

B U I L D

B U I L D

CREATING YOUR OWN 'NEW NORMAL'

Dunford & Redmond, 2020

INTRODUCTION

Whether we like it or not, the world has changed. This change also encompasses the educational landscape.

Many of the ways of working, the elements we were comfortable with, have either gone for good or will be limited for the time being.

The emphasis is now on how to move forward, to embrace the challenges and to understand that we are not powerless in the creation of our 'new normal'.

As the education world contemplates the transition back to school, we must be mindful of the impact this extended, unprecedented break has had on everyone in the school community (students, parents, families, teachers, and the wider staff body).

We are not transitioning back to anything that anyone is familiar and experienced with. We face a new context for which we must develop our own new normal.

Our schools, classrooms, and resources will look different. Moreover, relationships will have changed - between peers, between pupils and teachers and, potentially, between other members of the school community.

Many of the things that children, staff and parents are used to, and the procedures they have grown familiar with, will be altered.



As the process begins of creating new contexts and ways of working, we must seize this opportunity to build on existing good practice, draw on (and continue to develop) our resilience and inspire innovation.

This will mean embracing new ways of working, developing new skills, and using this as a positive window to make changes to some of the elements that were not effective but had just become part of the accepted norms.

It is important that we:

- Rebuild our relationships;
- Re-establish boundaries, procedures and routines;
- Re-visit previous skills, knowledge and experiences;
- Ensure that we factor in some orientation for everyone regarding our new environments;
- Use this opportunity to 'clean house' and remove things that were not working or stop things that were counter productive,
- Remember that education is about people, so we need to look after them.

Our BUILD process gives 5 interlinked areas that we feel are crucial starting points when thinking about the establishment of your new normal.

We understand each context will be different because of the many complex contextual variables involved.

The areas within the build BUILD process can help you to consider some key questions as a basis/starting point and as a catalyst for effective educational transformation and regeneration.

Within each of the 5 BUILD areas we outline are listed, but not yet explored in full detail here, some important key words, concepts and themes which you may wish to explore further as they are relevant to this process of creating a new normal.

B

BELONGING

- INCLUSION
- INVOLVEMENT
- OWNERSHIP
- RESPECT
- TRUST
- SAFETY
- NURTURE
- CARE
- EMBEDDING
- MOTIVATION
- ROUTINES
- COMMUNITY
- SYMBOLS
- INDUCTION

U

UNDERSTANDING

- KNOWLEDGE
- REASONING
- WHAT?
- WHY?
- WHO?
- HOW?
- WHEN?
- WHERE?
- ALIGNMENT
- VISION
- SHARED
- MISSION
- CONTEXT
- ACCEPTANCE
- COMMUNICATION
- RATIONALE

I

INTENTION

- CULTURES
- HABIT
- AUTOMATIC
- NURTURED
- ACCEPTANCE
- APPROPRIATE
- WELCOMING
- GUIDANCE
- ADVICE
- SUPPORT
- CONSENSUS
- VISION
- REESTABLISH
- RESET
- EVOLVE
- GROW

L

LEARNING

- SKILLS
- KNOWLEDGE
- PRACTICE
- REFLECTION
- SOLUTIONS
- INNOVATIVE
- CELEBRATION
- DIFFERENTIATION
- CLOSING GAPS
- SUPPORT
- CONFIDENCE
- ASSESSMENT
- CURRICULUM
- WELL-BEING

D

DYNAMICS

- EVOLVING
- PROACTIVE
- RELATIONSHIPS
- COMMUNICATION
- COLLABORATIVE
- ENERGY
- STAFFING
- SYSTEMS
- PROCESSES
- CLASSROOM
- GROUP
- SCHOOL
- FRIENDSHIPS
- INTERACTIONS
- LANGUAGE
- TERMINOLOGY
- OPPORTUNITY

Dunford & Redmond, 2020

B

BELONGING

Much has been written about the importance of a sense of belonging for students. Many factors influence this sense of belonging: academic achievement, motivation, personal characteristics, social relationships, demographic characteristics, school climate, and participation in extracurricular activities.

Of course more widely, the necessity of a sense of belonging extends to all members of the school community – students, parents/carers, school staff and members of the wider school family. All need to feel safe, feel valued, trust the environment, and feel that they have a voice and that they matter.

Influencing an individual's sense of belonging are the different micro contexts that impact them within the wider whole school context. More broadly, the context encompasses each person within the school community (students, staff and parents) in their different roles and with their different expectations, interactions and experiences.

