

The emotional and therapeutic turn in education: challenging the 'vulnerability zeitgeist'

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INTRODUCTION

I want to say at the outset that I'm feeling vulnerable this morning because I suffer from ViPAD –



10 ways to combat ViPAD (Visiting Professor Anxiety Disorder)

Are you happy ?

Do you have low self-esteem or are you a narcissist ?

What are your emotional barriers to learning?

Do our 'what makes you feel vulnerable?' quiz

But I'm OK now, thanks to the support I get from Professor Kristiina Brunila.....I have had some counselling this morning about my vulnerability and the reasons in my childhood that have created it...

Although I say this 'tongue in cheek' (I don't know how this translates in Finnish!), vulnerability is everywhere, creating the belief that the most serious to the most mundane life experiences are 'risks' that make us vulnerable, and that we need

emotional support to deal with those risks. A growing preoccupation with vulnerability is perhaps the most important manifestation of what I call the 'emotional and therapeutic turn' in education policy and practice, and in society and culture more widely.

Identifying new and important research questions often starts by noticing small everyday changes in how we treat people, our assumptions about them, our informal and formal assessments of them, or how they talk about themselves and present themselves to us.

My interest in what Kate Brown, lecturer in social policy at the University of York calls 'the vulnerability zeitgeist' and Ken McLaughlin, senior lecturer in mental health at Manchester Metropolitan University calls an 'age of vulnerability' was sparked by comparing images and assessments of students now, with those at the start of my education career with unemployed teenagers in the late 70s and early 80s and then with adults who we still refer to as 'non-traditional' students.

This was a time of mass youth unemployment, with the first wave of employment schemes introduced by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government, alternative qualifications with alternative forms of pedagogy and assessment for low achieving students, and the start of a big wave of programmes to get 'non-traditional students' into higher education. Many of the young people I taught 'life and social skills' to in the declining economy of South Yorkshire, a once-industrial region of the north of England, were the sons and daughters of coal miners engaged in a bitter dispute with the government over pit closures between 1982 and 1984, which the miners lost. This political context defined the lives of the young people I worked with in Rotherham and many were highly politicised. From 1985 to 1989, I worked with working class women on 'access to higher education courses'.

The idea that those adults and young people were vulnerable didn't enter their heads, or the heads of those who taught them. We saw their difficulties in structural terms rather than psycho-emotional ones.

This brief reference to historical context is important. Our contemporary ideas about students couldn't be more different today.

An age of vulnerability?

- vulnerable children, at risk learners
- learners with fragile identities, reluctant learners
- young people with an 'exhausted learning identity'
- the disaffected, disengaged and hard to reach
- low self esteemers
- people with fractured and fragmented lives, complex needs
- young people vulnerable to the risk of not meeting the achievement targets/being bored
- children from 'troubled families', children with troubling behaviour

It's now common to hear policy makers, teachers, support workers, researchers and teacher educators use these terms. The Social Exclusion Unit for the previous government offered people with 'fractured and fragmented lives' and 'complex needs' and the Coalition government refers to children from 'troubled families', leading to the emergence of references to troubled children and their troubling behaviour.

These labels have 3 things in common: a focus on emotional and psychological vulnerability, an expanding range of people deemed by policy makers to be vulnerable and a growing everyday sensibility that we are all, to a greater or lesser extent, vulnerable.

In my research in vocational and adult education, teachers use these labels to describe asylum seekers learning English, the children of asylum seekers, the "*low self-esteemers in my class*", working class boys, young people on entry to employment programmes, or 14-year olds disaffected with school education.

In his welcome to new staff in 2003, the vice-chancellor of a well-known English university told us that non-traditional students are vulnerable because of their 'emotional baggage' and their emotional barriers to learning.

