



Confederation
of School Trusts

Rising Strong

Essays On The Leadership
Response To Covid-19



About CST - The voice of school trusts

CST is the national organisation and sector body for academy and multi-academy trusts - advocating for, connecting and supporting executive and governance leaders in School Trusts.

We are a charitable company, registered with the Charity Commission. Our charitable purpose, as set out in our Articles of Association, is “the advancement of education for public benefit.”

We are governed by a Board of Trustees and are subject to the regulations of the Charity Commission and accountable to our members.

We are strictly apolitical. We work with the government of the day, political parties and politicians across the spectrum to advance education for public benefit.

CST’s mission is to build an excellent education system in England, with every school part of a strong and sustainable group in which every child is a powerful learner and adults learn and develop together as teachers and leaders.

Our vision is a system which holds trust on behalf of children.

Our values:

Selflessness
Integrity
Objectivity
Accountability

Openness
Honesty
Leadership

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Introduction

We have seen a plethora of articles and blogs written over the past few months, regarding all aspects of education. Many have called for fundamental and radical changes to our schooling system in England. I was struck by Russell Hobby's blog in which he outlines five ways NOT to think about the crisis and its aftermath:

1. "This will change everything."
2. "This proves what I always believed."
3. "It's all or nothing."
4. "It works for me."
5. "We already know what to do."

He concludes by saying that the crisis will not automatically transform our world. But if we want a small part of it to be different, we have a unique moment in which to work to make it so.

The American research professor Brené Brown coined the term "Rising Strong" as the title of her 2015 book. Rising Strong is a book about resilience - what it takes to get back up. Struggle can be our greatest call to courage. It can be a path to deeper meaning, wisdom and hope.

Good education and good society advance together. As we rebuild society following the COVID pandemic, school trusts are a core part of the way we repair the social and educational fabric. Trusts should be viewed in their localities with pride because they are creating a stronger education community, working with local authorities and other civic partners. Trusts could and should be viewed as important civic institutions in the goal of achieving the good society.

The essays in this short think piece seek to offer a constructive view of what we can learn from COVID-19. As we work together to rebuild the social and educational fabric of society, let us rise stronger, not by throwing out all that came before, but by building on the best of our education system.

Leora Cruddas

Chief Executive of The Confederation of School Trusts



Leaders as local 'connectors'

Schools, and groups of schools, have shown themselves to be strong, resilient and agile civic structures, performing a key role in maintaining community cohesion during the COVID-19 crisis. At times, they have been the main mediators of government and public health advice for parents and carers within their local communities providing much needed clarity when there has been a sea of official advice to comprehend and absorb.

The reality is that most schools have remained open during lockdown and not only provided an education for children in school and at home but also fulfilled the crucial social function of ensuring vulnerable families are looked after. School leaders have been key local 'connectors'. They have maintained local oversight and duty of care for the whole school workforce, pupil, parents/carers and the wider community.

It is our contribution to the national emergency that has led to a newfound respect for those who have helped keep society running. Schools and trusts have ensured that the most vulnerable pupils and families received the social and moral support they need during difficult times. Schools have much to be proud of.

The virus has not gone away. Social distancing, improved treatments and improving track and trace have ensured a decrease in post-peak transmission. However, there is a high probability that educational provision will need to be 'switched on and off' in response to localised lock-down in the Autumn term.

Leaders need to continue to be agile and resilient. The challenge now facing leaders in education is how we take forward the best aspects of recently developed approaches into a post-COVID 19 era whilst building on all that has been achieved by the sector over the past twenty years.

It is important that leaders identify the key developments and policy initiatives of the past twenty years that have had a profoundly positive impact on education for all children whilst confidently asserting the change that needs to happen for pupils to flourish.

