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Welcome to Issue 26 of the PEN Journal. At the time of completing this issue, I am very appreciative of the vitality and richness of the CPE/PEN community as expressed by the contributors to this Journal and the recent Learning Exchange at Colwyn Bay.

At the Learning Exchange, Sue Palmer led the morning session *21st Century Children: the state of play*. Her presentation was a wonderfully comprehensive, but devastating and salutatory, tour of the impact of modern life and rigid, misguided neoliberal schooling, on early childhood.

The rigidity of the way childhood and early education is approached, the too early start to formal schooling and the life-long influence of early policies surfaced again with Michelle Melson's input - *Why Parents Desire a Change in the Summer Born Law?*

Dr Harriet Pattison's qualitative research and publication *Redefining Learning to Read* provided insight into the complex and variety of ways children learn to read. Contrary to the received wisdoms of the schooling system that are currently very inflexible, home educated children still learn to read successfully. Harriet's input was able to shine light on the diversity of approaches to be found within home education.

Janette Mountford-Lees (Headteacher) and Lynda O'Sullivan (Teacher) of Hollinsclough Primary School inspired participants when they shared how, through flexi-schooling, they had been able to turn a struggling school, the smallest in England with five pupils, into a thriving and successful setting. In the process a small rural school and community has become sustainable and a range of children and families with particular needs have been accommodated.

I feel this Journal resonates with the spirit of the Learning Exchange. I have very much enjoyed putting together such striking, insightful and wholehearted writing which covers many of the strands of our interest and passion at CPE/PEN. I hope you too enjoy reading the articles.

Josh Gifford, Editor

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The Power of One Becoming the Power of Many

Julia Black



Ten years ago my life took a dramatic turn that I was never expecting. I was to become part of a revolution that I didn't even know needed to exist.

My daughter was 4 years old and she had just started school. She was excited. I was excited. She was ready to embark on a new adventure...

Or so I thought.

At her pre-school they had recognised that they needed to raise their game a bit when around 3 years old she became really defiant one day; totally out of the blue. She was running towards a road and they asked her to stop, which normally she would have. But this time she turned round, smiled at them and kept running.

All credit must go to the nursery manager, Claire, because when I picked her up she said, "I think we need to start teaching Esme to read." She then went on to describe what had happened. Despite the scare Esme had given them, Claire recognised they needed to change their learning environment to suit her. And they did. Esme embraced the new challenges they gave her and began the early stages of reading.

So when she went to school I, naively, assumed she would be able to continue to learn at her pace, with her enthusiasm, and that the teachers would also recognise that Esme was a hungry learner who grasped things easily.

I wasn't prepared for the brakes that would suddenly be put on her learning.

Now I'm not talking 'hot housing' here. I happen to believe that grades are just a bit of black print on a piece of white paper. If I had my way I'd ban all 'averages' from our education system and I don't think learning is linear. So it isn't about racing ahead to the finish line it is about going off-road, exploring, detouring, back-tracking, ac-

celerating forward and then wheel-spinning full circle to do it all over again.

So when I say put the brakes on I mean someone standing in the middle of the road directing my daughter.

"Sorry you can't come through here. You are going to have to wait and join the other track."

"But I've been on that track and I want to explore what is down there."

"Well you can't. Not yet!"

"Why?"

"Because we don't teach that until Spring Term, Year 2, Week 3 and you are in Autumn Term Reception, Week 6."

Ok - so with the last sentence I'm being a bit facetious but you get the picture. Esme was suddenly taken out of the driving seat of her learning and someone else took over. The school was controlling what she learned, when she learned it and even how she learned it. That was causing her to feel frustrated. Learning in school was not how I imagined it would be for her.

This is when I accidentally came across a quiet revolution that, at that time, you had to really hunt for to join. I phoned the County Council and a man, who I think was called Simon, answered. (I want to give him a name because he inadvertently changed my life!). I said that since my daughter had started school full time, after the staggered entry, she was increasingly getting angry when at home. I felt instinctively that full-time was too much for her and could I continue the part-time arrangement? I was fully expecting him to say no. Instead he said, "Yes. It's called flexi-schooling. You just have to get permission from the Head Teacher."

And that was that. In that moment my life was to change dramatically; although I didn't quite realise it at the time! But fast forward ten years and I'm now an educationalist and social entrepreneur with a learning framework called 'Lights On,' that has resulted from working with over 15 schools and delivering over 26,000 hours of hands-on learning to over 600 children in the past four years.

All of this is the direct result of me trying to solve the problem I saw in the education system for my daughter; that her lights were going dim when she started school. The more research I did (because I am a hungry learner too!), the more I became involved in her school; as a governor, then Chair of the PTA (winning the NCPTA Gold Star Reward for changing the life of the school in 2010). I began to realise that if I could be part of changing the life of one school maybe I could do the same with others? Then what about the millions of children in this country and around the world who were having the brakes put on their learning too? Could I also solve the problem for them?

