

The task and literacy curriculum as a containing metaphor

What are the child's unmet needs?
How can we choose tasks which address these ?

Marie Delaney, Slovenia, 2/7/13

A good learner

- Feels safe and is willing to take risks
- Has good self-esteem
- Can seek help when needed without expecting criticism or ridicule
- Is able to concentrate and be what Gardner calls 'in the flow'
- Is able to manage frustration, anxiety and disappointment
- Has the capacity to bear the powerlessness of not knowing
- Is optimistic and has a positive attitude to a problem
- Can wait for attention.

What affects this?

- Some children's lives have been traumatic
- Some children's environments have taught them different lessons
- Some children have learned responses which keep them safe and learning requires too much of a risk
- Some children's brain patterns have been laid down in response to difficult circumstances

Effects of trauma and loss on the brain

- A lack of 'attuned, sensitive care' can cause babies and young children to have abnormally high levels of stress hormones, including cortisol, in their bodies.
- High levels of cortisol are known to significantly impair the growth and development of the baby's brain and body.
- High cortisol levels can affect a child's ability to think, to retrieve information and to manage his or her own behaviour.
- Significant parts of their brains are not hooked up
- The 'flight-and-fight' response triggered by the oldest part of the brain is over-used.

A good learner's attitude to learning?



Is optimistic

Thinks 'What is working, what have I got right, where can I get help with the other bits?'

Vs.

