OCTOBER 2026
TERM 1
2026-27

R&D NEWSLETTER

WELCOME BACK

The Beacon



FROM THE EDITOR

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Welcome to The Beacon's termly Research and Development (R&D) Newsletter, focused on EVIDENCE and INNOVATION.

There's a clear link amongst this edition's articles relating to ideas around belonging, psychological and physical safety, emotional resilience and the prerequisites for 'thriving'. No specific focus was given to our contributors, so it's interesting to note that they've decided to submit something along the same lines...Must be something in the air during term 1!!!

Regular contributors to the Newsletter:

Ady Young (Headteacher)
Ali Cole (Special Projects and Teacher Training Lead)
Alice Journeaux (NHS SaLT)
Chrystele Perrier (Teacher)
Donna Wickens (Assistant Headteacher – Specialist Classes)
Elizabeth Hetterley (Teacher)
Ellie Garrett (Mental Health Lead, MAST)
Jeanne Lombart (Teacher)
Ruth Boyes (The Beacon SaLT)
Sam Allon (Teacher)
Sam Barnes (Teacher, Digital Technology Curriculum Leader)
Vicky Tong (Teacher, ITT Lead Mentor)

Remember, you don't have to be a teacher – anyone and everyone is welcome to contribute items of interest.

HIGHLIGHTS

STIMMING AND PUPIL VOICE
EXPLOITATION AND SEND
POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR
PUPIL-LED LEARNING
COMMUNICATION
PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

REMINDER



We have several members of staff around the organisation who are involved in undergraduate and/or postgraduate studies. Please remember that the school is here to help, guide, support, do your proofreading, be a 'critical friend', and so on, so please do take advantage of us (and particularly Donna Wickens, SLT member with responsibility for the "How to, and what's next" portfolio within our Exploration and Innovation work)! The school really wants to be involved with your professional development, and, additionally, to add your research papers/essays to our database of research evidence! Please do get in touch to let us know what you're studying/investigating/researching.

OCTOBER 2026
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R&D NEWSLETTER

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FROM WITHIN

The Beacon

RESEARCH UPDATES

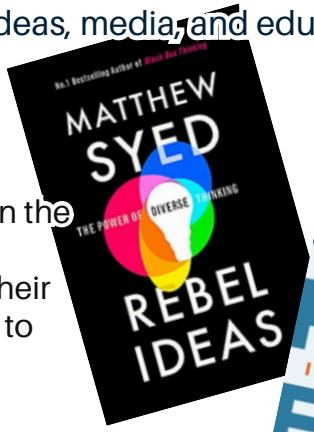
Exploration and Innovation

Think Piece and background review	Curious Questions	How to and whats next	Communication Hub	Celebrate Impact
•Ideas Hub •Sharing thoughts •Positive provocation •Inspiration on where to go next •Podcasts	•Identifying areas of interest to explore •Stoking professional curiosity •Methods to capture these and share the energy •Relationship to SER and SIP	•Getting started •Keeping on track •Methods •Processes •Prototypes •Innovation •Technical support	•Platform for change •Sharing, influencing and embedding •Internal and external	•Motivating others •Innovation awards •School improvement •Appraisal •Community awareness
Portfolio Lead Elizabeth Hetterley	Portfolio Lead Ali Cole	Portfolio Lead Donna Wickens	Portfolio Lead Casey Fletcher	Portfolio Lead Ady Young



A 'secret society' of curious minds exploring ideas, media, and education beneath the surface.

Currently our members are reading...





Keep an eye out for the opportunity to join the group...Maybe there will be a little box somewhere into which people can post their name if they would like to attend, adding to the secret society aspect 😄!

Starting small and building up...Watch this space!

CHOSEN BY ALI COLE

The Beacon

THE HISTORY OF PSYCHOLOGY

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory – a more interesting alternative than Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs?

You most probably have heard of Maslow and his hierarchy of needs. He ranked human need into a five-tier pyramid with physiological needs such as food, water, sleep and then safety needing to be satisfied before love and belonging, self-esteem and then self-actualization (which could include learning and creativity). Simply put, you are not going to learn if you are hungry, worried or don't feel safe.

In school we have a breakfast club, snack time, school lunches and have an amazing pupil support team in the M.A.S.T. We try to operate using nurture principles which are informed by Maslow's work.

However, have you heard of Bronfenbrenner's theory of child development which looks at the same topics as Maslow but in a far more complex and, in my humble opinion, interesting way? The following extract taken from an article in Simply Psychology makes for an interesting read. When you read it think about what it means for us in school. You can read the full article here Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (https://www.simplypsychology.org/bronfenbrenner.html).

Enjoy...!

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917–2005) was a Russian-American developmental psychologist. He pictured a child's development as shaped by nested structures, each one inside the next. He called this arrangement "a set of Russian dolls" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Its inner rings are family and school. Its outer rings are culture, economy and history.

Bronfenbrenner developed the theory partly to challenge the child psychology of his era. He dismissed much of it as "the science of the strange behaviour of children in strange situations with strange adults for the briefest possible periods of time." Lab tasks stripped away that everyday texture, he argued.

Bronfenbrenner co-founded the United States' Head Start early-intervention programme in the 1960s. He argued throughout his career that developmental science should inform public policy for children and families. His 1974 paper made a bolder claim still. Policy is not just an application of research, he wrote. Policy change, he added, is itself a natural experiment through which development can be studied.

The full theory followed in 1979. His book, The Ecology of Human Development, set out the nested micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystems for the first time. Because of this, the theory quickly became "a useful framework for psychologists, sociologists, and teachers studying child development." It soon shaped sociology, social work and education too.

The Five Ecological Systems



Bronfenbrenner (1977) suggested that the child's environment is a nested arrangement of structures, each contained within the next. He organized them in order of how much of an impact they have on a child.

He named these structures the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and the chronosystem.

Because the five systems are interrelated, the influence of one system on a child's development depends on its relationship with the others.

CHOSEN BY ALI COLE

THE HISTORY OF PSYCHOLOGY

1. The Microsystem

The microsystem is the first and innermost level of Bronfenbrenner's theory.

It consists of the people and settings that have direct, face-to-face contact with the child in their immediate environment. It includes the child's most immediate relationships and environments. For example, a child's parents, siblings, classmates, teachers, and neighbours would be part of their microsystem. Relationships in a microsystem are bi-directional, meaning other people can influence the child in their environment and change other people's beliefs and actions. The interactions the child has with these people and environments directly impact development. The child is not just a passive recipient but an active contributor in these bidirectional interactions.

Example:

Supportive parents who read to their child and provide educational activities may positively influence cognitive and language skills. Or, children with friends who bully them at school might develop self-esteem issues.

2. The Mesosystem

The mesosystem is where a person's individual microsystems do not function independently but are interconnected and exert influence upon one another.

