

The focus of this issue of SEBDA's newsletter is Early Years and includes an article on Early Years pedagogy informed by neuroscience and a link to a detailed account by Randa Williams of how her Montessori nursery achieved gold in UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools Award.

SEBDA

ONLINE STUDY IN SEMH

OXFORD
BROOKES
UNIVERSITY

New for September 2022!

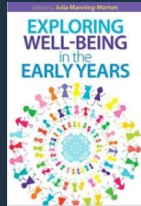
SEBDA, in partnership with Oxford Brookes University, will be offering a 2 year **Postgraduate Diploma in SEMH Difficulties** for professionals working with children and/or young people with social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Students will have the option of exiting with a **Postgraduate Certificate** after one year. More details available at: www.sebda.org



WELLBEING IN THE EARLY YEARS

What are the signs of wellbeing?

- Happily interacting with adults, peers and the environment.
- Being enthusiastic about people, play and food.
- The confident expression of thoughts and feelings.
- Successfully regulating emotions.
- Showing friendliness, empathy and caring.



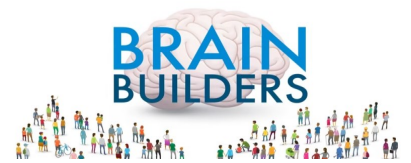
From: Manning-Morton, J. (2014) *Exploring Well-being in the Early Years*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

HOW BRAINS ARE BUILT: INTRODUCING THE BRAIN STORY

'Positive interactions between young children and their caregivers build the architecture of the developing brain'

A beautiful and powerful animation showing how we can build brains better.

Alberta Family
Wellness Initiative



Guidance
by the sector,
for the sector

Birth To 5 Matters is a non-statutory explanation of how the best interests of the child can still be met while delivering the new EYFS, with clear reference to enabling environments and positive relationships.

[Read more.](#)

'The role of childcare professionals in supporting mental health and wellbeing in young people: a literature review'

This [literature review](#) was prepared by Lone Inness whilst on an internship programme at the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY), December 2015.



The Early Years Curriculum and Social, Emotional and Mental Health

by

Dominic Gunn (Specialist Teacher for Early Years)

Before we ask 'What social skills or behaviour recovery programme should we employ with our 5 year olds?' we should first be asking 'How can recent research in neuroscience improve our early childhood education pedagogy and advocacy?'

'Every child is a unique child.'

'Children learn and develop well in enabling environments with teaching and support from adults, who respond to their individual interests and needs and help them to build their learning over time.'

'Children develop and learn at different rates.'

These are all quotations from the new Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (EYFS) (DfE, 2021), which became statutory from September 2021, and they are over-arching principles echoed from the previous statutory framework. They are positive statements which are central to our understanding of child development and which are crucial navigational markers for all adults, reminding us where our priorities lie in our interactions with young children.

There are also some notable changes in this revised framework. A new Early Learning Goal (ELG) is included (amongst the subtle emphases and language changes of other ELGs), entitled 'Self-Regulation'. This is a common term, well used amongst most Early Years (EY) practitioners, and it has now been incorporated into Government legislation and guidance. But as is usual with language that enters a professional popular vernacular, becoming almost meme-like in its ubiquity, 'self-regulation' can become a wafer thin concept as its depth, derivation, and value suffers from superficial repetition. Blooming from the beauty of brain science (Center on the Developing Child, no date), which has helped us to understand the impact of experiences on the young limbic system, and on neural path formations in general, it has a rightful place in our educational philosophy and pedagogy. This evidence should therefore be influencing the ways in which we nurture resilience, risk-taking, relationships and self-image. Acting upon this knowledge (which means *interacting with*, in Early Years), in the context of those opening over-arching statements from the EYFS, is our primary duty in improving the learning and life chances of all children.

Fortunately, we are better placed, in terms of our knowledge of the impact of adult-child interaction, than ever before. We have tested myths and folklore, like 'motherese' and 'familiar face time' (University of Massachusetts Boston, no date) and found, through MRI scans, that instinct and anecdotal evidence can be correct. Upsets, fear, disappointments and hurts (as well as the successes and joys) are experiences that need to be shared with trusted adults, while they are happening. This forges and strengthens the most useful neural pathways in the brain, creating healthy executive function, able to deal with the bombardment of information facing the young child, and helping that child self-regulate. The 'Self-Regulation' of the curriculum, and the skills and strengths we all want our children to acquire in order to have healthy mental states, resilience, the ability to learn and to have successful adult relationships and employment, will be determined primarily by these early adult-child interactions.

Far from disregarding the more specific learning needs of some children, including environmental influences, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) or traumas, this focus on adult-child interaction and brain architecture directly targets them. The new EYFS reminds us that:

'The framework covers the education and care of all children in early years provision, including children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)'. (DfE, 2021, p.6)

Cont...

EXECUTIVE FUNCTION

What is executive function and how does it relate to child development?

Check out [this infographic](#).



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The Early Years Curriculum and Social, Emotional and Mental Health cont...

So what to do?