Ensuring people feel they belong is not an instant or passive process; it takes time to build the level of safety and trust in an environment necessary for full engagement.

Belonging, therefore, takes effort and must be nurtured, reviewed, and revisited to ensure that it is maintained.

Changes in the context, big or small, can have huge impact on everyone's sense of belonging. Familiarity is a key feature for developing belonging; if things change then you might not know how you 'fit'.

We know there will be changes in the educational context within schools. As yet, the reality and extent of these changes has not quite been determined. This new unknown context will take time for people to understand, accept, adapt to and feel safe in.

People will adapt - they always do - but we need to be cognisant that we must provide additional support, guidance and information to build trust and enable embracing of the 'new' to happen.

Guiding Questions



- **INCLUSION**
- **INVOLVEMENT**
- **OWNERSHIP**
- **RESPECT**
- **TRUST**
- **SAFETY**
- **NURTURE**
- **CARE**
- **EMBEDDING**
- **MOTIVATION**
- **ROUTINES**
- **COMMUNITY**
- **SYMBOLS**
- **INDUCTION**

- How are we nurturing belonging?
- How are we giving a voice to all members of the community?
- How are we building/rebuilding trust with each member of the school community?
- How can we ensure students, parents and staff members trust the environment is as safe as it can reasonably be?
- How are we embedding new norms and routines such that pupils feel safe, comfortable and happy in the environment?
- How are we supporting children who are struggling to settle back into school? (Those who may be anxious, clingy and/or who have regressed in their independence, social and academic skills.)
- How do we ensure pupils are motivated to attend school when the school with which they were familiar has changed significantly?
- How do we nurture and rebuild the social relationships and friendships that may have been strained by distance?
- Knowing extracurricular activities significantly influence student belonging, what can we provide?
- How do we ensure children have opportunities to nurture the talents and skills from which they derive much of their self-esteem?
- How do we ensure the wider school community still feel a sense of belonging even if they can no longer physically enter the school building?
- How do we ensure new members of our school community are welcomed and feel they belong?
- What transition arrangements and information-sharing procedures have we established for new pupil entrants to the school (and their families) and for new staff members?

U UNDERSTANDING

Everyone reacts differently under pressure and in a crisis. Some will have responded in ways that are quite different to us. There are many differing viewpoints on the courses of action that has been taken, the necessity for school closures and distancing measures etc.

Understanding that we hold different thoughts and views, we must now strive to ensure our relationships with those who hold different opinions do not become tarnished.

School success now hinges on actively regrouping and refocusing such that all members of the school community are working with clear purpose and drive towards achieving a common mission.

Understanding involves ensuring that everyone knows why things happen the way they do.

Making sure that everyone understands that there are sound reasons for any changes and that these changes are to ensure everything runs as effectively as possible for everyone involved is vital.

Without understanding, things often don't or can't happen, and a lack of understanding (and involvement in decision making) can frequently lead to resistance, defiance and disengagement.

The feelings surrounding uncertainty are very powerful and influential on outcomes and behaviours.

We need to ensure people feel comfortable in their knowledge of what is happening, why it is happening, when things are happening and how they can get further support and information if needed.

Guiding Questions



- **KNOWLEDGE**
- **REASONING**
- **WHAT?**
- **WHY?**
- **WHO?**
- **HOW?**
- **WHEN?**
- **WHERE?**
- **ALIGNMENT**
- **VISION**
- **SHARED**
- **MISSION**
- **CONTEXT**
- **ACCEPTANCE**
- **COMMUNICATION**
- **RATIONALE**

- It is likely that many things now have to change, how are you going to communicate the rationale for changes made so that there is acceptance and understanding?
- How are we ensuring that everyone has the right knowledge and skills to make sense of the changing context?
- How do we respond those who struggle to adapt to and implement the changes deemed necessary?
- How do we align those with differing viewpoints to the school's singular vision and mission?
- How do we ensure we maintain positive relationships with everyone in the school community despite any potential differing opinions?
- How do we actively regroup and refocus to work with clear purpose and drive?
- Are you going to have a strategy to ensure that everyone is involved, their voices heard and that they have opportunities to clarify and consolidate their understanding?

I INTENTION

It is vital each member of the school community knows what we do, how we do it, and why we do it. In light of changed circumstances, we are tasked with coming together again, blending as a unified whole and working with intention to re-establish our revised what, how and why. Achieving this successfully hinges on our school culture.

What does our school culture and ethos expect and want to achieve? Our intentions.

School culture refers to the way members of the school community work together and the beliefs, values and assumptions we share. It can also encompass more concrete elements such as the physical environment. School culture can be positive or negative.

