

## ***The Long- Term Pandemic Effect on Students***

### **And how educators should prepare**

While we are still in the grip of an ongoing crisis, unsure how basic physiological and psychological health will endure, we may begin anticipating what comes next. Even with an abatement of the immediate threat, the residual fallout will be felt for years to come. Students will be imprinted by the fear and conditioned by living conditions in ways educators need to be ready for. Through preparation we can mitigate further damage and adequately equip future classroom, school, and district leaders.

*Apathy/ Motivation:* Malaise has become widespread for young people who have spent far too many hours in front of televisions, computers, tablets and cell phones. To pass the time, young people binge movies and videos, contributing to their mental and physical inertia. Convincing students to invest in academics will require sustained creativity and thoughtful experimentation, with intrinsic motivation depleted from prolonged malaise.

Educators should become familiar with the term, successive approximation. This is a form of shaping typically applied to behavior- we can also harness to improve attitude. By rewarding initiative, praising effort, and nurturing the sparks of interests, educators will see movement toward greater interest and excitement. Remember to measure the direction and not the speed of the momentum to reduce frustration for the adult.

*Intolerance of Distress:* Our collective capacity for discomfort has been decimated by two forces, the immediate gratification of wants from living at home and the chronic boredom. While it may seem that intellectual stimulation will be received, some children won't be able to sustain their focus or sit with ambivalence. Children who have been enabled to remain idle over long periods will have a lowered capacity for the discomfort required for traditional classroom learning.

Educators will want to identify reluctance around risk taking or emotionality around imperfection as signs of a lowered threshold for emotional pain. Close physical proximity, warm facial expressions, transitional objects, and affirmation will all help students learn into discomfort and increase the time before they give in or give up.

*Anxiety:* Financial hardship, the omnipresent fear of illness and widespread grief have contributed to the dramatic rise in mood disorders. Children with difficulty self-regulating and an imbalance in brain/body alignment will find separation from their parents more difficult, adding attachment problems to the list of issues classroom teachers will face.

To help students feel more grounded, elementary schools will want to provide more tactile stimulation, breaks for yoga and mindfulness throughout the day. Teachers ought to refrain from pushing medication consults, waiting to see if counselor groups and referrals to outside providers can help. All educators need to be trained in the etiology of anxiety and the range of meaningful interventions.

*Collaboration:* The quarantine forced shift toward greater autonomy was more than of a liability than a benefit for many children. Instead of becoming more organized and goal oriented, many young people became lazy and indifferent. Their learning occurred in solitude and their opportunity to practice negotiation or cooperation was diluted. This isn't their fault as they were simply too young and unprepared for the transition to remote learning, with too much unstructured time to use productively.

Psychosocial emotional learning is all about learning to identify, express, and meet out needs. Nearly a third of this work involves others, whom we rely upon for affiliation, fun, and love. Constructive differencing while maintaining contact is the core of business dealings, international diplomacy, and nearly every other form of business. Providing lessons around process will be vital for young people to overcome the delays of the past year.

*Impulsivity:* Due in large part to a growing brain/body imbalance from the saturation of technology, young people will have growing difficulty with self-control. At home, instincts to say or do are quickly followed by action while at school children will have to practice delayed gratification. Acting without thinking or giving in to urges, drives and instincts will make classroom management more challenging.

Students need time to readjust to sitting in a classroom all day long. Opportunities to move, change topics, even engage in spontaneous conversation may be helpful early on. If students can be given increasing levels of responsibility inside their classrooms, they will learn to manage their own time more efficiently. Roles can be given on a weekly basis, allowing a rotation of different interests requiring varying skill sets. Consequences needs to natural, related, or at least logical to be effective and not be punitive.

These and other lesser known consequences will expand outward to urban, rural, and suburban schools with new permutations. Sharing information among districts, allowing for researchers to conduct surveys, and providing ongoing mental health training/ support will help schools balance academic with moral and psychosocial emotional learning.