancashire, has decided this term they will have what they've called their 'rainbow curriculum'. The school is building a rainbow path as a symbol of remembrance which can be a place for children to talk about what

they've been through. In recovery, that's vital as the conversations do need to be child-to-child initiated.

There is also Foxfield School in Liverpool. The headteacher there, Martin McKenna, had plans this year to focus on mental health and emotional wellbeing even before the pandemic. The Recovery Curriculum is becoming the catalyst to do that work.

The Recovery Curriculum is about building resilience to make sure young people are emotionally robust and ready to come back.

Q What do you hope the Recovery Curriculum?

It was never intended to be a definitive curriculum framework but rather it is for people to consider and think about what they could do in school to help their young people recover. It's okay to think outside of the box.

What impresses us is that we don't find teachers kicking against mental health initiatives or arguing against the need to help our children through this pandemic.

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The aim of the new section is to enable schools to learn from each other, and to share their own learning with others
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There's a willingness, and many are asking 'how do I do that?'

Any work that's done on recovery now won't be redundant because it will go towards any schools' broader statutory work on mental health. I think

it's making the profession as a whole, more aware of the word trauma. Anxiety brings a rise in cortisol levels in the brain, and cortisol blocks memory imprint. Children may be sitting quietly in lessons and so we assume everything is fine, but it could be that they are rigid with fear, and they will remember nothing.

Q Any final points?

A headteacher rang me the other day to tell me they had a member of staff say: "When this is all over, I'd still like to do this Recovery Curriculum; it's what I came into teaching to do."

When we were creating the Recovery Curriculum we chose the word 'construct' because it's about building; every school community has been fractured by this, so you can't have young people locked down for six months and just think we're all happy and jolly and it's just back to page 67!



BIO

MATTHEW CARPENTER

Matthew is the Principle of Baxter College. He has a science teaching background and significant and wide-ranging experience in school leadership and improvement.