Endings and Lost transitions

When talking about the importance of transition; starting school, moving to secondary school, school transfer, we need to pay attention to the importance and significance of a well-managed ending. This is particularly relevant for our Year 6, Year 11 and Year 13 students during the school closure period. They have been deprived an opportunity for the usual planned celebrations (leavers assemblies, proms, signing clothes, yearbooks). On learning that school would be closing early due to the restrictions in place as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, one year 11 student describes feeling ‘frustrated that I took...school for granted... there wasn’t enough time to do and say all the things I wanted before I left school forever’, another ‘everyone was devastated...everyone was just so sad...it felt like the whole of year 11 went into meltdown’. SeeSaw (an Oxfordshire charity which provides bereavement support to children, young people and families), highlights that missed endings can be especially difficult for bereaved children, triggering memories of previous loss. We also know that careful management of endings is important for children who are looked after as they have also experienced significant loss.

The ‘need for closure’ was first described as a means to resolve painful feelings created by a loss. We know that there are differences between individuals and how much they ‘need’ closure, but we also know that when under stress, there is an increased need for closure for everyone. Effective closure can help us to manage difficult events and move forward more constructively and positively. We could anticipate that for some students, the anxiety elicited by school-closure may have increased the need to find a way to express their feelings about leaving school and moving on. Creative ways to support this may therefore be necessary.

Psychology gives us some direction about how to approach this issue. Peak-end theory describes a cognitive bias in our memory formation. For many of us our positive or negative memory of an experience is influenced by the feelings at the extreme (peak) points and how the experience ends, rather than the average of the ‘whole’ experience. This affords us the opportunity to give an ending to the school experience which may impact on a student’s perception of both the school-closures and their whole school experience. A ‘well rounded’ ending is associated with positive feelings about an event, reduced regret about an experience and an easier transition to the subsequent life phase. How we deal with the unforeseen ending that students have experienced is as important as focussing on a good start when schools reopen.

Some ideas that you might want to consider

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A digital/ online yearbook. e.g. <a href="https://allyearbooks.co.uk/">https://allyearbooks.co.uk/</a>, <a href="https://www.leaversbooks.com/">https://www.leaversbooks.com/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>A leaver’s video or virtual assembly e.g. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pr8aV30DSy0">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pr8aV30DSy0</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>How to safely return books and work to students who are no longer attending</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arrange for leaver’s hoodies etc. to be sent home to students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consider ways to collectively share positive experiences and fond memories</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remember this may be an appropriate place to mark any students who have died at the school e.g. inclusion on hoody, in yearbook</td>
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Nursery age

Consider pre-school virtual celebrations with families at the end of term to highlight the completion of pre-school and children’s individual development.

Share individual photo albums of the year with children and families. Send to families in the post with an end of year report, to share with the next teachers.

Encourage children to draw or paint pictures to say goodbye to their friends and teachers.

Sign post parents to PACEY which has excellent resources for starting school [https://www.pacey.org.uk/working-in-childcare/spotlight-on/being-school-ready/](https://www.pacey.org.uk/working-in-childcare/spotlight-on/being-school-ready/)

Year 6

Encourage children to write letters or draw pictures to send to teachers and friends as a way of saying thank you and goodbye.

Send certificates/achievements home to celebrate student’s achievements.

Activity – ‘The Bridge’ – sketch out the context they are leaving, and the one they are joining. Draw a bridge which links the two and position the child on the bridge. This provides a way to talk about the move and feelings which come with being ‘in between’. Take time to discuss thoughts and feelings generated by the activity with the child.

Activity – ‘The who and the how’ – Make a list with two columns headed ‘who’ and ‘how’. Help identify important people they want to say goodbye to, and how they will do that. This could also explore who they want to keep in touch with, and how they might do that.

Year 11/13

Subject teachers could write and summarise what they have done as a group, what they have covered and its value. There is a great example here [https://www.tes.com/news/coronavirus-open-letter-year-11-your-english-teacher](https://www.tes.com/news/coronavirus-open-letter-year-11-your-english-teacher)

If a prom cannot go ahead later in the year, consider whether students could arrange a virtual prom – getting dressed up and using video calling apps to celebrate. See a recent news article [here](https://www.tes.com/news/coronavirus-open-letter-year-11-your-english-teacher)

Students could put together a scrap book or photo album of their work, school friends, favourite memories.

Sharing what students are moving on to next.

Virtual awards ceremony (students to vote).

Consider plans for results day.

Consider marking what would be the final day of examinations.
For Children with SEN

It is likely that children with additional needs may struggle more than most with an abrupt ending to their school days. They may, for example, have particular bonds with some adults who have supported them at school, and they may not have the well-developed social networks or the skills to sustain friendships through social media that other students rely on. They may also have greater difficulty dealing with even well-planned and anticipated change. For these young people a personalised approach to helping them find a good ending is required.

Think about who is important to the child at school and how each person can say goodbye to that child in a way that is right for them e.g. a video call, a recorded video message, a card, a letter, a phone call.

Celebrate achievements - an end of year report, a school ‘reference’, a photo album or any means appropriate to the child, to remind them of what they have achieved in your setting.

Give parents some guidance about how to talk to their child about leaving their school. Encourage them to balance sadness about leaving with a positive outlook about moving on, and the next step. Encourage parents to involve the child - ask them what they would like to do to say goodbye and create opportunities to talk about what they feel and what would help.

With thanks to the following resources/ articles;

3. From www.facebook.com/134258159937700/posts/3298941206802697/?d=n