This link matters. When home and school reinforce each other's values, children tend to perform and behave more consistently.

When home and school clash instead, such as a home that dismisses education while the school prizes it, the child gets no cross-setting support and may struggle.

Example:

A child whose parents are actively involved in their school life, such as attending parent-teacher conferences and volunteering for school events, may perform better academically.

3. The Exosystem

The exosystem is a component of the ecological systems theory developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in the 1970s.

It incorporates other formal and informal social structures such as local governments, friends of the family, and mass media.

While not directly interacting with the child, the exosystem still influences the microsystems.

Other examples exist, too. A parent losing a job, a library closing, or a change to social services can all indirectly affect a child. These changes still reshape the environments around them.

A parent's workplace policies can significantly affect a child's development.

Example:

If a company offers flexible working hours or work-from-home options, parents might have more time to spend with their children, positively impacting the child's emotional development and family relationships.



CHOSEN BY ALI COLE

THE HISTORY OF PSYCHOLOGY

4. The Macrosystem

The macrosystem focuses on how cultural elements affect a child's development, consisting of cultural ideologies, attitudes, and social conditions that children are immersed in. Beliefs about gender roles, individualism, family structures, and social issues establish norms and values that permeate a child's microsystems.

In short, it answers one question: what kind of society, with what values and resources, is this child growing up in?

Example:

In a society that highly values individual achievement, children might be encouraged to be more competitive and self-reliant.

This could influence parenting styles in the microsystem, with parents focusing more on personal accomplishments and independence.

Conversely, in a culture that emphasizes collective harmony, children might be raised to prioritize group needs over individual desires.

5. The Chronosystem

The fifth and final level of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is known as the chronosystem. The chronosystem relates to environmental changes over a child's lifetime. These changes may be predictable, such as starting school, or unpredictable, such as experiencing parental divorce.

Timing matters. The same event can affect a child differently depending on when in their life it happens, since a child's ecology is never static.

Example:

The introduction of widespread internet access and social media represents a significant chronosystem change for many children.

This technological shift has altered how children interact with peers, access information, and spend their leisure time, potentially affecting their social skills, cognitive development, and even sleep patterns.

Classroom Application

The Ecological Systems Theory has been used to link psychological and educational theory to early educational curriculums and practice.

The developing child is at the centre of the theory, and all that occurs within and between the five ecological systems is done to benefit the child in the classroom.

Home-School Communication: Teachers and parents should maintain good communication and work together, strengthening the mesosystem for the child's benefit.

Understanding Family Context: Teachers should understand the social and economic factors their students' families may be experiencing.

Positive School Ethos: A good parent-teacher relationship and a supportive school culture positively shape the child's development.

Active Participation: The child must be active in their own learning, collaborating with peers in meaningful experiences.



THE HISTORY OF PSYCHOLOGY

CHOSEN BY ALI COLE

Head Start: The major US early-years program Bronfenbrenner helped found works simultaneously on the child's preschool, family involvement, and community services.