I set up Explorium in 2013, in the skittle alley of a pub, when it became unfeasible to keep my daughter in school. One morning, when in Year 4 after spending six

months on fractions, she looked up at me and said, "Mum you may as well be sending me to prison every day. That is what it feels like." She had been complaining that her learning was fenced in ever since she started. It had got a lot worse when she moved into Year 3 and then it just went downhill from there. She even went to talk to the Head Teacher and said, "I just want to learn."

So with both my children now out of school, as there was no way I was going to let my son go into Year 3 after that experience, I invested my time, energy and money into setting up a supplementary education centre. Enough talking. If I believed I could do it differently then now was the time to walk the walk. And so I did. For the next four years, now based in a former primary school building, I problem-solved my way through the obstacles that my team and I came across. I analysed why our approach seemed to really work for some children but not others. I looked at what didn't work just as much as what did.

After our first year we began to have children come out of school, through flexi-schooling agreements, to join us. It began with parents who wanted their children to learn through doing and loved what we offered. Then the Head Teachers of the participating schools began to see the impact of what we did and they started to send us students; sometimes individual ones and at other times groups of 15-25 children.

I was then invited to have my creative learning centre on-site at Ansford Academy. Here we modelled a flexi-learning collaboration where parents, or teachers, could choose to send their children/learners to us. Most commonly students came to us for just 2 hours a week, but a few came for a full day. The parents and teachers could see the impact our approach was having; in essence we gave them a chance to learn with their lights on and head off-road.

It was over this past year that I realised the true extent of our failing system. I was seeing far too many students come to us who were not in tune with what they loved to do. They had forgotten who they were. Some maybe never got the chance to find out in the first place, but part of what we spent our time doing was moving them from being passive to reclaiming ownership over their learning. Instead of questioning, as Esme and I had, and asking 'why can't we travel down that road?'; or being brave enough to get off at a particular junction and do things differently, parents and their children had accepted that 'school is school and we all have to do it.'

I don't accept this. I refuse to accept this. I don't believe our teachers want school to be viewed like this and as a parent, whose children have both now chosen to be in secondary school, I don't want to think of it like this. If school is where the majority of our children are going to learn then we have to look out towards the bigger picture. That is where, I believe, flexi-schooling plays a part in bringing about the revolution in our education system.

When parents take their child out of school altogether, as I once did, our education system most likely loses connection with what amazing learning that family might do. They will, as I did, find their own way to do things, learn from so many mistakes, have many successes that perhaps don't ever get shared.

However, when parents choose to flexi-school all of that magic (and potential to change the life of the school) stays connected to that school. Parents and children will, of course, go on their own adventure, but as they grow in confidence and trust their instincts about learning they may start to have a more open and constructive dialogue with their teachers. The school stands to benefit. More children, than one, potentially gain and this is where the real revolution lies - in the power of one becoming the power of many.

Sometimes, as parents, we don't see the role we can play in the bigger picture, because we feel alone. We think our problems are just that: our problems. But more and more parents, who have nothing to do with education (as was the case for me), are tuning into the global conversation that highlights just how much our education system is out of alignment with our modern world. They may never have thought they would get involved in education but they find themselves, as I did, unable to walk away. Their children are telling them through their anger, tears or even compliance, "This isn't right. It doesn't fit." And more and more parents are listening and being proactive and requesting (or when needed, demanding) to remain an active part of their child's education during the school week.

So I see flexi-schooling as the golden egg within our education system. An opportunity for our children, parents and schools to come together and co-create a new relationship around learning. Opening minds so we can explore, together, how a 3 or 4 day week could look for those who choose it. Where an active school policy for flexi-schooling will help rural schools survive because parents will favour flex-schooling friendly schools. Reduced class sizes, because parents are sharing the educational route through school, mean that teachers and children can benefit from more individualised roadmaps.

The list of benefits goes on and on but I find it hard to think of any downsides. All the arguments I hear schools give, in my view don't hold any weight. I've now got tangible qualitative evidence, with child after child, that flexi-schooling can transform their experience of learning, both in and out of the classroom. In the ten years since that fateful phone conversation with Simon, I've learned a huge amount about education. And my biggest takeaway is that flexi-schooling changes lives far beyond our own!

julia@explorium.co.uk

explorium

School Lane, Compton Dundon, Somerset, TA11 6TE
T 01458 274 050 explorium.co.uk

Rejoin the Revolution!

