



NEWSLETTER
February 2021

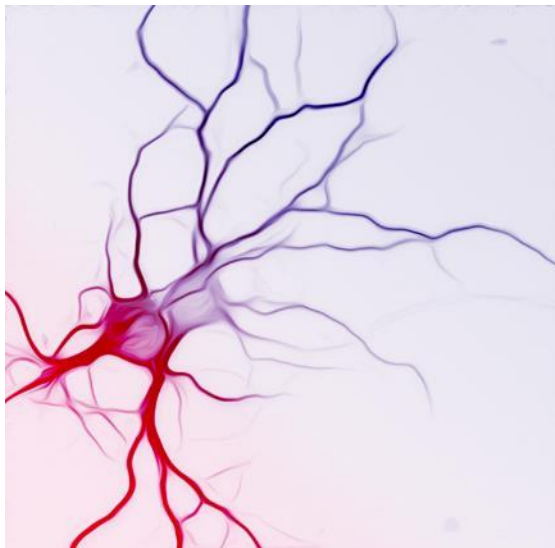


SENIA Beijing

Dear SENIA-Beijing Members,

Greetings from SENIA-Beijing, as we start 2021 and head into the Chinese New Year. We also would like to thank everyone that participated in the SENIA "Bridging the Gap" December Conference.

Continue reading on PG. 13



"When I started my educational therapy journey, I came across some reading materials about the structural and functional differences in dyslexic brains..."

Continue reading on PG. 6

Welcome to 2021, the Year of the Ox! Let's be inspired by the meaning of a new start throughout our days and months ahead. Embrace our challenges and learn how to be together safely. Let's explore the technological advances and share healthy ways to improve our wellbeing. Make new friends, reminding ourselves to be our first and foremost best friends. Only then, we can be there for you too.

By **Juliane Karlsson**
SENIA-Beijing Chair Media



Best Buddies Stories

"When I joined the Best Buddies Leadership and Service Activities (LSA)..."

Continue reading on PG. 3

"Remember that if you really want to motivate yourself, love is more powerful than fear."

- Kristin Neff



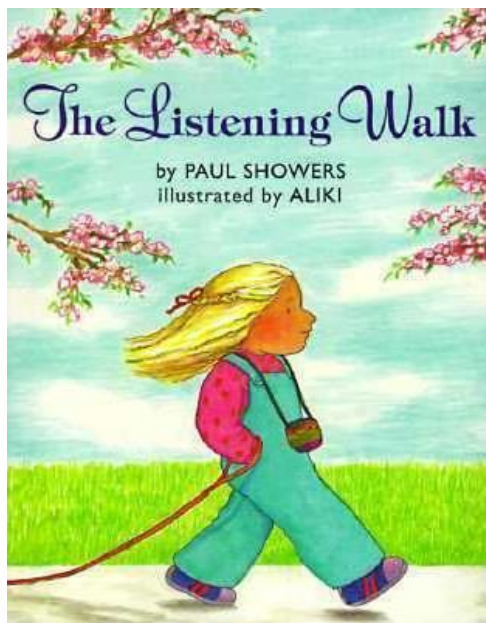
Let's share and keep our community stronger!

"Literacy rates among youth (aged 15 to 24) and adults are the test of an educational system, and the overall trend is positive, thanks to the expansion of educational opportunities. Globally, the youth literacy rate increased from 83 per cent to 91 per cent over two decades, while the number of illiterate youth declined from 170 million to 115 million. Regional and gender disparities persist, however."

FREE RESOURCES

ONLINE

<https://www.unicef.org/northmacedonia/learning-social-and-emotional-skills-pre-school>



This children's book by Paul Showers helps the new you discover the special moments in life that are passed up each day. Read this book with your child or on your own to quiet yourself and appreciate the little things that life offers.



When I joined the **Best Buddies Leadership and Service Activities (LSA)** in my school, I was paired up with a boy called Zhichao. I felt strange and awkward when I first saw a person like him. I did not know how to talk to him. Zhichao has physical deformities. His head was bigger than mine. His height is not proportion to his age (when I asked his mum how old he was). He has incomplete fingers. He doesn't speak the way I speak. He bangs his head many times while we were having activities in the room.



Surprisingly, we got along with each other after meeting for a few times. I was curious why he was hitting his head and so I tried to stop him and put my hand on the side of his head. I could then tell that he was not doing it on purpose! There is like an automatic impulse that makes him hit himself. He can't help it! It must have hurt a lot. I could see that the side of his head was sore. I think he does this when he is excited or nervous. So, I try to calm him down. I would play music on my computer and let him listen. I try to talk to him- I know he can hear me. When he is happy, he hums and dances. He runs around and laughs. I feel happy too when I see him happy.

