



**Episode 2 Transcript:
The First 20 Days of 2020**

In this episode I will focus on things we should consider when opening school in unprecedented times. Specifically, we will explore what the first 20 days should look like in order to accelerate learning forward.

It is hard to believe that we are ramping up for a new school year already. It seems as though we are just now recovering from quarter 4 of last school year. Some of you have been working all summer to figure out how to reopen schools. In my last episode I shared options for face-to-face, remote, and virtual learning and discussed the need to be nimble enough to possibly use multiple learning formats in one year depending on the need. Brick-to-Click, Click-to-Brick, or Click by Choice.

Although that was only a couple of weeks ago, the COVID-19 numbers continue to shift. Many districts across the Nation are now opting for a digital start where students will begin the school year online. CNN has published an article tracking these decisions that I have linked on my website. While there is no substitute for face-to-face teaching, many districts are struggling with safety protocols that work for students and staff within communities where numbers of cases are spiking. The constraints of simple square footage in a school building is an issue for social distancing along with more complicated feelings on wearing masks to school. Are they expected or required?

I am always optimistic, but this is a no-win proposition here. As I have coached district and school leaders during their planning, I have shared we just simply have to make the call on behalf of your students and staff. There is no way everyone is going to be happy. It is a tough position to be in, there is no doubt. Even the CDC continues to change their stance on reopening schools. I saw a great meme this week of an

educator standing in a bus lane with hands on her knees like she was in a fast-pitch softball game ready for the next batter up. The caption read, Educators checking their email to see what changed from 4 minutes ago. I laughed out loud. It was so true. You can make yourself crazy reading guidance from different entities - federal, state, and local. This is what I do know to be true. Focus on what you can control and always make a call that puts students first. You will have made the right decision every time.

So, how do we recover from this? How do we reopen, either face-to-face or remote, with a learner-centered approach that helps to bridge the gaps and help us return to some sense of normal (even if it is a new normal)?

The first 20 days of 2020 need to look different than in years past. We know that getting to know our students at the beginning of each year is important. However, this year goes beyond simple icebreakers and “get to know you” activities to truly building relationships and a community of learners. We know that relationships are the foundation for all that we do. We have not seen some of our children since March. Once school closed, some of our kiddos simply fell off the radar. Our students are coming back to us uncertain about this new reality and needing to reconnect to a school community that provides them stability and a place to call home. Some of our students have experienced life changing events while away from us. Making sure that all students are reconnected to school and are healthy and well is our first week priority. I would go so far as to say no testing should take place and no new content should be shared in the first 5 days of school. This seems strange since we lost so much instructional time, but we have to put the relational needs of our students first and then we will be able to accelerate academics. One of my best mentors used to say to me, “go slow to go fast”. I wanted to jump right into every task and “fix” it or “do” it quickly so we could move on to the next big thing. I learned from her that sometimes investing in time in laying the groundwork or rallying the troops helped to make everything else fall into place. The time you take to connect with students and help them build a

community is critical, especially if you are starting virtually. Students missed the social aspect of school. So Week 1, the first five days, relationships rule the day.

In week two we need to focus on routines and procedures. Good old Dr. Harry Wong, in his book *The First Days of School: How to Be an Effective Teacher*, suggested a three-step process for teaching classroom procedures to students:

1. Explain classroom procedures clearly.
2. Rehearse classroom procedures until they become routines.
3. Reinforce a correct procedure and reteach an incorrect one.

This book was published in 1997 and his process is still spot on. However, the routines and procedures we are teaching are different. Now, instead of teaching about care of textbooks, we are teaching about care of Chromebooks. We used to teach kids to turn in their work to a certain place in the room, corner of the teacher's desk or the 2nd period bin, etc. Now we are teaching kids how to upload their work online and submit assignments digitally. Rather than teaching about learning centers, lab safety, or classroom procedures, we are teaching apps, and accessing digital content, and how to participate in an online discussion. Every single procedure and routine that we expect of students must be clearly communicated and modeled.

When we left school on or around March 13, many of the procedures for remote learning were not clear and we were building the plane as we were flying it. Now we know better and have put processes in place. We now need to let our students and parents in on the new way we do business. Communicating expectations for learning, the rules of engagement if you will, needs to be shared with both students and parents. Creating classroom norms will also be critical. Some teachers during Spring 2020 found it to be helpful to communicate Zoom or Hangout Norms and posted them at the beginning of each session. Norms such as: Find a quiet place free from distractions; Show up on time and prepared; Maintain respect in speaking, writing, and appearance;

Stay on mute and raise hand when you want to contribute; Video needs to remain ON and to stay focused; Use the chat to pose relevant comments and questions; Refrain from eating, drinking, gum chewing while in class. Norms such as these help to keep the expectations for engagement front and center and allows for positive reinforcement as well as correction when needed. Many teachers have created great online learning norms for your reference!