Paul Henderson

Ideas such as progressive teaching, child-centred learning, self-directed learning, discovery learning and personalised learning tend to go in and out of favour as differing fashions and trends sweep through the world commonly referred to as education and more accurately described as schooling. The most recent peak in interest in personalised learning was probably around 2005 when it looked like a revolution in teaching and learning was set to begin. This was just before the theory of learning styles was debunked, the backlash of which caused a lot of individualised learning strategies to be viewed with equal doubt and suspicion, which consequently killed enthusiasm for any kind of revolution in personalised learning. The evidence that debunked the theory of learning styles was overwhelming and the lesson that was well and truly learned, and that has been emphatically rammed home ever since, is that teaching strategies must be informed by a strictly scientific evidence based approach informed by big data and cognitive psychology rather than neuroscience, which one high profile and very respected educationist has referred to quite publicly and unashamedly as “neurobollocks.”

While there were clear lessons to be learned from the debunking of the theory of learning styles, there are fascinating and potentially much more enlightening things to be learned from the backlash against the theory of learning styles which could lead to profoundly positive changes in the entire world of education, not just in schooling. These lessons are nuanced and subtle but they are of immense importance to anyone who genuinely cares about the future of education. The fascinating and very telling phenomenon that has occurred due to the debunking of the theory of learning styles is that a host of eminent academics have labelled learning styles as a “neuromyth.” Notice that they say learning styles are a myth and not the theory of learning styles. As far as schooling is concerned there is no difference between learning styles and the theory of learning styles because the theory of learning styles postulates that if learners are taught via their preferred learning style they will learn better, but when they are summatively assessed this theoretical hypothesis has been proven to be false, therefore as far as schooling is concerned learning styles might as well not exist because when teaching strategies are adjusted to accommodate them there is no improvement in standardised test results. The theory of learning styles is undoubtedly wrong but while it might be fine to say that learning styles don’t or need not exist in schooling, it is an entirely wrong to say this if you are interested in education in a general sense.

The reason that the theory of learning styles is wrong is that anything learned via a particular learning style is best expressed via that same style and, since summative assessments in school generally take the form of a written test which requires candidates to express the extent of their learning linguistically using words, symbols or pictures that can be written or drawn on a piece of paper, there is no allowance for meaning to be conveyed or expressed any other way. Apart from the movement of their pen candidates are generally not allowed to move or make a sound during a written exam and so any form of auditory or kinaesthetic expression would not be allowed and certainly would not form any part of anything that was formally assessed. The vast majority of prescribed curricular learning outcomes that are assessed in schooling are best expressed in written form because it is only learning in the cognitive domain expressed in written form that schooling assesses. Psychomotor and affective learning are generally of negligible interest. Contrary to the recent claims of legions of established and highly respected academics, learning styles are not a myth, they are very real and well documented, but instead of declaring that the theory of learning styles is nothing more than a myth (which is true) academics have been lining up to declare that learning styles are a myth (which is not true). The terms “learning styles” and “the theory of learning styles” have been used interchangeably in the media and are taken to mean the same thing in schooling because within a schooling environment they effectively are the same thing, but in the wider world of education they are subtly but crucially different. The misleading backlash against the theory of learning styles is just a minor symptom of a much bigger disease that afflicts schooling and, interestingly, it serves as a very useful way to exemplify and begin to explain the much bigger affliction and, even more interestingly, its potential cure.



Photo by Karl Baron, Flickr.com

One of the most serious diseases that blight schooling is that forms of learning that are not easily assessable using written exams or that do not make any difference in the outcomes of the conventional standard model of school-

ing are dismissed as a myth or of negligible importance. One of these forms of learning has proven itself to be the most important form of learning in human history. Without it the human species would not be significantly different from any other animal. Every significant original contribution or innovation from the wheel to the computer, in every field of human endeavour, has come about as a result of self directed learning; otherwise it would not have been original. Yet languishing at the bottom of one of John Hattie's revered league tables of classroom interventions, as calculated using metadata from thousands of assessments that utilise standard assessment techniques, is "student control over learning" or self-directed learning. Standard assessments measure how well people learn prescribed learning intentions therefore if candidates prescribe their own learning intentions, as they do in self-directed or self-determined learning, their learning cannot be measured by conventional means and therefore it does not show up in any assessment data that is collected from schools. This leads academics to believe that these vital forms of learning are of negligible importance or don't even exist, when they are in fact the very types of learning that help to set the human species apart from all other species and that also set us apart from computers and robots, which are increasingly taking jobs from humans as traditional industries become automated. The findings and conclusions from evidence based league tables of successful classroom interventions arrived at through the strict application of scientific method are yet another example that demonstrate how vitally important forms of learning end up being dismissed in school classrooms because they do not fit the prescribed curriculum/standard test model. If you strictly apply scientific method to a highly selective set of data taken from a highly contrived environment you can make science say anything you want it to depending on how the data is manipulated, filtered and selected. Of course scientific method is the only rational way forward, but the data that informs the science of schooling must be inclusive of all types of learning, and that means it needs to be derived from a much wider concept of assessment which takes a much wider concept of human ability into account. There is a vast amount of essential human ability that cannot be fully expressed via the very narrow window of a written exam. For those who are genuinely interested in systems of education which optimise the types of learning that are essential for our species to prosper in the future, it is not the vitally important forms of learning that should be dismissed: it is the conventional model of schooling.

