



RDI in the UK Newsletter

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The Core Deficits

by Elisa Ferriggi

Many people talk about the 'triad of impairments'; communication, social interaction and imagination when thinking about the deficits of autism. However, over the years since more research has been carried out, there is a better understanding of autism. We now understand the universal deficits amongst all people on the autistic spectrum in the following categories;

Experience sharing - This is the motivation to share experiences and emotions with other people. By definition humans are the only beings that have the desire and ability to do this. We long for the meeting of two minds, sharing perspectives, sharing emotions, aim to understand others and compare and contrast emotions and actions. Experience sharing is a type of communication that we use in both verbal and non-verbal ways. Some examples of experience sharing verbally are; "I love you" "yuk! I don't like tomato!" "Oh! I see a fast plane!" Some non-verbal ways of experience sharing are giving, pointing, sharing, and sharing gazes, following gazes. Many children with autism use instrumental communication as their primary communication with others. There are also some children with autism who have some abilities with experience sharing but it may not be very much, through the RDI® programme this is developed.

Episodic memory - This is the ability to create personal memories that mean something to

Editors Note

You may notice that our newsletter has been revamped, more so with the ezine version! We felt that it needed a new style to go with the new information that we are going to be sharing with you.

We now have the other UK Certified RDI® Consultants on board too. Each issue has a topic and each consultant will discuss the topic in relation to a particular perspective.

***by Elisa Ferriggi and
Sharon Bradbrook-Armit***

Project Corner

It's Spring Time! Spring Cleaning

Project Elements

- Plan together which room needs a clean up.
- Decide together what needs doing.
- Plan how you are going to work together to achieve it.
- Assign roles so that everyone is clear what their role is.

you. From creating personal memories we are able to learn from previous mistakes, feel competent in what we are doing, recognise familiar patterns so as not to be fearful of things. Often children with autism appraise environments and events differently and will focus on something like the light switches or a colour or number (something with a static element to it). Through the RDI® programme we help children identify and recognise the important parts of the environment and events by spotlighting these for them. This may be spotlighting competence, objectives achieved, emotion sharing aspects, togetherness etc. Many children with autism need help in creating these memories and they often have a negative memory bank of incompetence that needs to be replaced with lots of positive competent memories.

Self awareness - This includes the ability to have a reasonable awareness of the self in terms of monitoring and evaluating our own actions and thoughts. Understanding what is inappropriate and what is appropriate. Many children on the spectrum struggle with understanding what is appropriate e.g. monitoring their voice volume, their distance from other people, evaluating how tired they are. As you move through the RDI® programme these abilities are developed and strengthened.

Creative thinking and flexible problem solving - In today's dynamic world it is important to be able to think creatively and have a flexible problem solving approach. When things don't go as well as planned or how we expect them or like them to go we have to think on our feet and analyse the situation and think creatively about how to solve the situation. This includes abilities such as improvisation, multiple solutions, thinking outside the box. From not being able to reach something from a cupboard and running out of bowls to travel cancellations and going shopping to find there is

- Prepare the equipment you need to use.
- Work together on each job create memories of competence.
- Share experiences whilst doing cleaning up, have fun.

It's a project!

by Elisa Ferriggi

Easter Interaction Corner

Hunting for Treasure

- Use pictures as a mapping points to locate objects i.e. Easter eggs / objects hidden in the home, or food in the supermarket
- Have clues written on a piece of paper i.e. 'I'm green and look like a tree' (broccoli) 'this can come out of a tap, but I'm in a big bottle' (water) - then ponder over the meaning together, before searching together. If doing in the home the clue could lead to another clue...
- You and your child can hunt for things in the house i.e. 'let's find all the mirrors' then another time look for something else around your home
- You or your child could hide something in a room and then use non-verbal communication i.e. facial expression, vocal tone or gesture, to help the seeker find the missing item
- Place map markers on the

nothing on your list there. There are many objectives in the RDI® programme that help people achieve the capacity to think flexibly and problem solve appropriately and this is worked on early in the programme.

Dynamic intelligence - This is the ability to evaluate and monitor small changes in interaction on an on going basis. Dynamic intelligence really involves all of the above abilities to be able to get on in a dynamic world. It includes multiple, ever changing, surprising, simultaneous, imperfect, emotional and relative thinking.

Think about your own strengths and weaknesses in each of these areas and how would you cope and how you would feel if you had deficits in any of these areas?

Alysia's story / Our RDI Journey Pt 4

by Sharon Bradbrook-Armit

In thinking about the Core Deficits and how those have impacted Lissi (Alysia) I've decided to take a 'then - pre RDI and now March 2010' approach. These are just a few brief examples:

Experience Sharing

'Then' - Lissi did label things, she did show an interest in reading a book together, had preferences and liked to go to different places. Let's take an amusement park scenario, she would request to go on rides that she had a preference for, but where our other children would be smiling and laughing and looking for our reaction to their obvious enjoyment or to see if we were having fun too, Lissi was in the main emotionless. Her face, tone of voice, body language gave nothing to show enjoyment or displeasure, her verbal request / resistance was our only guide.

floor and work out what they mean together as you hunt for an item i.e. 'the arrow is pointing.... this way', 'I wonder which way we should go now?'. The complexity can increase as your child begins to feel more competent. Change the markers around, take turns in placing the markers, or have the markers less obvious i.e. your own joint coding.