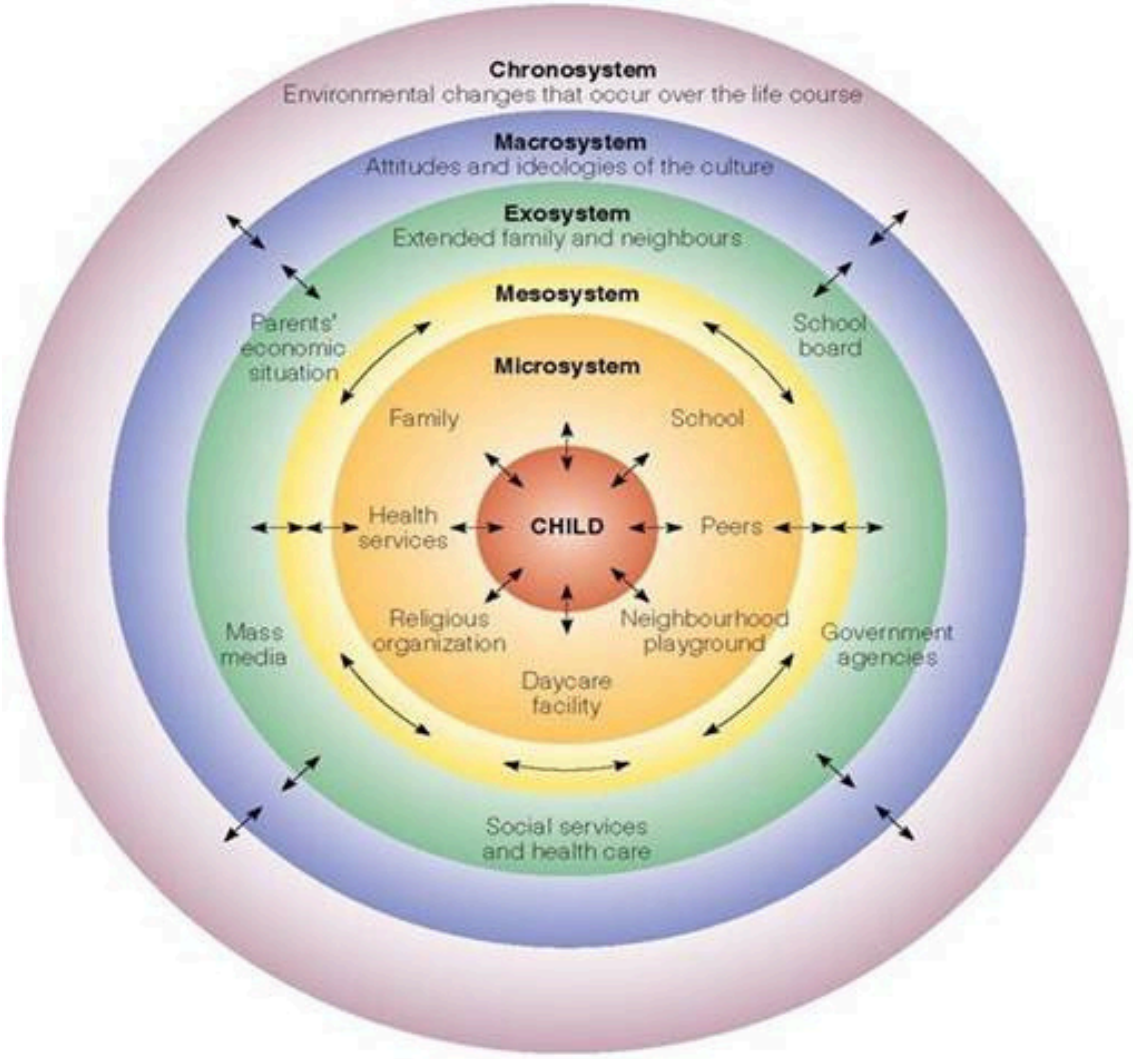


Diagram of the Five Systems

FROM ELLIE GARRETT

The Beacon

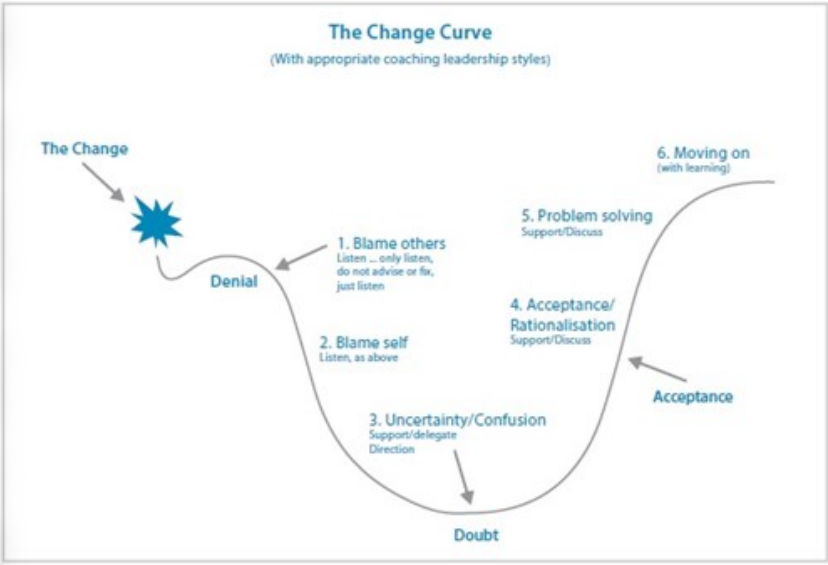
WELLBEING: CHANGE PART 2

Change - part 2 - the change curve (and working through it)
Ellie Garrett, Mental Health Lead (MAST)

In the last edition of the newsletter, before the summer holiday and potential new arrangements in place when we returned to school in September, we considered the issue of 'embracing change' as a positive strategy, rather than focusing on any negative connotations. This second part of our mini-series on 'change', looks at the concept of a 'change curve' and working through it.

What is the Change Curve?

The Change Curve is a popular and powerful model used to understand the stages of personal transition and organisational change. It helps you predict how people will react to change, so that you can help them make their own personal transitions and make sure that they have the help and support they need. Personality underpins how people will respond to change. So, understanding the differences in personalities allows leaders, managers and coaches to predict how different personality types are likely to respond to a situation or change, and then to deploy the correct leadership or coaching style in order to smooth the transition from resistance to acceptance.



Personality and response to change

The Change Curve model describes the six stages most people go through as they adjust to change.

Stage 1 begins when a change is first introduced, where people's initial reaction may be shock or denial.

This manifests by blaming others as they react to the challenge of the status quo.

People then move to **Stage 2** of the Change Curve: they become critical of themselves. For as long as people resist the change and remain at Stages 1 and 2 of the Change Curve, the change will be unsuccessful, at least for the people who react in this way. This is a stressful and unpleasant stage. It should also be noted that people can waver between these two stages for quite some time.



Stage 3 is where confusion and doubt set it, but it's a good sign as people are beginning to move on. This manifests in various ways but people will show signs of doubt and confusion. Signs of acceptance will, however, shine through, as they may ask questions such as:

FROM ELLIE GARRETT

WELLBEING: CHANGE PART 2

- Do I carry on with my work?
- What will my job be now?
- How do I use this new machine?

At **Stage 4** of the Change Curve - Acceptance Rationalisation - people stop focusing on what they have lost. They start to let go and accept the changes. They begin testing and exploring what the changes mean and so learn the reality of what's good and not so good, and how they must adapt. It is useful to be cautious at this stage of people sliding backwards into doubt. This can be common.

By **Stage 5**, Solutions and Problem Solving, people not only accept the changes but also start to embrace them. They begin to rebuild their ways of working. Only when people get to this stage can the organisation really start to reap the benefits of change. It is here that new job descriptions, ideas and innovation now blossom.

We then reach **Stage 6**. The change is now starting to become 'normal' or the beginnings of routine and status quo. Learnings can now be captured through a review process and feed into the next cycle of change. Individuals have a greater awareness of how to respond to change and begin to build the personal development aspects of this. This stage is the one you have been waiting for! This is where the changes start to become second nature, and people embrace the improvements to the way they work.

As someone managing the change, you'll finally start to see the benefits you worked so hard for. Your team or organisation starts to become productive and efficient, and the positive effects of change become apparent. Whilst you are busy counting the benefits, don't forget to celebrate the success! The journey may have been rocky, and it will have certainly been at least a little uncomfortable for some people involved. Everyone deserves to share the success. What's more, by celebrating the achievement, you establish a track record of success, which will make things easier the next time change is needed.

If **you find that an individual is stuck in one of the first three stages of the curve, consider if they:**

Have been given all the information they would need in order to accept the change and see it as necessary and positive for themselves, their team or the organisation. They may also want to know that the inherent risks of change have been considered and that it is worth changing the status quo which they may feel more comfortable with Have had adequate time to accept the change. They may need more time but will move through to acceptance at a steady pace.

If you find that an individual gets through all the stages quickly, but then reverts back to confusion, consider if they:

Like change and are future-oriented but are so excited by the idea that they've skipped the attention to detail and understanding that change involves. This might mean you support them in getting through the stages quickly at first, but know that once the confusion sets back in, you may need to follow up again with information and coaching that has already been offered in order for the change to take hold long-term.



FROM ELLIE GARRETT

The Beacon

WELLBEING: CHANGE PART 2

If you find that an individual is stuck specifically at Stage 2 (Blaming Others) and is doing so very vocally, consider if they:
Were the ones to instigate the change. If they weren't, then they may feel that change is being imposed upon them as a done deal without consultation. If they weren't involved in the change planning, then ask them to provide feedback in order to gain their buy-in and support. You may find yourself with some great new ideas!

Coaching individuals through the Change Curve

Change Curve Stages 1 and 2 - Blaming Self and Others
This is easy to spot. The style to use here is to simply listen... don't be tempted to jump in and fix it, don't offer solutions, and don't agree with them, just listen. Watch as they move to Stage 2, where again, you just listen. This can take some time, but you need to let them vent. Patience is often the key here!

Change Curve Stage 3 - Confusion
Again, this is easy to spot. You'll probably hear sentiments like: 'What am I supposed to do with my work?', 'Perhaps I should look elsewhere', or 'I am not sure of any of this'. The style here is to start giving pointers, start directing them and give some context around the way things will look. It is now your role to 'sell' the benefits of the change processes, people, future, and business value.

Change Curve Stage 4 - Acceptance Rationalisation
Here things begin to get easier. This is a good time to get your team to start brainstorming ideas, solutions, and let them know you are supporting them. Watch for individuals who may slip into confusion as they realise they aren't fully sure of what's just happened.

