



Relational Inclusion blog #54: Hearing with My Eyes

This morning, before school, daughter number two was fussing about her bags. She wanted to know whether to put her snack in her swimming bag or her usual bag. In all honesty I wasn't paying too much attention. I made a few suggestions, and bearing in mind there were only two choices, it didn't really matter.

Except it did. If she put it in her school bag and wasn't allowed to take that swimming, then she wouldn't have it. But she didn't seem to want to put it in her swimming bag either. I suggested she put it in her school bag, but now she wanted to leave that at school, and the teacher might not let her take it anyway.

I heard myself say, "I'm getting quite cross now - it's quite simple - just pick a bag and make sure you take the bag it's in as well as your swimming bag."

And then I did the blink thing, because I suddenly realised it had absolutely nothing to do with bags or snacks.

Let's rewind.

My daughter hates school swimming lessons (I've mentioned this before). Last week, unusually, when I asked her how swimming was, she said, "It was okay." Which is unheard of. She went on to explain that the four strongest swimmers (boys and girls) had been picked for the swimming gala, and she was one of them.

I was pleasantly surprised, not because she's not a good swimmer, but because she isn't competitive in any way and a year ago, even suggesting a swimming competition, would have made her shudder. It's also possible that she had no idea what a swimming gala is. She knew it was 'this year' and there were '4 girls and three boys' but that was about it.

Let's return to this morning.

"Are you nervous?" I ask. "Do you feel a bit uncomfortable?"

She's not sure. Which isn't surprising. She has no concept of a swimming gala and yet she also knows it is a 'thing'. I needed to listen better with my eyes. She's excited but nervous and probably a bit worried. As an eight-year-old she doesn't know how to say any of this so it's translated into a different problem, which she can label but can't solve - her snack pack.

Now that her bumbling dad has remembered children and nervous systems we can settle the morning back into its routine and everyone can leave the house feeling okay.

Fast-forward to the afternoon.

I'm standing on the viewing gallery at the swimming pool, looking down. I must be more competitive than I thought, because I hate it. I'm worried for my daughter. I can feel the tension. I'm worried how she'll handle the competition; how she'll feel if she doesn't do very well; I'm wondering if she's even worked out yet that it's a competition. Another parent says that the other schools have children one and two years older and I think *she hasn't got a chance*.

Then, in that heavy, horrible sweaty heat you only get at swimming pools, I think about how strange we are as human beings. What is it about humans and having to compete? Why do we have to be bigger and better and stronger and faster? (this sounds more like my 5-year old's idea of life, not a grown-up way to behave). And it's not as though we're content to keep this between ourselves. We must pass it on to our children. As the event unfolding before my eyes is proving.

