

Relational Inclusion blog #41: Know Thyself

Last weekend my daughters spent their first weekend at cub camp. I dropped them off on Friday night and picked them up Sunday morning. It's the longest the two of them have ever been away from home, and it was weird. Other than the odd WhatsApp photo, we didn't know what they were up to. We didn't know whether they were getting on, eating properly, getting to bed, whether they slept, or—possibly most importantly—whether they were happy.

I guess this is what being a parent is. You wonder and worry when they're there, and you worry and wonder when they aren't. Typically, they didn't miss us at all. They were far too busy doing whatever it was they were doing.

My drive to collect them was interesting. It was Sunday morning, the roads were quiet and I had an hour of my own company as I followed the A6 to Buxton. I thought about the gap my children had left over the weekend, and how I was managing as a dad. And, probably, fairly typically for most human beings, I began to focus on the things I was doing wrong. Their empty booster seats kind of spoke to me. Maybe I needed to wonder a little more, be more curious, and add a bucket-load more empathy to my parenting. They're good kids, and maybe I'm a bit too grumpy.

Of course, this lovely reflective bubble was unlikely to last. Two nights in a hostel wasn't going to give them great sleep. They'd be full of excitement and running on nervous system energy for the best part of two days was always going to lead to a crash. To add an extra layer of complication, our dog and cat have developed their own rendition of the dawn chorus—starting around 4.30am and lasting up to an hour. So, we had a household of tired people coming together. The writing was very much on the wall.

This sent me down a different trouser leg of thought (to quote Terry Pratchett) about where most of our family arguments actually come from. Typically my wife or I might say:

“Right guys, time to get dressed.”

At which point the dog springs up (he doesn't know how to get dressed but he's always eager to please), one daughter offers some kind of bargain, the other flatly refuses, and our little boy also can't (or won't) get dressed himself. The same routine appears with brushing teeth, and if we even suggest going for a walk there's near revolution. We manage it—because we know about agency and about 5-, 8-, and 10-year-old brain development—but I'm not always as patient as I'd like to be.

As I was driving, I wondered about this. About the training we delivered in school that we loosely call “Know Thyself,” and about a conversation I'd been having with the children

about our voices. You know—the common talk about how your voice sounds different to you than it does to other people.

Now I know the loose science behind it—how we hear our voice from inside, not outside—but I wonder if there's something else. What if the voice we hear inside our heads is our true voice, and the voice everyone else hears is just their interpretation of us?

It made me think of a book that is sitting on my shelf: *One, None and a Hundred Thousand*. It opens with a casual comment about a man's nose that unravels everything he thinks he knows about who he is.

In the opening, Vitangelo Moscarda's wife casually notes his nose tilts to the right, triggering a spiral into questions of identity, how others see us, and the "hundred thousand" selves we wear.

I've thought about this a lot—who we actually are, who we pretend to be, who we want to be, and how others see us. And it strikes me that if I don't really know who I am as a person, I can't begin to understand how I behave as a parent. How I see myself shapes how I show up—with my children, with other people, and in all those small moments that go right or wrong before I've even noticed. The *Guardian* recently ran a piece about someone who ditched small talk for a month and started noticing everything differently. It made me think how much of our behaviour is just habit—and how different we might be if we paused long enough to notice ourselves. I also read somewhere that we spend much of our lives thinking about who our children will become as adults, but we rarely stop to consider who we are as adults..

We spend so much of our lives wondering or worrying about who or what we're going to be. Exams, careers, marriage, children, money. These things make us wonder at best and, at worst, push us into anxiety. We lose sight of the experience of life and living. Maybe this compromises our sense of agency, and in turn leads us to try and control it in others. When we spin out of control, we reach for the nearest thing and hold on tight, trying to make sense of it.

Unsurprisingly, Sunday night after camp wasn't without event. As time ticked on, the girls grew more tired and less tolerant with themselves and each other. As did I, and I imagine my wife. We joked in the kitchen about what on earth we were doing and what we needed to do to get the kids through the rest of the evening. But we could laugh, and we did get through.

I was left thinking about the melting pot of cub camp: three children—two very tired—two tired adults, a senile cat, and a rescue dog. It's no surprise we have hairy moments.

And then I thought of the pressure cooker that was COVID. How, for some, my tired and emotionally charged Sunday wasn't a one-off, but an everyday reality that lasted months on end.

Finally I thought of schools—where that melting pot is multiplied. Fifty to two hundred staff. Two hundred to a thousand children. All bringing a different emotional backpack to work every day. And I think: if we don't support each other in developing our emotional intelligence and our relational inclusion, well... it's not surprising we get fireworks.

My 10-year-old is reading a book and on the front cover it says:

“Always be proud of who you are.”

And I think that's the point, isn't it?

If we can't be proud of ourselves—and we don't really know ourselves—we haven't got a hope in hell with anyone else.