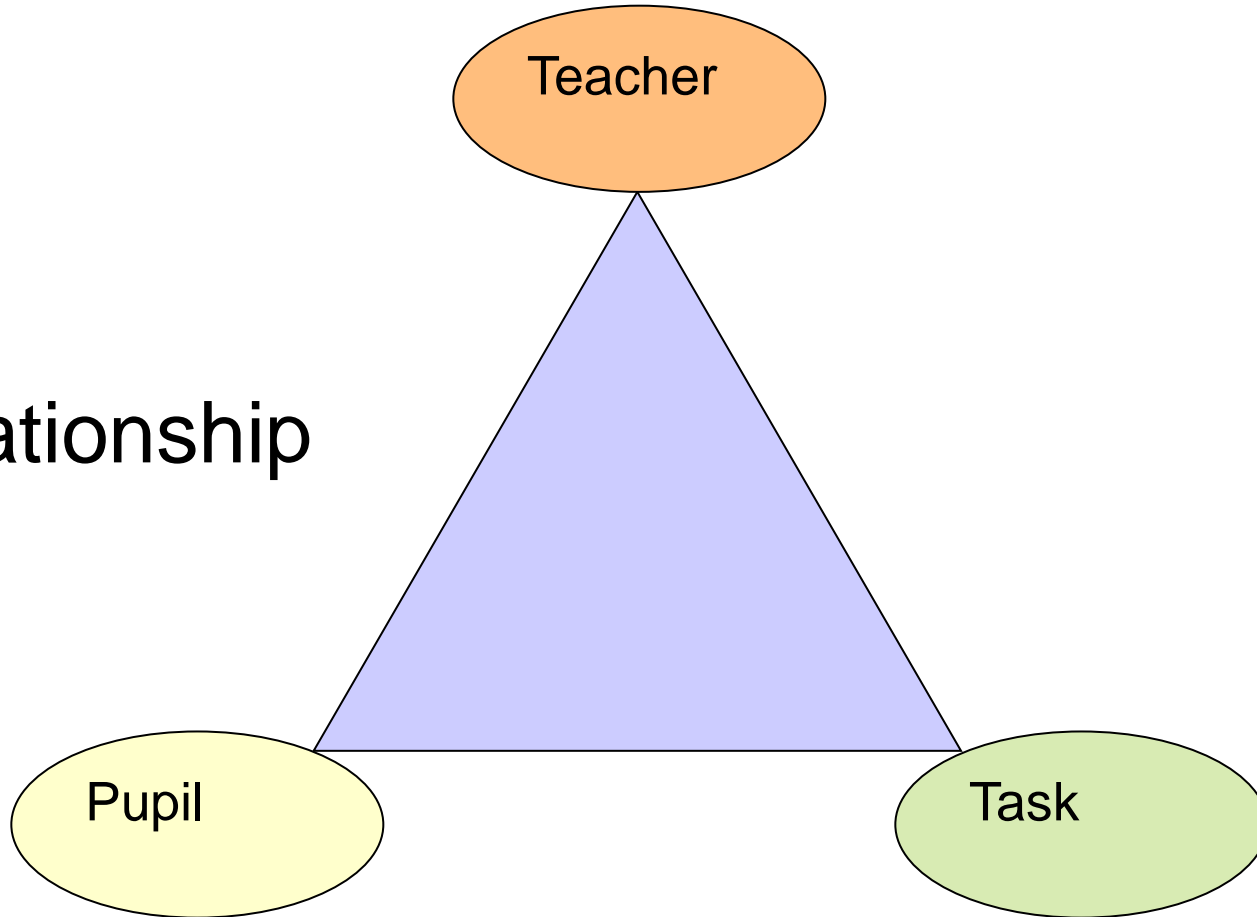


Is pessimistic

Thinks 'I got so much wrong, I don't know anything about this, it's not for me, I should give up'

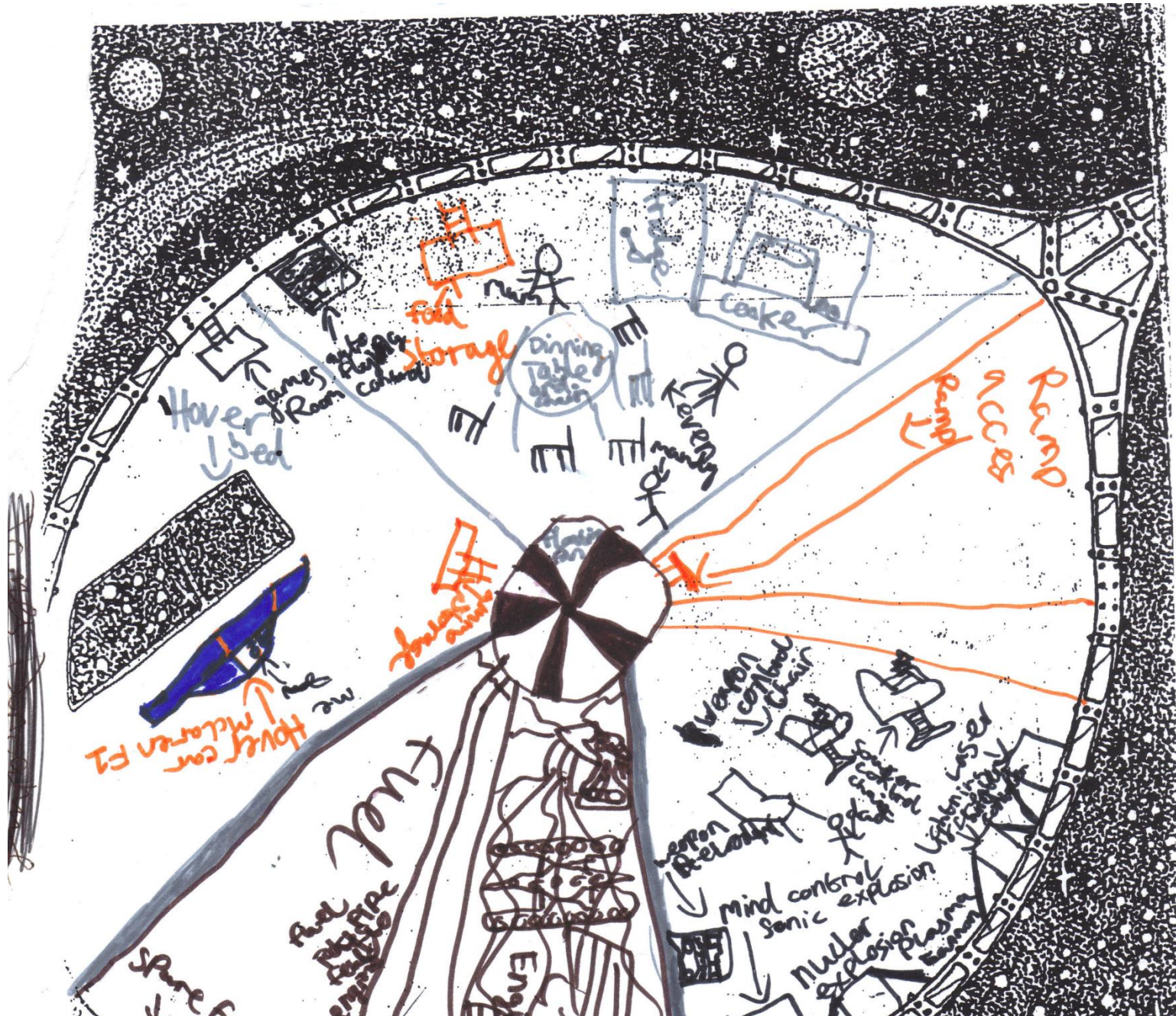
The Learning Triangle

- Relationship



The internal world

- Unconscious blocks can tell us something about anxieties in the internal world
- Tasks such as drawing, writing, reading stories, watch videos and discussing, can unlock the internal world