Key areas that warrant further exploration are:

- How the system can lever schools into sustainable groups that provide adequately for adult learning as well as pupil learning. This includes a mechanism for greater collaboration between trusts and maintained schools.
- How more value can be placed on the civic role of trusts.
- How the system can develop teacher training so that well-supported early career teachers have the highest expectations of all children and young people as well as being skilled enough to enable them to achieve these high expectations.
- How technology is harnessed to maximise teaching time and improve school efficiency.
- How the sector promotes and nurtures collaboration using an approach to system wide improvement and accountability premised on collective efficacy.
- How SEND is funded and led to ensure all children learn.
- How funding can be appropriate to the task at hand – how much does a good education cost?

John Camp
Compass Partnership Trust

Rebekah Iiyambo
Eko Trust

Emerging stronger

"Out of adversity comes opportunity"

Benjamin Franklin

COVID-19 has undoubtedly brought many challenges and struggles and yet through the hardship we have been courageous, resilient and innovative. Many stars have shone through the darkness and if we harness all that has glowed brightly, we will emerge stronger.

Lest we forget

We have a unique teachable moment in education if we remember our struggles and triumphs. It is important that, while we are in what Stephen Covey describes as 'white water,' preoccupied by the 'urgent' and planning for a full reopening of schools in September, we take time to reflect and capture what has gone well in order to build a brighter future.

At Windsor Academy Trust we are creating a COVID-19 journal - with an accompanying short video - including contributions from staff, students and parents about their lessons learned and ideas on how we capitalise on the collective wisdom to create a future of hope and promise.

I am not of the view that education needs a radical overhaul. There is so much about it that is already impressive. I do, however, believe that the way we educate our young people could be significantly enhanced. A part of legacy of the disruption caused by COVID-19 could be to bend the curve of educational progression, to create an inflection point where educating the nation's children is poised for greater things. We can forge an agile, robust, innovative, honourable and future-focused system that allows the coming generations to flourish.

Powering up teaching

Trust leaders around the country will be brimming with pride for their exceptional staff during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many have 'bubbled-up,' demonstrating hidden talents that we must now maximise and create the conditions for previously unseen talents to surface. We have found new creative on-line approaches to staff professional learning. Going forward, how and when staff learn and develop will be more fluid and vibrant.

Powering up learning

We hear much about 'catch-up' for children that have fallen behind. Yet the very phrase has negative connotations, creating anxieties for the actors in the system. Instead, at Windsor Academy Trust, we are using the more positive narrative of 'accelerating learning' - an expedited journey over a period of time.



When we reflect on the children who have thrived through COVID-19 remote education, a common feature is learner self-regulation. Alongside a curriculum that equips our young with knowledge we can intentionally furnish them with learning strategies and skills, so that they can navigate their journey.

Character development

James Lane Allen famously said, “adversity does not build character, it reveals it.” We have repeatedly seen how COVID-19 has brought out the best and worst in people, both young and old. Like many school trusts we have been intentional about character development, utilising The Jubilee Centre *Framework for Character Education in Schools*. Our lockdown 50 Character Challenges and our Hope Curriculum have enabled students to ‘learn’ about character virtues and, more importantly, to ‘live’ them. As we move forward we can be more deliberate about how character is ‘taught, caught and sought.’

Nurturing Wellbeing

Children and staff alike have experienced varying levels of COVID-19 induced social dislocation, trauma and impacted mental, emotional and physical wellbeing. We have seen creativity in nurturing the wellbeing of those in our educational family. These and other developments must not peter out; they ought to become integral to our advancing education.

Inspiring leadership:

The choppy waters of COVID-19 have required leaders to know what to do when they don’t know what to. We have learned leadership lessons previous generations of educators could not have imagined would be necessary and we have a

duty to pass these on. Tim McGraw’s song ‘Humble and Kind’ sums up our duty to future leaders: “*When you get where you’re going, don’t forget turn back around and help the next one in line*”.

Parent power

Parents have learnt the language of learning, through ‘being teachers’ of their own children at home. They have new insights and contributions to make. Moreover we have opened the door to greater participation and support for their child’s learning aligned to collaboration with their teachers.

