

TOUCH IS GOOD

Touch is a strong anchor in behaviour and learning. It is time to re-learn appropriate, supportive touch and value it for its function in development and learning. Using hands-on experiences or manipulatives during the learning process greatly increases learning efficiency.

Whenever touch is combined with the other senses much more of the brain is activated, thus building more complex nerve networks and tapping into more learning potential. If children are gently touched on the shoulder while they are reading, the brain connects the encouraging touch with the reading and helps to anchor the positive experience.

(Carla Hanaford. 'Smart Moves – Why Learning is Not All in Your Head')

TES article Zofia Niemtus

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“We won’t stop bad things happening by scaring good people” (*Heather Piper* emeritus professor of Education Manchester Metropolitan University)

“When I hear people saying that children shouldn’t be touched in school situations, it makes me sad, and it worries me. If a child doesn’t have any safe touch in their lives, it’s easy to get disconnected from people and life, and to not want to live at all, and a compassionate teacher may be the only safety and caring a child has in their life”. (*Cheryl Rainfield* – a young adult novelist who has written several books on her experiences of abuse and bullying)

Carey Jewitt, director of UCL Knowledge Lab, is currently leading the IN-TOUCH project, exploring how the digital world is reshaping touch and touch communication. She says that touch offers many opportunities for communication in a classroom setting.

“Touch can be really important around compliance. If a doctor or a teacher just touches somebody gently on the forearm as they ask them to do something or is giving them information, research shows that the person is more likely to listen, and more likely to do what that person wants them to do.”

Professor Francis McGlone, a lecturer in neuroscience at Liverpool John Moores University. He has been studying touch for decades. Is head of the Somatosensory and Affective Neuroscience Group at LJMU:

Touch is “as important for **brain development** as the oxygen we breathe”

The importance of touch comes down to the actions of our C-tactile fibres. These are nerves in the skin that react to gentle touch and send pleasant signals to the brain. But they offer more than simply a nice sensation; McGlone refers to the process as “**life-**

giving touch”, with it being instrumental in the way a child develops a sense of self, and in regulating stress as they grow up.

“**Brain development** is impacted positively by physical contact and negatively by a lack of it. All the animal research shows this very clearly.”

..the growing **evidence base** is “difficult to disagree with”.

We have to take the first step together: an acknowledgement that touch is “**honest and normal**” **interaction** and that- although there are “still more unknowns than knowns” about the long-term impacts of the neurological systems at work – **its absence unquestionably has negative effects on development and emotional regulation.**

“We need to get a grip on the risk assessment” he says. “There is inappropriate touch, clearly, but you don’t want to throw the baby out with the bath water. The evidence of the science needs to be laid on the table; this is the harm you are causing. I think **the risk is infinitesimal compared to the damage that can be done by litigating against it.**”