Change Curve Stage 5 - Problem Solving
As above, here they take ownership for the change. They stop focusing on what they have lost and start to let go and accept the changes. They begin testing and exploring what the changes mean and so learn how they must adapt. This is where you stabilise the change.

Change Curve Stage 6 - Moving On
Here the golden question to ask is 'what have you learnt about yourself and the process you have gone through?' At this stage, they not only accept the changes but also start to embrace them and begin to rebuild their ways of working. You should now see some benefits coming through from the change.



FROM ELLIE GARRETT

The Beacon

WELLBEING: STIMMING AND SELF-INJURIOUS BEHAVIOURS

Understanding Stimming and Self-Injurious Behaviours: Listening to What Pupils Are Telling Us

Over recent years, we have seen an increase in pupils who use a range of self-directed behaviours, including stimming and self-injurious behaviours. While these behaviours can sometimes appear similar, understanding their purpose helps us respond with curiosity, compassion, and appropriate support.

As part of this year's **World Mental Health Day theme, "Lived Experiences Heard: Real Voices, Real Change,"** we have been asked to focus on how we can better hear and understand the voices of our pupils, particularly those who communicate in ways beyond spoken language.

Stimming: Supporting Regulation and Self-Expression
Stimming (self-stimulatory behaviour) refers to repetitive movements, sounds, or actions that help an individual regulate their sensory experiences, emotions, attention, or energy levels.

Examples may include:

- Hand flapping or finger movements
- Rocking
- Pacing
- Repeating words or sounds
- Seeking visual stimulation
- Head banging
- Slapping parts of the body
- Biting or applying pressure to the body

For many pupils, particularly autistic pupils and those with sensory processing differences, these behaviours serve an important purpose. They may help a pupil:

- Feel calm and regulated
- Cope with sensory overload
- Express excitement, joy, frustration, or anxiety
- Increase focus and concentration
- Meet sensory needs
- Feel safe and in control of their environment

Rather than asking, *"How can we stop this behaviour?"* it is often more helpful to ask, *"What need is this behaviour meeting?"*.

Many forms of stimming are a healthy and effective way for pupils to regulate themselves and communicate their experiences.

Self-Injurious Behaviour: Understanding Distress and Unmet Need

Some pupils may engage in behaviours that cause injury to themselves, such as:

- Repeatedly hitting themselves
- Head banging that causes physical harm
- Scratching or biting to the point of injury



FROM ELLIE GARRETT

The Beacon

WELLBEING: STIMMING AND SELF-INJURIOUS BEHAVIOURS

- Picking at skin or wounds

These behaviours may indicate that a pupil is experiencing significant distress, dysregulation, frustration, anxiety, pain, or difficulty communicating their needs. It is important to remember that self-injurious behaviour is not about seeking attention. Rather, it is often a sign that a pupil needs support, understanding, and help to communicate what they are experiencing.

Looking Beyond What We See

Behaviours such as head banging or self-slapping can occur as part of sensory regulation for some pupils and as an expression of distress for others. The behaviour itself does not always tell us the reason behind it.

Understanding the context is key:

- When does the behaviour occur?
- What happened before and after?
- What might the pupil be experiencing emotionally or sensory-wise?
- What is the behaviour helping the pupil achieve or communicate?

By considering the function of the behaviour, we are more likely to respond in ways that support the pupil's wellbeing and dignity.

Linking to Pupil Voice

Our World Mental Health Day focus on **giving pupils a voice** has reminded us that communication takes many forms.

Pupils may communicate through:

- Speech
- AAC devices
- Symbols and visuals
- Sign language
- Gestures
- Facial expressions
- Behaviour

Sometimes a pupil's most authentic voice is expressed through their actions rather than their words. When we take time to understand the meaning behind a behaviour, we are recognising and valuing that communication.

Not all voices are spoken. By looking beyond the behaviour and seeking to understand the experience behind it, we can ensure that every pupil feels heard, respected and supported. Real voices create real change when we take the time to listen.



FROM RUSSELL AMES

The Beacon

BEHAVIOUR: GATEWAYS TO POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR

GATEWAYS TO POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR - PROACTIVE MANAGEMENT

Be proactive! Consider these 10 positive behaviour strategies...

Communication	Have you offered an opportunity for the individual to communicate using objects, signs, symbols, or speech / communication aids, and have you responded positively? Do they have a functional communication system?
Choice	Have you offered another activity and encouraged the individual to choose? Are the activities geared for success? Structured choices from preferred options?
Environment	Have you offered a change of location or setting, e.g. a smaller space, a low distraction area and have you adapted the environment to support the individual?
Physical Needs	Have you considered hunger, thirst, pain, heat, cold, tiredness, activity, illness, sensory perception or need for the toilet?
Interaction	Have you offered a change of staff member and responded to the need for positive attention? Is there a role for intensive interaction? NOTE: problem behaviour is often driven by disordered attachments or the need for attention.
Therapeutic Alternatives	Have you offered music, aromatherapy, massage, reflexology, sensory diet? THINK SENSORY – is there another means to meet their need? What is the sensory driver that led to that particular behaviour? Sensory circuits?



FROM RUSSELL AMES

The Beacon

BEHAVIOUR: GATEWAYS TO POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR

Relaxation	Have you tried deep breathing, slow breathing, counting, yoga, soft music etc?
Calming Techniques	Have you used verbal and non-verbal calming to include: reflection, empathy, redirection, reassurance, distraction, incentives and rewards? Encourage positive behaviour using their preferred re-inforcers – food, singing, stickers, DVD. Did you use their calming stimuli and discuss the natural consequences?
Listening Techniques	Have you listened, read the signs, picked up cues, and given prompts rather than hurrying to give advice? Don't react – stand, take a breath, reflect, then make a planned choice of how you will act…
Sensitivity	Have you helped to restore the individual's confidence and dignity - being sensitive rather than confrontational? Is the individual getting what they need – attention, sensory stimulus, escape time, tangible or low demand? Have you offered a constructive functional, meaningful, enjoyable or motivating activity?

Remember: outside events affect our own behaviour and that of our students – WHAT YOU DO REALLY MATTERS (to help or hinder)!!

Loddon Training

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FROM NAOMI FULLER

The Beacon

SAFEGUARDING

Safeguarding Spotlight: Exploitation and SEND
Are we recognising the risks?

Research focus: Understanding vulnerability to exploitation, communication barriers and safeguarding children and young people with SEND.

What does the research tell us?

Lambert et al. (2025) explored the relationship between cognitive impairment and vulnerability to exploitation, reviewing 20 studies. The review identified research relating to sexual exploitation (10 studies), financial exploitation (8 studies) and criminal exploitation (2 studies). The authors concluded that cognitive impairment may increase vulnerability to exploitation.