- Ensure all staff access and constantly refresh CPD from your Local Authority (LA) and enrich this by referencing national and international research in neuroscience and brain architecture (if this is not already included in the LA core training) – links below.
- Use the keyperson* system in school as well as pre-school.
- Employ strategies to support diagnosed conditions or identified difficulties with communication, consistently, and in real social situations, as well as any discrete interventions.
- Remember that developing social skills and acquiring self-regulation is the curriculum in Early Years – behaviour is not something we ‘manage’ external to the curriculum.
- Deploy adults primarily to support child-led play, where most meaningful learning occurs, and self-regulation and executive function develops.
- Maintain thorough, unhurried discussions with parents and carers to identify anxieties, ACEs or trauma.
- Seek specialist advice where persistent difficulties are recognised and, in these cases, deliver specific personalised interventions as early and consistently as possible.

The world of early years education and child development continues to provoke a fierce, often zealous, pursuit for the most effective, most wholesome, most human nurturing of the emerging, learning mind. In the last decade it has been bolstered by huge advances in brain science which show exactly how young minds are formed, for better or for worse, how they are affected by their adults and their other environmental experiences, and how they can to some extent be repaired following damage. We are increasingly able to combine this evidence with our ancient instincts and enable ourselves, as an early years workforce that includes many committed, effective but non-academic practitioners, to articulate the value of our interactions with children. Articulating and advocating our best practice is essential in the face of some re-emerging, regressive, and restrictive attitudes towards Early Years and SEMH, mostly voices from outside of our informed, professional workforce.

* ‘Key person’ is a statutory requirement throughout the EYFS, usually present in pre-schools, often absent in Year R, and rarely mentioned in OFSTED inspections)

References:

Center on the Developing Child (no date) *Brain Architecture*. Available at <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/brain-architecture/> (Accessed: 19 November 2021).

DfE (2021) Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage. London: DfE.

University of Massachusetts Boston (no date) Infant-Parent Mental Health Expert Ed Tronick Available at https://www.umb.edu/research/recognizing_excellence/outstanding_faculty/psychologist_ed_tronick (Accessed: 19 November 2021).

Further information:

- International perspectives on child development, European Early Childhood Education Research Journal <https://www.eecera.org/journal/>
- Further information and training from Dr Mine Conkbayir (Birmingham City University) and Dr David Whitebread (University of Cambridge) <https://www.upstart.scot/assessing-self-regulation-missed-opportunity/>
- ‘Best Practice’ – many LAs are producing Best Practice Guidance, with this example recently being recognised by Nursery World: <https://www.theeducationpeople.org/products/early-years-childcare/best-practice-guidance/>

The UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA) and the Montessori approach

The UNICEF UK RRSA supports schools and nurseries across the UK to embed children's rights in their ethos and culture. A rights respecting school is a community where children's rights are learned, taught, practised, respected, protected and promoted. Go to the [SEBDA website](#) and read a practical and inspiring account of how one Montessori nursery school has fully embedded children's rights throughout the school and achieved RRSA Gold.



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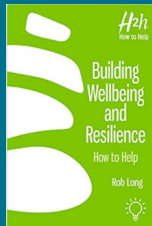
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Promoting the social and emotional well being of children and young people

Building Wellbeing and Resilience

By Dr Rob Long (2021)

Wellbeing fuses physical wellness, mental health, social relationships and other elements into a general sense of 'how we are'. High wellbeing is linked directly to resilience - the ability to cope with adversity and move forward - and vice versa. But how can we ensure that the children and young people in our care develop high wellbeing and resilience?



SEBDA's bespoke training offer

The National Council at SEBDA comprises a range of professionals including teachers, university tutors, psychologists and specialists in mental health and wellbeing, behaviour and a range of psychotherapies. Working together these specialists enable SEBDA to offer a range of unique training opportunities. These include CPD in whole school, classroom and individual SEMH issues. SEBDA is able to design bespoke courses to match the needs of individuals or of particular settings.

Contact SEBDA to discuss your training needs.

FOREST SCHOOL



Holistic development of the child includes physical, intellectual, linguistic and emotional and social development. A happy child with their needs met will learn, most importantly they will love learning. Forest School is essential to this. The Forest School Association describe Forest School by saying :

"It is an inspirational process, that offers ALL learners regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland or natural environment with trees".

Join SEBDA and

- Share good practice
- Have a national voice
- Network
- Benefit from reduced fees for courses & conferences
- Receive quarterly issues of the international academic journal



Farewells

If we stand tall it is because we stand on the shoulders of many ancestors (African Proverb)



Sir Michael Rutter (1933-2021)

A child psychiatrist who laid the foundations for current understanding of normal and abnormal child development psychology. With especial contributions to maternal deprivation and autism. Using naturalistic experiments he showed that wellbeing differed hugely between schools, showing that schooling quality helps shape child development.



Albert Bandura (1925 - 2021)

An influential social cognitive psychologist who is perhaps best known for observational learning, the concept of self-efficacy, and his famous Bobo doll experiments. These highlighted how aggressive behaviours can be learned. His social learning theory integrated a continuous interaction between behaviours, cognitions, and the environment.



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