



## **IMPROVING THE POST-PANDEMIC LEARNING DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN**

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### **Improving the Post-Pandemic Learning Developing of Children**

During early 2020, the coronavirus expanded globally. Its effect led to an international lockdown, shutting down schools and workplaces, closing multiple small businesses and distressing the economies of many countries. However, as public places were shut down to prevent the spread of the disease, many families with younger children are left isolated at home. In this isolation, many younger children experienced depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues. Besides isolation, other factors of the pandemic lead to a high rate of mental issues, such as devastating economic factors, George Floyd's killing by Minneapolis police and the subsequent vehement public protests throughout the country, with such incidents repeated nationwide. As society starts to reemerge from the lockdown, many community places are readjusting to normal activities, such as schools. However, if younger students are having a hard time handling their mental health and learning as they start going back to school. It's been common to witness many younger students struggling at school when they return and experiencing lower learning abilities, which are essential skills for adulthood. To help young

school children recover learning development skills after the pandemic, teachers should create peer-interactive activities, host interactive counseling programs, and practice mentoring and empathy techniques to connect with students at school.

### **The Role of Education in Child Development**

Child development is an important phase of emotional and mental changes as a young child develops into a teenager. Through skills they are born with, young children, experience and respond to the environment. When a child grows older, the skills progress to suitably fit the child's environment. These skills are essential when the child becomes an adult.. One essential aspect of child development is that it prepares the child to “set goals, value progress in meeting these goals, relish existing and new relationships...and have compassion for others" (Barnett, 2023, p.4).

Learning provides an important life experience for younger children as it allows them to encounter scenarios they may experience later in life. In this regard, “...learning is understood to be related to internal development and mental changes through the interactions that occur between the child, people, and the environment” (Roos, et al., 2021, p.4). As well, schools provide a preview of how the world functions. As younger children are exposed to the school environment, it's essential that the school remains as a role model for the young child.

If teachers uplift and celebrate a child's successes, children will be more positive about themselves and accepted in a community. To promote this enjoyment towards younger children, teachers should use their creative abilities and be open to new ideas and strategies that can help learning be more fun. For instance, the teacher can promote hands-on activities and group discussions, like science projects that pair-up students, or doing a play based on a popular, classical book (such as *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*) These activities and projects could

promote the enjoyment and understanding of classroom learning and transmit this to families.

“With good communication and cooperation, the lessons designed by the teacher would be easier for parents to understand and apply at home” (Roos, et al., 2021, p.7). Thus, younger children can understand what they want to accomplish in their lives.

### **Promoting Learning in the Classroom with Peer-Interactive Activities**

The pandemic caused children to isolate and spend less time interacting with friends and peers. Therefore "Not being able to meet face-to-face with children has created challenges for developing learning activities due to issues such as limited access to technological devices and skills" (Roos, et al., 2021, p.2). This has resulted in many children becoming less sociable and more anxious when meeting others. Furthermore, the pandemic forced many schools to become virtual, which reduced the connection between students and teachers. This led to more conflicts when engaging in class and difficulty catching up and understanding lesson plans, resulting in an overall decline in learning development.

As schools return to their original schedule, students have to adapt to the changing school environment. As younger students are returning from an isolated environment, the teacher needs to help them return to their daily lives. To this end, teachers must create activities that can once again sponsor learning that was neglected over the pandemic and encourage students to be social. Teachers must “Identify innovations that can dramatically improve student social-emotional learning and help schools meet students’ mental health needs” (Hamilton & Gross, 2021, p.13).

Peer activities are crucial, especially as they allow younger children to develop connections with others after the pandemic, bond with the classroom environment, and interact with other students who have gone through the same experiences as they have. It is essential that activities involve every student in the classroom, regardless of their basic needs. Some examples

of interactive activities that students can participate in together include working on a mini-project together by pairing students for a lesson, or playing a game like Kahoot or an interactive sport. All of these emphasize the importance of group time and social interaction with peers while also promoting an emerging enjoyment of learning and establishing a strong connection with the school environment and teachers.

### **Strategies Promoting Learning in the Classroom: Interactive School Counseling**

As younger students return to school after being isolated for nearly two years, many of them have experienced mental and emotional health issues related to the pandemic and home factors. Nonetheless, teachers must assist students in maintaining healthy emotional and mental well-being, as it is critical for the development of many young children. Social and emotional learning (SEL) skills are developed when students reflect on their emotions. This helps build a deep "interpersonal connection...[and] provides relief from stress, making space for improved wellness and engagement in learning" (Cipriano, & Brackett, , 2023 p. 8). To help younger children adapt to SEL skills, teachers must assist them in developing those skills as early as possible.

Counseling is a valuable option for engaging teachers and younger children in discussing their feelings and emotions. Counseling is important because it allows individuals to express their emotions and receive assistance in dealing with the situation. It is particularly recommended to counsel those who are struggling with mental health issues. Methods of counseling could include "actively listening to understand and honor all feelings...supporting students in processing current events" and "discussing the challenges...conversations about challenging topics can help young people learn...that they can come to adults around them" (Cipriano & Brackett, 2023, p. 9). Promoting counseling to younger children will benefit their

mental and emotional health as well as their academic performance. It is essential for educators to take care of their students. Although their duty is to educate students for the future, it is also essential that they focus on being compassionate and forming a bond with their students.

### **Strategies towards Promoting Learning in the Classroom: Mentoring and Empathy**

When younger students return to face-to-face learning, it's essential for teachers to empathize with their experience and feelings. It may take time for students to adapt to their new learning environment, especially if they have had a challenging time transitioning from an isolating environment back to the classroom. To help, teachers must understand their experiences, developmental stages, and backgrounds to gain insight into what they are dealing with (Hamilton & Gross, 2021). Many younger children have experienced "quarantine-related mental health problems including depression, low mood, irritability, insomnia, anger, and emotional exhaustion" (Fegert et al, 2020), making it crucial for teachers to provide a safe and supportive environment where students can check in with the teacher when they experience conflicts at home or personally.

Understanding how younger students are experiencing the return to in-person learning can be challenging and it may take a long time for them to adapt. However, with the support of their teachers, students can gradually improve their experience and find school enjoyable. To foster an empathetic environment for students, teachers can implement daily check-ins, warm-ups, and ask about their day. These actions show that the teacher cares about the student's well-being and current situation, which helps students feel safe and develop a connection with their teachers. As a result, students may become more interactive, joyous, and productive in class.

### **Conclusion**

The effects of the pandemic and isolation have allowed teachers to bond more effectively with their students than before the pandemic. This connection allows students to feel more comfortable in the school environment and enjoy school in a happier mood. Teachers can use methods such as peer-interactive activities, interactive counseling, and mentoring and empathy techniques to promote learning enjoyment . These techniques not only help students connect with their school environment and teachers, but also make learning more enjoyable. When children enjoy learning, they unlock opportunities and become open to different choices and experiences in life as they grow older. After the pandemic, younger children can start to feel happier about going to school, improve their socializing abilities with their peers, and become more interested in lessons and teaching.

When younger children's mental and emotional states are more stable, they demonstrate better academic performance and are more actively involved in class. As teachers continue to adapt and use these methods more frequently, statistics show an increase in learning among younger students. In this way, teachers are positively preparing their students for their futures in the right direction. Children use learning as an experience to develop skills and interests that they will use as adults.

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