

Children With Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities.

Cutting Edge Research and Development.



What is Happening?

- The population of children with CLDD/SLD/PMLD in our schools is increasing at a dramatic rate.
- It is not a UK phenomena, there is a worldwide shift in our population.
- The numbers of children with severe or complex needs in one Local Authority more than doubled between 1981 and 2001.
- 5 years ago there were 700, 000 children with a disability now there are 950, 000 and that number is rising.
- Children with ASD rose in the USA from 1/150 to 1/90 in the UK that rise went from 1/166 to 1/86 in ten years.
- **We are starting to see children the like of which we have never seen before.**

Why?

- Ten years ago less than 25% of premature babies survived. With major breakthroughs in medical care survival rates are now 90%. Of those babies that survive a large percentage will have a disability of some kind, many will have a learning difficulty and most will develop mental health problems at some point in their lives.
- As drug and alcohol misuse spreads then so do the number of children who are damaged. 1% of children have FASD (the equivalent to the number of children with ASD)



Why?

- We are seeing a new strand of ASD developing. A study of Romanian orphans showed that a type of Autism has developed unlike the Kanner/Aspberger model. We are seeing some premature babies starting to develop similar conditions. It is argued that the effect on babies of being in a sterile, self stimulatory environment is having a major impact on their ability to bond with people and the world around them. Academics are hopeful that they will unlock the key to autism very soon because of the advances in medical scanning technology and study of the brain in such children.



The Importance of Neuroscience.

- These children are ‘wired differently.’
- Differentiation is not enough.
- Our curriculum is often not appropriate.
- Our pedagogy is out of date as it is fit for the 20th century whilst we are living in the 21st Century with new 21st Century problems.
- The brain can develop, a child’s path can be altered but only up to the age of 15 years. After that it is too late.
- To understand how to help these children and young people we must work with neuroscience to work out what we can do/how to approach and what works best?



What Can Be Done.

- Academics are saying that mirror neurons are not used enough. It is a key way that all can learn. Can we develop this?
- For example children with Downs Syndrome need a different methodology than phonetics when learning to read as the left side of the brain is underdeveloped. What else are we doing?
- What are we doing to keep our pupils emotionally strong/preventing mental ill health?
- Depression affects progression this must be tackled in school.
- We need to take our vulnerable children to a place of resilience.
- The curriculum is the tool that responds to the learning needs of our children. One is the servant of the other. We must never lose sight of this. How can we move forward with it?



The future.

- Meaningful engagement is when sustained learning occurs. This must be our aim.
- To do this we must first understand their needs. Then change our pedagogy and BE BRAVE. Lets do the unthinkable and give our children what we know they deserve.
- Without engagement there is no deep learning. We end up with partly sustained or disengaged students and no progression. The end result can and often is mental health disorders and no hope of a future that these children deserve.
- The Learning pattern of these children is different to anything we have ever seen before. The time has come to re focus on learning and the learning context. We must strive to recapture a pedagogy for this new group of learners and so deepen our understanding of their learning style and needs.



Pause For Thought.

- Are we working with PHD students so we can learn alongside them. Are we developing in school an inquiry based model of research? **Not yet.**
- Physical activity has a tremendous affect on the body and mind. By the release of endorphins children are better able to focus, mental health is helped and engagement occurs more readily. Are we giving kids the opportunity for this? **Not as much as we could.**
- Where in school is there a place for quiet/reflection/therepeutic support/holistic support? **There isn't.**
- How is our curriculum and teaching methods different from what we were doing 10 years ago?? **It isn't.**
- How do we react when we get a very complex child that we don't understand? **We say we can't meet their needs. We need to question if not us then who???**