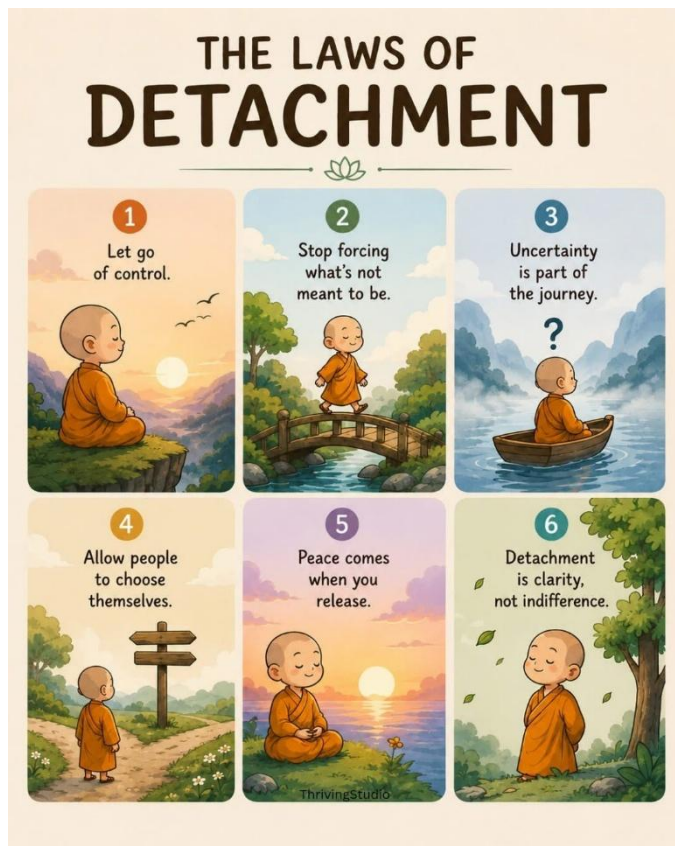
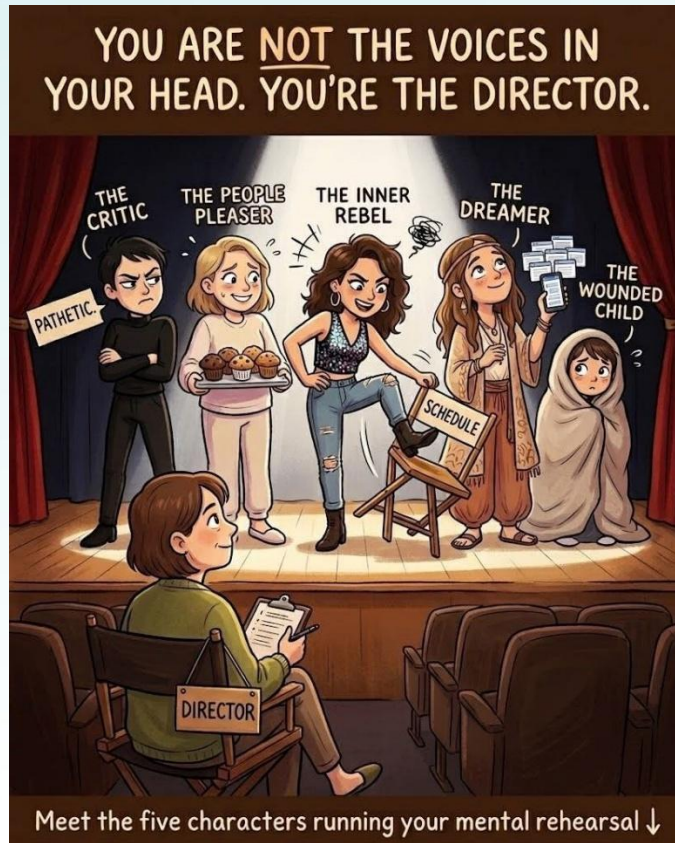
Maybe fifty kids are waiting below to race each other. I'm betting half of them aren't really sure why they're even there. I'm sure some love it; some will be indifferent and some might get really upset. And I know that pushing yourself out of your comfort zone is good, and exercise is certainly good. But I can't help feeling this is all a bit mad.

This morning I'd remembered children have nervous systems.
This afternoon I'd forgotten I do too.

My one a day quotes for this week are:

1. If it's not yours, don't take it.
If it's not right, don't do it.
If it's not true, don't say it.
If you don't know, be quiet. (unknown)
2. "All of Western medicine is built on getting rid of pain, which is not the same as healing. Healing is actually the capacity to hold pain." Gabor Maté
3. "a safe place is not minus conflict. safety means we can have conflict and nobody's in danger of being shamed, silenced, or fired."
4. A large part of living well is learning not to panic about time — noticing it, respecting it, and choosing what matters while it passes anyway.
5. Children adapt to the emotional climate they grow up in. If the world feels tense, staying alert makes sense.
6. Most inherited anxiety isn't taught, it's mirrored.
7. Yelling at someone doesn't make your point valid, it only shows your inability to communicate effectively

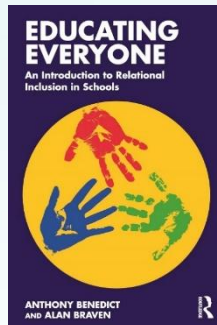
My two print and stick to the wall images this week are:



My recommended read this week is about why emotions are rational: [Emotions are rational](#)
[| Daniel Vanello » IAI TV](#)

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:

We suffer more from imagination than from reality. (Seneca)

Thanks for reading
Anthony Benedict

CEO Ambition Community Trust