I know that his humming and dancing was his way to convey a message, or maybe to say thank you. He was doing this a lot when we had a party. He was humming and dancing, laughing and playing games.

But I am more than thankful to meet someone like him. My friends tell me it was kind of me to teach, play and talk to people with disabilities but it I

learned more from this experience. I learned that there are several ways to communicate and connect with people.

I would encourage students like me to join activities like Best Buddies! Let us know more about intellectual and development disabilities and learn how to include them in our spaces and in our lives.

— Jack Zhi, Year 8, Harrow School Beijing.



I am one of the students who've participated in the **Best Buddies Leadership and Service Activities (LSA)** when I first came to Harrow Beijing. It's a very meaningful and educational experience for me. In this LSA, I've met people who are in the same age as me but have difficulties in learning and doing activities. It made me feel extremely sympathetic for them but also empathetic. Also, knowing how lucky I was for having a chance helping them in this LSA. I was able to understand people with intellectual and developmental disabilities more.



Zhichao Gao was my buddy. He has intellectual disabilities and didn't quite understand what we were doing at first. However, I found him very smart because I knew he was trying very hard to be in the same pace with other people. He tried to join in arts and crafts, and played games with us.

Sometimes he would run off because there were many people in one room, especially when we had our end of year party. He did not want people touching him but one afternoon, when we were sending them off for home, he crossed his arms with me. I thought it was such a kind gesture.

I was also amazed with all the other Rong Ai Rong Le (RARL) students. They all tried hard to get connected. They might not have done something how I expected (like trying to initiate conversations, make eye contact), but they had their own way in doing so. I just had to think deeper and understand clearer to get to know them better. I'm very grateful to Harrow Beijing and RARL for providing me such a precious opportunity.



— Christina Wang, Year 10, Harrow School Beijing

PRESENTED BY

SENIA

融爱融乐

HELP SPREAD INCLUSION!

**YOU
INCLUDE
ME**

SCAN THE QR CODE TO JOIN!

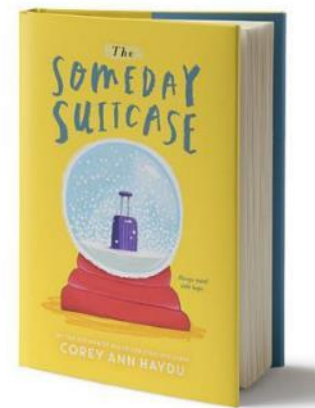


If you have questions, you can contact
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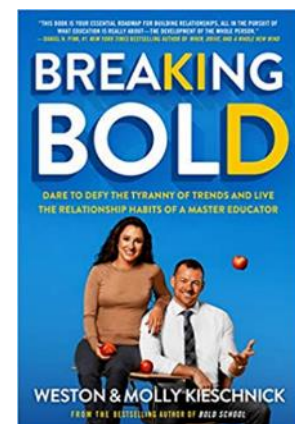
The Someday Suitcase, by Corey Ann Haydu. Katherine Tegen Books.

Readers who loved *The Thing About Jellyfish* and *Goodbye Stranger* will find a mysterious magic and unforgettable friendship in *The Someday Suitcase*, from the critically acclaimed author of *Rules for Stealing Stars*. This middle grade novel is an excellent choice for tween readers in grades 5 to 6, especially during homeschooling. It's a fun way to keep your child entertained and engaged while not in the classroom.



Breaking Bold, by Weston & Molly Kieschnick. International Center for Leadership in Education.

This second great professional development book from the writers of *Bold School* (Weston and Molly Kieschnick) gives teachers and specialists a step-by-step lesson in the twelve relational habits of a master educator challenging us not to be just an educator, but a **BOLD** educator.



“There is
more than
one way to
do it.”

Larry Wall



Neuroscience

Informed practices

When I started my educational therapy journey, I came across some reading materials about the structural and functional differences in dyslexic brains. At that time, I had five years of full-time teaching experience in China and the USA, with a master's degree in education from an Ivy League university. However, I was barely exposed to neuroscience. It got me thinking. Dentists study teeth, and car engineers study engines. How come teachers don't study brains? Ever since then, one of my professional goals has been to equip myself with neuroscience knowledge to become a better educational therapist and teacher for all learners.

In this article, I share some concepts I've learned in neuroscience and how I apply them in my practices.