The reason so many progressive or child-centred approaches to learning have never really taken off in the past in schools is because when teaching methodologies were changed to accommodate the principles of personalised learning, the approach to summative assessment remained the same. If the type of assessment utilised requires all candidates to express the extent of their

knowledge of the same curricular learning intentions in the same way then success in such assessments is very rarely achieved through individual personalised learning techniques. The concept of personalised assessment may provoke a strongly negative kneejerk reaction from many educators for understandable reasons but there are good examples of personalised assessment that have been used for decades that prove that it can be done efficiently, effectively and fairly.

The best places to look for such examples are in areas of learning that necessitate forms of assessment which do not involve written exams. A perfect example is the music instrumental solo performance exam. The complexion of instrumental music instruction varies significantly in different areas in different countries; the assessment I will describe here is the Scottish Qualifications Authority solo performance assessment at levels 5, 6 and 7, with which I am the most familiar.

The great thing about learning a musical instrument is that it requires learners to learn in all three of the domains of learning. They need to learn cognitive concepts but also have to interpret the mood, style and feeling in the piece which requires them to learn in the affective domain. Music is sound and sound is created through movement, and so playing an instrument well requires a high degree of highly refined psychomotor learning. Consequently, rather than assessing through the narrow window of a written exam, which only assesses the extent to which candidates have learned prescribed cognitive concepts, a music performance exam requires candidates to express the extent of their cognitive, affective and psychomotor learning through the auditory medium of music. For example if candidates who play a stringed instrument were being asked to express the extent to which they understand the term vibrato in a written exam they may regurgitate the textbook definition, but in a solo performance music exam they would express the extent to which they understand the term by recognising the symbol in the music and adjusting the movement of their fingers to create the auditory musical effect, thus demonstrating their cognitive understanding of the term kinaesthetically via their psychomotor skills using the auditory medium of music.

The degree of personalisation and choice in such exams is practically limitless and the breadth of teaching methodologies open to music instructors covers the whole of the pedagogy, andragogy and heutagogy continuum. The reason there is so much choice for learners is due to the fact that there is no prescribed repertoire, instead the exam board give examples and guidelines at each level of assessment which means that if there is not a single piece of music in the known universe that a learner likes he or she can create his or her own and play that in the exam, as long as it meets or exceeds the min-

imum criteria for the level of assessment, thus learners' imagination is their only limit when it comes to personalisation and choice.



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There are a great many other aspects of instrumental instruction that differ from classroom teaching. Prospective instrumental music students are invited to be auditioned for places on an instructor's timetable therefore their participation in learning is voluntary and consequently an instructor's teaching is invited. This makes a huge difference to any of the vast array of teaching methodologies that are related to motivation. In instrumental instruction, motivation is much more intrinsic than extrinsic because students choose to participate voluntarily, whereas core subjects taught in classrooms are compulsory and the teaching of such subjects can often be uninvited. Students are taught them whether they like it or not. Teaching and learning depends heavily on motivation and instrumental instruction and classroom teaching involve entirely opposite forms of motivation.

The absence of a prescribed repertoire for instrumental music learners allows for four learning pathways which can be mixed and matched according to learner preference. If learners prefer the default pieces chosen by their instructor this allows for a traditional teacher led pedagogical pathway, if they prefer to learn a mixture of self and instructor chosen pieces this leads to an andragogical learning pathway, if they decide to source their own learning content this leads to an andragogical/heutagogical open source learning self directed pathway and if learners enjoy creating music then learning intentions can be entirely learner created, in which case the content of the assessment is created by the learner. Learners have been successfully assessed with excellent results at all levels of school assessment on pieces that they have created. This last approach is entirely self-determined and heutagogical. These alternative learning pathways offer a significant shift of emphasis that makes music instruction profoundly different from classroom teaching. Another important consideration is that classroom teachers' subject knowledge tends to lie within either the primary, secondary, or tertiary levels of assessment but instructors have to have knowledge of all three; this is yet another crucial and fundamental difference. It means that

learners can learn at their own pace which can be as much as four years ahead or behind the level of average exam board age-stage expectations commonly found in classrooms. This means for example that there is no learning ceiling in the last year of secondary school because keen music students taught by instructors can study undergraduate university level material if they want to.

