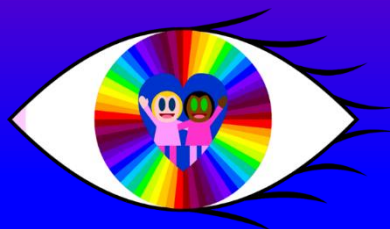


A Different Perspective CIC

April 2024

Issue 13



In This Issue:

PhD Updates.

School Non-Attendance Article by Lauren Smith.

A Relaxation Exercise.

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Quote:

"Equality, diversity and inclusion – of people and ideas – is integral to excellence in innovation, letting us access the best talent and nurture great ideas" – UKRI.

Please get in touch:
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Hi Everyone,

Welcome to the latest edition of our company newsletter. We hope you enjoyed the Easter break. Fingers crossed for some sunshine soon!

Please remember to take time out for yourself. Spend time with people who uplift you and align with your values. Nurture your passions and strengths.

Due to my PhD studies, we are currently working at a limited capacity however we hope to organise more local activities for autistic young people and their families soon.

"I want days without a schedule to keep. Hours left open for unplanned adventure. Moments of true stillness. I want a life outside of our busy schedule – a life with time to live" – Brooke Hampton.



Online Training with Springfield's Academy.

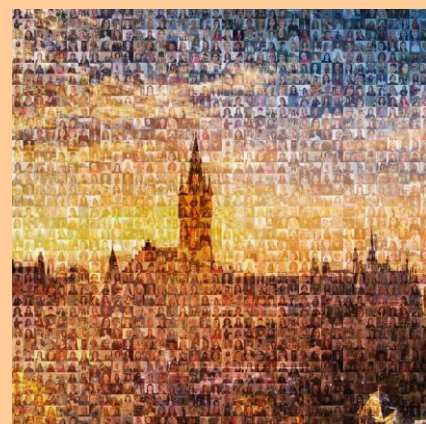
I enjoyed delivering a webinar for A-Fest Online in February. I shared my educational experience and my research on friendships and support strategies.

Love Letter to My Thesis Competition.

I'm excited to have won a competition run by the University of Glasgow, titled 'a love letter to my thesis.' My letter, describing my relationship and challenges with my PhD research, came first place in the 'most bittersweet category.' This will be published in the University of Glasgow's blog in due course.

International Women's Day.

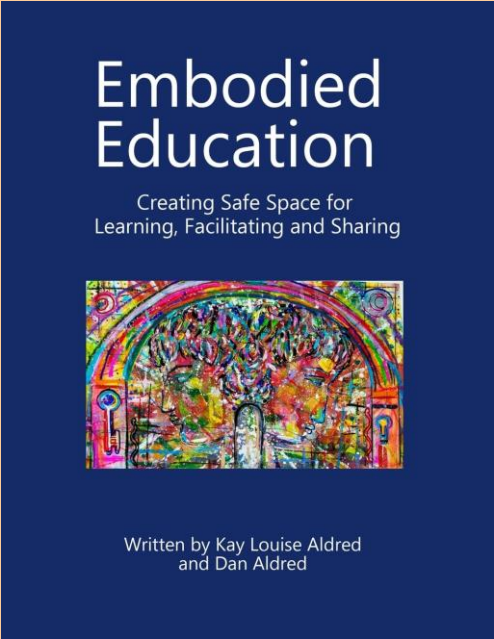
I'm pleased to have featured in a mural with the University of Glasgow as part of International Women's Day in March.



Education Studies Conference.

I look forward to presenting my current PhD research at the University of Warwick's 11th Annual Education Studies Postgraduate Research Conference. This will be held on Friday 26th and 27th April on Microsoft Teams.

**Book
Recommendation:**



Embodied Education: Creating Safe Space for Learning, Facilitating and Sharing by Kay and Dan Aldred.

“Safety is not the absence of threat. It is the presence of connection” – Gabor Maté.

Inclusivity means accommodating the unique needs of all. For autistic people, this can include:

- Sensory friendly spaces
- Clear communication
- Flexible approaches
- Respectful support.

Autistic Girls Network.

The Autism Arena: Meeting Your Sensory Needs.

- Use sunglasses and noise cancelling headphones if needed.
- Use dimmed lights instead of florescent lights.
- Unclutter your workspace – try to remove as many auditory and visual distractions as possible.
- Use deep pressure – weighted blankets, weighted lap vests.
- Do not be afraid to leave a social event if it becomes too overwhelming. Try to prepare a get-out/signal beforehand.
- Create a sensory box – stress ball, textured balls, chewy jewellery, different fabrics.
- Have a sensory corridor in schools.
- Make a den/use a tent to create a quiet space.
- Break down tasks into smaller chunks and have a movement break in between. Practice PACE (ECAP) – Energise, Clear, Active, Positive (see an explanation on page 4).
- Incorporate physical activities into each day – trampolining, pushing against the wall.

