

# WHAT IS AUTISTIC INTELLIGENCE?

It's a different way of thinking.

It's a 'diffability'.

It's a term used by Hans Asperger

# Autism numbers

1 in 64

**Likely to be twice that number** - in the Avon Longitudinal Study (2010) children were investigated for diagnosis. It discovered that 55% of children with autistic traits at the same level of those with a diagnosis had not been identified as needing extra support from education services or health services.

BAP

# How do we recognise autistic intelligence (autism) as teachers?

We just learn what it is and how it works!

Once we know, we can adjust what we do.

It's not rocket science - it's more difficult than that!(adjustments always are)

# Autism is extended sensory thinking

The stage of development in which we explore the world through our senses and try to make rules about the patterns we see is attenuated in autism.

This is called Local Processing Bias.

# Why?

- The Executive Centre (pre-frontal cortex) of the brain starts to develop at a different time (not typical) - earlier than most and TOO early
- This interferes with neural pruning - bushes not trees
- The motor cortex is also under-connected
- The MNS fails to develop
- The senses continue to make their own 'decisions' about the world for much longer

# This means that ...

- Senses are on high alert or almost totally suppressed
- Sensory processing is preferred
- It's pattern that matters
- Detail makes pattern/system
- The world is examined, just as a scientist observes, looking for pattern/system
- So autism foregrounds detail not the 'big picture'
- Social detail is the most difficult detail to process because it changes all the time and involves processing too much sensory information simultaneously
- It's best if *nothing changes* until a pattern has been established - everything has to stand still - sensory processing is slow
- If there is too much sensory information to process, there can be a 'meltdown'
- The 'meltdown' need not be created by what's happening now, the effect is cumulative - 'larva layers'

# Autistic intelligence

QuickTime™ and a  
decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

# Remember...

- The problems with connections to the **pre-frontal cortex** may mean that you're not very good at prioritising, decision-making, editing things out, organising things.
- The problems with connections to the **MNS** may mean that you don't naturally 'mirror' other people and take their experiences on board, effortlessly, but you CAN mimic. You don't understand that others help you.
- The problems with connections to the **motor cortex** means that complex and integrated motor behaviour like handwriting, talking, catching a ball, walking a straight line, using two senses at once, may be difficult.



# So.....

- You put the physical world first, not the social world (you're alone).
- If you're trying to negotiate the world through a 'system' which is unchanging (and few things ever are) and you think you're alone, and you just want to feel 'safe' you may be in a constant state of anxiety.
- Because you have to remember the detail of what you've seen, if you're going to create a system, you may have an outstanding memory for names of things, lists, timetables of buses etc, but you may have a poor short-term memory.
- To work out systems in this way takes a long time and you may have to keep going back to the beginning, so that repetitive behaviours increase.
- You may not be able to read facial expression - there's too much information, so you can't interpret whether someone is angry, fearful, disgusted - whatever.
- You may find it hard to make up stories, because these depend on long cause/effect chains which are social in nature.
- You'll ignore the 'taken-for-granted' because you take nothing for granted
- You'll ask a lot of questions which want numbers for answers (numbers tend to be unchanging) so you ask, 'how tall?' 'how far away?' 'how many?'

# According to two surveys in the last 5 years asking parents about their spectrum children

- 50% of these children, parents said, were not in the kind of school that the parent thought might best support them
- Only 27% reported that mainstream teachers were adjusting their approach and teaching materials to the child, with that figure dropping to 13% for secondary school aged children.
- 23% of parents felt that the Special Educational Needs Coordinator in their child's school had little understanding of autism (Batten et al, NAS, 2006)
- 40% of all parents, whatever the setting and provision, expressed dissatisfaction with the education of their child (Whitaker 2007)

# And More!

- Children with ASCs, in this survey, had fixed term exclusions 20 times more than children not on the autism spectrum.
- 27% of children with autism spectrum conditions had been excluded from school (Batten et al, NAS, 2006).
- The permanent exclusion rate of the children on the autism spectrum whose parents responded to this survey was 50 times the national average

# And should we worry about this?

- 40% of the children in the NAS survey, according to their parents, had been bullied
- This figure rose to 53% of those with Asperger's Syndrome, who may arguably be more likely to attend mainstream school
- Only half of the children in the Whitaker survey had formed ANY friendship at school
- Only one in five of the 'dissatisfied' parents felt that their children were ACCEPTED by their peers

# So that's why I did my research

I wanted to find out if there were any gaps in understanding between 3 groups of stakeholders - 5 students with autism in 'inclusive' education, their parents and their teachers.

