

# Endings and Lost transitions

In Educational Psychology, we often talk about the importance of transition; starting school, moving to secondary school, school transfer. It can be easy to neglect the importance and significance of a well-managed ending. This is particularly relevant for our EYFS age children moving onto school, Year 6, Year 11 and Year 13 students, who have been deprived an opportunity for the usual celebrations (Early Years celebrations, leavers assemblies, prom's, signing clothes, yearbooks) and therefore, for closure. 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'*. A US high-school senior describes *'it feels like something I worked for...my whole life, is all being taken away in an instant'*. See how highlighted that missed endings can be especially difficult for bereaved children, triggering memories of previous loss<sup>iv</sup>.

Kruglanski first described a 'need for closure'<sup>v</sup> 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<sup>vi</sup>, but we also know that when under stress (e.g. following terrorist activity), there is an increased need for closure for everyone<sup>vii</sup>. We could anticipate that for some students, the anxiety elicited by school-closure may have increased the need to find closure on their school experience, whilst also denying the usual means to achieve it.

Psychology gives us some direction about how to approach this issue. Peak-end theory<sup>viii</sup> describes a cognitive bias in our memory formation. This theory suggests that our positive or negative memory of an experience is dependant on 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. Research also suggests that 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<sup>ix</sup>. It would follow that how we deal with the unforeseen ending that students have experienced is as important as focussing on a good start when schools reopen.

## Ideas to support

### All students

Consider developing a digital/ online yearbook. e.g. <https://allyearbooks.co.uk/>, <https://www.leaversbooks.com/>

Consider putting together a leaver's video or virtual assembly e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pr8aV30DSy0>

Consider how to safely return books and work to students who are no longer attending

Arrange for leaver's hoodies etc. to be sent home to students

Remember this may be an appropriate place to mark any students who have died at the school

## Nursery age children

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/>

## 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'<sup>x</sup> – 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'.

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>

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](#)

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

With thanks to the following resources/ articles;

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<sup>i</sup> From <https://welldoing.org/article/unexpected-endings-support-young-people-dealing-covid-19-school-closures>

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- ii From <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/mar/19/year-11-went-into-meltdown-pupils-hit-with-implications-of-school-closures>
- iii From <https://www.kiro7.com/news/80000-state-high-school-seniors-feeling-loss-closure-traditions-with-pandemic-school-shutdowns/GFSLMKU4KFHDNN26CMHKFQDGD4/>
- iv From [www.facebook.com/134258159937700/posts/3298941206802697/?d=n](https://www.facebook.com/134258159937700/posts/3298941206802697/?d=n)
- v Kruglanski, A. W., Peri, N. and Zakai, D. 1991. Interactive effects of need for closure and initial confidence on social information seeking. *Social Cognition*, 9: 127–48.
- vi Jaško, K., Czernatowicz-Kukuczka, A., Kossowska, M., & Czarna, A. Z. (2015). Individual differences in response to uncertainty and decision making: The role of behavioral inhibition system and need for closure. *Motivation and emotion*, 39(4), 541–552. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-015-9478-x>
- vii Bar-Tal, Y., Shrira, A., Keinan, G. (2013) The effect of stress on cognitive structuring: a cognitive motivational model. *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 17 (1): 87-99
- viii Kahneman, Daniel. (2011) *Thinking, fast and slow*. New York : Farrar, Straus and Giroux,
- ix Schwörer, B., Krott, N. R., & Oettingen, G. (2020). Saying goodbye and saying it well: Consequences of a (not) well-rounded ending. *Motivation Science*, 6(1), 21–33.
- x PAC-UK & The Agency for Adoption and Permanency Support (2016) Thinking about Goodbyes and Transitions', Available <https://www.pac-uk.org%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2016%2F04%2FGoodbyes-and-Transitions-V1.1-1.pdf&usg=AOvVaw1i9jRmDecfEWOEwFqgrfJg>