

Relational Inclusion blog #23: The Components of Learning

Back in January, I said to my colleague Alan, that I was thinking of brining back my weekly blog. I also said that I was going to try and have a theme for each week. His response was something like. "Good luck with that."

Some people might say I'm stubborn - I like to think I'm just up for a challenge. Either way, here we are, blog #23 and, with many schools finishing Friday, this will be the last blog of the school year. (Although I did write an article for Schools Week which was published on Friday and I will be sharing the original 'longer' article as a 'think piece' midweek).

What started as some key quotes, some recommended reading and a shameless plug for our soon to be published book, has developed and grown. I hope you have enjoyed reading it and all being well it will return in September. So here is the final blog of the year:

This week I want to talk about the components of learning. Well, not exactly.

My 7-year-old daughter is learning to play the piano. Usually, she is quite happy to practice but today she doesn't want to - and there is a pattern forming. She finishes her piano lessons full of confidence and enthusiasm and, more importantly, happy. When she sits down to practice her new learning the next day - suddenly the enthusiasm is gone. I'm guessing this is because new learning is hard. She can remember yesterday's feelings but suddenly the notes in her piano book aren't so easy to translate when her fingers hit the piano keys.

There is a lot going on here:

1. She must remember the tune. This week that's easy as it's Three Blind Mice however knowing the tune in your head and replicating that sound on a piano are two very different things – this is also easy for a 51-year-old to say.
2. She must read the music on the page. This is fairly new to her so I can only describe it as learning a different language and a different alphabet at the same time.
3. Once she reads the music, she must translate this into notes on the piano. This has to happen for both her left **and** her right hand.
4. Although the notes look the same, she must remember that you read the left-hand music (bass) differently to the right-hand (melody).
5. She must remember the hand and finger positions she was taught the day before, which, at the moment, doesn't come naturally.

6. Now she must put all that together to play a new piece of music.

I'm sure you can see where I'm going. For my daughter, learning to play the piano is a choice. She wants to do it. Yet today she would rather give up. That is because new learning is difficult. But what happens when we translate this idea into our classrooms and it's not a choice - our children must do this? They must learn all the different lessons whether they like it or not.

Then they must combine multiple skills (memory; coordination; translation; hearing; sight etc etc) to make that learning work - in a very simple form- this is executive function. And we've not even considered the conditions needed just to access social engagement – by this I mean the state we must enter so that learning is possible.

When my daughter couldn't 'do it' - her first response was blame. It was the piano teacher's fault. He hadn't taught her properly; he'd not thought about how she learns; he taught her the wrong hand positions.

Her second response was anger and frustration. Her third response were tears and sadness.

My daughter is lucky. A long time ago I learned to read music. It's been a while, and I wouldn't say I was fluent - but I am able to dust down those cobwebby bits of my brain and work it out.

So, we sat down together, and we worked out the notes and the hand positions. It reminded me of being little, when I learnt to play guitar. In particular it reminded me of learning theory - my mum and dad couldn't read music but my grandma could so she helped me. I was transported back, able to feel both my *little boy part* and my *adult part*. In essence, I have become my grandma as I help my daughter (I'm sure internal family system people could go to town with that).

I say my daughter is lucky because she was able to have one to one support; She has a parent who fortunately can access the language of 'music' and so support her development and ability to interpret and engage with it. We can talk through her feelings; we can talk through her problems and then we can learn together.

But it's all these moving parts which made me reflect on *the components of learning*. Look at all the subtle steps and spaces where misunderstanding can occur. Then add in obvious things like English as a second language; then more complex things like dyslexia or neuro-divergence.

And then think of the brilliant job that teachers do with thirty different children in the classroom. And then reflect on the impossibility of this job. It's easy to see how steps can

be missed or misinterpreted and how one slight error can lead someone down a totally different trouser leg.

The brain is so clever - it adapts quickly and then makes sense of its new reality and creates new rules and pathways to support this. Then it reshuffles and readjusts. Some of its strategies work really well for survival in one environment and terribly when applied to a different environment. This is the adaptive brain which can appear maladaptive when settings change.

I suppose this is the nub of my point. There is no longer an excuse for not knowing this stuff - for not teaching trainee teachers brain science before curriculum. For not applying Relational Inclusion from the very start. If we can teach four-year-olds to read, we can teach adults neuroscience as a very basic.

Please take the time to read this week's quotes. I think every one of them is a belter!