# Students

- ALL strongly claimed that they were and knew themselves to be 'different'
- 3 of the 5 had been seriously bullied
- 1 of the 5 had been permanently excluded, and 2 others had a fixed-term exclusion, 3 had been home-schooled at some stage
- 1 was also classed as Gifted and Talented
- Acceptance by teachers and others was what they craved
- Only 1, the 7-year-old, had experienced 'friendship'

# ‘The other children just ‘smell’ them’ (parent)

- *Well it wasn't really the sort of bullying where everyone yells at you. It's sort of where everyone just kind of avoids you. It is just sort of like they point at you. There was a thing when they called 'crops' I am not sure what that was about but apparently I was always the one with it and if you touch that person then you got crops? [NB noticeably agitated voice] They say if you're wearing trainers, which obviously was a lie because all through year 6 I was wearing trainers and they said nothing. When I got to secondary school they don't do the whole crops scene, more physical assaults, but that was because I pushed them off when they tried to sit on top of me.*

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# Teachers

- All believed it was wrong to 'label' a child.
- They tended to reject the 'label' of autism
- They believed all children can succeed, if they have an average or above IQ and we ignore their differences, they will find their own way (with generic support) to achieve.
- None mentioned curricular and environmental adaptations for autism as being essential although some had made them.
- None understood that the children had already been labelled and rejected by their peers.



# One 'good' teacher's view

- **Researcher:** *Do you think autism is a disability?*
- **Harry's teacher:** *No I don't think so, I wouldn't say so. I think it's just finding the right way to learn. Dyslexia and all the rest of it. I think everyone can do what they want to, they've just got to work out their way of doing it. I think it's the same with all of them. It gets me so cross when they come up with these silly names for it everything all of the time and I think well no, everyone can do what they want pretty much as long as they find their way of doing it, it's perfectly....I mean he's intelligent, he's good with his work. There are certain things he needs to work on but he is perfectly capable, and it's just finding his way of doing the right thing and succeeding.*

# Parents

- All felt that they had to fight a battle with statutory bodies, continually.
- Most felt they got no/little support, and were let down.
- All felt that the statementing process gave them at least some opportunity to raise their concerns and that this process was crucial.
- All felt they weren't listened to, valued, acknowledged, or respected as the expert on their child.
- All felt that services don't listen to each other.

# Good practice?

- *Tim used to get an awful lot [of bullying] and he used to have issues, he would be sent home because he was being sick physically and that was stress. He still gets a bit like that when he is stressed but he's not at school any more so it doesn't really happen. When he moved up from Junior School that got worse and he was being sick in the classroom a lot of the time. I explained to the school, because he was missing so much school, because he was being sick, and what it was was a nervous problem. They dealt with this by giving him a bucket to carry around. Instead of being sick and we clean it, he had to be sick in the bucket and empty it himself. I'm sure you can imagine what that did for his social status?*

Teacher knowledge about autistic intelligence and its possible impact on educational achievement, rather than rejection of labelling, is the bedrock on which true inclusion could be built. Recognition is crucial. Then, there may be a need for schools to constantly adapt their practices in line with a student's requirements, rather than expecting adaptations from those who may have significant difficulty in making them. A tolerant understanding of, and working with, the concept of autistic intelligence may enable the 'difficulties' these children present to the 'school system' to be resolved. It may encourage the notion that the difficulties may be mutual in nature and open to mutual remediation.