

Relational Inclusion blog #52: On Being Seen

For the last few weeks daughter number one has been mumbling about a class award she hasn't received yet.. They have star of the week and a headteacher's award (maybe they're actually the same thing), and throughout the year everyone in the class wins it, so I haven't paid a great deal of attention. These things tend to come round eventually.

Something about this seems to be different, which possibly says something about my active listening skills, so I properly attune.

She says, "Everyone in the class has won it except me. And some people have even won it twice. And only one other girl hadn't won it and she told the teacher and then she won it the next day."

She has my attention now.

"The star of the week award?" I ask.

"No. This is something else." My daughter doesn't separate teaching assistants and teachers, but from what I can gather this is something the TA awards (not part of school policy, but I push my CEO voice aside).

"It's not fair," she repeats. "I told her I hadn't won it and she just said I need to stop laughing."

This mildly annoys me. She can be giggly - which ten-year-olds aren't? Equally, I know some of the other characters in her class — she's definitely not the only child laughing when they shouldn't. And anyway, when did classrooms become places where laughter is something to be punished? Somewhere along the way there seems to have been a shift where delight and noise have been confused with poor behaviour. These are young children after all - isn't learning supposed to be fun?

My daughter also has a real sense of right and wrong and fairness. More so than my other two children.

Then she says something about a fidget. And now it starts to make more sense. It's not the award she's after. It's the toy. And I can vaguely remember what that was like - to keep your eye on those tiny, mysterious prizes, whilst also counting down who else has won and knowing that it will be your turn soon. And though the prize is often of little or no value, you build it up in your mind and imagine being noticed and winning it. And that makes it more valuable than anything.

We formulate a plan. Politely she will again mention to her TA that she hasn't won it yet.

I say she should add that *everyone else has*, but I'm corrected. My daughter rightly explains that this would be rude. If she hasn't been noticed by the end of the week, I will speak to her teacher.

By Thursday she still hasn't been noticed. I ask if she wants me to speak to her teacher, but she doesn't. She says no-one was picked today so she's pretty sure it will be her tomorrow.

Friday comes and I can tell by the expression on her face that she's been missed again.

Again, she doesn't want me to talk to her teaching assistant. This time she explains, "It's too embarrassing."

That word bothers me. I mean, I know that parents are supposed to be embarrassing but this isn't about that. This is about the embarrassment of being seen asking to be noticed. And the embarrassment of being the only one who hasn't been chosen.

I explain she doesn't have to come if she points out which teaching assistant it is.

I speak to the teaching assistant, and in full-on protective dad mode I just about manage to resist the urge to tell her exactly how she is making my child feel. Instead, I tell her that my daughter is upset (she looks genuinely surprised) and that everyone has won except her.

"She's on my list for next week," she says and smiles.

And although I know that has only just become true, it's good enough for now.

The whole thing reminds me of something I heard Mary Myatt and Rachel Higginson say a couple of weeks earlier. They were talking about *work of the week* type praise, and they said something like:

"The problem is children will do their best piece of work to be recognised and noticed — but only one child can win.

And what is the message that all those who didn't win take away?

Either:

I tried my best and nobody noticed, so there's no point in trying again.

Or — and possibly worse — I tried my best and my best wasn't good enough. Maybe I'm not good enough."

And it makes me think about how delicate our moments with these little people are. How our best intentions to reward and praise can so easily have exactly the opposite effect.

How quickly children start to measure themselves against each other.

How early they learn who gets seen and who stays invisible.

There is good evidence now that when children feel overlooked or separated from ordinary classroom life, it affects far more than behaviour. Research into practices such as internal exclusion has found that *“the impact of isolation is reported to be a reduced sense of belonging, poorer relationships with teachers and lower levels of mental wellbeing.”* [Can Isolation Rooms Cause Harm? | Emotionally Friendly Settings](#)

Everyone deserves to be noticed. For their efforts to be recognised. To feel special.

This doesn't mean we can't have competition — that is something else entirely. Everyday school is competitive enough already. But if we aren't careful, our systems of praise don't just motivate. They teach children what they are worth.

And yes, of course we should be nurturing intrinsic motivation. But before any of that, we might need to get much better at simply noticing the children who are trying their best — some quietly and some through a megaphone — and waiting, in very different ways, to be seen.

My one a day quotes for this week are:

1. *Perhaps one did not want to be loved so much as to be understood.* (George Orwell, 1984)
2. *Belonging is being welcomed just as you are, not in spite of who you are.* (URevolution inclusion quote collection)
3. *Children are not bad. Children do not need to be punished... Children need to be seen and heard.* (relational parenting discourse / widely shared insight)
4. *Belonging is being accepted for you. Fitting in is being accepted for being like everyone else.* (Brené Brown, Daring Greatly)
5. *True belonging doesn't require you to change who you are; it requires you to be who you are.* (Brené Brown belonging discourse)
6. *You are loved just for being who you are, just for existing. You don't have to do anything to earn it.* (Ram Dass)
7. *Children are not things to be moulded, but are people to be unfolded.* (Jess Lair)

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



and their communities

THE STRESS RESPONSE

WholeHearted School Counseling

FIGHT

CAN LOOK LIKE:

Yelling, Screaming, Using Mean Words
Hitting, Kicking, Biting, Throwing, Punching
Blaming, Not Taking Responsibility, Defensive
Making Demands or Talking Back

CAN FEEL LIKE:

Irritable, Angry, Furious
Offended, Aggressive



MOVING TOWARDS WHAT FEELS THREATENING

FLIGHT

CAN LOOK LIKE:

Wanting to Escape, Running Away
Hard to Focus or Pay Attention
Fidgeting, Restlessness, Hyperactive
Preoccupied, Procrastinating, or Avoiding the Situation

CAN FEEL LIKE:

Anxious, Panicked, Scared
Worried, Overwhelmed



MOVING AWAY FROM WHAT FEELS THREATENING

FREEZE

CAN LOOK LIKE:

Mind Goes Blank and It's Hard to Think
Hiding or Trying to Be Alone (Isolating Self)
Not Wanting to Talk or Respond to Others
It's Hard to Complete Tasks

CAN FEEL LIKE:

Depressed, Numb, Bored,
Apathetic, Helpless, Zoned Out



UNABLE TO MOVE, FROZEN, OR STUCK

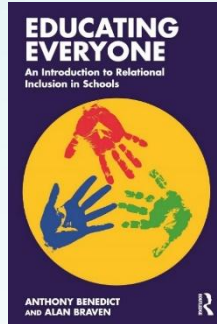
My recommended

[Isolation Rooms Cause Harm? | Emotionally Friendly Settings](#)

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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:

If it is out of your hands, then it deserves freedom from your mind too! (unknown)

Thanks for reading
Anthony Benedict

CEO Ambition Community Trust