The above strategies may or may not benefit you since we all have different sensory profiles. Our triggers and level of tolerance may be different to other people. Therefore, it is important to create a list of bespoke strategies that will be helpful for our specific sensory needs. We also need to remember that in different environments and at different points during the day, our sensory needs may change.

UNABLE TO ASK FOR CLARIFICATION WHEN NOT UNDERSTANDING	PRACTISING CONVERSATIONS & PHONE CALLS	NOT TALKING ABOUT SPECIAL INTERESTS	CHANGING VOCAL TONE FROM WHAT FEELS NATURAL
NOT TALKING FOR FEAR OF APPEARING AWKWARD OR INAPPROPRIATE	MIMICKING TONES OF VOICE	SUPRESSING STIMS	LEARNING HOW TO USE IDIOMS
MASKING			
LAUGHING AT JOKES WHEN NOT UNDERSTANDING THEM	FORCING EYE CONTACT	REHEARSING SOCIAL SCRIPTS	SACRIFICING OWN NEEDS FOR THE COMFORT OF OTHERS
SUPRESSING FEELINGS OF OVERSTIMULATION	PRACTISING FACIAL EXPRESSIONS	LEARNING HOW TO APPEAR RELAXED	MIMICKING OTHERS GESTURES



Language We Use:

The language we use to describe non-attendance is vital. The terms school ‘refusal,’ ‘withdrawal’ and ‘truancy’ highlight a deficit-based view and one which suggests that the ‘problem’ is within the child. Recently, there has been a shift towards progressive language; Higgins (2022) suggests that the term ‘emotionally based school non-attendance (EBSNA)’ is preferred. Morgan and Costello (2023) add that the term ‘school attendance problems and barriers’ should be used. Suzy Rowland from the Happy in School Project prefers the term ‘school distress.’ When thinking about attendance plans, the term ‘suggestions for progress’ could be used as opposed to ‘back to school.’

What is School Non-Attendance?

Thambirajah et al. (2008) state that school non-attendance happens *“when stress exceeds support, when risks are greater than resilience and when ‘pull factors’ that promote school non-attendance overcome the ‘push’ factors that encourage attendance.”* Hamilton (2024) adds that it can be due to a contractual breakdown between schools and families. The Department for Education (2023) considers persistent absenteeism to be when attendance drops below 90%. Specifically, over 30% of autistic students are persistent absentees (Department for Education, 2023).

Understanding the Child/Young Person’s Perspective:

There are numerous triggers for EBSNA; these can include bullying, stressful transitions, struggling to access the curriculum, friendship challenges, sensory issues, unmet needs, and a lack of appropriate support and understanding. We need to recognise that these triggers focus on the school environment and ethos rather than place the blame on the child. School may not be a place of safety for all children and autistic children and young people may experience autistic burnout due to the constant demands, increased social expectations and having to mask their challenges. Generally, autistic young people reject a toxic environment and high levels of stress (Rae, 2023; Hamilton, 2024). Smitten (2022), an autistic specialist, shares how children are not ‘refusing’ school; they are in fact, in self-preservation mode. It is vital to listen to children and young people about their experiences and to understand their unique triggers.

The Impact of COVID:

Walters (2023) suggests EBSNA rates may have been exacerbated since COVID because young people learn that remaining absent from school reduces their anxiety. Many autistic people thrived during the lockdowns; therefore, the way that children receive education should be reframed (Rae, 2023). There are several alternatives if mainstream education is not meeting individual needs.

How Can the Situation Be Improved?

Schools should be proactive and solution-focused and try to identify patterns of low attendance before a crisis point. Providing quiet spaces, prioritising creative subjects, developing mental health, and bullying reduction programmes and diversity education programmes can be ways of supporting learner’s specific needs. Supporting autistic people to recognise, name and communicate their emotions and seek help when needed is important; education should include the mind-body connection.

It is imperative that autistic children and young people and their families can share their views; creative methods may be required to support communication differences. It is important for children and young people to share their unique triggers, needs and wants. All aspects of the school day must be considered, including the journey to school, toilets, assembly, and lunch time. Some young people may need more time to learn and engage; it should be considered how much they can cope with at the given time. It should be identified who the young person trusts at school; having a key worker may be helpful. Activities that align with the young person’s strengths and align with a positive relationship with a teacher or peer are important. Effective partnerships between home and school are vital; blame should be avoided. It is important to have clear objectives; can they attend their favourite lesson, attend for a morning or certain days only or just focus on socialising/feeling happy at school? If the young person does manage to attend, teachers must be welcoming, encouraging, reliable and consistent. Progress must be regularly reviewed, and everyone involved must be consulted. In specific circumstances, outside agencies, namely, educational psychologists and alternative provisions may be sought. All autistic children and young people are different, therefore there should be a focus on individual needs rather than labels.

