Back to school in 2020 as Covid 19 restrictions ease……

Returning to the School Environment during the Covid 19 Pandemic

Not all experiences of Covid 19 will be equal for students returning to school in the coming weeks. For some students in households where there is sufficient computer equipment and a reasonable internet connection getting on with remote learning has probably been successful. In other households the digital divide, varying levels of parental stress along with previous stressful or traumatic experiences create a back drop that may have meant this has been a very stressful and distressing experience for students. As the pandemic curve flattens and we regain some normalcy we may see a spike in the levels of students in distress as they return to school. Not all experiences of Covid 19 will be equal.

For some students Covid 19 will be like a rain shower of activation…
For students and teachers for that matter, if there is a background of traumatic experience, the pandemic will act as a low-

level background of anxiety that may rekindle previous trauma reactivity.

Reassuring parents about the impact of school disruption.

Hattie has a few words to say about this…..

To begin, Hattie asks: "First, does it matter that students are not in the physical place called school?"
Hattie highlights that, although no meta-analysis exists on the effect on the length of a school year, traditional reviews show the effect to be "tiny". Also, both Australia and the US have some of the longest school days and school years across all of the OECD countries, meaning we have some room to give.
"If we take out one term/semester of 10 weeks, [Australia and the US] still have more in-school time compared to Finland, Estonia, Korea and Sweden, which all outscore Australia and the USA on PISA," Hattie says.
https://www.educationreview.com.au/2020/04/education-expert-john-hattie-weighs-in-on-the-impacts-of-distance-learning/

Using the PBL framework to re-engage in on site learning.

PBL schools are in a strong position as they have the opportunity to use the framework to define, teach and acknowledge expectations for safe school protocols during this Covid 19 period. Adding Covid 19 protocols to your existing behaviour matrix, developing lessons to explicitly teach these protocols and having a focus on acknowledgement of safe behaviours will support the safe re-engagement of students at school. The ESO PBL team has developed a 60-90 minute

presentation on Layering Mental Health at the Tier 1 Level. If you are interested in finding out more about this contact Louise Bromhead.

Play

There are many ways that schools influence emotional regulation in a positive way. Positive relationships between teachers and students, consistent practices across the school and the explicit teaching of expectations all help to create a safe environment. Play is another way that students can be supported to self-regulate. For many this is something that has been sorely missed in the past few weeks. Building play and connecting activities into the school day with a stronger focus may help students in this resettling period.

Nature

Spending time in nature is another way that we know helps to build a sense of connection. Brain circuitry reacts in a similar way in nature as it does when we are connecting with others. So are there ways that students can spend time outdoors doing some of their learning in close proximity to nature?

Other self-regulating activities

There will be a range of ways that settling students back into school emotionally will happen. Physical, rhythmic, musical and art-based activities are all ways that will help students' nervous systems to settle. A greater emphasis on these types of activities may be warranted.

Voice- a cue of safety

Whilst physical distancing may not be fully possible in the school environment, there will be steps to limit physical contact to a degree. So life will not be quite back to the way it was in February 2020. Using our voices to cue safety will become even more important. Intonation counts, so being more mindful of voice tone that is soothing, melodic or soft may compensate for our altered interactions. Affection that is delivered verbally may need to be increased to compensate for limited physical contact.

A word about mindfulness

If you are using an SEL program that incorporates mindfulness, anchors like sight and sound may need to be used more frequently in group settings that do not conform to 1.5m social distancing protocols. Using the breath as an anchor will be more safely used outside or in spaces where students can safely spread out.

Mind Full, or Mindful?