



Relational Inclusion blog #60: It's not about the bag

About midway through the summer holidays daughter number one decided she wanted a new school bag.

Up until now, school bags haven't really been a 'thing' for her. When she first started school, she had a standard school backpack. At some point we bought her a rucksack, she needed it for an overnight school trip or something, and she switched to using that as her bag and that was pretty much it.

So, the request came a bit out of the blue. Eventually we managed to establish that all her friends had a something or other bag and she just had to have one.

My wife tried the, 'do you want to just copy your friends and be the same as them and have the same as them' approach. But it didn't work.

And actually, as I write that sentence, the answer is in the question. Sometimes we do want to be like our friends, and look like our friends - is that always such a bad thing?

My first school bags came from Leeds market. I can remember going with my mum and pointing to a black leather one hanging from the top of the market stall and the man fishing it down and I was quite happy with it.

My wife said she'd also got her bags from the market. And there was nothing wrong with that.

Except suddenly there was. I can't remember when the change happened or why it happened but suddenly which bag you had mattered. It probably came with which shoes or trainers and which coat.

And I wasn't after really expensive things back then and we didn't have loads of money anyway but a bag with a made-up name from the market and a bag with a real make suddenly did make a difference.

I don't remember any of my friends ever saying anything. I wasn't teased or bullied. And I am aware that some families just aren't in a position financially to buy stuff like that.

But there is a thing about fitting in. And fitting in doesn't mean you can't also be individual and be your own person.

How we separate that from the incessant need and want for new and more things, not helped by today's technology, where everything is at your fingertips, is quite a different issue.

It just made me think. Something as seemingly unimportant as a bag which no one else has noticed or commented on can make a real difference to how you feel about yourself. It shouldn't. But I think it does no matter how we tell ourselves otherwise. Especially when you're 10.

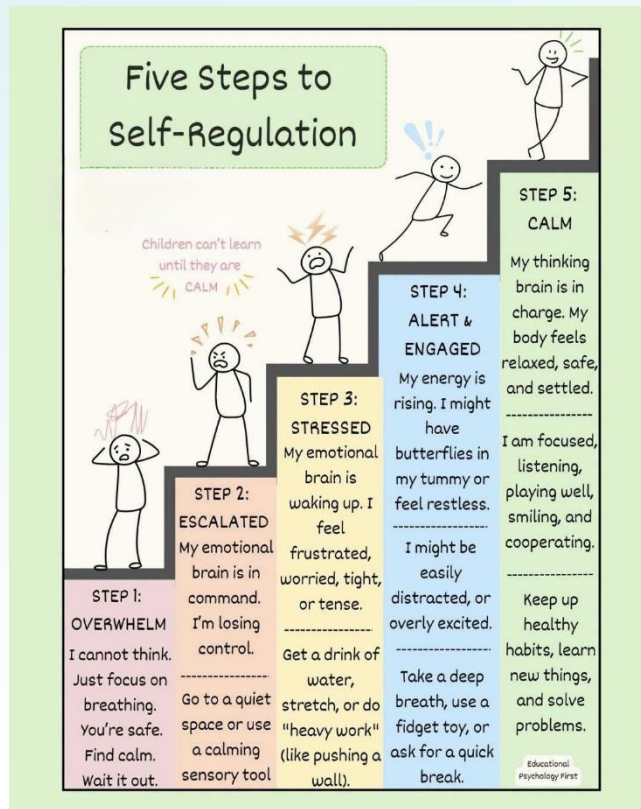
How we manage that. In our homes, in our schools, in our communities, well, that is something to think about for sure. Perhaps that's where belonging sits too. Not in making everyone the same, but in creating communities where children feel accepted enough not to have to worry quite so much about whether the bag on their back is helping them fit in. Inclusion isn't just about how a place makes our children feel. It's also about recognising how they feel inside their own skin, and what they carry in their metaphorical backpack – something that can't simply be changed with a familiar logo or a new label.

My one a day quotes for this week are:

- 1) *But if you knew you might not be able to see it again tomorrow, everything would suddenly become special and precious, wouldn't it?* (@mind authority)
- 2) *Be Careful not to confuse quiet and compliant WITH calm and well-regulated.*
- 3) *If you want calm kids, be calm. If you want respectful kids, be respectful. If you want confident kids, be confident. If you want patient kids, be patient. If you want kind kids, be kind. They're watching you.* (unknown)
- 4) *Sometimes the fastest way to stop an argument is to just decide that understanding the other person is actually way more important than proving that you are right.* (@the mindful walk)
- 5) *If you slow down a little, you will notice a little. If you slow down a lot, you will notice a lot. If you slow down completely, you will see things as they are.* (@mind Rise)
- 6) *The beautiful thing about life is that you can always change, grow, and get better. You aren't defined by your past. You aren't your mistakes.* (@POWEROFPOSITIVITY)
- 7) *All that we are is the result of what we have thought.* (THE BUDDHA)



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



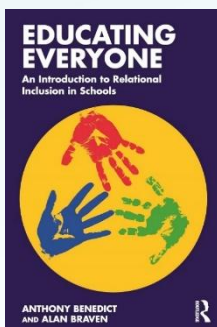
Name It, Don't Flame It

- ☐ Starting something new (like a new school)
 - ☐ The work felt confusing
 - ☒ Someone was mean to me
 - ☐ Conflicts at home
 - ☐ Feeling left out, lonely, or unloved
 - ☐ Hungry or thirsty
 - ☐ Problems with friends or other kids
 - ☐ I felt rushed
 - ☐ I didn't feel heard
 - ☐ Too many directions at once
 - ☐ Feeling tired, sleepy, or sick
 - ☒ I was trying to play but it went wrong
- WholeHearted School Counseling

My recommended read this week is about [Language to avoid for an inclusive school culture](#)
[| Tes](#)

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:

*I've been wasting a lot of time in yesterday and tomorrow.
Sometimes I forget that it's always today. (jkkennedy)*

Thanks for reading
Anthony Benedict

CEO Ambition Community Trust