

Chronos and kairos

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The ancient Greeks had two understandings of time, *chronos* and *kairos*. Both are important, but the latter rarely gets the attention it warrants. It deserves to now.

Chronos time is chronological time: how we measure our days and our lives quantitatively. We've been setting our lives by some form of chronological time for centuries. Judging by our cultural lexicon – 'Time waits for no one', 'Time is of the essence', 'Time is money' – then we are afraid of losing it.

It is unsurprising that in relation to 'lost schooling' political leaders have provided headline writers with the appointment of a 'Recovery Tsar' and schools with untold millions to be spent on 'catch up'. Time lost must be followed by time replaced, with its focus on quantity: summer schools, extended days, twilight classes, online tutoring.

Perhaps we should look at things through the prism of *kairos*.

How do we honour *kairos* time, what the ancient Greeks understood as the most opportune time for something new? The concept has its origins in the practice of Greek archery, representing the moment when the archer finds the perfect opening to shoot his arrow and hit the target.

Kairos was also the Greek god of opportunity. He had wings on his feet and darted quickly about.

If we think of the return to school as led by *kairos* time rather than *chronos* time, we might think differently about how we best meet the needs of children and young people.

First, is to acknowledge that as social animals, children and staff alike have missed the daily commerce and fun of classrooms, breaktimes and extra-curricular activities. The sooner routines around these work and social spaces are re-established the better, with as much time spent mixing outdoors as can be orchestrated within the school day.

Second, is to harness the significant lessons of the past year with regard to blended teaching and learning. Students and staff alike have learned new ways of doing and there will be no going back: from submitting essays online to holding virtual parents' evenings – the list is significant and will reshape how schools are organised. See [Learning from Lockdown](#)

Third, for those youngsters with special educational needs, and for those who often find themselves on the margins and temporarily or permanently excluded, schools have realised they can take more imaginative, inclusive approaches.

Fourth, for all of us confined largely to our homes, we have seen that while academic study has a central place in young lives, so too does slow cooking, conversation, art, video-making, dance, walking, cycling and gazing out of the window. We are human *beings* as much as human *doings*.

For education to see the world now only through *chronos* time is to harness the depressing vocabulary of 'lost generation', 'catch-up' and 'recovery'. This has to be resisted thoughtfully. To see the coming months and years through *kairos* time is to champion the social beings in us all, to mimic the archer who finds the perfect opening.

That will lead teachers to draw on the extraordinary steps forward in their practice of recent months, and give lessons in classrooms and on playing fields that will raise cheer, attainment and achievement. And includes well designed additional tutorials for those children who need them. 'Gaps & Gains' might be the timely phrase.

That will mean leaders at all levels in schools thinking creatively and questioning orthodoxies about what they do every day, and why they do it.

In turn, in the arena of education where practice shapes policy, this will lead to system-wide changes from politicians and regulators, thinking anew about the values and purposes of schooling and how to measure them. Rethinking assessment has already begun.

Across the nation's schools this month there is certain to be a tsunami of optimism and laughter which will prove infectious throughout society as we gently open up and rediscover our vital social selves. The archer is about to find his target.

With acknowledgements to Enuma Okoro.