My one-a-day quotes for this week are:

1) *Discipline says, "I'll teach you how to do it right", while punishment says, "I'll make you regret doing it wrong." (- Leah Martin)*

2) *Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. (unknown)*

3) *“It is the small everyday deeds of ordinary folk that keep the darkness at bay... small acts of kindness and love.” (Gandalf, The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey - film dialogue)*

4) *The skill nobody teaches: how to be wrong well. Admit it fast. Correct it immediately. Learn from it completely. Most people defend wrong positions until they're indefensible. Being wrong isn't the problem. Staying wrong is. Update your beliefs or become irrelevant. (@scottdclary)*

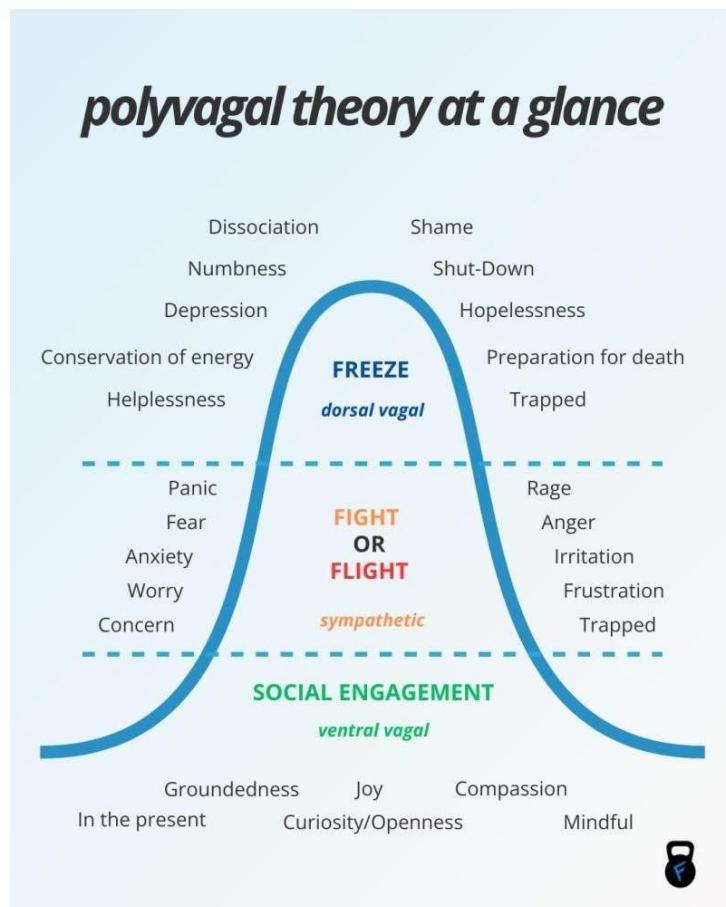
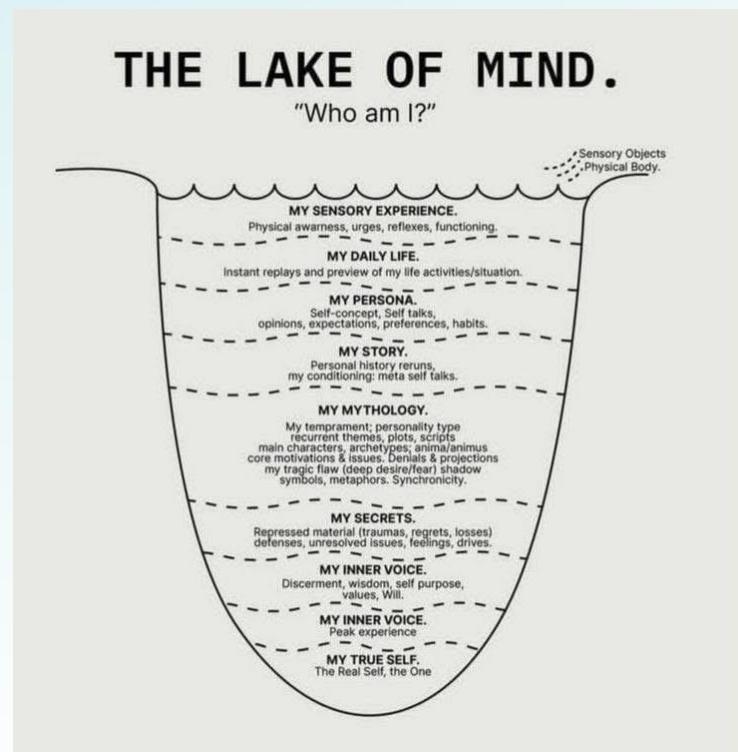
5) *Social and emotional learning needs to be redefined. It is about the health of our nervous systems. It is about recognising our sensations. It is as much about the adults as it is the students. When we are aware, we can begin to self-regulate, manage our feelings, and problem solve. (Dr. Lori Desautels)*

6) *You cannot calm a storm by screaming at the wind. Your child's chaos cannot be fixed by your chaos. Your peace is the only thing that quiets the noise. (Arsalan Moin)*

7) *When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace.*
(unknown)



My two print and stick to the wall images this week are:

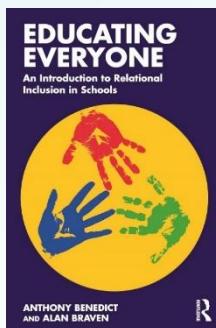


My recommended read this week is about small talk:

[A moment that changed me: I gave up small talk for a month – and the world came alive | Social etiquette | The Guardian](#)

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

Our book, *Educating Everyone: An Introduction to relational Inclusion in Schools* is out now and you must buy it and tell everyone else to buy it. It is available pretty much everywhere that sells books or you can get it here:



Finally, I'd like to share a quote which has really stuck in my mind and it came from a conversation with a friend:

If you don't have a belief system – that is despair. (Stephen Brock)

Thanks for reading

Anthony Benedict

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