

## Relational Inclusion blog #30: Is it Hidden?

On Monday my little boy's teacher called me over for the *dreaded word*. And this isn't automatic negative thinking. We stand in line as parents and wait for our children to waddle out in their little lines. Every now and then the teacher makes eye contact with someone and sort of whisper shouts - could I have a quick word? Today it seems it's my turn.

As I step forward, I wonder whether he's clonked someone with the pot on his arm or said something he shouldn't have said or drifted off into some kind of El Gran Maja/Bloop world (google them - I had no idea pre 5-year-old). I sort of sidle over and his teacher mumbles something about another child and my first thought is that my boy has been rude - she's sort of doing that out of the corner mumble so the other parents can't hear. Then I focus.

"Have you thought of having his eyes tested?" She asks.

Suddenly I'm the child - slight sweats, bit of worry - and I mumble back, "No. Not at all." I stop myself saying, "Sorry miss, I'll try better next time." I'm also a bit confused because I've been listening to him read for a week and I've not spotted any eyesight issues. Equally he's watching his tablet too much. Maybe I'm a terrible parent and it has begun to affect his vision.

"It's just I asked him to read the blurb on the back, and he said he couldn't see it. So maybe you should think about getting his eyes tested."

I sweep him under my arm and scurry out of hearing range trying to make sense of what's going on whilst also wondering how on earth I'm going to a) get him to the opticians b) get him to answer properly and take an eye test seriously c) ever get him to wear glasses should it come to that. After all he's only just turned five. And this week, in particular, once again I've learnt his world works very differently to mine. Let's back track.

In the morning I brush his teeth. Every morning without fail, he dribbles his toothpaste - it flows down his chin, covers his cardy (and if I'm not quick enough my suit) and then, quick as a flash, he wipes his face with his sleeve. By 7.20am his clean school clothes are smeared in hard white toothpaste.

For good measure, he usually follows this up with an explosive sneeze which is also quickly wiped with his sleeve, so his green cardy toothpaste is now accompanied by dark green slug trails. He carries on with whatever he was doing, oblivious.

Two weeks ago I responded by saying his name in that sort of incredulous frustrated parent tone. Sometimes he'd sort of jump. Sometimes he'd ignore me. This made me think of the quotes I often share. In particular the one that says *the voice you use with your child becomes their inner voice*. And I started to think

Now, in all fairness, when he's had a mouthful of porridge and granola, and then sneezed, pebble dashing everything within close range, it's hard not to be just a little frustrated, but I tried to take my own advice. I think of his little hands (see quotes later) and I think of the surprised slightly shocked expression on his face when I called his name to reprimand and I practiced the pause. I think maybe I should just ask him why he's dribbling toothpaste.

He looked a bit confused.

I explained, "When I brush your teeth and stuff builds up in your mouth, you can swallow you know?" He looks at me like I've told some kind of mystical secret. Then we practiced a couple of times together and then he managed it himself. Now we haven't wiped out toothpaste dribble, but we've certainly reduced it by about 90%.

Hmmm.

I thought I'd try the same approach with the sneeze attacks.

"You know when you sneeze?" I asked. "Do you think you can maybe tell when you're about to sneeze and try tell me so we can grab a hanky?"

And what do you know? Now the success rate is not as good as the dribble but still maybe a 70% improvement. Like I said - he's five. He isn't worrying about things like snot and sneezes and dribble. It doesn't matter to him. He's got a grown-up servant (me) to sort it out for him. Equally - how or why would he know not to do that? No wonder he looked a little confused and shocked when I called his name incredulously. He's not old enough to ask - *how else should I do it?* But *I am* old enough to work that out for him. That's kind of my job.

Let's return to the playground and his supposed need for glasses. I decided to try the same approach.

"Can you tell me what happened when you were trying to read today? The teacher said you couldn't see the words - is that true?"

"Yes," he said. "I can't."

"Ok. Can you tell me why you can't see the words?"

"They're too small?"

"They're too small to see?"

"Yes. They're too small to see because if I put my finger under the word my nail gets in the way because they're so small and I can't see them."

Ahhhh.

“So your finger is blocking the words?”

“Yes.”

“If we maybe used a piece of card or a ruler and put it under the word, might you be able to see it then?”

“Yes.”

When we got home, we got out his book and looked at the blurb. I’d forgotten what the blurb of a five-year old’s book looked like. For those of you who don’t know, it’s not War and Peace. This one had three words ‘Is it hidden?’ (The book was about camouflaged animals not small writing by the way).

I got a piece of card, placed it under the sentence (whilst also wondering why the teacher even bothered with the blurb- the blurb was the title of the book and was in huge letters on the front anyway) and asked him to read.

“Is it hidden?” he said fluently and confidently. Notice I wrote ‘said’ not ‘read’.

“Hang on, have you memorized that?”

“Yes.”

And I think that’s my point - welcome to the world of a five-year-old. Everything they say is generally true. Equally everything they say doesn’t necessarily mean the same thing as if we said it. Don’t we need to listen to what they are actually saying as opposed to what we think they are saying? Which also made me think. His teacher is very young. She wouldn’t have a clue about the inner workings of a five-year-old. I’m not sure you really can until you own your own.

The same applies to neuroscience and trauma and attachment et al. If we don’t teach this right at the start of a teacher’s career, how can they ever really understand the brain and how children learn? Teaching isn’t a data transfer. We can’t download all our wonderful subject knowledge from our brain and upload it into theirs. There is so much more going on.

We need to teach teachers about the nervous system, about the brain, about stress response, the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex. We need to help them understand this about themselves and how they can apply it to the children in front of them. And then we need to watch what a difference that makes to everyone’s lives. Just as my son’s words needed interpreting carefully, children’s behaviours need interpreting through the lens of neuroscience and relationships.

My quotes a day for this this week are:

- 1) *Infants and young children dawdle because they are looking at the world with fresh eyes and ears.* (David Elkind)
- 2) *Sometimes we forget children are the same as us. They have days when they feel angry, tired, unwell and don't understand their emotions. This doesn't make them 'naughty', this makes them human* (inside parenting)
- 3) *Helping one person might not change the whole world, but it could change the world for one person.* (unknown)
- 4) *The world needs more kids that still talk to flowers, dance in the rain, howl at the moon, leave out gifts for the fairies, rescue worms and hug trees.* (Wilder Child)
- 5) *If speaking kindly to plants helps them grow, imagine what speaking kindly to children can do ...* (Unknown)
- 6) *A defiant child is often a drowning child – refusing the lifeboat, not because they don't need it, but because they're terrified.* (The contented child)
- 7) *Expecting all children the same age to learn from the same materials is like expecting all children to wear the same size clothing.* (Madeline Hunter)

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

They said: "Whenever you're feeling frustrated with your kids, **take a minute and look at their little hands.**"

still learning



still growing

still reaching out

@littlegraceph



i finally found my  
rhythm when i  
realized that even  
the steps  
backward were  
part of the dance

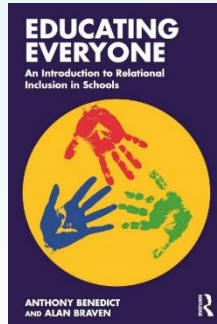




My recommended read is about SEN in mainstream: [Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools | EEF](#)

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:

*8) I thought I was broken and needed fixing. Not true! I was hurting and needed healing. A completely different concept.*

Thanks for reading

Anthony Benedict

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