The above example illustrates how music instructors use personalised learning in conjunction with personalised assessment which can only be possible because the exam board does not prescribe learning intentions; instead it prescribes criteria which the learning intentions have to comply with at each level of assessment. It is interesting that music instructors implement the principles of what is sometimes called "alternative learning" (voluntary, non-coercive, convivial learning) within the institutions of mainstream formal learning; it shows that it can be done. Their approach to teaching, learning and assessment has been used very successfully in music exams for decades and if it could be translated, developed and widened to other disciplines there is no reason why personalised learning and assessment cannot work in ways that are far more suitable and efficient than the ubiquitous traditional methods that have been associated with classroom teaching for the last 150 years

It is intriguing to think that personalised learning in conjunction with personalised assessment could form part of a very effective treatment which may even lead to a possible and much sought after cure for the very poorly patient known as schooling. In the world of medicine such treatments would be tested in clinical trials before they could be licensed for use on the general public, but in education such trials have already been carried out in the world sometimes referred to "alternative education" and the results have been very positive. So much so that Sir Ken Robinson, one of the world's most highly respected educationists, has recently declared that "alternative education works" and that we should be making every possible effort to bring the methodologies of alternative learning to the mainstream. There are millions of people from all around the globe who have benefited greatly from alternative approaches to learning such as unschooling, flexischooling and democratic free schooling and there is more and more research coming out to confirm what they already know and what educationists are beginning to discover: it works. Will policy makers listen? History has shown that they will not and therefore the only way change is likely to happen is through a ground up revolution. If you have read this article thus far then you are either part of the revolution or you have the potential to be part of it. To be part of it all you need to do is spread the word.

Paul Henderson is an experienced educator in the fields of science and music education. His own family is being home-educated and Paul uses his experiences of learning in conventional and Elective Home Education settings to write about education. He has been a regular contributor to the CPE-PEN Blog and previous Journals.

Child of the Parent or Child of the State?

Wendy Charles-Warner



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In recent years there has been an increasing trend toward social workers making assumptions that state oversight of children is essential, in order to ensure that parents comply with their legal duties toward their children. This is something that older generations would not have tolerated, as they considered social workers to be there to step in when a parent did not get it right, in order to help vulnerable children and families. They also expected to be trusted to not break the law, unless there was good reason to think otherwise.

Social workers do an excellent job in many cases and make a real difference to the lives of vulnerable children. It is not in those cases that their involvement is questioned, but in cases where the parents are good parents, or at least 'good enough'. The current approach appears to be that when a parent acts in conformity with expected norms they do not require investigation, but any divergence from the norm, no matter that it is a legal divergence, will require investigation.

This phenomenon is most clearly demonstrated with families who home educate their children, particularly where some other form of state intervention is declined or not taken up. Recently, a Yorkshire mother declined health visiting services on the basis that she is a

paediatric specialist and an experienced mother, with a family with no indication of genetic abnormality or inherited disease. Such explanation should not be necessary because, as the mother had quite rightly pointed out, health visiting is an 'opt in' service, not mandatory. The case was nonetheless reported to children's services as a safeguarding concern, because the children are home educated. The main theme of the referral was that home education means that children are 'unseen'.

To put this into even clearer perspective, the children of the family are all involved in regular activities outside the home, including public performances and classes provided by the local authority. The social work responses raised to the health visitor referral, were revealing: social workers reported 'whilst there are no safeguarding concerns, the children are 'unseen' and we therefore would not know if there are concerns'. The children's GP responded to state that verbal referral had been made to 'education' as this 'seems to be the easiest way to get into this family'. Tellingly, a trainee social worker, when advised of the case stated: 'That's right because a parent is not capable to assess their child'. (confidential discussion, September 2017). It appears that trainee social workers are being indoctrinated into the cult of state control.

This suggestion that social workers should investigate families where there are no safeguarding concerns because, having not seen the children, there might be concerns if they look hard enough, is rather in the vein of 'prove that you do not beat your wife', or 'prove that you are not a burglar'. It seems that the ethos is moving toward a culture of proactively seeking concerns, rather than responding to real concerns.

The mother above mentioned is not unusual; a great many referrals are made to children's services in respect of home educated children, solely on the assumption that they are 'unseen'. What is risible in this suggestion is that home educated children are uniquely visible, given that they are out in public during school hours, rather than cloistered in a classroom. In fact:

'Home educated children were found to be disproportionately scrutinised, being approximately twice as likely to be referred to Social Services ... as were children aged 0-4 years and children aged 5-16 who attend school. Despite that double referral rate, ... Referrals to Social Services were found to be 3.5 - 5 times less likely to lead to a Child Protection Plan with home educated children than with referrals of schooled children aged 5-16 ... and 5 - 7 times less likely to lead to a Child Protection Plan than referrals for children aged 0-4 years ... Rates of home educated children subject to a Child Protection Plan ... were also found to be less

than teaching staff guilty of abuse offences.’ (Charles-Warner, 2015)

The safeguarding industry and, make no mistake, it is a self-perpetuating industry, is spearheading this charge toward 1984: professional oversight of every child, with effective parental responsibility to the state, on the basis that ‘they’ need to watch just in case parents do something:

‘Sadly, safeguarding has moved in many areas from a system designed to support individuals, to one that is a self-perpetuating industry, more interested in policies and procedures than in ensuring people have freedom, autonomy and choice, as well as being safe and secure within their services’ (Green, 2016).

