

# Talking Head

**Mogg Hercules** tells the story of meeting a boy who didn't yet understand the pleasure of learning and exploring new ideas for himself

I sat beside a boy, who had been invited to spend the day with the children in Year 3, to have a chat, about how he felt about the possibility of being included at Dallington and to ask him to comment on his day's activities with us. He was keen to show me how quickly he could complete computational maths, using the four basic functions. His answers were faultless.

As a matter of interest, I asked him how long he thought his eyelashes were.

"I haven't learnt that. I don't know the method, so I can't do the answer."

"Estimate! Have a guess, then tell me what length you think your eyelashes could be."

"My tutor could show me how to do that. I have a tutor three times a week and we do tests from a book and I get to colour in a column to show how many I got right. If I get any wrong, I have to do lots of practice until I can do them."

So, was this the way maths was intended to be experienced? Hopefully not: learning, especially of maths, must have a secure basis using concrete objects and we believe very strongly that time must be made available to enable genuine discoveries to take place, ideas to be formulated, exchanged, discussed – and for the whole process to be enjoyable, rather than one long test.

Is it more acceptable to say, "I can't do maths. I was never any good at maths," rather than, "I can't read and



I certainly can't spell." Could this possibly have been the reasoning behind this boy's parents having a maths tutor?

He seemed to have been placed on a conveyor belt which, presumably, will lead to his academic success, which is all well and good but it's not at the heart of what learning is about for us at Dallington.

Then I asked: "Would you draw the people in your family? I really love looking at drawings."

"I'm not very good at drawing, but I can copy them."

"Have a go! You can talk me through your drawing, as you're making it."

Because the boy was so uneasy about drawing without some form of reference in front of him, I asked if he would prefer to read to me. He did. He read each word perfectly. He could not predict what possibilities could develop, nor explain why certain events had taken place, in the story he had chosen to read.

"But I was just reading! You asked me to read."

"And you did. Thank you."

Do we really want our children to avoid taking risks, making 'mistakes', or assuming that there is only one way to arrive at a destination? No: we must allow youngsters to fail, to allow them to grow. When I hear young children telling me that they 'won't do it like that again, because it just didn't work,' I am absolutely delighted. They had an idea, they put it into practice,

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 "DO WE REALLY WANT OUR CHILDREN TO AVOID TAKING RISKS?"  
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and finally they reached their own conclusion. To me, that is a learning experience worthy of a place in a child's developmental journey.

In some peer groups there will be children who have had almost three learning Terms longer than those with late summer births. Do ages really matter? Is the provision made, or is it assumed that they are all in the same group, so they should all be doing the same things at the same time? I don't think so - but it happens!

*Dallington School is a family-run, independent, co-educational day school for children aged 3 to 11, in the heart of London*

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