

## Relational Inclusion blog #29: Micro Decisions

Over the last few years, those of you who know me know I have become slightly evangelical about Relational Inclusion and sharing what I have learnt about trauma and attachment and aces and neuroscience.

I think I have probably presented to thousands of staff. In my presentation, possibly the first key quote I use is this by Lori Desautels:

*We are not excusing these negative, volatile, or shut-down behaviours, but we need to understand not only the neurobiology of trauma and adversity, but also how our schools have traditionally created climates that unintentionally add secondary pain on top of primary pain. Most importantly, we need to understand how this has occurred - and is still occurring - through traditional discipline protocols.*

With all the research and understanding that is so readily available, I have found myself repeating to so many people (this week alone) that ignorance is not an excuse.

And yet we are still doing it. And often we are totally oblivious - it's these micro decisions that we make on the spur of the moment, for a whole host of reasons, that can be very damaging.

One morning this week, as we got the children ready for school, we were talking about some of the teachers and how kind they were. We mentioned a particular person who we thought both our children thought fondly of.

And then my eldest interrupted and said very clearly - that person is not a good teacher, which took everyone by surprise.

She went on to explain that maybe three years ago she had been in a lesson and had done some work on a sheet of paper which had taken time and considerable effort. The class had then moved to sit on the mat and she had taken the paper with her. (I'm not quite sure why but equally she was probably 5 or 6 and who knows why children of that age do what they do). On the mat, she folded the piece of paper over and on the clean side, from what I can gather, began to draw or doodle.

The teacher noticed and asked her to hand the paper in.

Now up to this point everything seems fine, taking the paper away is not harmful.

However, the teacher then proceeded to tear the paper up and place the torn pieces on their desk, instructing my daughter to get another piece of paper.

At this point of telling, my daughter's eyes began to well up. she is now nearly 10 years old. She explained that this made her cry at the time (the teacher ripping up the paper) and to make matters worse, when she cried the teacher ignored her.

And it's this exact moment that is the reason for this week's blog.

My wife and I were puzzled by why our daughter has held this for three years. (I was going to avoid referring to this a 'trauma' but I remind myself of my own training-

If an instance is significant for a person - even if it seems insignificant to another (or to me now) we need to recognize it the way they feel it and provide the appropriate empathy).

Maybe she hasn't said anything because somewhere there is still some shame attached to the incident. She shouldn't have been doodling - she had done *something* wrong.

Equally something didn't feel quite right for her because all her hard work had been torn up in front of everyone and she was left crying without being consoled.

What actually happened those three years ago is anyone's guess. Why the teacher decided to tear up the work and ignore the crying could be interpreted in many ways. It could be their own realization of guilt at carrying out quite a drastic action.

I have to say that tearing up work is pretty much a no go - however this is also - I think - a very old-fashioned response. If children did wrong, I think teachers often tore up work but that was when tv was back and white wasn't it?

Maybe the teacher experienced something similar when they were at school (we often reenact what was done to us - I've caught myself doing it countless times).

Maybe their window of tolerance was very narrow that day.

We gave our daughter a cuddle and we talked through her feelings and hopefully that trauma has been managed. I half toyed with talking to the teacher, who may or may not remember the incident, hoping they'd agree to some kind of conflict resolution (I'm avoiding the term RJ).

My point though still stands. As teachers and support staff we make millions of micro decisions. And we are only human. But these are young children learning to make sense of an adult world which doesn't make much sense. So, whilst being firm on behaviour we must **always** be gentle on the child.

As a footnote, having reflected on this week's blog, I am left with two questions:

Firstly, is doodling being naughty? Does it mean you're not concentrating? I'm really bad at sitting still and I've pretty much always doodled when I take notes. Is that really a problem?

Secondly, what about this idea of *all eyes on me; look at me when I'm talking to you; track the teacher?*

Now I understand the thinking behind this - in the old days looking at a teacher meant you were listening and concentrating. But is that true - does looking at someone mean you're listening to and learning from them? Does looking someone in the eyes suit all learners? Does not looking mean that children aren't listening?

My little boy seems to pay little attention to anything when he's immersed in whatever else he's doing yet I know he hears and absorbs everything.

I purposely haven't mentioned whether the teachers themselves are engaging enough. Does this idea of *sit down, shut up and listen to me whilst I impart all this important knowledge from my head into yours* actually work? Is this really the best way to learn?