- 1) *If a kid struggles to sit in their seat or be still, this is an indication that they learn best when they are not sitting in a seat or being still! (NeuroWild)*
- 2) *If a child still struggles to grip a pencil correctly, give them play-doh. If they can't sit still or be quiet to listen to a story, read while they're eating a meal. Instead of becoming frustrated trying to force a child to do something they aren't ready for, meet them where they are, not where you want them to be. (Shelby Dersa)*
- 3) *We repeat what we don't repair. Whether it's a bad habit, unresolved issue, or past mistake, ignoring it just keeps you stuck in the same loop. Break the cycle. Face what needs fixing and move forward. Growth only happens when we take action. (Unknown)*
- 4) *Oh boy, is it hard trying to discipline the you out of your child.*
- 5) *If they're just "doing it for attention" maybe we should give them some attention. (@the therapist parent)*
- 6) *When you're born in a burning house, you think the whole world is on fire. But it's not. (Richard Kadrey)*
- 7) *If it requires my child to sit still and be quiet, I can't come. (unknown)*



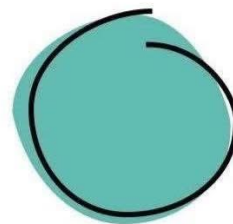
- 8) *Real growth is when you start checking and correcting yourself instead of blaming others. You take your power back by being responsible for your life.*
(unknown)

My two print and stick to the wall images this week are:

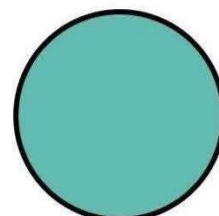
Gaslighting Phrases vs. Respectful Alternatives

1. "You're too sensitive."
→ "I see this affected you. Let's talk about it."
2. "That never happened."
→ "I remember it differently—let's sort this out together."
3. "You're overreacting."
→ "This seems important to you. Let's understand why."
4. "You're crazy."
→ "I want to understand your point of view."
5. "Stop being dramatic."
→ "I can see this really matters to you."
6. "I never said that."
→ "Maybe we misunderstood each other. Let's clarify."
7. "Why can't you just move on?"
→ "It's okay to need time to process things."
8. "You're too emotional."
→ "Your feelings are valid—let's talk through them."
9. "You can't take a joke."
→ "I didn't mean to hurt you. I'll be more careful next time."

JUST MAKE IT EXIST FIRST

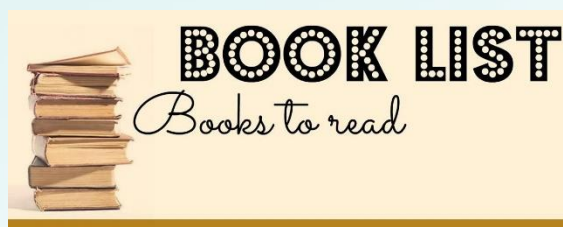


YOU CAN MAKE IT GOOD LATER



My recommended read is an article about recent Harvard research which suggests that reading skills – and struggles – manifest earlier than previously thought

[Reading skills — and struggles — manifest earlier than thought — Harvard Gazette](#)



In my 'piano story' I mentioned internal family systems so it would make sense for this week's *book from my shelf* to be **No Bad Parts** by Richard C. Schwartz. He likens our 'parts' and our 'personal burdens' to John Bowlby's (attachment pioneer):

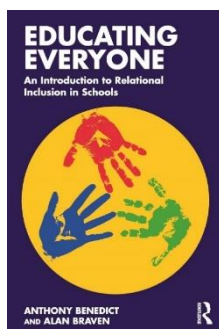
internal working models. He saw them as maps you developed as a child of what to expect from your caretaker and the world in general ... they also tell you things about your own level of goodness and how much you deserve love and support.

[of parts he explains] Often, they can tell you the exact traumatic moment these emotions and beliefs came into or attached to them and they can tell you where they carry what seem to them to be the foreign objects in or on their bodies.

If you have read any interesting books which support / develop / further understanding of all things relational inclusion, please add a comment through Substack.

If you find the Relational Inclusion blog useful, feel free to share with your networks.

Our book, *Educating Everyone: An Introduction to relational Inclusion in Schools* is out now and you must buy it and tell everyone else to buy it. It is available pretty much everywhere that sells books or you can get it here:



Our third book study takes place on 9th September 4-5.30pm. If you would like to join us, tickets are free but limited. We will be discussing chapters 4-6. Book here:

[Educating Everyone: Book Study Session 3 Tickets, Tue 9 Sep 2025 at 16:00 | Eventbrite](#)



Ambition
Community Trust



You can subscribe to my weekly blog here:

https://open.substack.com/pub/anthonybenedict/p/relational-inclusion-blog-15?r=5ki35n&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web&showWelcomeOnShare=true

Finally, I'd like to share a quote which has really stuck in my mind:

9) *Childhood is not a rehearsal for life – it is life.*
(@Mrs Tia)

Thanks for reading

Anthony Benedict

CEO Ambition Community Trust