Please follow me at ‘A Different Perspective CIC’ on Facebook and X/email me at: differentperspectives98@gmail.com

A Different Perspective Community Interest Company

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A Relaxation Exercise:

I have been shown the following exercise as part of Brain Gym. You can practice this whenever you feel overwhelmed or anxious. The aim is to support you to feel regulated and able to learn.

Get READY & RELAXED!

P.A.C.E. (Positive, Active, Clear and Energetic) is a four-step Brain Gym® warm-up that can be done in less than four minutes. Starting with water to energize the neurological system, the activities work together to create a calm, balanced and focused system for new learning and optimal performance. Do PACE before beginning tasks or in any challenging situation.

P. Positive	A. Active	C. Clear	E. Energetic
 Water	♦ Drinking water is essential for nerve function. It increases the electrical potential across cell membranes, thereby making them ready to work. ♦ All of the electrical and chemical actions of the brain and central nervous system are dependent on water for conductivity. ♦ So drink up!!		
 Brain Buttons	♦ With the thumb and forefinger of one hand, massage the soft spots below the collarbones, just to the left and right sides of the sternum. Place the other hand on the belly. ♦ Massage for around 20-60 seconds, switching hands, if desired. ♦ This activity improves overall electromagnetic activity in the brain and body.		
 The Cross Crawl	♦ Move one arm and its opposite leg to meet at the midline, then the other arm and its opposite leg, similar to marching in place with the elbows or hands touching the opposite knees as they rise. ♦ Cross Crawl around 30-60 seconds. ♦ The Cross Crawl activates the brain for crossing the visual/kinesthetic/auditory/tactile midline, helping with coordination and communication of the brain and body.		
 Hook-Ups	♦ Extend both arms straight in front of you. Thumbs down, cross the wrists, lace your fingers and tuck your hands up to rest on your chest. ♦ Next, cross one leg over your other leg. As you stand or sit in this relaxed position, gently rest your tongue on the roof of your mouth. ♦ Breathe slowly and deeply, until you shift into a more relaxed state. Switch sides, if desired. ♦ End by uncrossing the arms and legs, bringing the fingertips to touch each other. Continue with slow breathing until fully relaxed.		

For more information, please get in touch with Caroline Seyedi: <https://copingwithautism.co.uk/about.php>

The Parent Network:

Our Facebook page – The Parent Network - provides autism information, resources, and regular updates on parent meetups in North Somerset. We offer a safe space for parents to meet likeminded people, share experiences and gain support.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/parentnetwork21>

Recognising the Positives of Being Autistic:

All autistic people have different strengths, and their abilities may differ depending on the context, time of day and energy levels.

Tenacious
and
'resilient.'

Good
attention to
detail.

Ability to
focus
deeply on a
passion.

Accepting
of others,
empathetic.

Analytical
and good at
spotting
patterns.

Honest.

Creative and
imaginative.

Loyal.

Good sense
of humour.

Diligent.

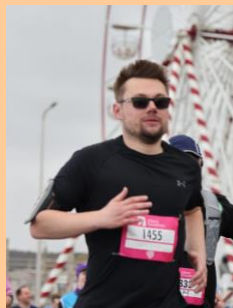
Good
memory and
knowledge.

Positive
energy.

As we are currently running at limited capacity, we have been unable to run as many social activities as hoped. Over the next few months, we hope to organise some local activities, including a trip to the museum, trampoline park and a meetup in Clevedon and Portishead. We are always looking to welcome autistic children and young people who may benefit from engaging and structured activities in a safe environment, to help build confidence and friendships.

We are extremely proud of Adam, who successfully completed the Weston Super Half on 24th March with a time of 2 hours and 3 minutes! Adam is now preparing to participate in the Bristol 10k on 19th May and the Exeter half marathon on 26th May.

We wish him the best of luck! 😊



Free, Online Continued Professional Development Modules:

The Department for Education have developed and funded short modules on special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Modules include understanding behaviour as communication, supporting sensory differences in the classroom, transitions, promoting independence, executive function and speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN). The modules are accompanied by free, online networking opportunities.

To access this, please use the link below and create a free account:

<https://www.wholeschooolsend.org.uk/page/online-cpd-units>

Free Resources for Supporting Relationships and Sexuality:

A relationships and sexuality resource bank has been compiled by Alice Hoyle. This is specifically to support young autistic people and those with learning disabilities.

To access this, please use <https://padlet.com/Drestermcgeeny/send-rse-resources-md40wy1f4gv1j8d1>

Please check out our website for autism information, resources, services and more!

www.adifferentperspective.info

Please get in touch with our team if you would like more information about our work or would like to get involved with our projects. We would love to hear from you!