The quotes I thought worth sharing this week are:

- 1) *How much a child is able to learn is directly related to how safe they feel in their environment and with the people around them.* (@responsive parenting)
- 2) *Empathy is seeing with the eyes of another, listening with the ears of another, and feeling with the heart of another.* (Alfred Adler)
- 3) *Our internal state dictates our external behaviour.* (Conscious Discipline)
- 4) *Most of the weight comes from yesterday and tomorrow. Let them rest, and carry only today.* (Thriving Studio)
- 5) *We built classrooms for workers and forgot the children sitting inside them* (Unknown)
- 6) *Raising kind humans starts with modeling kindness, even when it's hard.* (Carolina King)
- 7) *And, when we grow up  
we must never forget  
that hidden away, deep down  
Within us  
Is our forever inner child  
Resting, silently  
Forever waiting  
Forever hoping  
that one day*



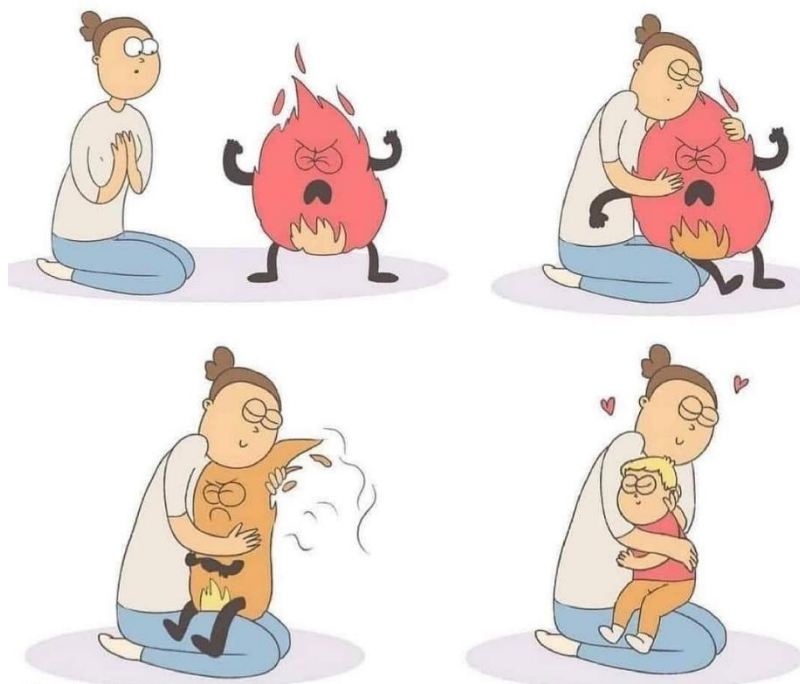
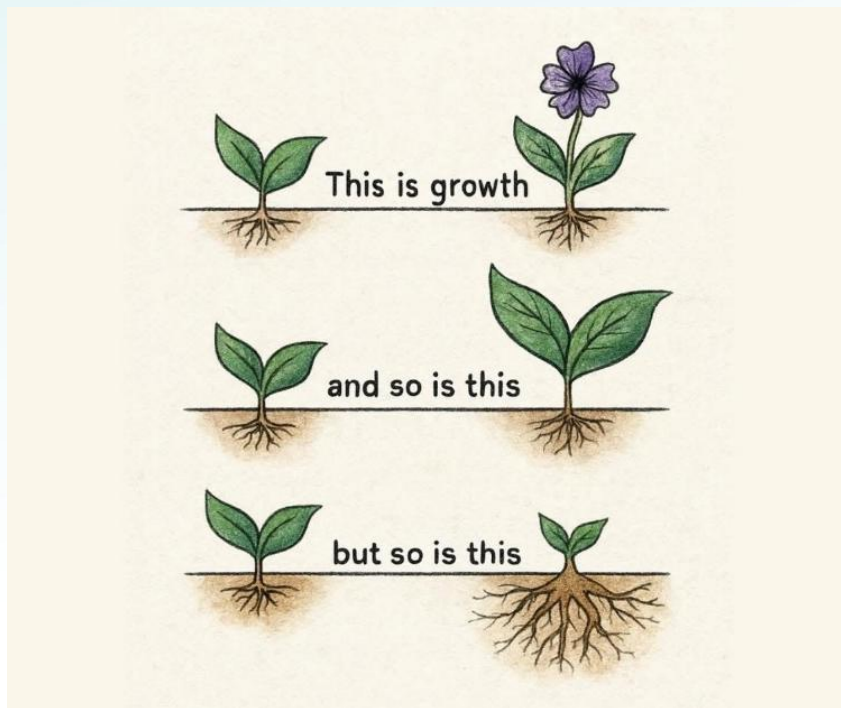
*we shall, remember it (Athey Thompson)*

*8) We talk about 'teaching kids to listen to their bodies'.*

*Often kids are inherently good at listening to their bodies.*

*It's just that when they do it in inconvenient ways, we call it 'behaviour'. (occuplaytional)*

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



Original: @realnasty  
Adaptado: @mamidentes

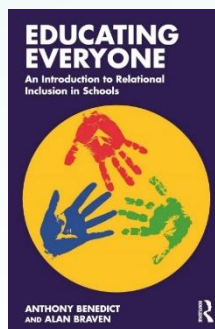


My recommended read is about biologically distinct subtypes of autism: [Major autism study uncovers biologically distinct subtypes, paving the way for precision diagnosis and care](#)

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:



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

*9) Correction changes behaviour in the moment.  
Connection changes behaviour for life (the therapist parent)*

Thanks for reading

Anthony Benedict

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