The power of collaboration

School trusts have not just survived COVID-19. We have excelled through the power of collaboration; between staff, schools, school trusts and with wider organisations. COVID-19 has revealed how interdependent the education ecosystem is within education and with other aspects of society. The generosity of collaboration must endure.

The challenges, anxieties and disruption of COVID-19 will live long in our memories. But, ‘lest we forget’ the wonderful things that have also materialised, and harness these to emerge stronger. We have a unique moment in time to impact for the better the learning and lives of the children we serve. That, surely, is a gift.

Dawn Haywood
Windsor Academy Trust

A renewal curriculum

In a recent article I referred to the five phases of the pandemic and its aftermath identified by McKinsey and discussed by Sir David Carter in a recent publication for Ambition Institute on 'How governors and trustees can help schools make sense of the future.' In this article, I want to propose three 'Rs' rather than five:

- Return
- Resilience
- Renewal

As we enter the return phase there has been some reductive thinking about what a recovery curriculum means in practice. In some cases, there may be an assumption that our children and young people have not completed any learning at home or had any positive experiences. There is talk of them as 'the lost generation.'

Return

I worry that this kind of rhetoric will lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy. They will only have missed 3.5 percent of the total number of school days possible between Year 1 and

Year 11. We know that our teachers across the Trust, ably supported by our support staff are highly skilled at helping and supporting our children and young people to re-engage with school and make progress.

Resilience

There is a great deal spoken about resilience at the moment. Someone once defined 'resilience' as 'accepting your new reality, even if it's less good than the one you had before.' I think if we took this view, we would be failing our schools, our children and young people and our communities. The word resilience comes from the Latin 'resalire', which means 'springing'. How do we put in place strategies for September that will support those children and young people to spring back?



Renewal

As a Trust, we know that school in September may be a very different place from the schools our children and young people remember prior to lockdown. We recognise the fundamental importance of the curriculum in supporting our children and young people back into learning.

We have been discussing with our school leaders the need for not just a 'recovery' curriculum which attempts to make up for lost learning and to address the social, emotional and mental health issues arising from the pandemic but also a curriculum focused on another 'R', 'Renewal'. A curriculum model to help us and them to rise strongly together and renew our commitment to learning, each other and our schools.

Renewal Curriculum Principles

As we start to think about September, we have asked our school leaders to consider the following principles:

- Compassionate but ambitious leadership is needed.
 - We will work together to take a holistic approach to the curriculum.
 - We can have the biggest impact by engaging the community in helping us transition children back to school by taking account of their recent experiences.
 - We should aim to recognise that pupils will have been using different skills for their home learning and asking them to reflect on these and their effectiveness.
 - We need to make it clear how we will aim to address any gaps in knowledge and learning.
- We know that Quality First teaching should be the first point of call. This means finding out what pupils already know, have learnt during this period and building sequences of learning from their new starting point.
 - Our curriculum will still reflect the stated intent of taking into account the cultural capital needed by all our children and young people to enrich their learning and lives.
 - This is not a time to compromise. We would be failing our children and young people if we do not have a full entitlement curriculum on offer. They need to experience a breadth of subjects which can in turn provide rich contexts for reading, writing and applying mathematical knowledge and skills.

So, our renewal curriculum is designed to move children on in September from where their new starting point will be. Most importantly we will use this period to re-imagine the bright future that lies ahead of them.

Stephen Chamberlain
Active Learning Trust

Rising strong, enduring stronger

*"Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul
And sings the tune without words
And never stops...at all"*

Emily Dickinson

As the entire planet breathes in, is forced to stop – and even to hold its breath waiting to see what unfolds, there are people who have the capacity to lean into the future and by holding a common purpose can support the unfolding by gaining a sense of what is new and what is needed. Our school communities are those people.

At the Embark Federation we posed the question: how can our community lean into the future and articulate a pathway through this experience?

Drawing on the expertise of the Embark community we co-created a path to support our way through this complex challenge. Our focus is on staying as connected as possible during the lockdown, and planning for reconnection, recovery, repairing the rupture and enabling resilience for all.

