

Relational Inclusion blog #8: An Eternal Optimist

This week I'm not going to talk about my family (this may be a relief or a disappointment for you!). I do want to share something I learned. For those of you who know me, you've heard me say this many times before. **I came into teaching to change the world**, to make it a better place, to help the new generation shape a better future. I believe that our schools *should* equip our children with all they need for a bright future. But what if the very system designed to support them is fundamentally flawed? What if they are not just creaking at the seams – but they are actively perpetuating the problems they ought to solve?

Last week I was lucky enough to be invited to Cambridge where I heard Hilary Cremin talk about 'Rewilding Education'. (I have included her full talk as a link at the end of this blog.) She raised some uncomfortable truths:

Schooling as it stands has failed to bridge the growing gap between rich and poor. In many classrooms around the globe, opportunity is still tethered to privilege, and disadvantage remains entrenched. We see generations of marginalized students left behind, even as test scores and university admissions might give the illusion of progress. Education was meant to be the great equalizer, but the reality is far different. Decades of market-driven reforms have, reduced learning to a commodity – something to be consumed and competed for, rather than a universal right that nurtures every child's full potential. As a result, our schools often reproduce the very inequities they were meant to erase.

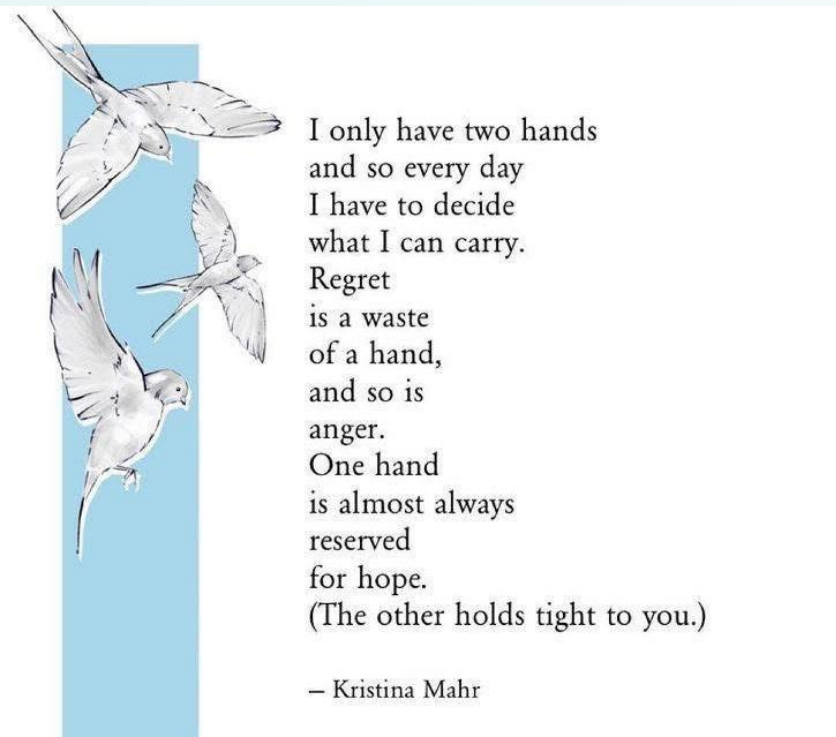
Worse still, the system is failing to address the pressing challenges of our time. The way we educate now encourages unsustainable habits and blind obedience to a status quo that is hurtling us toward ecological and social crises. Students dutifully learn to succeed in the world we have, even as that world rapidly changes or even vanishes before their eyes. Our schools too often prepare children for a future that no longer exists – training them for jobs being automated away, instilling facts divorced from the reality of a planet in peril, and promoting competition over compassion in an era that cries out for collaboration.

And what is the human cost of clinging to this broken model? Children and their teachers and support staff are suffering. Classrooms built on relentless testing and strict obedience leave many students anxious, disengaged, or discouraged, while their teachers grapple with burnout and disillusionment. The very spaces that should foster curiosity and well-being have become pressure cookers. Mental health issues are soaring among youth, and educators, caught in a system that demands ever-higher performance with ever-fewer resources, often find themselves exhausted and ill. Our schooling model is not just outdated; it is making us unwell.

Listening to Hilary also helped me realise that I am an **eternal optimist**, which did take me a little bit by surprise as I thought I generally have a negative disposition. Maybe for

some reason I champion the under-dog, and equally I just don't like being told no or made to do things which are clearly wrong. Just because 'that's the way we always did it' doesn't mean we have to carry on regardless. I am convinced that we are on the right path to disrupt the system and generate change. I think we can do this by pulling together, by applying relational inclusion as a strategy to shift culture and ethos and by not giving up. Today's quotes are all about why and how we must carry on, even when things appear difficult.

My first quote is a poem I found:



I think the two things I always imagine I carry are **hope** and **understanding**.

The second quote reminds me a little of my grandpa. I always wanted to travel, and he always thought that strange. He would say words to the effect of '*wherever you go, you can't escape yourself. What is it exactly that you're hoping to find?*' Work can be a little like that and sometimes we move schools or jobs trying to find the thing that fits.

2) *It's not that we need to seek new landscapes but rather to have fresh eyes.*
Jon Kabat-Zinn

My next two quotes are about when things get tough. I don't know if the first is true, but I really hope that it is:

3) *Bison are the only animal that turn into a snowstorm rather than away from it because they instinctively know that walking into the storm will get them out of the weather quicker. There may be a life lesson for humans in this.*

4) *The best way out is always through*
Robert Frost

As humans we seem to be a bit rubbish at acting when we know things are wrong. For some reason we often try to push on regardless.