Importantly, this research encourages us to consider how an individual's cognitive, communication and social needs may influence their vulnerability to being manipulated or taken advantage.

For children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), this raises important safeguarding questions. Could a pupil recognise when someone is exploiting their trust? Would they understand when a request is inappropriate? Could they communicate what has happened, particularly if the person responsible is someone they know or depend upon?

The key message from Lambert et al. (2025) is that we need to understand vulnerability to exploitation, not simply look for obvious signs that abuse has occurred.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, but helping pupils recognise risk, understand boundaries and communicate concerns requires careful consideration in a specialist school.

Why does this research matter for pupils with SEND?

The NSPCC's guidance on safeguarding, highlights that disabled children face an increased risk of abuse, with statistics showing children with SEND are nearly 4 times more likely to be abused than their peers and may be less likely to receive appropriate protection and support.

When considered alongside Lambert et al. (2025), this reinforces the importance of recognising how individual needs and wider environmental barriers may contribute to exploitation risk.

Our responsibility is not simply to teach pupils to recognise danger. It is to ensure that our safeguarding systems account for the possibility that some pupils may not recognise exploitation or be able to tell us about it in conventional ways.

Some pupils may experience barriers to recognising unsafe situations or explaining that something is wrong. Communication difficulties, dependence on adults for care, social isolation and limited access to appropriate relationships and safety education may affect how a pupil recognises, responds to or reports abuse (NSPCC, 2025).



SAFEGUARDING

FROM NAOMI FULLER

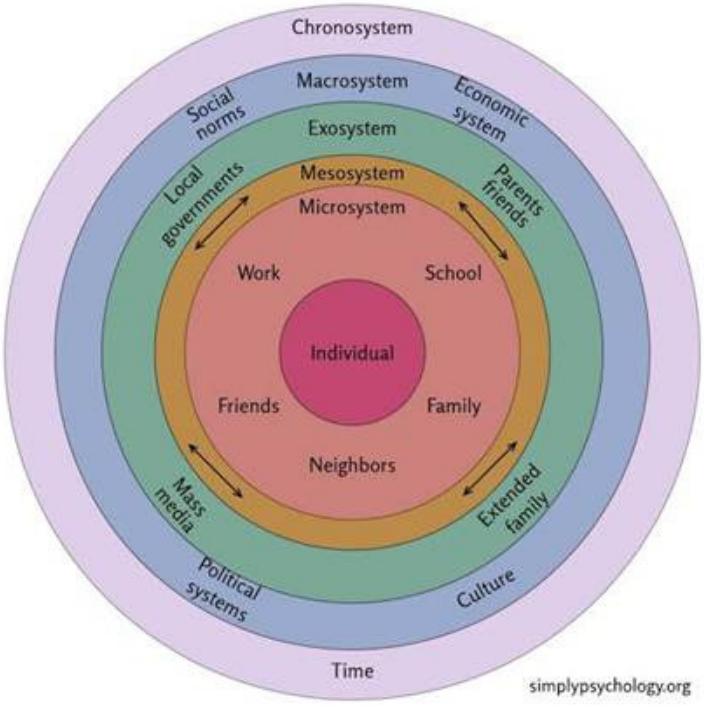
The Beacon

Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 (Department for Education, 2026) reinforces the importance of a child-centred approach and the responsibility of all staff to act on safeguarding concerns. Changes in behaviour or presentation may indicate that a pupil needs additional support or that something requires further exploration. Although these changes do not automatically indicate abuse, concerns should never be dismissed simply because a pupil has SEND.

What does theory tell us?

Two theoretical perspectives help us apply Lambert et al.'s findings to safeguarding practice.

1. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) highlights how a child's development is influenced by the relationships and environments around them. Applied to safeguarding, this encourages us to look beyond the individual pupil and consider their relationships, peer groups, school environment, online experiences, and wider community. Understanding these influences can help staff recognise potential risks and identify opportunities for protection.



2. The social model of disability (Oliver, 1990) encourages us to consider how barriers within environments and systems can restrict participation. In safeguarding, this means asking whether our communication methods, resources and teaching approaches enable every pupil to understand safety and express concerns.

Together, these perspectives encourage us to consider both a pupil's individual support needs and the barriers that may prevent them from accessing protection.

SAFEGUARDING

FROM NAOMI FULLER

The Beacon

What does this mean for our practice?

Create opportunities for pupils to be heard.
Pupils need accessible, consistent opportunities to express preferences, ask for help and communicate when something feels wrong. Depending on their individual needs, visual resources, symbols, social stories and communication aids may help pupils understand personal safety and communicate concerns.

A question for reflection.

If a pupil in our school felt unsafe, would they know how to communicate this?

Consider how we adapt communication, teach personal safety and respond consistently to each pupil's individual ways of expressing distress or concern.

The R&D takeaway - Safeguarding is not just about recognising signs of harm, it is also about removing barriers that prevent children from understanding risk, expressing concerns and being heard. By combining research-informed practice with accessible communication and professional curiosity, we can help ensure that every pupil has the best possible opportunity to be safe and receive support.

Further reading

- Lambert, I. et al. (2025). Cognitive Impairment as a Vulnerability for Exploitation: A Scoping Review. Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 26(3), pp. 468–482.
- Department for Education (2026). Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026.
- NSPCC Learning (2025). Safeguarding d/Deaf and disabled children and young people.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design.
- Oliver, M. (1990). The Politics of Disablement.



ARTICLE

The Beacon

PUPIL-LED LEARNING

Let the pupil lead the learning!
based on the article by Martin Goodwin in "PMLD Link" (Summer 2023)

Sequenced vs Process-Based Curriculum

The challenges of a sequenced curriculum

Within Education, the concept of a sequenced curriculum is specified by Ofsted. This article explores potential issues in determining a sequenced curriculum concerning pupils with PMLD; however, many of the points raised could be considered relevant for pupils with severe and complex learning needs as well, so perhaps there's something here for everyone at The Beacon?!

Ofsted's (2019) expectation that curricula should be "coherently planned and sequenced" presents methodological and ethical challenges when educating pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). This approach may conflict with the Rochford Review (2016), which emphasises non-hierarchical learning. When curriculum and assessment become too closely linked, learning risks becoming rigid, target-driven and focused on measurable outcomes rather than meaningful experiences.

A standardised, developmental sequence cannot meet the diverse needs of all pupils with PMLD. Multiple disabilities can significantly affect developmental trajectories, making conventional developmental milestones inappropriate. Breaking learning into isolated skills may prevent pupils from making meaningful connections and developing understanding. Furthermore, a rigid sequence can create a "readiness model", whereby pupils cannot progress until a particular skill has been mastered. This risks limiting learning opportunities and prioritising targets over the pupil's interests and engagement.