Mike's story

- **Marie** : One day a boy woke up and decided he wanted an adventure. He wondered what to do. He felt a bit frightened at the idea but also excited.
- **Mike** : He got up and had his breakfast and went over to his garage door. His Mum and Dad said that they were going to take him on an adventure but he didn't know where to go so he went to his globe and spun it round, closed his eyes and put his finger on it. When he looked it was the Australian Desert but he was shaking.
- **Marie** : He thought the Australian Desert would be new and exciting but also a bit scary. It was very big and far away. He wondered if he would be lonely because he wasn't sure his Mum and Dad would want to go with him.
- **Mike** : He asked his Mum and Dad if they wanted to go to the desert and they **said** OK and then he went to his book and read a book about the desert. When he finished reading it he went and told his Mum and Dad what stuff they would need to survive better out in the desert..
- **Marie** : He wanted to feel prepared so that he would not be taken by surprise. He wanted to control things so that nothing bad could happen to him. ..When they got to the airport they found their plane was delayed.
- **Mike** : Then all they heard was gunfire from their plane and they started to run back to the car..'

A muddled up story

- *There was a robbery from the friend of a man that was in jail. They used to be friends but they are no longer friends because one is a policeman. The policeman went after him. They dodged each other lots of times. The policeman went in the car. The robber was tied up in the back. He escaped. The car he was using to escape crashed up. A lot of people came. Everyone's getting him. He keeps making people crash. ...They put him in jail by accident but then they found out it wasn't him. They let him out. They broke up the jail so they wouldn't make that mistake again but they needed it. So the man who helps made it again.'*