There is an expectation on school leaders, teachers, and school community members to model positive, healthy behaviours for students. Some of the norms and rituals we have previously used for this may no longer be suitable and may have to be reviewed.

Safety is critical to a positive school culture. We must ensure members of the school community are physically safe. Creating risk assessments in the contexts of so many unknowns is onerous, and we must seek out the best advice and guidance available.

Furthermore, we must ensure community members are emotionally safe. We may have lost members of our community to this virus. We may face outbreaks of it upon our return. How we deal with this and support each other feeds into our culture which in turn fuels our mission.

In order to work with intention, we must establish unity of purpose. Important leadership decisions must be made collaboratively with input from staff members, students, and parents.

How this is to be achieved in current circumstances before schools reopen is a question school leaders must address.

Guiding Questions



- How is the school vision to be established / reestablished?
Consider:
 - Is everyone clear as to why this school exists and what our purpose is?
 - Is there consensus as to what achieving our purpose looks like? What are students doing?
 - What are we doing to create an environment conducive to promoting the behaviours we have identified as key?
 - How are we holding one another accountable for promoting that which we wish to see?

- **CULTURES**
- **HABIT**
- **AUTOMATIC**
- **NURTURED**
- **ACCEPTANCE**
- **APPROPRIATE**
- **WELCOMING**
- **GUIDANCE**
- **ADVICE**
- **SUPPORT**
- **CONSENSUS**
- **VISION**
- **REESTABLISH**
- **RESET**
- **EVOLVE**
- **GROW**

- How are you going to revisit and redevelop your new vision?
- How do you ensure a collective approach whilst allowing for individuality?
- People will adapt to changes at different rates and with differing levels of confidence, how are you going to provide support for this journey?
- How do we ensure the school environment feels warm and welcoming in light of health and safety guidelines, hygiene, and distancing measures?
- How do we ensure the environment is as physically safe as it can possibly be?
- Who/where do we turn to for advice and guidance on such matters?

L

LEARNING

The core business of school is learning. This has been severely interrupted and changed by school closures.

The impact of this must be analysed for we know some children will have been affected to a far greater extent than others. For certain pupils - those with additional needs, those for whom the digital divide is a huge chasm, those leading chaotic home lives - the impact of school closures will be significantly greater.

There is a risk fear of lost face to face learning time could have damaged pupils' confidence in themselves as learners and may stymie their progress upon return to school. Knowledge may have been lost and skills forgotten.

As school leaders and teachers, we are charged with responding to a situation that has caused disruption on a global scale and finding solutions that work for us at a local level with the needs of each individual to the fore. Harking back to the strand of belonging, it is essential we address access for all.

We must ensure educational resources and learning opportunities are equitably distributed such that all students are having their needs met. All pupils should have access to the academic support and services they require to succeed, but equality does not mean treating each child the same. It means viewing them as individuals and identifying and addressing their unique needs accordingly. It demands we have a curriculum that sets high expectations for all, but the focus cannot solely be academic.

Our curriculum must set pupils up for life. It must build their academic abilities, their physical and mental health and facilitate creative pursuits. Pupils should leave our schools feeling self-assured and with the foundations for healthy and positive life habits embedded.

When schools reopen, we must chart a path with our students and their parents/carers such that they are confident they can fulfil their potential.

We must consider if changes to our learning ethos are necessary when we reopen. Schools are largely judged on academic success. The extent to which mental well-being could and should be used as a success indicator is a question for schools to consider.

L

LEARNING

We hear much about the 'new normal,' yet there is no such thing. It does not yet exist. It must be created and then refined; we do not adapt to it, rather we innovate ways to function and interact as effectively as possible within a new set of parameters and conditions.

This forms an enormous learning challenge for us as teachers and leaders. Doubtless there will be many mistakes as we attempt to work within this new context, and we need to ensure these do not become a barrier to progress and a drain on morale.

Accountability has led to much fear within the education system. Ultimately, this fear stunts learning and development and this applies for both children and adults. There is a risk that the fear of making a mistake will paralyse us from acting, thereby hindering and damaging our students' learning opportunities.

To achieve learning, it is imperative we view mistakes as opportunities to develop, grow and enhance ourselves and our provision; without such an attitude, there will be no enhanced and improved 'new normal'.

As we embark upon reestablishing our whats, hows and whys, it would be timely to consider the whats, hows and whys of the wider system within which we operate.

It may be worthwhile examining the extent to which accountability and performance measures influence our whats, hows and whys and whether that influence is positive for our school community.