- Use the supermarket hanging signs to help you locate items
- Work out your route using a theme park map (general map) together, gradually handing over more responsibility to your child.
- Go for the same walk looking for one particular thing one day and another thing on a different day i.e. red doors, then the number 8
- When in the car play 'yellow car' where you call out when you see a yellow car - change what you are looking for on different journeys

By Sharon Bradbrook-Armit

Research Corner

Gulsrud, A. C., Jahroni, L. B., & Kasari, C. (2010). The co-regulation of emotions between mothers and their children with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 40, 227 – 237.

'Now' - in the last school holiday Lissi attended a youth club for a few of their daily activities, on one of the days the leaders arranged a day out at a big shopping mall. Lissi went on this trip with no aide, she chose a small group of teenagers to go around with, their only adult contact was to check in with the leaders by text or at a meeting point on / off during the day.

When she came home she was so animated and excited about the trip, filled with her own success at finding the items she had wanted to buy, along with her own level of independence, her bubblyness was contagious. Her whole body, face and voice vibrated with pride and pleasure as she gave us a summary of her day, unprompted, pausing to allow for our emotional responses to mix with hers before continuing.

Episodic Memory

'Then' you may have seen footage of 'our family walk in the woods' on the Bright Futures Facebook group or at a talk?? The walk shows Lissi and her obsession of looking for Fungi! Basically that would have been her only focus and memories stored of that walk, she would have missed the family interactions that took place, the whole togetherness of the situation, those memories just wouldn't have been meaningful to her and therefore not encoded.

Lissi had very low self-esteem giving up very easily and retreating. Her motivation to approach novel situations and try something for the first time was almost non-existent. Her memories tended to reflect her 'fight or flight' stance. Flight being prevalent with her anxieties having the upper hand. The words 'I can't' were often heard.

'Now' - she has had many years of feeling successful, her whole self-worth and stored emotion meaningful memories have changed her outlook of 'I can't' to 'why not?!' When recalling the trip and relaying the details to us she laid emphasis on her success of how she had tried on her dress

The ability to monitor, evaluate, and modify our emotional states is a process that develops gradually during infancy and childhood. Very young babies depend upon their caregivers to help them calm down when they are upset, and even as early as 6 months of age, infants start to play an active role in this development. For example, babies who are better at following their parents' gaze are better able to distract themselves and regulate their feelings. Because of early-occurring difficulties with joint attention, children with autism have quite a bit of difficulty making use of their caregivers to help them regulate emotions through coordinating eye contact, gestures and emotional expressions. Early communication plays a pivotal role in helping babies and toddlers respond to sensitive and responsive parents in order to develop self-regulation abilities as they get older.

In this recently published study, the authors (Gulsrud, Jahromi, & Kasari, 2010) describe how children with autism are at risk for having difficulty regulating their emotions. In comparison with typically developing children, children with autism can have more difficult

and shown the other girls before deciding to buy it. How she had found a DVD but had decided not to buy until she had looked at other things to make sure she would have enough money.

My first episodic memory of her new found confidence and motivation to try again happened while at an Occupational Therapy assessment some years back. She was asked to walk across a beam that was a few inches off the floor. She took a few steps and stumbled, then turned to me with a smile as she took herself back to the beginning to try again. She never made it to the other side, but was happy with what she had achieved, as those few steps turned into a few more on her second attempt.

Self Awareness

'Then' not much seen, Lissi was highly prompt dependent and in the main oblivious to her impact on other people, or to an extent on herself. She learnt social rules but did not readily apply those to new situations. She had no recognition that as we were not present we were not aware of things that had happened in her day.

'Now' Lissi can self-regulate to 'go with the flow'! She has a pretty good basic understanding of how her emotions can impact others and how their emotions impact her. She has a want and need to regulate not only herself but the general atmosphere of the interaction that is taking place between herself and her partner(s). She doesn't just follow rules that are set in different environments, she is increasingly able to think about what is going on around her and adjust accordingly. Lissi now recognises that if she doesn't share information about how she feels and things that have happened to her we will not be aware of them.

Creative thinking and problem solving

'Then' Lissi heavily relied on others to do her

temperaments, be slower to adapt, less able to focus and shift their attention, and more easily distracted and upset. The authors studied 34 mothers and their toddlers with autism and reported how toddlers with autism show a great deal of distress and negativity. Children with greater emotional difficulties had mothers who reported feeling more stress, and these mothers often had to physically hold their toddlers with autism to comfort them. The authors provided a brief intervention supporting joint attention in the mother-child pairs, by helping them participate in coordinated joint activity. Mothers and their children with autism improved in their ability to co-regulate difficult emotions. The findings from this study suggest that children with autism are at special risk for difficulties managing their emotions and that the caregiver-child context might be the ideal place to promote development of emotion regulation through the fostering of caregiver-child joint attention and communication.

