

A Sceptic's Experience of the Wall

What follows is a write up a teaching assistant in a large secondary school provided following some training she received in using the Wall.

"We have all been there. Yet another 'expert' coming in to tell us all about a new 'something or other' that will transform our lives. So we dutifully sit there and try to be enthusiastic about the 'something or other'. We walk away from the session, glad it's over, thinking about what we are going to teach Year 7 first thing tomorrow. I couldn't see how the Wall was going to change my life – then one day along came Fred.

Fred was a year 7 pupil in my tutor group. Along with the general problems encountered by a dyspraxic child Fred did not always use socially acceptable behaviour and as he developed he started to have 'urges' that he did not always understand and was unable to control. I talked to all the professionals in school I could for ideas to help him. In desperation I turned to 'The Wall'. Don't ask me why, I can't answer that question.

In an idle five minutes I got The Wall out and thought about Fred. I asked myself some questions about what I thought his problems were. I then looked at each of the developmental tasks and if I thought he could do it, it went on the board, those things I thought that he could not do I turned upside down. At the end of all this I removed the good statements which just left the upside down ones. Well it was an interesting exercise but it didn't really help me to see the light so I put it on one side. Things continued as before, with frustration on both sides and his behaviour deteriorating. As a result of Fred's review various suggestions were put forward by me to try to help him. One of these things was to work one to one with him on his social skills. But where to start? How do we identify the problem? The Wall!

So at our first session Fred and I sat down together and we looked at The Wall. The result was a revelation! It helped! It worked! How annoying was that!

How on earth do you start?

I removed Fred from PHSE and we spent about an hour doing The Wall. I started by explaining what the Wall was about. I said that each colour represented a stage in how we grow up. I used language and stages that Fred would understand. The magnetic Wall proved to be particularly useful for a pupil like Fred who likes to fiddle. It meant that he could move the bricks around and keep the whole thing neat. I gave him each brick in turn, starting with the red ones, he read it, and we discussed it. He made the decision about whether he could do it and put these on the board. He found very quickly there were lots of things he could do and he liked the fact that it was positive. The ones he couldn't do we turned upside down. Ones he was working on we put sideways onto the board.

We then removed all the bricks he could do and left the sideways and upside down ones. We looked at these bricks again. It was at this point that I was completely blown away by what I saw. The bricks Fred had identified were all interrelated. Of the 'working on' bricks only one appeared random.

What it taught me

I think the secret of The Wall is to use it as a diagnostic tool. Faced with a child like Fred I could only see the problems. The Wall showed me that the problems were simply symptoms of a very narrow band of missing, inter-related developmental stages. Armed with this information and the insight that I had gained from Fred's world I am now ready to start working on the things that Fred has identified as his problems. The task is now a manageable one!

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I have tried to make my experience a light hearted one and I hope that it will give you the confidence to have a go at The Wall. You will find a way that works for you. Sometimes it is worth ignoring that little sceptical voice in your head."