Neuroplasticity

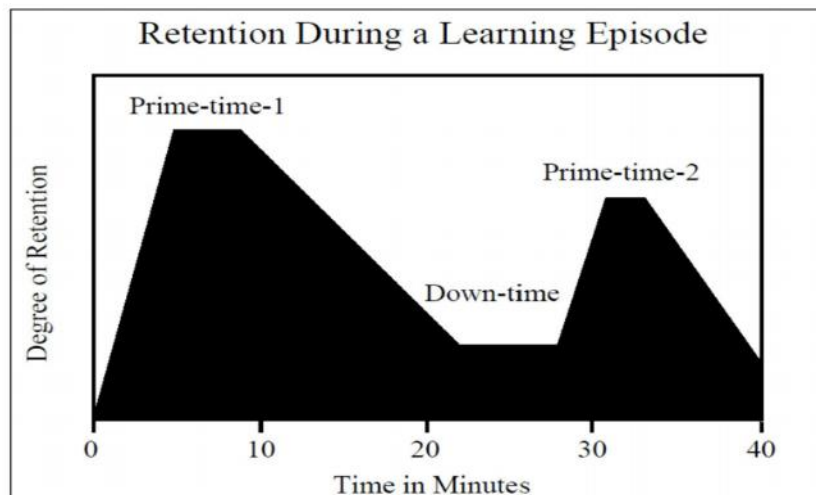
The first part of this word, “neuro”, means neurons, the nerve cells that are the building blocks of the brain and nervous system. The second part, “plasticity” means the capacity for being molded or altered. Neuroplasticity refers to the brain's ability to change and adapt as a result of experience.

“Students are constantly in the process of rewiring their brains—and how this happens will be influenced by the actions of the teacher. Furthermore, this is true for all

students, the high fliers and ‘just fine’ students as well as those with learning challenges” (Whitman & Kelleher, 2016).

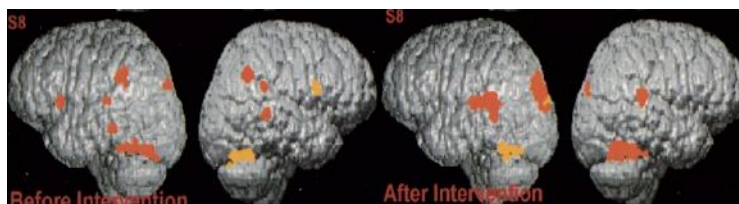
This concept has given me a new lens to view teaching and learning. Since every child goes through the schooling period only once and their brains are going through intense development during this period, I see the urgency to make neuroscience informed decisions as a teacher.

One of the changes I made is to teach the most important concepts at the beginning of the class instead of going through homework as I used to. I learned from the book *Neuroteach: Brain science and the future of education* that “What students will recall most is what takes place in the first part of the class and what students will recall second most will take place in the closing minutes of class” (Whitman & Kelleher, 2016). The following graph shows that the degree of retention is the highest at the beginning during a learning episode.



Primacy Recency Effect. Reproduced from “How the Brain Learns” by David A. Sousa.

The concept of neuroplasticity has also given my students a lot of hope and reinforced the growth mindset. I teach in a school for students with language-based learning difficulties. When I showed my students the brain images below to demonstrate how brains can change after reading intervention, I saw sparks in my students’ eyes. Talking about neuroplasticity in class has instilled in my students the belief that they have the ability to rewire their brain to become better learners and higher-achieving students.



Brain activation profiles picture. Reproduced from “Dyslexia-specific brain activation profile becomes normal following successful remedial training” (Simos et al., 2002).

Integration

I learned about the concept of integration from Dr. Daniel J. Siegel, a pioneer in the field called interpersonal neurobiology. According to Dr. Daniel J. Siegel, “For the brain, integration means that separated areas with their unique functions, in the skull and throughout the body, become linked to each other through synaptic connections. These integrated linkages enable more intricate functions to emerge—such as insight, empathy, intuition, and morality. A result of integration is kindness, resilience, and health. Terms for these three forms of integration are a coherent mind, empathic relationships, and an integrated brain”.

In the book “*The whole-brain child: 12 revolutionary strategies to nurture your child's developing mind*”, the authors, Dr. Daniel J. Siegel and Dr. Tina P. Bryson, used layman friendly language to explain the integration of the left and right hemispheres of the brain, as well as the integration of the limbic system and neocortex. I will also be using the same language in the following paragraphs.



