

Queensmill School

Research & Development Newsletter

Welcome and Update from R&D Board

Welcome to the summer edition of the Queensmill R&D newsletter for this academic year.

As the academic year comes to an end, we wanted to reflect on some of the research highlights at Queensmill this year and to look ahead to some of our plans for the autumn term.

Our internal R&D activities continue to expand and make an important contribution to the education and wellbeing of our students and their families. At the start of the year we completed our sleep project, based on the Sleepwise programme, and we were able to report positive findings to the Bailey Thomas Charitable Fund who supported the pilot project. The findings of the pilot showed improvements for the children in, for example, time taken to fall asleep, reductions in night waking and instances of falling asleep in parents/sibling's bed. We also learnt how parents greatly appreciated the programme being delivered by school staff who were well known to the families. We are now seeking further funding to support a programme for a larger number of parents. In the autumn term a second Cygnet Parenting programme was delivered with parents reporting greater confidence in managing social difficulties and challenges with routines and rigidity experienced by their children. Finally a new Sensory Integration Therapy programme resulted in observed improved functioning across various performance areas including motor skills, arousal levels and participation in self-care activities for the children involved. This programme is to be extended to include more children in 2017-18.

Queensmill greatly values our collaborations with external research partners and this year technology, in different forms, was a key feature of our work. In the autumn term we welcomed Zeno the robot as part of the DE-ENIGMA project based at the Centre for Research in Autism and Education at UCL Institute of Education. The findings are due next term when we hope to find out more about how a robot can, for example, support emotion recognition in children with autism. As you will read in this issue, we have continued our research on the E-Mentoring programme led by Dr Maria Kambouri at UCL Institute of Education.

The publication of the National Autism Project Report (NAPR) this year identified key areas for research in autism. The Research and Development Board will use the research recommendations to shape our strategic plan in 2017-18. After the publication of the report we met with Autistica to investigate how Queensmill and schools more generally, might contribute to some of the recommendations made in the NAPR.

Finally, Charlotte Spencer, the Queensmill Family Support Worker, is stepping down as a member of the Research and Development Board. The Board would like to thank Charlotte for her contribution to research and development activities and in particular the leading role she played in the Sleepwise and Cygnet programmes. We know that families at Queensmill greatly valued the support and guidance she provided during those projects.



**Best wishes for the summer break.
Research & Development Board**

Selective Eating

“Can playing with food encourage selective eaters with Autism to try new foods?”

Autism Spectrum disorders comprise of a set of complex impairments including sensory processing. This possibly contributes to the sensory sensitivities and food selectivity often displayed in children with autism. Studies have shown that children on the spectrum have significantly more feeding problems and eat a significantly more limited range of foods than children without autism.

Alexcia White, University of East London student and Queensmill member of staff, carried out research exploring whether playing with food could encourage selective eaters with autism to try new foods. A range of strategies were used including social stories and role play with food. An iPad was used to film the children during the sessions. The findings showed that playing with food in a naturalistic setting, with their sensory and special interests catered for, encouraged children aged between 4 – 8 years old to try new foods. In 95% of the cases of food presentation, the participants interacted with the food. They showed interest by either touching, putting in mouth, licking, biting and swallowing. In 33% of the cases food was consumed typically on the first occasion it was presented.



Student 1

One child enjoyed playing with the different foods. There was no hesitation in touching different foods and packing them into the toy cars available. One interesting observation was that the child licked their fingers, but not the food, when they thought Alexcia was not looking. As soon as they saw her looking they quickly stopped and continued to play with the toy cars. On another occasion the child tried a non-cheesy flavour, non-branded, different textured crisp to the ones they normally consume; they were so intrigued of being able to see themselves eating on the iPad screen that they attempted to consume a large packet of crisps so they could see themselves eating. The iPad was supposed to a non intrusive way of collecting information but it may have added another method of encouraging food consumption.