Undoubtedly any new expectations will need clear definition. Expect that new knowledge will need to be learnt, new skills mastered, and new ways of operating adapted to.

Furthermore, new models of curriculum delivery (perhaps even new curricular elements) may need to be considered and alternative ways to access this may need to be established, supported by new routines and procedures that will need to be embedded.

As we do so, we must keep our whats, hows and whys to the forefront of our minds.

Guiding Questions



- **SKILLS**
- **KNOWLEDGE**
- **PRACTICE**
- **REFLECTION**
- **SOLUTIONS**
- **INNOVATIVE**
- **CELEBRATION**
- **DIFFERENTIATION**
- **CLOSING GAPS**
- **SUPPORT**
- **CONFIDENCE**
- **ASSESSMENT**
- **CURRICULUM**
- **WELL-BEING**

- Where things have to be changed or adapted, what is your process for collaborative problem solving?
- What new skills, knowledge areas and understanding need to be learnt?
- Learning new things take time, so how are new skills, routines and practices going to be embedded?
- Are there aspects of the curriculum that now need to be changed or amended?
- Does the curriculum sufficiently provide for the well-being and mental health needs of our children?
- How will assessment be undertaken?
- How will identified gaps in learning be addressed?
- How will regular feedback and updates be shared with students and parents?
- Will typical staff deployment have to be changed to meet guidelines regarding distancing? If so, how do we ensure the impact of any such changes is minimised?
- How can we rebuild the confidence of those members of our school community who have had it dented during school closures?
- How will key milestones and achievements be celebrated?
- How will professional development and learning opportunities for staff be continued?

D

DYNAMICS

Dynamics refers to the the forces which, combined, stimulate growth, development, or change within a system or process. As we prepare for schools to reopen, we must consider how the things around us are working and influencing what we do daily.

The dynamics we have been used to, trained for, and have prepared for possibly don't exist in the same way now. We need to prepare, and be prepared, for a life that has a new set of dynamics.

Dynamics may be considered as a product of the 4 previous elements of our BUILD process. Dynamics happen because of the success or limitations of belonging, understanding, intention and learning – each of these are massively influential on the overall dynamics of any context and as such they must be monitored, nurtured, supported, refined, reviewed and valued collectively and individually.

We often refer to classroom dynamics or group dynamics. Classroom and group dynamics will likely be changed significantly as a result of safety regulations and guidelines.

Friendship and relationship dynamics may have been impacted by time spent away from school. We can expect the pupil-teacher dynamic to be altered also and consideration must be given to balancing the intertwined dynamics of each families' personal and educational strategies with classroom and school learning culture.

The conventions governing how we interacted within the school community previously may no longer be suitable. Consider whether our systems are still fit for purpose.

Moreover, consider how our language and terminology may influence dynamics. 'Social distancing', for example, is a misnomer. What is required is physical distancing yet social solidarity.

Covid-19 has stopped us in our tracks, rendering all that was familiar and known to us changed. In leading through this crisis, we need to manage the day to day but plan with the future in mind.

If we are to look for a silver lining, this pause in face to face schooling and statutory assessment affords us an opportunity to consider whether further changes to the dynamics of the wider system would benefit our pupils.

Guiding Questions



- **EVOLVING**
- **PROACTIVE**
- **RELATIONSHIPS**
- **COMMUNICATION**
- **COLLABORATIVE**
- **ENERGY**
- **STAFFING**
- **SYSTEMS**
- **PROCESSES**
- **CLASSROOM**
- **GROUP**
- **SCHOOL**
- **FRIENDSHIPS**
- **INTERACTIONS**
- **LANGUAGE**
- **TERMINOLOGY**
- **OPPORTUNITY**

- Can you envisage any changes or challenges regarding the dynamics between the elements of Belonging, Understanding, Intention and Learning?
- How are you planning for potentially new dynamics?
- Have you identified what the changes have been for you and your context?
- What areas from before can be retained and which need adaptation?
- How much energy, time and resources do you think you might need to ensure that all the elements are working in synergy?
- A multi-directional channel of communication is the major conduit for ensuring that the elements of the school dynamic function together. How are these crucial lines going to be re-booted?
- Are you going to have a process for monitoring student interactions to enable appropriate and timely support to be provided if any relationship issues arise?
- As schools return to their own versions of the 'new normal', positivity is going to be key. The behaviour of all adults and the language and tone that we all use throughout the day must be upbeat, enthusiastic, solution-focused and bring people together to create a positive and valuable experience for all. How will you promote this?



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