5) *Better to admit you walked through the wrong door than spend your life in the wrong room*

6) *If you get on the wrong train, get off at the next station; the longer you stay on, the more expensive the return trip will be*

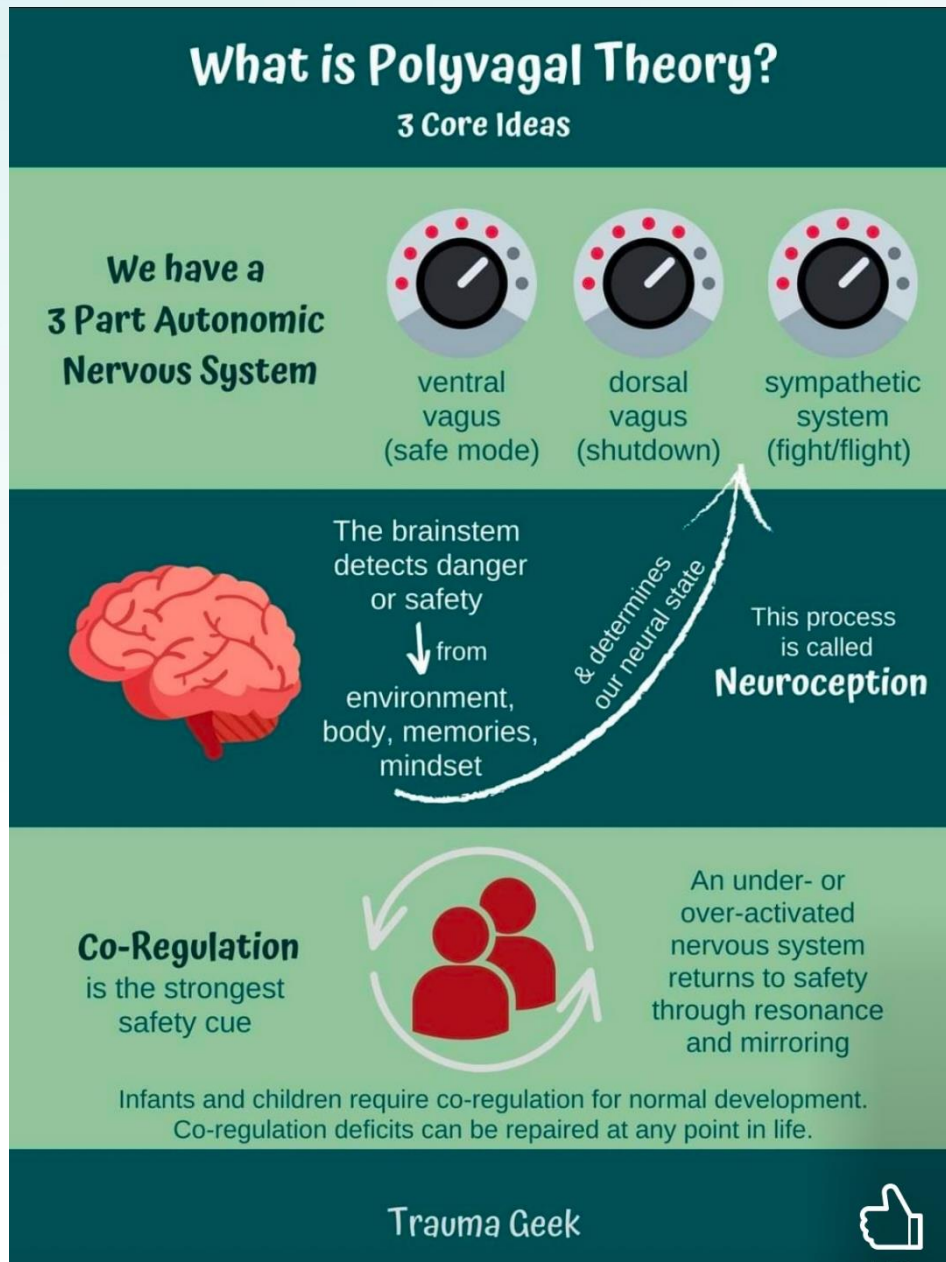
Haruki Murakami is one of my favourite authors. This is my quote to print and pin to the wall:



And once the storm is over, you won't remember how you made it through, how you managed to survive. You won't even be sure, whether the storm is really over. But one thing is certain. When you come out of the storm, you won't be the same person who walked in. That's what this storm's all about.

~Haruki Murakami

I find polyvagal theory fascinating but can't always keep it clear in my head. This week's infographic provides a really simple way of remembering it.



My article for this week is a YouTube link to Hilary Cremlin's talk about rewilding Education:

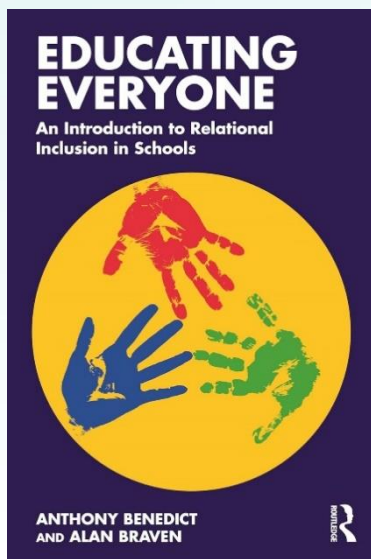
<https://youtu.be/YxbVkkGgc4-M?si=7AofPDG2Wkf2eKYG>

If you find the Relational Inclusion blog useful, feel free to share with your networks.

If you would like adding to the mailing list please email Hannah:

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Our book, *Educating Everyone: An Introduction to relational Inclusion in Schools* is available from Amazon **from Monday**. You can still order it here:



Thanks for reading

Anthony Benedict

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