

Editorial: We Are Limitless Difference

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In 2011 I graduated with a PhD entitled *The Gateless Gate of Home Education Discovery* (2011). In that thesis—my gate into academia, provided by gatekeeping examiners—I suggested the field of alternative education (and especially home education) had no gates, but many valid entrances. I quoted a few times from Zen koans, just to prove the point...If I extend the metaphor today there are likely not even hedges around the edges of the field of alternative education. I notice this as I edit this journal, given the wide range of work and topics offered...and the lack of clear identity. Or so it seems. This editorial aims to change that, once and for all? You see: *We are different. We are not limited. We have an identity.* This threefold label of “We are Limitless Difference” needs explanation.

I’ll explain it thus: Our disciplinary identity is not based on tribalism, but on a way of thinking. This way of thinking combines our interests at the deepest level of seeking freedom as a project for living. It unites us. It identifies us.

A lack of gates or hedges? Our thinking is without dogma. There nevertheless are in alternative education paths worn in where people tread together to enter the field; there are borders. Ways we follow, if you like. In this issue articles speak of people acting, thinking together. In doing so they create the paths in alternative education as a field. I, in acting as a gatekeeper for what is Other Education appropriate or not create the borders. How do I do this given the limitless nature of possibilities that is the difference involved?

I’ve pitched my tent semi-permanently on the edge of this field. I notice some of those who come and go and what they have in common. I notice they don’t know that their work (I’m losing the countryside metaphor now...) is on common ground. We need to get serious about recognising the concepts of alternatives. That’s why I’ve finally decided to put it down in writing: We are limitless difference.

I know what is “other education” by virtue of its status as eschewing a project of education involving clear cut binaries of winner, loser, success, failure, included, excluded, new, old, believer, non-believer. It’s almost as though the project we are *not interested* in here has a certain vision of the human or the person as limited and limiting. *Other* education has no such vision, which *is* its vision.

Dispersal and dilution of acknowledgment of alternative like-minded thinkers continues because a vision for an alternative educational world is still weak. It’s still

seen as a quirky thing, this “other” education. I suggest this is because an other, alternative vision is part of an idea of personhood we are still to fully acknowledge and embrace as possible, despite that many do live with and by it. Of those who live by it these are the non-racists, the feminists, the ecologists with a sustainability vision, the pro-migration voices. People are welcome, whoever they are, accepted as found—education is the transmutator, but only according to volition and non-coercion because in limitless difference only the individual can choose and know the path.

That is what *other* education is about. Any education working from this premise is other. Its educational activity is based on an idea of the inherent sameness of all people as persons and simultaneously of their difference. Furthermore this embracing of all as same based on a welcoming of difference and the freedoms difference should afford extends to a sense that, as one vision of persons, we all need to be co-responsible for the health of our communities and our planet. In other words, taking responsibility for self means taking responsibility for other. We and our educational vision are defined by this. It can be our dogma. The opposite—what currently is conceived of as the norm—is that someone else (the teacher, the state, the parent) takes responsibility for us and for our relation to the other. This latter, current model, doesn’t work to enable people to thrive as best they can, nor our planet to live with health. We choose what works.

It’s that simple. So, in place of being silenced politely by people who do not get or like the ways of thinking we alternative believer-knowers have, we need to speak, resolutely and unremittingly, about what we think and do as positive, as working. This makes an identity that insists it take its place in the gap of silence that marginalises and side-lines. We are limitless difference.

To speak with positive identity into silence is the superb conclusion to a thesis I examined, as gatekeeper, last year, by Clark (2018) which spoke of LGBT silencing in schools. As far as I am concerned she has found the formula to dissolve *all* forms of discrimination. The principle applies for alternative education (or any prejudiced area). We need to boldly create, replace and insist on the positives of our vision being the language we and others use. Only then can we aim for a balanced picture, devoid of the prejudice against alternatives as quirky (“hippie,” “weird,” “wild,” “unusual,” “a novelty”) so often encountered. Instead of moaning about why alternative education is ignored or dismissed we just need, I think after having read Clark (2018), to keep talking about that and why it works, how positive it is. Then it will rise. Then, *after this*, once safe, we can go for all kinds of comments in a fair way, unhindered by fighting for breath and platform. Because our identity has been positively affirmed in the gap of silence we will be unblocked by conservative forces using our weak concepts against us to hold the power we ought to have.

In educational research, discussion, knowing, communicating, it is important to feel orientated. Without a sense of direction the argument, debate or deliberations

can lose meaning. Gates can provide that, so if we have so few, if any, and more a network of paths (often with little signage)—well, we may need to rethink the gateless thing. Naming, signing, smiling. Just smiling. Not moaning and complaining. Then naming, signing again, pointing positively to what is.

A.S. Neill believed in the inherent goodness of children (from which we can extend the idea of the inherent goodness of people). His belief affected me profoundly when I first encountered it. I agree. So too, I believe in the inherent rightness of education for freedom because people who are good will use freedom somewhat wisely and that freedom will let the goodness be—all we need is education that allows this to emerge. Through speaking into silences with positive vision we make our gates and our paths—our territory, our identity—and thus it is allowed to emerge. This is what it means to be using other ways to think ourselves into relation with the world than the ones we are given by systems. To speak up and offer concepts by which to know ourselves as free is what I hope to find in submissions to Other Education.

I wish Other Education to play its part in contributing to a world where people coming together on our common ground of difference, strength, freedom and empowerment validate uniqueness. Please join us. Every published contribution matters.

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We all need to play a part in reducing emissions and creating ways to draw them down via rewilding, sustainable living, care and solutions for the environment. What is the point of an open access journal acting for the future of children if this is not here mentioned? Please speak with others about this need.
Thank you.

References

- Lees, Helen E. (2011). *The Gateless Gate of home education discovery: What happens to the self of adults upon discovery of the possibility and possibilities of an educational alternative?* PhD thesis. Department of Education. Birmingham: University of Birmingham.
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