Green, the chief executive of Care England, was referring to inconsistency in care, but the comment resonates for those who find themselves shocked to be brought into that ‘safeguarding industry’, for making a reasonable and legal choice.

It is particularly alarming that children’s services investigations are often undertaken covertly, without the parent consenting to share their data. Consent is required unless there is significant risk of harm to the child if consent is sought, but any objection raised is swept away as soon as ‘safeguarding’ is mentioned.

In a recent case where the parent had relocated to escape serious domestic violence, the investigation was akin to iatrogenic intervention, in that social workers traced and discussed their ‘concerns’ that the child was unseen with the abusive parent, thereby providing sufficient information for that parent to locate the child, exposing the child to serious risk of harm. To read the phrase ‘we have no background information on these children, which needs investigation to obtain’, is extremely worrying in cases where a parent has escaped domestic abuse, or where the family has been relocated by the Police. The reactive duty to address present concerns is cast aside in an effort to invade the privacy of a family, by obtaining background information to which the investigating social worker is rarely entitled.

It is commonplace nowadays that where parents are referred to social services in respect of home education, the allegation made is of emotional abuse. Emotional abuse is all too easy to allege, as you cannot evidence emotional abuse readily, but all too difficult to defend against. Social work is not the only arena within the safeguarding industry where this approach is causing good enough parents to be brought within its bounds.

In the last few years, claims of ‘emotional abuse’ have become almost ubiquitous in CAFCASS reporting in

private Children Act applications. Most usually nowadays the report will state that the parents are ‘conflicted’ and are therefore emotionally abusing their child. This is an extremely serious concern, as a parent worried for the wellbeing of their child, will be accused of emotionally abusing their child, simply because they applied to the Court to seek to protect their child’s best interests. The protective parent inadvertently becomes the suspected parent.

Confidentiality restrictions prohibit the disclosure of these reports, which are consequently unseen by the public, upon whose behalf those reporting officers work. The illogicality of a situation where a parent is referred for being ‘unseen’ by public employees and yet the work of those employees within the safeguarding industry is unseen, should not be lost on that public. This is not to suggest that private law reports should be made public, albeit they should be able to be challenged over their accuracy, but rather to highlight the incongruity of suggesting that a home educated child is an ‘unseen’ child and therefore at risk of harm.

Imagine a parent who is worried because their child is reporting that the other parent is frequently drunk and that their new partner beats them. The drunken parent denies there is a problem and the protective parent applies to the Court to care for the child, in order to remove the child to a safer environment. CAFCASS report that the parental ‘conflict’ is emotionally abusing the child and social workers step in to welcome the protective parent into the widening arms of the safeguarding machine, where they will be told that they are equally to blame for abusing their child. Sadly, that is not fiction for many families.

This article cannot address every arm of the safeguarding industry, but suffice it to say that it is a many-armed creature, intent on gathering in any parent making legal choices which are not the social norm: declining opt in health visiting, registering with a private GP, using a private midwifery service, declining vaccinations and home education are all regular justification used for reaching out to take hold of families. Where a home educating family ticks a second, or even a third box, their invitation to join the safeguarding industry is not one that is readily refused.

Diverse societies are thriving societies and we need to act to protect that diversity. Ordinary caring parents need to raise their voices to protest about this travesty, to stem the tide of public ownership of our children. 1984 is already establishing itself, do not dare blink, because if you take your eyes off the ball it will be here.

Do we want it to be too late to stop it?

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Wendy Charles-Warner is a trustee / director of the Centre for Personalised Education. She is a tireless, experienced lawyer, advocate and campaigner on a range of issues including elective home education, home education and the law, relationships with local authorities and government.

Guiding Young People After Terrorist Attacks

Edith W. King



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There is a pressing need at present after the recent terrorist attacks in London, Manchester, France or any country to reassure and support young people. The daily reports in the media on mass-casualty terrorism constantly cite credible plots carried out despite the efforts of counter-terrorism authorities. "Cascade of Violence Puts Uneasy Nation Further on Edge" (Wall Street Journal, June 20th, 2017). No wonder our young people are stressed and worried. Students enrolled in public and private schools have concerned teachers and administrators who feel it is their responsibility to discuss these out-

rageous attacks. For example: Dr. Lynn Davies at the organisation Connect Futures (connectfutures.org) offers educators the blog: How should teachers talk to their students in the event of a terrorist attack?