Left and right brain. Reproduced from “*The whole-brain child: 12 revolutionary strategies to nurture your child's developing mind*”, by Daniel J. Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson.

Dr. Siegel and Dr. Bryson called the left and right hemisphere of the brain the left and right brain. The integration of the left and right brain results in clarity and understanding. Kids are able to use both the logical left brain and the emotional right brain as a team.

One strategy I learned from the book is “Connect and Redirect”. When a student is upset, I first connect emotionally with the student, right brain to right brain. Then, once the student is calmer and more receptive, I bring in the left-brain lessons and discipline. It sounds like a no brainer that a calm brain listens and learns much better

than an upset brain, but sometimes it's easy to forget the roles emotions play in learning.



Upstairs and downstairs brain. Reproduced from *“The whole-brain child: 12 revolutionary strategies to nurture your child's developing mind”*, by Daniel J. Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson.

Dr. Siegel and Dr. Bryson referred to the neocortex, the part of the brain involved in higher-order brain functions such as planning, as the upstairs brain. They referred to the limbic system, the part of the brain that deals with emotions and memory, as the downstairs brain.

Integrating the upstairs brain and downstairs brain means to “watch for ways to help build the sophisticated upstairs brain, which is “under construction” during childhood and adolescence and can be ‘hijacked’ by the downstairs brain, especially in high-emotion situations” (Siegel & Bryson, 2011). As we all know, the frontal cortex which controls executive functions does not mature until the mid 20s. Executive function skills of children and adolescents are still developing and they are easily compromised by emotions sent from the downstairs brain.

One strategy I started using in my classroom is “Engage, not enrage”. In a high-stress situation like a student refusing to work with peers, instead of insisting they have to do what they are told, I would ask questions, discuss alternatives and even negotiate.

Maybe the student is upset at a classmate, or fearful how their peers might see them. I would never know without engaging in a conversation with the student. Nor could I avoid similar situations in the future if I enrage the student.

Another strategy that has worked effectively for my students is “Move it or lose it”, which means to have a student move their body when they lose touch with their upstairs brain. Stretching, taking a walk in the hallway, doing push ups, etc. are all great ways to get students back to a more regulated state.

The concept of integration taught me to co-regulate with my students. Co-regulation is to “support students as they regain emotional composure as well as teaching them skills that will help them stay balanced and regulated more easily in the future” (Siegel & Bryson, 2018).

Retrieval Practice

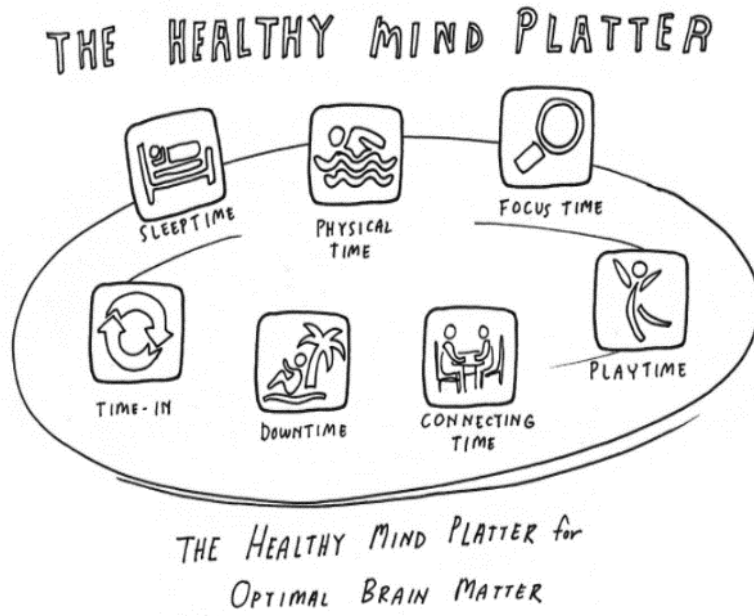
Retrieval practice is “a strategy in which bringing information to mind enhances and boosts learning” (Agarwal, n.d.). This strategy has been proved effective by neuroscientists such as Paul Howard-Jones and Mariale Hardiman, and cognitive psychologists like Jeffrey D. Karpicke and Janell Blunt (Whitman & Kelleher, 2016).

My Do Now activities used to be some worksheets just to keep my students busy during the first five minutes of a lesson, so I could take attendance and get ready for the class. Since knowing the effectiveness of retrieval practice, I have redesigned my Do Now activities to be reviewing questions such as listing the elements of fiction you learned from last class. I am now much more mindful to include more frequent, formative, low-stakes assessments of learning.