Teaching should instead consider each pupil's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1987), using appropriate scaffolding (Bruner, 1960) to extend their learning. While sequenced teaching can be beneficial, this does not require a prescribed, linear curriculum. The sequence should emerge through the interaction between teacher and pupil, rather than being dictated solely by curriculum objectives.

The benefits of a process-based approach

A process-based curriculum prioritises personalised, responsive teaching through sensitive interactions, meaningful contexts and motivating activities. Teachers observe, listen and respond to pupils' communication, interests, strengths and needs, allowing learning to be negotiated and increasingly pupil-led. This supports agency, active participation and the development of meaningful learning.

A spiral-based approach enables valuable experiences and engagement behaviours to be revisited and reinforced over time. Through repetition, responsiveness and varied learning opportunities, pupils can develop understanding beyond learned responses towards more purposeful and intelligent behaviour (Lacey in Hewett et al., 2012). Although progress may be less predictable and outcomes harder to measure precisely, this approach better accommodates individual learning pathways.



ARTICLE

Personalisation and alternative frameworks

Approaches such as Chailey Heritage School's personalised curriculum, Routes for Learning and MAPP demonstrate alternatives to fixed sequences. Routes for Learning offers 43 key milestones that pupils can approach through different pathways, while MAPP supports personalised learning intentions without assuming milestones must be achieved in a fixed order. These approaches reinforce the principle that the sequence of learning should be personalised, not standardised.

Implications for practice

Schools must interpret Ofsted's expectations flexibly, avoiding an overreliance on assessment frameworks or the use of developmental milestones as rigid checklists. Although frameworks can inform teaching and help identify possible next steps, they should not replace professional judgement, teacher reflection or attention to pupil agency. The Engagement Model and Rochford Review provide useful principles for recognising engagement and supporting personalised learning.

Research into effective curricula and pedagogy for pupils with PMLD remains limited (Kossyvaki, 2019). Schools should therefore critically evaluate available evidence and seek further research into the impact of prescribed sequenced curricula.

Key Challenges of a Sequenced Curriculum for PMLD Learners

- **Non-Linear Development:** Pupils with PMLD (and other severe and complex needs) do not always learn in a straight line. They may master a skill, lose it due to medical or physical health fluctuations, and regain it later.
- The "Small Steps" Trap: Traditional sequencing breaks tasks into smaller steps. For a PMLD learner, even the smallest traditional step may be too massive or completely irrelevant to their sensory experience.
- Over-Standardization: Emphasis on a clearly mapped, sequential journey of "knowing and remembering more" can inadvertently penalise settings that (rightfully) prioritise flexible, pupil-led exploration over fixed academic milestones.

Conclusion: Curriculum design must reflect the individual pupil rather than require the pupil to fit the curriculum. A flexible, process-based approach allows teaching sequences to develop through responsive partnerships, supporting meaningful engagement, personal development and active learning. The ultimate aim is to enable pupils (with PMLD and others) to influence their learning and achieve outcomes that are significant to them.



FROM SaLT

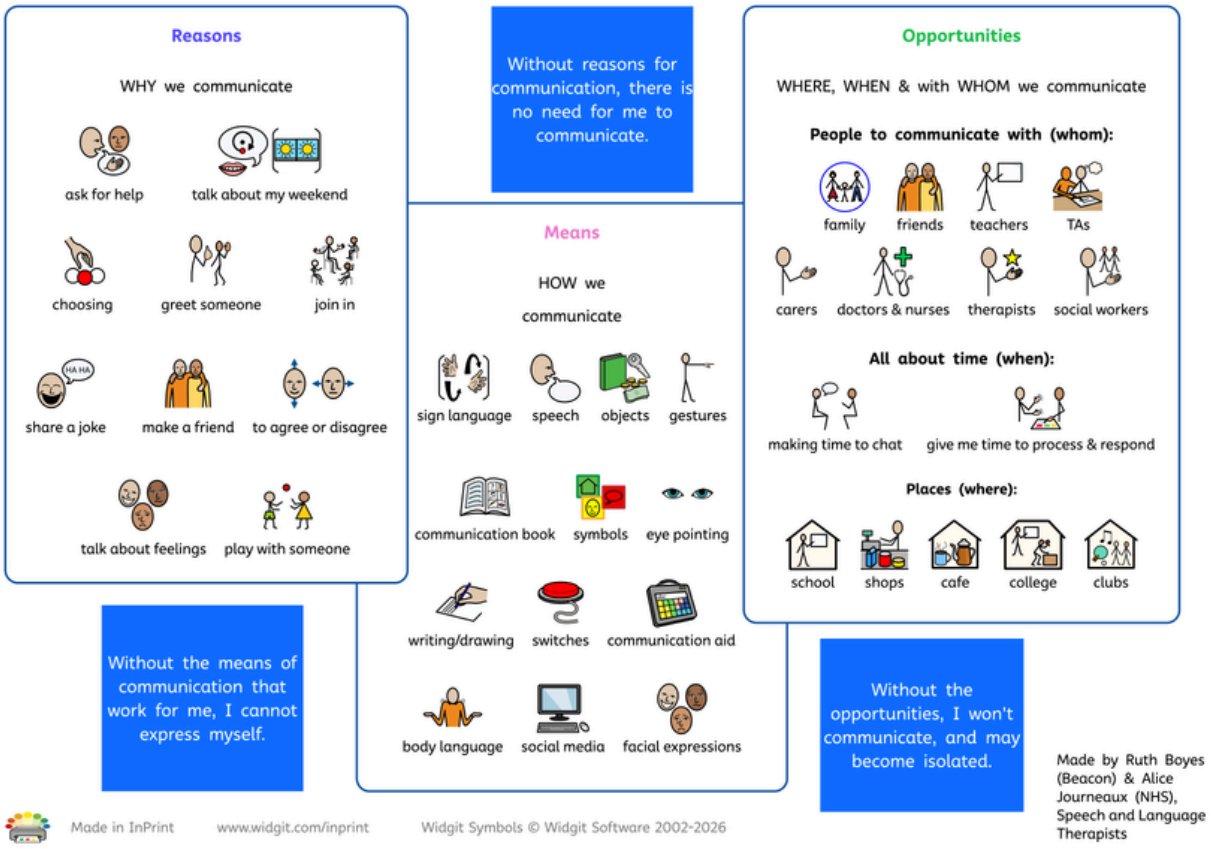
The Beacon

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE: COMMUNICATION

Speech and Language - Evidence-based Practice

From Ruth Boyes (The Beacon SaLT) & Alice Journeaux (NHS SaLT)

Communication – reasons, means, opportunities



Made by Ruth Boyes (Beacon) & Alice Journeaux (NHS), Speech and Language Therapists

FROM SAM BARNES

The Beacon

JUDGEMENT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Judgement and Psychological Safety

To judge or not: what is the preferred word?

