

SEND AWARE

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Are we prepared?

I started the dialogue about Foetal Alcohol Syndrome and related disorders last term in the Summer Edition. Following on from the 'headlines' I wanted to develop further the new and worrying trend of complex needs in mainstream. My by-line asks the question-can we answer it with a resounding 'Yes'?

The inside story will add some detail to this dialogue and explore what this means in our classrooms and in our schools.

We have no choice but to be prepared but this is not going to be easy.

I am becoming increasingly aware of the challenges that our children are facing in coping with maths concepts and developing maths competency. The second major report in this issue will unpick some of these challenges and start to ask why this is the case and what we should be doing.

I will also look at the role of positive self-image and SEND.

TEACHERS AS ROLE MODELS

How often does your class see you with a reading book, downloaded book or other reading material? Where are the images of people reading around our school-can we take photos of the strangest places that we have ever read and start a fun gallery to show that everybody reads? Where are we asking our children to read? Is it a 'nice' place to read, is it comfortable, warm and inviting? Or is it a corridor or corner of a noisy space? If a child is reluctant to be seen reading, can we offer a 'dark den' or fun space for them? If a child does not want to read aloud, can we give them a walkie-talkie so that they can read to another child or adult at a distance? Can we help our readers to discover the joy of reading? Just some thoughts.....

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- Engage your readers
- Why is maths so difficult to grasp?
- Why complex needs will have an impact upon our pedagogy whether we like it or not
- Feeding self-image-how can we do this?
- Bouncebackability

THE CHALLENGE OF MATHS

Modern living has done nothing to support the acquisition of maths skills. When we eat in front of the TV, not only do we lose the interactive nature of sitting at a table, but children do not lay the table with the required number of cutlery items. If washing is dried indoors, they do not pair up socks and learn the language of maths. If they do not cook cakes with mother, they do not learn about quantities, about measuring and about estimating. They do not learn through doing, through the physical manipulation and visual input that this allows them.

The basic foundations of number consist of:

- *Copying patterns
- *Sorting objects
- *Language of number
- *Sequencing numbers
- *Object counting
- *Number patterns/subitising
- *Development of numerosity

*Conservation of number

Number patterns are extremely beneficial to children with poor number sense as they prevent a 'one after another' view of numbers. They can develop internally-constructed patterns to use with new numbers or when new concepts are introduced.

Children need to see concrete examples of the relative size of numbers-how do you show that 100 is 'bigger' than 1 on a 100-square? How can we ensure that the child has internalised the concept and can then generalise this?

Retention of number facts can be hugely supported through pattern work, especially for children with dyscalculia. Many children are weak at dot enumeration-estimation, and yet we know that estimation is crucial to maths development. Failure in maths is debilitating for children. This, in turn, affects their ability to learn and progress. Make maths fun!

WHAT WORKS.....

- *Understand how the child is learning and use this strength area wherever possible
- *Introduce all concepts in a concrete manner-use real life examples
- *Continually re-visit and over-learn to ensure that the child is comfortable
- *Reinforce a knowledge of the language of maths-this is a strange language
- *ensure a cumulative development in your lessons-do not jump about
- *Use movement as much as possible-kinaesthetic memory is very powerful and will aid retention and recall
- *Work with patterns as much as possible (packs of cards, dice, Numicon, etc)
- *Do not assume that, just because they have the right answer, they have understood and can replicate this on another occasion
- *Make lessons enjoyable and amusing to aid retention-maths can be tedious!!

Take a risk-that's what the UNDO button is for!!

COMPLEX NEEDS IN OUR SCHOOLS

Children have changed, are changing, and will continue to change. We are finding more rare and complex syndromes being diagnosed and these children are coming into mainstream to be educated. Did you know that 10% of children born prematurely will be diagnosed with some form of Autism?

According to national statistics there are 950 000 families in the UK living with at least one child with a disability. According to doctors and those working with these families this is a serious underestimation of 250 000. Every year 90 000 children are born prematurely (pre-36 weeks) and 93% now survive with a disability. This is a 40% increase which is rapid and exponential. This also covers the whole spectrum of SEND.

