

Editorial: Interrogating the Other in Other Education

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Rosetta: This year, more than ever before, it's been hard not to think deeply about that word "other" in the journal title. It's been a year when other has taken on so many resonances, and when the lethal potential of being an other has become so visible to people around the world. The George Floyd murder underscored what happens when you build a society around the othering of Black people. And the immigration crisis at the U.S. border—like the refugee crisis in Europe and around the world—is fundamentally about the problem of "the other"—what we owe those whose "otherness" puts them in immediate peril. The principles that undergird *Other Education* have always been, obliquely, about these issues. As the journal has always demonstrated, traditional schooling too often normalizes our sense that certain people should be classified as other—those who learn differently, look differently, speak differently. And alternative education has often sought to redress that, by mobilizing different spaces, pedagogies, hierarchies. But as we think today about ways to address the marginalizing of others, I keep coming back to the value of public education; the principles—idealistic as they are—of bringing children together in one publicly funded system where they can experience—as Dewey would say—the broadest forms of association. So I am asking you, Helen: How can we reconcile other forms of education, celebrated in OE, with that larger and more urgent goal?

Helen: Rosetta these questions and concerns about public versus private education are for me a dead end alley. Neither yet seem to me to work alone, although I find alternative education has better pedagogy for the democratic and inter-personal democracy and public education has better broad social democracy. Each can learn from the other. I increasingly find alternative education outside of the broad social democratic project becomes too inward and that is troubling, but social project schooling is disastrously voiceless and violent at the emotional and pedagogic level. In sum, I consider we do not need changes to education nor educational revolution. We need understanding of the self as an entity requiring emotional growth. We need to privilege "state of mind" (Lees, 2021), not learning. Alternative education has taught us people learn naturally. They don't need to be taught. What we need to help people with is in

understanding their anxiety, fears, sadnesses and axis of happiness. From this learning emerges. I do believe in social projects but only those wherein people are free to choose how to do this, together, whilst choosing.

Rosetta: I cannot disagree with anything you're saying, but I'm a practical person, and I want to see how this would work in action. It would seem to have to start with a total transformation of teacher preparation: focusing not on pedagogy or content, or even on social justice; but on diagnosing and addressing the nuances of individual children's psychological needs. Or maybe doing all of that. That's a steep ask for teachers, especially since—at least now in America—they are poorly paid compared to other professionals, too many are still drawn from the lowest quadrants of their graduating classes, and too often have little agency in their classrooms. You say you are not advocating “education revolution,” but what you are describing is indeed education revolution and “professional revolution.”

Helen: Aha. Caught out. Yes it's education revolution. But not because we make education better or improved or value one model over another or indeed see one setting as superior. Nothing is to improve. Nothing is to judge. Nothing wins. Instead everyone, and this very much includes teachers who don't at all lose their jobs or their vocation nor their students, because a “state of mind” approach took hold. No. Teachers need a good state of mind too and in this approach everyone without exception is considered worthy of having their state of mind valued and helped. Again I go back to what we've learnt from alternative education philosophies of not interfering. Help is on offer. It is not forced. The point is that a person doesn't start from what they know but from how they feel and what state of mind they bring to any given situation. This is an *other* education in a very deep sense and overturns even the other educations the journal already presents. How does it value the Other? There is no other with a state of mind approach because the other is based on seeable quantifiable aspects of the world in play. The mind is not part of that dramatic game. So each mind is a mind. No more nor less. The aim is for that mind to gather to itself an education but not at the cost of state of mind. The mind decides the education to hand, not the world. Around the person whose mind is the focus are infrastructure, people, circumstances. So to allow the mind the right to be in a good state, lots of practical aspects are involved. Education as learning new information is even going on. But not as a priority over state of mind. This affects speed of learning, ways of learning, outcomes. Revolution? Yes. But affecting education fundamentally because we have changed our vision of how people live. We don't need to touch the diversity of pedagogies that already exists. Possibly add to them but no need to worry some are right and some wrong. It's a way of living that allows each person and people together to have the best chance to be

true to themselves and good as a part of community. I have a question for you in this context of interrogation of the other: Why do you believe in schooling given it is so problematic?

Rosetta: Well, it really comes down to subjective experience, doesn't it? For me, my fundamental belief in schooling is grounded in the fact that I know and have experienced so many fantastic teachers—including a mother, a sister, and a husband (who you know too!). All of them changed and change lives for the better. That doesn't give less urgency to the legitimate concerns you express, or to my own sense that education—both public and private—is deeply flawed. But I believe that great teachers—if we could get enough of them—are the answer to the epidemic of “othering” in the world, and that they are the hope for a kinder, wiser, and more just culture.

Helen: That's true. Teachers matter a lot when they care and are empathic. They can have profound positive impact. I guess it's about consistency. Not all teachers care or are great or right. So there needs to be a plan B. Or I would call it plan A of self-directed care for state of mind as the primary focus and educational guide, with the ever present hope one encounters one of these special and valuable pedagogues. The Other should always be a positive. I think if plan A is in place it would have a better chance of being so. I think the respect you have for teachers is important but if they are themselves educational plan A (the first port of resource) it creates risk: subservience and giving one's consent away unwillingly, if those teachers do not understand consent and voice. This means one is possibly estranged from oneself by and in education—then the Other can become a threat, for one is not “at home” to self-protect. One cannot welcome the Other in, so to speak for one is not around to open the door to self and greet. For me respect for how we be and become with self and other through our state of mind comes first. Schools play no part in that except of course as a place to encounter some good teachers such as those you mention who I know are the kinds of people all children ought to get the luck to meet and learn with. The Other in education is an open, positive question? I think this dialogue embodies that. Do you agree?

Rosetta: Yes, I agree. I think everybody needs to be in therapy. But then, of course, the same problem exists with therapists as with teachers. It only works if you have great ones.

References

Lees, H. E. (2021). Alternative education in light of the Coronavirus crisis. In. Online seminar: PESGB and Cambridge Faculty of Education: Cambridge Philosophy of Education Seminar Series.



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