Student 2

When working with the child the iPad again seemed to play an important part in the sessions. The child took whatever food interested them and played with it in front of the camera, watching themselves the whole time. On different occasions they tried different foods and made sounds of enjoyment.



Student 3

For another child the social story had the most impact. Having the social story read to them by their mother and the confirmation from her that it was ok to try foods with Alexcia, whilst they were playing, may have contributed to the child feeling more confident and safe about the foods offered. A more collaborative effort should be implemented between parents and professionals in showing the child that it is ok to eat what is offered at school. In this child's instance the social story seemed to have had a very positive effect and it could be a method that is employed more often.

Channel 4 “How Autistic Are You?”



Last term Channel 4 came to Queensmill School to film for a new TV show called “How Autistic Are You?”. The programme meets leading experts to explore autism spectrum disorders. As part of their work at the Autism Research Centre Professor Baron-Cohen and Dr David Greenberg designed four short questionnaires (40 questions in total) to identify different autistic traits. The first three questionnaires examine your behaviour across three areas of autistic traits – Sensory, Social Interaction and Organisation & Routine. The fourth questionnaire examines your overall number of autistic traits.

(These questionnaires are not a diagnostic tool, they only help to identify traits).

The rationale behind the test is to identify autistic traits amongst the general population. A number of Queensmill staff took the test and out of those who shared their score their results ranged from 0 to 8. This indicates that even those of us who do not have Autism show some autistic traits - some exhibiting more than others.

Queensmill Staff take the Questionnaire

“I got 0/10 on the test. I was very surprised by that and expecting more.”

“I got 2/10. I was expecting a higher score particularly for routines. I like to keep sloppy foods separate, not wear any clothing with buttons, and make everything symmetrical.”

“I got 8/10! My sensory perception was very high but everything else in social and organisation and routine was average”.

Charity Support



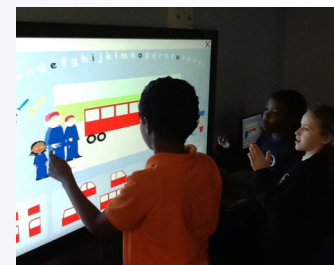
'Contact a family' are a charity that provides information, advice, and support for families with disabled children. They offer family support groups, information and services on: child and family wellbeing, education health and social care, money benefits, childcare and work.

CAF recently completed a survey with parents of children with disabilities and found that there was an impact on families' health and finances. The report will be published later in autumn, and will be covered in the R&D Board newsletter. In response to their findings, they hope to extend the support services that they make available to families.

<https://www.cafamily.org.uk/>

E Mentoring

The E-mentors project has been running at Queensmill for the last three years. On Thursday 6th of July an exhibition was held in order to showcase to all members of staff what the project involved, the technology used, how well the project worked, and how it might help in the future.



The aims of the project are:

- To identify and develop examples of effective practice in using ICT which facilitate learning and aids teaching of pupils. ICT programme examples: Reading Eggs, Clicker6, Kinems and Dragon Speaks;
- To develop an e-mentor scheme in which teachers work collaboratively to develop their effective use of ICT;
- To build a community of practice within the school which is sustainable.

RESEARCH REQUESTS

The R&D board would like to share a research project by Louise Turner, a student from Institute of Education, UCL, whose study is looking at the role of sleep in relation to psychological wellbeing in parents with a child on the autism spectrum. If you would like to find out more about this project, or take part please contact Louise Turner on:

louise.turner.14@ucl.ac.uk

Another research project from the Institute of Child Health, UCL and the Autism Research Centre, University of Cambridge examines the effectiveness of a socio-emotional intervention - 'The Transporters'. 'The Transporters' is designed to teach children with Autism Spectrum Condition about emotion recognition through an entertaining animation series. If you are interested in participating or would like further information, please contact: Hiba Khan: **07729203439**, hiba.khan.16@ucl.ac.uk