Mr J and his ‘Insta’ account: Aaron builds big social media following to inspire other teachers

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Meet Aaron Johnston (BEd, 2008), who epitomises the bright future of teaching. In the lead up to World Teachers’ Day in Australia this Friday (October 29, 2021), we asked @mr.j.learning.space (as he’s known to his 18,400 followers on Instagram - 20.5K by early 2022) these questions.

> *One of the positive impacts from COVID has been our realisation of students’ flexibility and adaptability*



Figure 1. *Aaron Johnston*

Why a teaching Insta account?
I wanted to connect with colleagues in other states and across the world for advice and inspiration. It’s a great way to see inside the classrooms of other amazing educators and share what I do with others as well.

What has remote learning taught us about teaching?
It’s opened the door into classrooms. We now have a much greater understanding of the role teachers play in supporting the needs of students so they can reach their potential.

You’re Assistant Principal at your school, how have you found remote learning?
Difficult, but as we finished our final week of it, a student emailed to thank me for the effort and the feedback we provided. I can’t tell you how much that meant to me, to have a student show such kindness and gratitude.

Any good resources you recommend?
The Teacher Takeaway podcast (n.d.). I host it with three other incredible educators and school leaders. I also love *The New Brew* (n.d.) and *The Art of Teaching* (n.d.). They’re podcasts, too.

In your role are you finding persisting positive or negative impacts of COVID, being consequences of the adaptations made for learning?*
One of the positive impacts from COVID has been our realisation of students’ flexibility and adaptability to change without warning. I was incredibly impressed by how easily our students adapted to learning from home and got on with what needed to be done; it was mind blowing to see. I think sometimes we don’t give our students enough credit for what they are truly capable of doing without needing a lot of prompting and support beforehand. The gaps in learning that have been revealed, as a result of two years of interruptions to learning, is the biggest challenge for us as educators. We look to support students in trying to ‘catch up’ those bits that were missed usually because the style or learning and pedagogy required wasn’t as easy to adapt during remote learning—in the way we do in the classroom as we immediately respond to the needs of our learners as we teach.

What are you implementing or suggesting for the students within your own classroom as a consequence?*
The additional funding provided to schools as a result of returning from COVID has been such

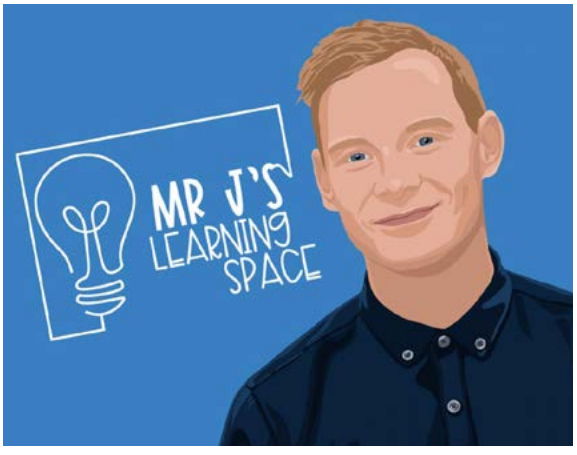
a great resource for us to create small support groups for students in literacy and numeracy to provide them ongoing, targeted intervention at their point of need every day of the week which was not something we were able to do previously.

What school wide initiatives are direct responses to long term COVID impacts?*

Acknowledging the ongoing impact of lockdowns and COVID has also led us to have a greater emphasis on mental health and wellbeing which we are addressing through the Smiling Mind program for schools. This is all about providing regular and ongoing opportunities for students to grow in their mindfulness and self-awareness by providing them tools to help regulate their emotions, including through the use of the Smiling Mind app in the classroom, which has been integrated into our PDHPE programs across K-6. Our staff have also had the opportunity to build their understanding and skills through professional learning around Trauma Informed Practices to again support us in how best to meet the emotional needs of our students.

Have you sourced specific materials to meet these needs on your 'insta' account?*

There's a wealth of resources available to educators in the 'instagram' teacher world with educators around the world sharing examples of practice and amazing resources to support student learning. I have created a range of free resources which teachers can access to support differentiation in literacy and numeracy to meet the needs of students, but there are also so many other incredible educators out there doing the same. One of the educators I follow online is 'Good Morning Ms Foster' (Foster, n.d.) who shares a wealth of knowledge about behaviour, emotional regulation, student support and building safe classroom spaces.



What do you love about teaching?

Making our future all it can be and having an impact beyond the classroom.

Finally, tell us about your Avondale experience?

Studying teaching at Avondale not only enabled me to develop knowledge and understanding of the curriculum but to also apply that in the classroom through practical experience. I felt at home. The smaller class sizes meant I had better access to my lecturers, who were always willing to help in any way they could.TEACH

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Sharna Kosmeier was Content Creation Officer at Avondale University at the time of writing and currently serves as marketing Manager at Bedford College Norwest, NSW.

*Editor's Note:

Additional questions were addressed to Aaron in 2022 and his responses update information to address current contexts.



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