



How knowledge about the developing child supports inclusion in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

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LASSO: Children's stress regulation and learning

- Leader, Nina Sajaniemi, PhD, Associate Professor
- ECEC should create an optimal setting for child development: socio-cultural, emotional, cognitive
 - child development is understood through integrative developmental sciences – natural and socio-cultural
 - interpersonal interactions are recognized as both the motor and the steering wheel of development
- Searching for understand over the correlations of child learning, prosocial behavior, and stress
 - stress is the state of not being in social engagement
 - integrative learning is put on hold
 - educators have a key role in co-regulating children's stress
 - formulating a way to support better child development through a brief intervention to support pedagogical sensitivity

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Inclusion is the human default-mode

- The human being is an ultra-social species
 - much (most?) of our brain capacity is used for interaction
 - face, voice, hands, body and language form the social communication system
 - throughout life, communication is what matters most
 - the most painful destiny is to be left without an answer (M.Bahtin XXX)
- We have an inborn need to be a part of a group
 - all children have a deep need to be an accepted and valued part of their natural community
 - natural means family, day-care, school, neighborhood, kin...
 - human parenting has always been co-operative (S.Hrdy 2009)



Basic capacity towards the interpersonal

- Primary interest in other people: inborn capacities to notice and assess relations
 - neuroception and the social engagement system (S. Porges 2007)
 - synrythmia (C. Trevarthen 1998)
 - affect attunement (D. Stern 1985)
 - prosocial moral assessments (JK Hamlin, K Wynn 2011)
- Basic feelings of pleasure arise from engagement
 - pleasure tells us that our system is in positive balance
 - integrative brain functioning and development is made possible
- Breaches in relational being are traumatic
 - reconnection is crucial (E.Tronick & al.1978), and is the responsibility of the adult, parent or teacher



Social exclusion is painful

- Social exclusion is the greatest developmental risk factor for children and adolescents
 - 5 – 10 % of youth in Finland are at potential risk of social exclusion
 - tremendous loss of human potential for the society + an estimated life time cost of 1 – 2 million €
 - Exclusion is the accumulated experience of being left out
 - increases malicious intentions (J Twenge, R Baumeister 2005)
 - Humans easily notice non-resonance, not receiving an answer
 - shame –reactions lead both to depression and to aggression
 - true pain: same brain areas are activated as in physical pain
 - exclusion is a human catastrophe

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Being accepted as a part of ones culture feels good

- The capacity of the ECEC system to offer an experience of inclusion to all children is a value in itself
 - it must organize itself so as to accommodate the individually different developmental needs of children
 - this is a vital form of primary prevention of social exclusion
- Individual developmental needs are not a diagnosis
- They are met when the moment by moment needs for co-regulation of inner state are sensitively answered to
- Inner state can be understood as the combination of motivated activation and its regulation
 - children signal their state continuously and search for answers that support the positive and manage the negative

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Pedagogical sensitivity

- Noticing signals that children send, while keeping group functioning a priority
 - group sensitivity (Ahnert & Lamb 2006)
 - warmth of expression, attuned oversight (Singer et al 2013)
- Supporting stress regulation through interpersonal engagement
 - fostering social development through supporting the inherent sympathetic capacity towards other children
- Creating a rhythm between play and intent learning
 - play creates space and incentive to learning (J.Panksepp 2007)
 - making sense together: verbal structuring
- creating possibilities for intent participation (B.Rogoff 2003)

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Complexity is strength within a child and within any group

- Complexity brings resilience
 - the more complex a system is, the more flexible it is
- Supporting learning is to support complex integration
 - integration of various levels of information processing
 - body: gut reactions and engagement
 - emotion: sympathy and mirroring
 - thought: understanding; moral and social evaluations
 - regulation of stress supports integration and learning
 - integration is an active enterprise and needs a regulated state
 - rigidity or chaos follow from failures of integration
 - dysregulation is often dismissed or chastised as bad behavior

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The knowledge needed for pedagogical sensitivity

- Every child is absolutely unique in his/her developmental possibilities
 - interplay of genes and environment
 - a child cannot attain his/her possibilities without adult support (scaffolding)
- Children develop in and through interpersonal experiences
 - child needs adult's higher integration to set upon new paths and to strengthen those with most difficulties
 - experiences with peers are immensely important for positive emotions, prosocial learning and being valued
- Strong engagement is the key to effectual interaction
 - non-engagement is very common in ECEC

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Thank you!

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