Throughout the Embark Federation, children, staff, families, and wider community have always been encouraged to engage head, heart, and hand in learning to make full use of the intellectual, emotional and physical processes. It is this approach that will help during reconnection to recovery and resilience. This largely informs our thinking as to how we bridge the 'here and now' into future successful learning and living.



We have two assumptions:

- The immediate effects and long-term impacts of this rapidly changing situation will not be evenly distributed; and
- Acting on the best available and most credible scientific knowledge has never been more essential, yet science by itself does not have all the answers.

Coming from two very different areas of research, the most highly relevant science-based messages are urging both supportive relationships and physical distancing as critical priorities. Prolonged physical separation is absolutely necessary to slow down the progression of a pandemic; responsive social interaction is essential for strengthening resilience in the face of adversity.

Reconciling these conflicting necessities and developing effective strategies requires the combined wisdom of rigorous scientific thinking, on-the-ground expertise, and the lived experiences of a wide diversity of people and communities. As we pull out all the stops to prevent broader infection, we must also remain vigilant in caring proactively for those who are especially vulnerable to the threat and consequences of social isolation.

Our trust is drawing from actionable scientific knowledge for supporting the developmental needs of young children and their families in this current context and equally from our own knowledge and understanding of our own contexts.

The question is not whether we will get through the ordeal that lies ahead, because we will. The important questions are how well we can work together to protect all children and their families and how much we will learn from this unprecedented challenge and make necessary changes for the future.

Our approach is built on 9 stages. Some children will return to school disengaged. School may seem irrelevant after a long period of isolation. Our quest, our mission as educators, is to journey with that child through a process of re-engagement, which leads them back to their rightful status as a fully engaged, authentic learner.



Our aim is to support our staff to anticipate, plan for and meet the needs of our children and families as we reconnect. By having a wide range of activities planned and resources available, we hope to reduce workload and enable our staff to be emotionally available and present whilst ensuring their own emotional and physical health and wellbeing.

► **Stage 1: Responding to the here and now**

Staying connected - to self, each other, and across our Embark families. Supporting staff teams to reach out to support our families.

► **Stage 2: Staff**

Maintaining the courage to do what's right for our children and stick to our Embark core beliefs of Family, Integrity, Teamwork and Success. We will start by reconnecting as staff teams, ensuring a secure base from which we can enable our communities to thrive and flourish.

► **Stage 3: An accurate analysis of the current situation for all stakeholders**

Identifying the 'here and now', a baseline database informed by gathering information from and with all stakeholders reflecting an accurate understanding of the 'lived experience' for our entire Embark family - staff, children, parents/carers, communities.

► **Stage 4: Truly hearing the staff voice**

Communicating the detail of the current reality with staff and ensuring sufficient capacity to meet the needs across the community. Ensuring our staff are sufficiently supported and resourced for the transition.

► **Stage 5: Risk assessment, planning a staggered, phased return for identified children and groups**

Creating the safe space for reconnection. By carrying out a school by school and whole trust analysis of the baseline, inform a school specific re-connection/recovery plan as we start the staged transition back into our schools opening.

► **Stage 6: The Embark Interim Reconnection Recovery to Resilience Curriculum**

'Rising Strong, Enduring Stronger' - what will this look like for each age, stage, school, group. Transition.

► **Stage 7: Supporting all stakeholders**

Where parents/carers or staff have experienced loss, bereavement, key transition points, loss.

► **Stage 8: Acknowledging the positives**

Taking the courage to use the 'here and now experience' to inform our ongoing journey into our curriculum of Hope - as rich in humanity as it is in knowledge.

► **Stage 9: On-going targeted support**

Personalised for all stakeholders, children, leaders, staff, families, mentoring, supervision, constantly reviewing and revisiting.

Sharon Gray Obe Nle
Wholehearted Learning on behalf
of the Embark Federation