But those students who do not attend daily public or private schools may not have readily available support groups during these trying times. Did you know that there is information and guidelines for students in home schools and flexi-schools, for parents, grandparents, care-givers, friends and families? As Peter Humphreys explains:

"Critical, intellectual perspectives can only flourish within an environment of plentiful exchange of ideas with a range of people and sources.... The home-based educated and flexi-schooled have the time and space, tending to immerse themselves in questioning and freethinking in the more informal settings." Humphreys, P. 2017

We know that terrorists are not a new phenomenon. They have been present in our midst for centuries. The extremists that confront us today, wherever they operate, are not unique. They spread fear, distrust, racism and hatred that disrupts social groups and alienates family members. It is widely acknowledged that current acts of terrorism are not condoned by Islam or the Muslim religion. The Associated Press reported in June, 2017 that since the wave of Islamic State-inspired terror attacks in Britain, there has been a fivefold increase of hate crimes against Muslims. Terrorists use suicide attacks that spurn their own demise. This "war on terrorism" brings attention to the various causes that use violence for the means to gain power. But those of us educating young people should stress an appreciation of difference and a desire for peaceful existence. The following ideas can be used for students of all ages.

Guiding Young People in Times of Stress

For those adults interacting with older learners or younger students in informal settings, here are some recommendations to remember. You can support students by first thinking critically yourself about these acts of destruction and extremism. Then help learners to find the words to express their understanding of the violence. Providing a climate of acceptance and openness for talking about recent terrorist events still fresh in the news and in mind is essential. It is important to set guidelines for these small group discussions such as allowing each participant to fully make remarks. Stressing confidentiality of the discussion and the assurance that the conversation stays within in group is vital. Listen to young people, as they may struggle to express their fears and what is troubling them. Then try to understand their point of view. It can be helpful and reassuring to re-phrase or re-state what has been said. You can also watch for nonverbal messages

as well, such as facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice or emotional signals, and indicate that for everyone extremism is taking a toll. It is important to correct misinformation about the reporting and the conditions surrounding these extremist attacks - the use of vehicles to run people down or hide a bomb in clothing to blow up a market full of shoppers. Make clear that most adults are deeply concerned and apprehensive about these reoccurring forms of terrorism.

Consider exploring the ideals of democracy such as freedom of speech and actions, justice, equal opportunities for all people. Flexi-schoolers can be encouraged to write to their legislators about the impact of terrorist acts on the community and the hardships that can arise after such incidences. Bring in human rights through cross-cultural topics and themes including use of languages spoken by peoples around the world. Create opportunities to discuss and use differing languages. Investigate if languages other than English are spoken, or are being read or written in your community. Make use of signs or notices distributed in languages other than English for these activities. Learners can watch for resulting legislation arising from terrorism and if they do not agree protest in writing or through joining organised protests.

Remember young people should have a climate of acceptance and openness so they can ask difficult-to-discuss questions about these continual violent acts. Such efforts lead to discussions about conflict resolution techniques to resolve disagreements rather than turning to the outrageous and heinous strategies of extremists. This type of education calls upon adults to examine their own attitudes and values in relation to extremists and the results of their crimes. Now is a time for all those caring for young people to educate themselves on the current ideas, theories and world views evolving in this era of terrorist extremism.

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Edith W. King (ekingwm@hotmail.com) is Professor of Educational Sociology emerita and Chair of the Worldmindedness Institute of Colorado.

The Journal of Personalised Education Now

On Oceans and Swimming Pools

Rowan Salim



Challenging the Sea by Trick D. Barrett, Flickr.com

I learnt to swim on the Atlantic coast of Morocco. Between the ages of four and 10, I spent the summer months by the ocean. My parents would pitch a patterned parasol on the crowded beach and my sister and I would memorize its location vis a vis the myriad other parasols and run off into the waves. I remember my first few visits to the ocean; I remember jumping over the shallow foamy breaks before having learnt how to swim. I remember venturing further and further in, with waves breaking at my ankles, then at my knees, then my thighs. I remember laying down in the shallows and pretending to swim, floating in the breaking waves as I learnt to release my weight in the water.

I remember mustering the courage to jump over waves, and the first time I braved diving underneath a wave just before it broke. I became a pro at that. I remember being hit in the face by a wall of water, a wave I misjudged. I remember the first time I body surfed the length of the beach, not stopping till the sand had made contact with my whole body. I was thrown, pushed and pulled by unruly and powerful waves which refused to let me surface and had to hold my breath and be battered until they lost their energy. I remember being repeatedly pulled by the currents until I lost sight of the multi-coloured parasol and having to swim upstream through the salty ocean river. I watched older kids swimming beyond the breaking waves to the freedom of the calm waters beyond, and I remember the first time I swam past that boundary. I learnt how float there, and I even remember dozing off in the afternoon sun, bobbing on the water.

By the time I was 10, I knew I was a confident swimmer.