A recent meeting brought about a sense that making judgements is not what we do, nor should we, so that we may successfully encourage self-reflection that promotes progress. But this raises the question why? Why does judgement have the affect to hinder honest self-reflection, and is this important? Well, the evidence, as it were, could lie in the word's history.

Consider first the meaning of the word and its origins: the act of declaring what is right, lawful, or true. At its root, it is linked to law. To be judged, subconscious or otherwise, under such 'high stakes' meaning can feel detrimental to our wellbeing, our everyday comforts, and reputation. If something feels like a judgement, do we then jump to threat mode? A fight or flight type response?

Studies consistently show that when employees feel they are being negatively judged, performance can suffer...Emphasis on the word 'feel', because how a judgement is perceived or felt is not in the eye of the beholder. Those judging may not mean to impart negativity, but it is outside of their control. Conversely, when people feel 'safe' to contribute without fear of embarrassment or criticism, performance tends to improve. One of the most cited workplace studies, Project Aristotle at Google, found that psychological safety[1] was the strongest characteristic distinguishing high-performing teams from less effective ones. Team members felt comfortable making mistakes, asking questions, and expressing concerns without fear of judgement. Psychological safety is defined as the belief that people can speak up, ask questions, admit mistakes, or offer ideas without fear of negative consequences[2]. What we know of 'judgement', both of its root, and our own personal experience, is that it can come at great cost - positive or negative - but we'd rather not take the risk. So, what can we learn from Project Aristotle in how we move away from notions of judgement and towards psychological safety?

To replicate more psychologically safe environments, Google created a 'Team Effectiveness Discussion Guide[3], supporting teams to foster 5 key factors, as illustrated.



The question then, is not about judgement, because this article makes clear its detrimental impact. Should the question be - one to honestly reflect upon - how do we idenitfy and replicate our psychologically safe teams, and are we using those characteristics mentioned above to the best effect?



[1] Google's Project Aristotle - Psych Safety

[2] Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work Teams

[3] [re:Work] Team Effectiveness Discussion Guide - Google Docs

FROM VICKY TONG

The Beacon

INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING:
ESTABLISHING ROUTINES

Establishing Routines, Expectations and Relationships in a SEND Classroom

Our new ITT teachers have started their year of Initial Teacher Training. One of the first things they have been asked to focus on is establishing routines and expectations.

Establishing clear routines and expectations helps create a positive, predictable learning environment where all pupils can feel safe, valued and ready to learn.

In our setting, this goes beyond behaviour management. Strong routines, positive relationships and a deep understanding of individual needs help pupils develop confidence, independence and a sense of belonging within the classroom community.

Some questions to reflect on within your teams

- What does a positive learning environment look like to you?
- How does it feel to be in that classroom?
- Would every child feel safe, welcomed and successful in that environment?
- How do adults contribute to the emotional climate of the classroom?
- Are relationships at the heart of our practice?

Key things to think about

Positivity

Think carefully about how your words, actions and responses impact others.
Children are more likely to engage and take risks in their learning when they know that adults believe in them and celebrate their successes, however small.

Behaviour Expectations

Are the children clear about what is expected of them? Are all staff consistent in promoting expectations?
Clear, consistent expectations reduce anxiety and provide the security many of our pupils need to thrive.

Engagement

Be clear about what you want to see from pupils at different points throughout the day.
Consider:

- Is the task accessible?
- Is the length appropriate?
- Are there opportunities for movement, choice and success?
- Are pupils emotionally available for learning?

Delivery

Teaching and learning should meet the needs of the children in the class.

Consider adaptations, communication needs, sensory needs, processing time and individual learning profiles to ensure all pupils can access learning successfully.



FROM VICKY TONG

The Beacon

INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING:
ESTABLISHING ROUTINES

Building Relationships: The Foundation for Learning

Many of our pupils learn best when strong, trusting relationships are in place. Relationships are often the key that unlocks engagement, communication and learning.

Some tips that have been shared with ITT students include:

- Speak to every member of the class individually so they feel listened to and valued.
- Take time to learn about their interests, strengths and achievements.
- Listen actively and demonstrate that you have listened. For example, remember their favourite football team, hobby or special interest.
- Celebrate effort as well as achievement (Beacon Values).
- Help pupils to believe in themselves and recognise their own successes.
- Follow through on promises and be a predictable, trusted adult.
- Recognise that behaviour is often a form of communication and seek to understand the need behind it.

These approaches align closely with our Nurture Principles



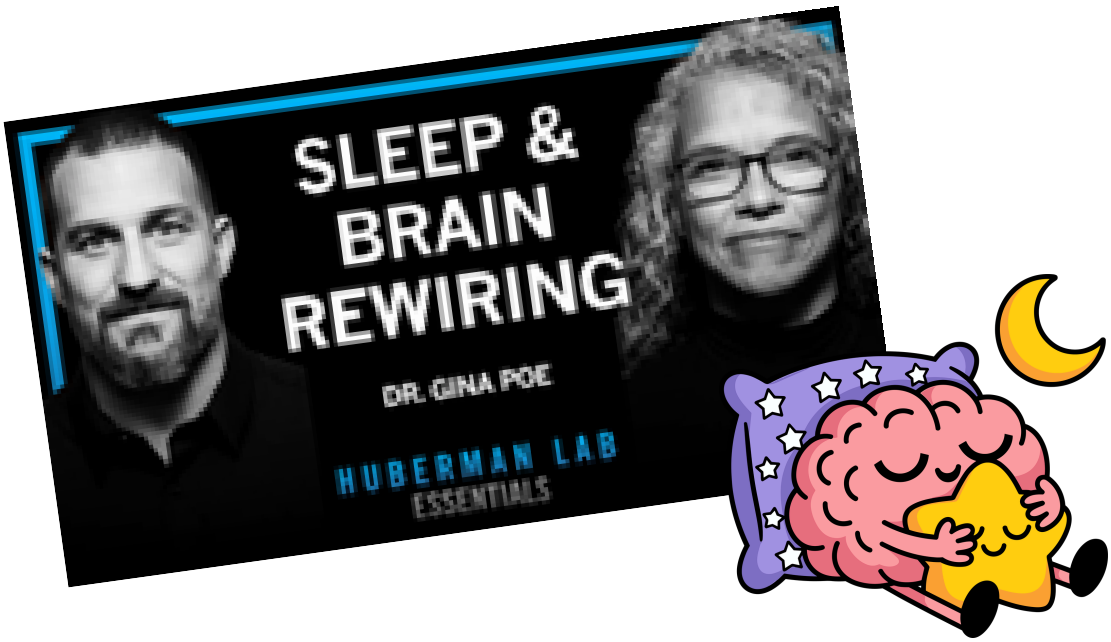
FROM SAM ALLON

OTHER SOURCES: SAM'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DIGITAL SOURCES OF RESEARCH ARTICLES AND INFORMATION



OTHER SOURCES

Alongside our typical array of wonderful information provided by the R&D sources journals, this is our section to provide recommendations for sources of information from alternative avenues!