“Spacing is a powerful strategy that boosts learning by spreading lessons and retrieval opportunities out over time so learning is not crammed all at once. By returning to content every so often, students’ knowledge has had time to rest and be refreshed” (Agarwal, n.d.).

Quizzes and tests can be very anxiety inducing for my students. As an educational therapist, I believe it’s important to teach study skills. In my class and educational therapy sessions, I explicitly teach how to study for quizzes and tests. I show my students videos of experts explaining retrieval practice and spacing in student friendly language. Many students find it surprising to hear that re-reading notes or textbooks is not as effective as they thought. We then brainstorm retrieval practice they can do such as asking a parent to quiz them, using websites such as Quizlet, making a mock quiz or test, etc. I also ask my students to make a plan to space out their review sessions and write down the plan on their planner or calendar.

The Healthy Mind Platter



The healthy mind. Reproduced from *"The yes brain: how to cultivate courage, curiosity, and resilience in your child"*, by Daniel J. Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson.

As much as I want all of my students to be good learners, I also want them to be healthy and happy human beings. The seven daily activities listed in the healthy mind platter make up the full set of "mental nutrients" that every brain needs to function at its best. I teach this concept to my students hoping that what I teach serves them beyond school.

As an English teacher, I always want my students to share books they like. I started regular book sharing, but soon changed it to what we now call "Feed Your Brain". At Feed Your Brain sharings, students share books they enjoy, as well as podcasts, puzzles, sports, outdoor activities, etc. because all of these feed our brain. As I mentioned before, my students are all dyslexic, not all of them enjoy reading. Students who used to be intimidated by the book sharing are now actively sharing podcasts, audiobooks, and games they love. I've even heard my students advocating for more recess time saying "playtime is important for my brain".

Before I became a special education teacher and an educational therapist, I was a general education teacher and thought special education had little in common with general education. On my educational therapy journey learning how to serve neurodiverse learners, I've realized that the so-called special education knowledge applies to general education too. The neuroscience knowledge I've learned is one of the examples. I hope all the teachers and professionals, whether they work with

neurotypical or neurodiverse learners, can utilize neuroscience to inform their practices.

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About the author

Kaini Gu works as an English Language Arts teacher and Orton-Gillingham tutor at the Carroll School in Massachusetts, a school for students with language-based learning difficulties. She is also an Educational Therapist / Professional certified by the Association of Educational Therapists, with her private practice in the Boston area. You can reach her at edtherapy.gu@gmail.com.

Greetings from the Board

Dear SENIA-Beijing Members,

SENIA-Beijing sends you greetings as we start 2021 and head into the Chinese New Year. We want to thank everyone that participated in the SENIA Bridging the Gap December Conference. It was a very successful conference with a total of **882 participants from six different continents.**

As exciting as the conference was, we are still continuing to gain momentum with various upcoming spring events that will lead to our **SENIA-Beijing Collaborative on April 23, 2021.** Don't forget to save the date on your calendar. Details will be coming soon.

Not only looking toward the future, it is also good to appreciate the present. Let us remain growing together as professionals, colleagues, and SENIA-Beijing members. As members, continue spreading the word that SENIA-Beijing is an available resource to your fellow colleagues and friends that connects and supports SEN with the goal of having an inclusive community.

In conclusion, we wish you **a safe, happy, and healthy Lunar New Year!**

Regards,

Dr. Gerald Anthony, Chairman

On Behalf of the SENIA-Beijing Board

SENIA- BEIJING SPRING CONFERENCE



SAVE THE DATE!

23.04.2021
FRIDAY

MORE DETAILS
COMING SOON

SENIA-BEIJING SPRING CONFERENCE

23.04.2021 | FRIDAY



MORE DETAILS COMING SOON

Would you attend
**VIRTUAL OR
IN-PERSON?**

VOTE HERE!



Getting in touch. Meet the Board.

Welcome to SENIA-Beijing, a volunteer organization committed to support, teach, and learn from parents, teachers, students, learning support professionals, counsellors, and anyone involved with education for differently-abled people!



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It is always a pleasure to have you in our community. One of our main pillars is the voluntary collaboration through our different platforms; where we share free resources / materials, workshops, events, and job opportunities.



WeChat: SENIA-Beijing group



Website: <https://seniainternational.org/beijing/>



Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1728937867318355/>



L.I.N.K – Local Integration to Needs and Knowledge

Please reach out to Dr. Gerald Anthony at geraldanthony@keystoneacademy.cn