Interestingly there are some glaring omissions in these statistics-Fragile X Syndrome is the most genetically inherited disability and accounts for 1 in 500 live births, and yet these figures are not included. Nor is Foetal Alcohol data or acquired brain injury children. We have many more new causal bases for disability that are not being factored into our structures and planning in schools.

We must understand that these children are 'wired differently' due to the challenges of prematurity. We cannot see what this looks like, we cannot observe what is going on in the brain, but we must change our idea of pedagogy for these children-and quick.

These children have over-lapping and co-occurring challenges that compound the difficulties that they face in accessing

education and that we face in attempting to educate them. They often have unique learning patterns and inconsistent attainment. They do not fit comfortably into data tables and government charts. Without sensitive and understanding support many children will develop mental health issues, including bipolar disorders and depression.

These children, despite the challenges will still be developing and acquiring 700 new neurons per second in the first year of life-but this can only happen in a nurturing environment. We used to discuss child abuse, now we discuss neglect-this is no longer a poverty issue but is pervasive across all strata of society. With 35% of women age 18-25 binge drinking at least twice a week, where does that leave Foetal Alcohol? It is now thought that 80% of ADHD is wrongly diagnosed and scans of the brain would prove FAS.

In schools we need a new toolkit-the best predictor for all children, regardless of their SEND or non-SEND status, is **engagement**. We know this, so how can we engage this group of complex needs children to obtain the best possible outcomes? We first need to look at the diet we offer-do we know, for instance, that children with Autism and children born prematurely do not process auditory phonics and will struggle to learn in this manner if we bark only up this one pedagogical tree?

"Tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it"-African proverb

HOW DO WE FEED SELF-IMAGE?

In order for a child to experience mastery of anything it is necessary for the child to fail, to feel bad, and to try again repeatedly until success occurs. None of these steps can be circumvented. Failure and feeling bad are necessary building blocks for ultimate success and feeling good.

Seligman argues that, rather than poor self-esteem causing academic failure and worse, the reverse is actually true: poor self-esteem is the result of these ills rather than the cause.

Self-image is intrinsically linked to self-esteem and resilience. To build a sense of worth and a positive self-image we must help children to master challenges, to work successfully, to overcome boredom and frustration, and to ultimately achieve at whatever they are attempting.

"The effects of teaching self-esteem are not confined to teachers mouthing self-contradictory slogans (if everybody is special, is anybody special?) Kids soon learn to

ignore such flattery as insincere anyway" (M Seligman, *The Optimistic Child* (1995)).

A child has only one of two tactics available when he feels bad. He can stay in the situation and act, trying to terminate the emotion by changing the situation. Or he can give up and leave the situation. This tactic also terminates the emotion by removing the situation altogether. The first tactic is mastery, allowing growth: the second tactic is learned helplessness, achieves no growth for the child, who has not engaged with the possibility of change.

The answer to all this seems deceptively simple. Children need distinct values and aspirations to measure success against; they need opportunities to explore and master new tasks; they need the ability to overcome failure and disappointment. And they need all of this in the context of healthy attachment to supportive caregivers and teachers who are concerned enough to set clear limits and boundaries that define acceptable behaviour.

BOUNCEBACKABILITY

I was inspired by a presentation by a group of secondary students, many of whom had struggled in school and at least three who had been on the SEND spectrum. They wanted to prove that you can turn your life around, set goals, support one another and pass this on, so that the whole process becomes self-sustaining. It was truly magical to hear their stories and to see what a difference their teachers had made to their life chances through believing in them, guiding and counselling, but also in caring enough to have the tough talks. Their key message-**Bouncebackability**-reminded me that resilience is so crucial to ensuring positive outcomes. Can we build a little of this every day for our children?

Need more advice? Want to know more? Come and see DB!



Art of Brilliance-have you heard of it yet? Can you meet the daily challenge?

Pass it on.....