Since we are uncertain about how long we will be f2f or virtual, these expectations are critical to operating smoothly whether you are Brick-to-Click, Click-to-Brick, or Click by Choice. I recognize there are still unknowns and things are changing daily; however, communicate what you can control - classroom norms, routines, and procedures. As I have shared in the past, we have digital natives that have never been asked to learn digitally. This is all new to them as well. We are reimagining learning together.

Week 3 offers an opportunity to begin assessment. There is a great deal of angst over the "Covid slide" and it is understandable. However, I would encourage us to be smart about assessing and not do too much testing. There is a difference. Giving students end of year benchmarks that are lengthy and address standards for an entire course may not be the best option. Nor would giving a pre-assessment on new content quite yet. We want to assess formatively to see where there are learning gaps from last year. I would suggest looking at quarter 4 Focus or Priority Standards first. Create an authentic assessment that requires students to not just recall knowledge, but that asks students to show that they know how to apply their knowledge. This can be done through a task or problem to solve. These types of assessments provide so much insight into not only what a students knows in terms of content, but their work ethic, perseverance, and attention to detail. Not to mention, authentic assessments do not have to feel like an assessment to a student. Quite honestly, posing a problem to solve through one task or multiple tasks may seem like an engaging learning experience and

not an assessment. And it gives us so much more information. You can even integrate some pre-requisite skills for this year's course as well.

There are also several diagnostic assessments that may be helpful at this point as well, especially at the younger grades. These are often tied to adaptive programs that help students fill in those skill gaps that we have identified. Getting a clear picture of where our students are at the beginning of the year has always been important for moving forward with new content, but this year it is a puzzle piece we can't lose. Meaning we can't have all of the other pieces in place and miss out on the opportunity to personalize learning for our students. Personalization is always informed by standards-based data. They will need that leg up this year more than ever.

And finally, week four is full on new content. There may be a need to continue to provide interventions for some students, but this is where you have laid a strong foundation and can move full steam ahead.

Now you may be thinking that we are wasting time by not getting into our new coursework until week four, but I would argue we are investing time that will have a big payoff later. I recognize that those of you on a block schedule will need to make adjustments for time. Just remember, go slow to go fast.

Days 1-5 - Relationships and community building

Days 6-10 - Routines and procedures

Days 11-15 - Diagnostic and authentic assessment, address learning gaps

Days 16-20 - Introduce new content

We are unlearning to relearn new ways of doing school. Unlearning is having the capacity to use your knowledge and skills to challenge some beliefs and learnings that you had obtained before. There are typically three phases of unlearning as cited in the article by Macharia linked on my website.

The first one is resistance. This is where we resist change and yearn for the way we used to do it. Certainly you have heard colleagues, or even had the thought yourself, that everything was back to normal. But, was the normal as good as it could have been? Were there things you wanted to change before? Let's not rush to normal.

The second phase is changing attitude. In this phase you start to accept that things are different and change your mindset about the current situation. I will say, this one is tough. My heart hurts for educators, students, and their families. Our current situation is frightening and no one ever imagined that teachers would be considered front line workers. Take the precautions you need to and be smart. I have seen amazing optimism from teachers as they are readying to open their doors. Teams of teachers with masks on excited about a new school year. Your attitude is everything.

Lastly, the third phase is about embracing the new learning. We are all learning. This is where you take control of your situation through fully engaging in our new normal with a desire to come out better on the other side. Be thoughtful about what you want to learn and how you, yourself, want to improve in spite of COVID-19. There has to be good that comes from this horrific pandemic that has rocked our world in ways we may not realize for years to come.

It is my sincere hope that we continue to unlearn to relearn new ways of doing school. We have done school the same way for decades, let's take this opportunity to reimagine learning. One of my favorite sayings is "growth begins where comfort ends". We have all been uncomfortable over the last several months. And I would venture to say that we will for the next several as well. But lets not seek comfort in the way we have always done it. Let's find comfort in that we came out of this better than before.

Have a great start to your school year! Love on your kiddos and don't forget to love on yourself!

References:

Several Big US School Districts Are Extending Remote Classes Into the Fall. CNN Updated 7.15.20, Click [HERE](#)

Learn to Unlearn to Relearn. Willie Nganga Macharia, Medium, September 29, 2019, Click [HERE](#)

First Days of School: How to be an Effective Teacher. (1997) Wong, H. and Wong, R. Click [HERE](#)