Essentials: Use Sleep to Enhance Learning, Memory & Emotional State | Dr. Gina Poe

In this Huberman Lab Essentials episode, the guest is Dr. Gina Poe, PhD, a Professor of Integrative Biology and Physiology at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). The discussion concerns the architecture of sleep and how each stage supports distinct functions, including memory consolidation, creativity, brain restoration, and emotional processing. There is also an explanation about how science-supported tools to improve sleep quality, support cognitive performance, and hormone balance.

Articles

- Induction of Hippocampal Long-Term Potentiation during Waking Leads to Increased Extrahippocampal zif-268 Expression during Ensuing Rapid-Eye-Movement Sleep (The Journal of Neuroscience)
- Publisher Correction: Cortical dendritic activity correlates with spindle-rich oscillations during sleep in rodents (Nature Communications)

FROM SAM ALLON

The Beacon

OTHER SOURCES: SAM'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DIGITAL SOURCES OF RESEARCH ARTICLES AND INFORMATION



Essentials: Manage Stress & Build Resilience | Dr. Elissa Epel

In this Huberman Lab Essentials episode, the guest is Dr. Elissa Epel, PhD, a Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF). The episode discusses how acute and chronic stress affect the body and brain, including their links to cellular aging and mitochondrial health. There is also an explanation about tools used to reduce rumination, reframe stress as a challenge and build resilience, as well as how radical acceptance and a sense of purpose can help us navigate stressors we cannot change.

Articles

- Impact of the Baltimore Experience Corps Trial on cortical and hippocampal volumes (Alzheimer's & Dementia)
- Mind over matter: reappraising arousal improves cardiovascular and cognitive responses to stress (Journal of Experimental Psychology: General)
- A Mitochondrial Health Index Sensitive to Mood and Caregiving Stress (Biological Psychiatry)



FROM ELIZABETH HETTERLEY

The Beacon

PODCAST: CREATING A SUCCESSFUL MINDSET THROUGH PASSION AND PERSEVERANCE



Podcast Episode

How to Create a Successful Mindset: The Science of Passion and Perseverance

The Mel Robbins Podcast

Listen to the episode on Spotify

Mel Robins and Angela Duckworth explore passion and perseverance as the science of success. Educators, support staff, classroom teachers and school leaders know that both passion and perseverance are required in September, because the whole of the first term requires grit and certainly isn't for the faint hearted!

Angela discusses her research findings, with the 'heart and soul' of these being consistency. She articulates that consistency overrides intensity because it's sustainable, whilst challenging the idea that talent equals success, recognising that small consistent steps are what is required in order to improve. Angela believes that we cannot grow passion without being interested and we cannot force ourselves to be interested in something that we are quite simply not interested in, but she explores how she parents her daughters, encourages consistency and commitment.

Through their discussion, Mel and Angela identify those that they have helped to develop that have been following in the footsteps of parents and individuals that have always been driven forward by the expectations of others that are ultimately untrue to their authentic selves, whilst exploring extrinsic and intrinsic motivators.

Duckworth confidently confirms that 'grit' does not mean 'suffering' - instead it is made up of interest, practise, purpose and hope.



Choose Easy. Work Smart.



IMPACT JOURNAL

The Beacon

CHARTERED COLLEGE OF TEACHING

Impact journal - Summer 2026



Below are links to the articles which can be accessed online in the latest edition without a subscription. These represent about half of the articles in the entire journal, so it's well worth the subscription, especially if you're a current teacher or undertaking any form of studies relating to education.

(Please see CHRIS WALLIS if you'd like to borrow a hard copy of the journal.)



CASE STUDY

Professional development for creative pedagogies: The Art of Learning as a model for practice and pedagogical renewal

CASE STUDY

Calm through creativity: Embedding daily creative habits to foster emotional regulation and wellbeing in primary classrooms





PERSPECTIVE

Using the concept of perezhivanie to understand and reduce maths anxiety

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Resilience, mindset or classroom experience? Give me the keys to language attainment!



IMPACT JOURNAL

The Beacon

CHARTERED COLLEGE OF TEACHING



TEACHER REFLECTION

Policy into practice: Empowering creativity and agency through ethical AI integration

PERSPECTIVE

Building human-centred schools: Generative AI, creativity and strategic leadership





ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Beyond the page: Contemporary classroom use of generative AI to democratise the expression of learning

CASE STUDY

Co-constructing learning with generative AI: Implications for supporting autistic students





CASE STUDY

A multimodal AI approach to supporting students with English as an additional language in a British international school setting

PERSPECTIVE

Don't let the bots do the thinking: Reclaiming creativity and creative skills in an AI world

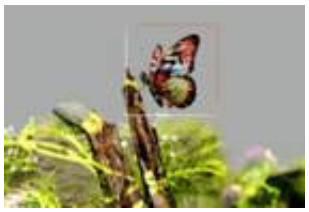


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IMPACT JOURNAL

The Beacon

CHARTERED COLLEGE OF TEACHING



ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Generative AI, integrated curricula and a new index for measuring creative and original learning

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Autonomy and agency in the age of algorithms: How is AI shaping professional knowledge, identity and practice?





CASE STUDY

From novelty to normal: How teachers are using AI in 2026

CASE STUDY

From pilot to platform: Scaling safe, creative and equitable student use of AI at Barton Peveril Sixth Form College





PERSPECTIVE

Integrating AI into productivity, planning and preparation, and pedagogy in schools

PERSPECTIVE

Reclaiming creativity in the generative AI Era: Dialogic pedagogy as human-centred innovation



IMPACT JOURNAL

The Beacon

CHARTERED COLLEGE OF TEACHING



PERSPECTIVE

Effective use of AI to support EAL learners

PERSPECTIVE

A pair of ears in every lesson? Using AI to give trainee teachers richer feedback





TEACHER REFLECTION

Using generative AI: How might teachers integrate it into their practice?

PERSPECTIVE

Creative fidelity: Keeping learners in charge of their ideas



IN PRAXIS

The Beacon

CHARTERED COLLEGE OF TEACHING

In Praxis journal – First edition 2026

In addition to the Impact journal, the Chartered College of Teaching (in collaboration with Twinkl) is aiming to publish copies of In Praxis twice yearly, each time with a distinct focus on a particular area of classroom practice. Here are the contents of the first edition.

(It's not yet available online, so please see CHRIS WALLIS if you'd like to borrow a hard copy of In Praxis.)

[In Praxis: SEND and Inclusion – publication page]



IN PRAXIS

CHARTERED COLLEGE OF TEACHING

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