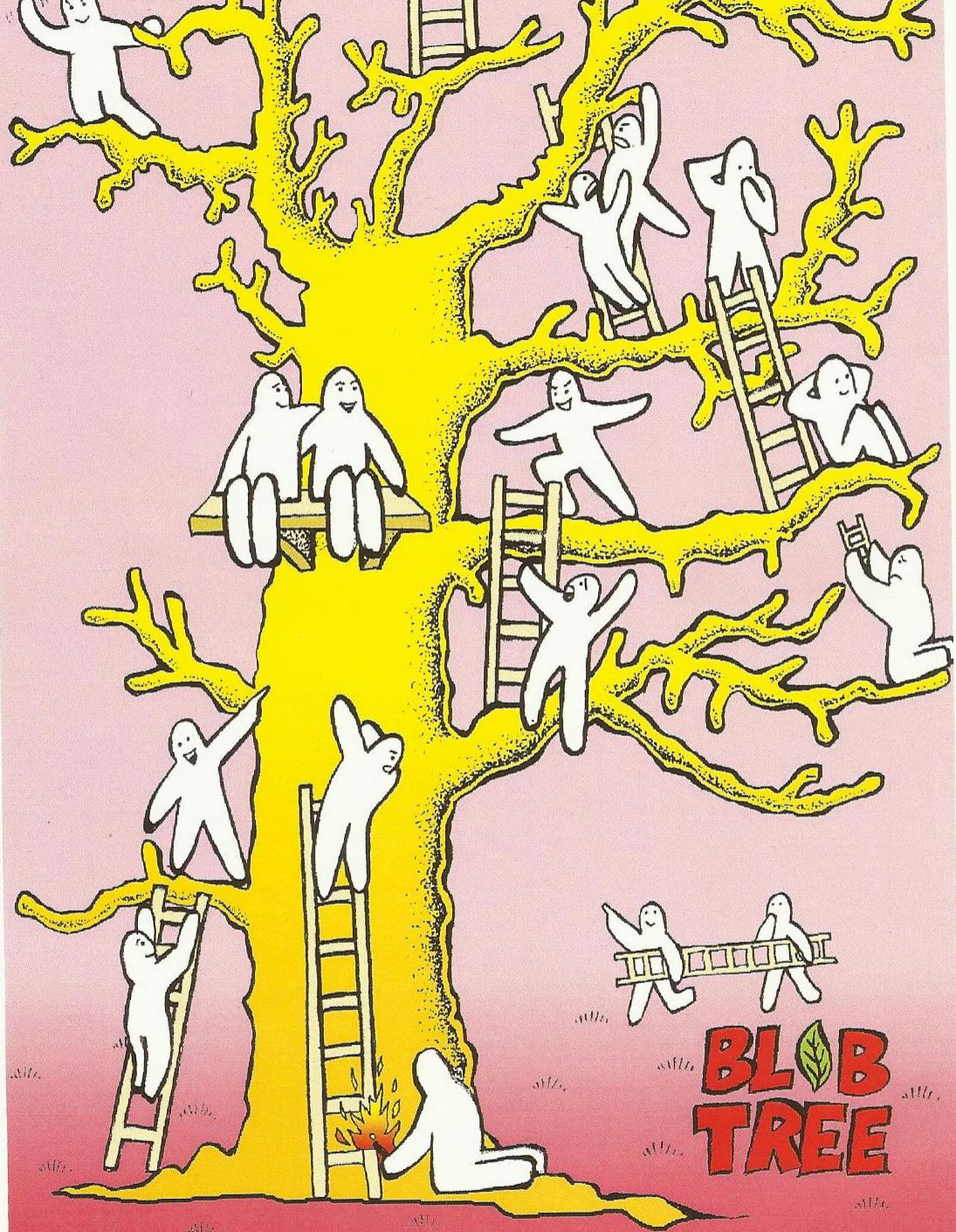


Psychological Defence Mechanisms

- **Barriers to protect the personality from fear of threat/anxiety and to keep this conflict from coming to the conscious level.**
- **Projection** – when we have unbearable, painful feelings we externalise them by pushing them out and trying to attribute them to others.

Omnipotence

- I can't let you teach me because that gives you power over me
- I have to do it myself
- The task is safe until I need your help



**BLOB
TREE**

The teacher's challenge

- Contain the feelings
- Notice the patterns
- Be a secure attachment figure
- Withstand the onslaught
- Break the pattern if necessary
- Be aware of your own defence mechanisms
- Sometimes 'being' not 'doing'
- Notice rather than judge

Activities

- Develop activities which allow recognition and acceptance of negative feelings e.g competitive word games such as hangman, battleships, teach children how to win and lose safely.
- Make sure young people know it is not the **feelings** which are bad. We all have **bad** feelings, we need to acknowledge and decide how to act on them.
- Use creative activities and metaphor to help pupils explore feelings in a safe, 'contained' way e.g stories, drawings, modelling, games, videos, soaps. Comment in a the third person, indirect way.
- Plan for times when anxiety might need to be lessened. Concrete, mechanical tasks can provide calming left brain activity

Types of literacy activities

- Jigsaws
- Matching pairs/pelmanism
- Games for empathy eg. Guess your partner's answer
- Joining things up with a line e.g match the word and meaning
- Putting in order/sequencing stories and tasks
- Finding things e.g Find Wally
- Stories which allow all feelings e.g Where the Wild Things Are
- Films with good/bad in one character eg. Incredible Hulk
- Activities with frames, enclosed eg. Word snake
- Boxes – to contain work and feelings

Exploring different sides of self

The Incredible Hulk

- **the Hulk**
- large, green, humanoid, possesses near limitless superhuman strength and great invulnerability, attributes that grow more potent the angrier he becomes.
- **Bruce Banner**
- a socially withdrawn and emotionally reserved physicist who physically transforms into the Hulk under emotional stress and other specific circumstances

Challenges in certain curriculum areas

- English : writing about self – how to make sense of my life and risk sharing it with others?
- Maths – how to put things together which cannot be put together?
- History and writing in the past – not wanting to think back
- Geography, writing about location, other cultures, places –where is my place?
- Creative writing – creativity is risky, straight lines are better?
- Science and sequencing – how can I order and sequence when my life has no order?

Resources

- Any children's books with conflicts, expression of feelings
- Superheroes and Fairy Tales
- **Some examples**
- The Huge Bag of Worries. (V. Ironside and F.Roberts. Hodder Children's Books 2004)
- Willy and the Wobbly House. (Series by Margot Sunderland, Hinton House publishing)
- Where the Wild Things are. (Maurice Sendak. Red Fox. 2000)
- Owl Babies. (Martin Waddell. Walker books. 1994)
- Anti-coloring coloring book. (Susan Striker Owl Books, US.)

Want to know more?

- Marie Delaney
- The Learning Harbour, Crosshaven, Co Cork, Ireland
- Email : the learningharbour@gmail.com
- www.thelearningharbour.ie
- Teaching the Unteachable, October 2008, Worth Publishing, UK
- What can I do with the kid who....2010. Worth publishing, UK
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