At 15 I moved back to England, and at 18 I went to university. The college I attended had an indoor swimming pool, and during my first week at college I went to the

pool with my new friends. We all jumped and dived in and started playing and racing. But very quickly, my confidence sank. My friends swam the length of the pool in a third of the time it took me to swim it. Their strokes were an image of perfection I'd never seen before. Their shoulders moved at impeccable angles. They moved through the water barely making a splash. They wore goggles. They opened their mouths to breath just above the flat water line and folded back into the chlorine like it was their home.



Photo by Barry Thomas, Flickr.com

I got out of the water within 15 minutes. I was no swimmer. By comparison, I was like a bull in a china shop. And I barely ever went back to that swimming pool.

Years later I returned to the Atlantic coast on holiday with my friends from university. We rented an apartment by the ocean and on our first evening we ran down to the beach. The waves were high and the rough beach was steep. I tore my clothes off and ran straight in. But when I re-emerged beyond the breaking waves, I saw that my friends were still standing on the beach, too worried to venture in.

There's a beauty and a utility to learning perfection within fixed parameters. There is also a joy and a necessity to learning to survive, adapt and make sense in the eddies and the chaos of the real world. Our education system today is teaching us to thrive in swimming pools; fixed exams, rigid curricula, narrow definitions of success, the four walls of the classroom. But the world will sometimes throw our children into the open water. Learning to swim in the ocean, you are never alone. You have to understand, respond and react to your environment. I later learnt to swim in a swimming pool, and even started to enjoy doing lengths. There's a surety in solitude. But we live in a world where the only thing that is sure is change. A world where our interactions with each other and the environment around us is key to our collective wellbeing. Maybe it's time to reimagine our children's learning environments, to open our schools, to free our children from the confines of the classrooms, to play and learn not only in swimming pools, but also in the ocean.

Rowan Salim is director and facilitator at Free We Grow @ Dacres Wood, a new democratic children's community in South London. She also works for the Pheonix Education Trust and is a community gardener.

PERSONALISED EDUCATION NOW

The vision of Personalised Education Now built upon a funded Personalised Educational Landscape

- A focus on the **uniqueness of individuals**, of their learning experiences and of their many and varied learning styles.
- Support of education in **human scale settings**, including home-based education, community learning centres, small schools, mini-schools, and schools-within-schools, flex-schooling and flexicolleges, networks of groups or individuals, both physical and virtual.
- Recognition that **learners** themselves have the ability to make both rational and intuitive **choices** about their education.
- The integration of **learning, life and community**.
- Advocacy of **co-operative and democratic organisation** of places of learning.
- Belief in the need to share national resources fairly, so that everyone has a real choice in education.
- Acceptance of Einstein's view that **imagination is more important than knowledge** in our modern and constantly changing world.
- A belief in **subsidiarity**... learning, acting and taking responsibility to the level of which you are capable.
- Adoption of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms**.

PERSONALISED EDUCATION NOW

Maintains that people learn best:

- when they are **self-motivated** and are equipped with **learning to learn tools**.
- when they feel comfortable in their surroundings, **free from coercion and fear**.
- when educators and learners **value, trust, respect and listen** to each other.
- when they **can invite support / challenge and co-create** their learning pathways from those educators and others they trust.
- when education is seen as an **active life-long process**.

What is meant by 'Personalised Education'

Personalised education is derived from the philosophy of autonomous education. This centres on learner-managed learning, invitational learning institutions, the catalogue/natural versions of curriculum, invited rather than uninvited teaching, and assessment at the learner's request. Its slogan is, 'I did it my way – though often in co-operation with others' and it operates within a general democratically-based learning landscape that has the slogan, 'alternatives for everybody, all the time'.

Within the context of the UK 'schooled society' there are already some key institutions that work to the autonomous philosophy within a democratic value system. A prime example is the public library. Others are nursery centres, some schools and colleges, museums, community arts projects, and home-based education networks. They work to the principle of, 'anybody, any age; any time, any place; any pathway, any pace.'

Such institutions are learner-friendly, non-ageist, convivial not coercive, and capable of operating as community learning centres which can provide courses, classes, workshops and experiences as requested by local learners. These are part of a rich and successful, but undervalued personalised learning heritage, from which we draw strength, and which we celebrate.

Personalised Education is legitimated by the latest understanding about the brain, and how we develop as learners and human beings throughout our lives. It operates within a framework of principles and values resulting in learners whose outcomes are expressed in their character, personality, in the quality of life they lead, in the development and sustainability of our communities and planet, and in peaceful coexistence and conflict resolution. Learner success is therefore measured in terms of good physical and mental health, in peaceful existence, freedom from crime, usefulness of their contributions and work, and levels of active citizenship. In reality, these are more significant than the limitations and delusions of over-emphasis on assessment scores and paper accreditations.

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Nikki O'Rourke, Secretary
The Centre for Personalised Education Trust
Personalised Education Now
Flat 65 Edge Hill Court, Edge Hill,
Wimbledon, London, SW19 4LW

Email: nikki.orourke@icloud.com

Telephone: 07748 807065