This fresh approach to intervention highlights how the difficulties of children with autism can affect their interactions with their caregivers

thinking for her, she was too compliant and prompt dependent. The more we prompted the less thinking she did; a 'no win' situation. When put on the spot i.e. working out how much she needed to pay for something or how much change she would get, or even if she had enough money, anxiety would kick-in big time.

'Now' as mentioned above during her shopping trip she was able to decide when and on what she should spend her money. She initially liked a different more expensive dress but after weighing up her options decided she could get more for her money if she looked for a nice but cheaper dress.

Dynamic Intelligence

'Then' Lissi believed there was only a right or wrong way to do things, looking to give the correct solution even when there wasn't one. Thinking in black & white not in shades of grey. She found it hard to see underlying meaning within both the spoken word and text.

'Now' I think that all of the above 'now' comments show how she has developed thus far.

We are still working at improving Lissi's gains in all the core deficit areas, but I think you will agree that she has come such a long way.

(I would like to thank Lissi's teacher and school speech therapist for continuing to develop Lissi's independence and for working with us to do this!)

Residential Care Home and Core Deficits

by Silvia Haywood Panella

Residential care homes provide services for adults with learning disabilities and/or mental health issues. Some people with autism have co-occurring conditions such as epilepsy or schizophrenia therefore the core deficits we find in individuals with autism are manifested in different ways. When

and, in turn, the ability of their caregivers to scaffold and support their children's emotional development. Rather than training the children individually, these authors used the approach of supporting the natural developmental processes which takes place so easily for the majority of children who do not have autism in the context of guided interaction with their caregivers. By helping to improve joint attention and communication with their mothers, there were developmental effects for the children in their emotional regulation abilities which, in turn, are likely to have far-reaching implications for attention, learning, and motivation in many other areas of emotional, cognitive and social development.

By Jessica Hobson

Other Info

Yahoo Support Group

Join RDI-UK Yahoo support group. This is a parent-centered group for parents involved in, or wanting to learn about, a Relationship Development Intervention programme. Certified and trainee RDI® consultants are also welcome.

RDI Consultant Training

we think about core deficits, one area that we need to take into consideration is the environmental aspects that are attached to living in residential care homes. Adults in care homes frequently have to share their care staff with up to 6 others. This makes individualised plans challenging to implement, however by developing the key skills of increased attention span, decreasing impatience and developing improved social functioning, we can help adults live in a 'shared, dynamic world' environment. We need to understand how autism manifests itself in the individual, for example, day to day activities such as putting shoes on, doing laundry, etc, may represent big obstacles for the adult with autism. Imagine not being able to do these things, now imagine if your life had been like this for 50 or so years! This has a tremendous impact on self-esteem and sense of competency.

Creating a safe space and allowing time to develop relationships of trust are pivotal when remediating deficits. Guiding individuals and allowing room for mistakes without fear of "getting it wrong" are some of the useful strategies that can be used to help adults think and problem-solve more effectively.

Creating opportunities for sharing experiences, observing, commenting, will reduce the damage that living in group homes may cause for these individuals. Reducing the amount of verbal communication in favour of "broadband" communication, where facial expressions, gestures, prosody take central stage can increase the individual's ability to think and interact in a more dynamic manner.

In summary, the core deficits of autism present a complex picture for adults living in care homes. The co-occurring disorders that often manifest alongside autism and the personal experiences that adults have had throughout their lives mean that very

The Tavistock Clinic in the UK will be hosting the beginning and intermediate professional Seminars!

Beginning Seminar: August 24-27, 2010.

Intermediate Seminar: August 31-September 3, 2010.

Location: Tavistock Clinic, 120 Belsize Lane, London, UK, NW3 5BA.

Course Organizer/Instructor: Dr. Jessica Hobson.

The single most important tool for a family is the RDI Consultant.

De Clutter

Have a clear out and with your unwanted items recycle them on the Autism Free Stuff UK yahoo group. The "Autism Free Stuff UK" group is open to families who have autistic children in the UK and are looking for related items or to get rid of items. This is a place to exchange and give away.

Raise Awareness

If you would like some brochures, leaflets, or mini books of My Baby can Dance and The RDI Book for FREE to share with your friends, family or support groups, please send an email to elisa@thinkautism.co.uk stating how many you would like and where to send them to.

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individualised programmes to help work on remediating their core deficits with their co-occurring conditions are required. Nonetheless, it is possible that an RDI® approach can be implemented for these individuals, where trust is built alongside a safe, positive environment where remediation can take place and where a more inviting approach is taken rather than a directive, imposing one.

Consultants

Elisa Ferriggi
elisa@thinkautism.co.uk

Sharon Bradbrook-Armit
tisog@btinternet.com

Jessica Hobson
j.hobson@ich.ucl.ac.uk

Margaret Hobson
mdhobsomah@hotmail.co.uk

Silvia Haywood Panella
silvia@devonautismcentre.com