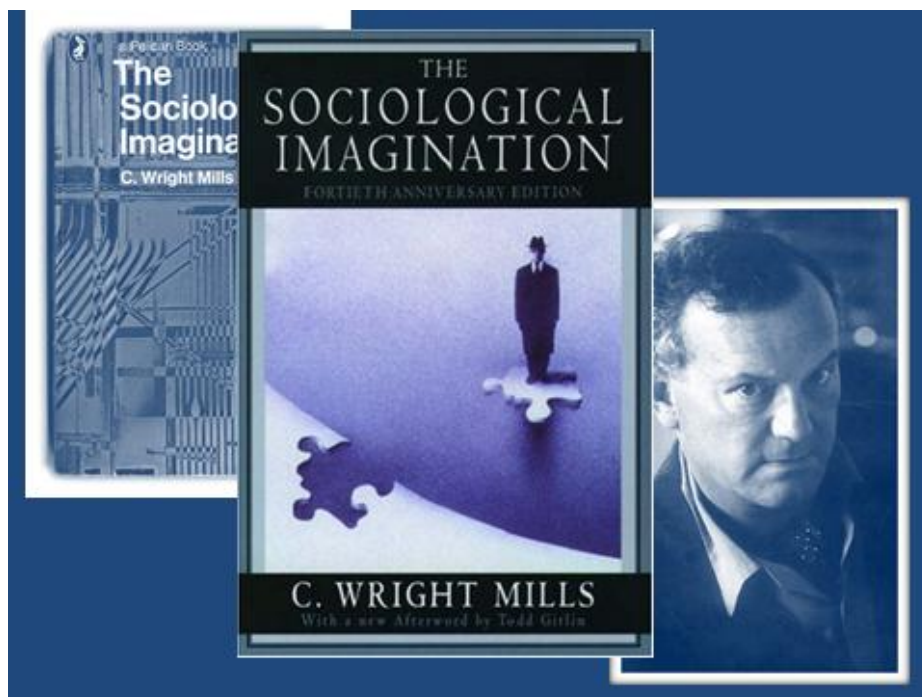
The human targets of such labels also increasingly refer to themselves in this way. In 2011, I was one of 4 university policy commissioners in an inquiry about the future of public services and their role in changing citizens' behaviour. A group of homeless young people in one of our witness sessions used the term frequently to describe themselves, defining it widely, from feeling very insecure in a scary, horrible world to the serious material problems of being homeless and unemployed.

Some young people recognise a different class dimension to vulnerability. In 2012, an 18 year old student at Wellington School, one of Britain's most influential and expensive private schools, escorted me to the cloistered library where I was taking part in a public debate at the annual Times Education Festival. He asked what we were going to discuss. I told him that we were debating whether schools are facing a crisis of emotional well-being and then asked 'out of interest, would you describe yourself as vulnerable?' With an incredulous look, he said 'Vulnerable? In *my* circumstances?'. He understood intuitively that class, social and educational privilege immunise him from such labels.

But perhaps he is unusual. Self-imposed and official descriptions of vulnerability are no longer confined to those at the educational and social margins. It's increasingly common for high achieving, middle class, confident post-graduate and undergraduate students to refer to themselves as vulnerable. My god-daughter, who is studying Philosophy and French at university, tells me that it has become a badge of pride, a form of competitive identity, to say you are more stressed and anxious than anyone else. Her refusal to do this makes her friends uncomfortable; vulnerable! Mental health and counselling colleagues in my university say that more students than ever before are claiming to be anxious, stressed, depressed, having panic attacks, unable to cope.

I need to say at the outset that these examples shouldn't suggest I don't care about students' anxiety, or that I don't believe they feel vulnerable or that I never feel anxious or under pressure. Nor am I suggesting that people don't need emotional and psychological support.

But following the interest of cultural historian Raymond Williams in how words and terms are embedded in culture and how they change, I'm interested in why vulnerability has become such a preoccupation at this point in history, and in this culture, and where it comes from. I'm interested in who we regard as vulnerable, or who sees themselves in that way, how vulnerability changes how we regard each other, the ways in which we present ourselves to others, and the ways we respond to expressions of vulnerability. I'm interested in how vulnerability changes our everyday expectations and practices in universities, adult education and schools, and whether we should regard these changes as educationally and politically progressive.



Sociological interests

- ‘the varieties of men and women that come to prevail’ at a particular period, in a particular context...how ‘private troubles become public issues’ (Wright-Mills 1959)
- modes through which we are made subjects; discourses and practices through which a problem is framed, responded to; the truths we tell about and to ourselves and others(Foucault...)
- what the emotional turn and vulnerability ‘do’ to educational subjects and practices
 - the silence of curriculum subjects
 - curriculum subject as instruments for other things
 - the hollowing out of ‘education’ for all social problems

In grappling with these questions, I’ve revisited some influential ideas of American sociologist Charles Wright Mills. Writing in 1959, Mills urged social scientists to use what he called a sociological imagination, to combine history, psychology and sociology to help people see that the troubles they experience as private individual problems are really public issues that come from wider structures of class, culture, economics and politics. Different historical periods influence what we see as private troubles and public issues.

Mills also asked a deeper question: how should we understand the varieties of men and women that seem to prevail in this society and in this period? What kinds of human nature are revealed in the conduct and character we observe in this society, in this period?

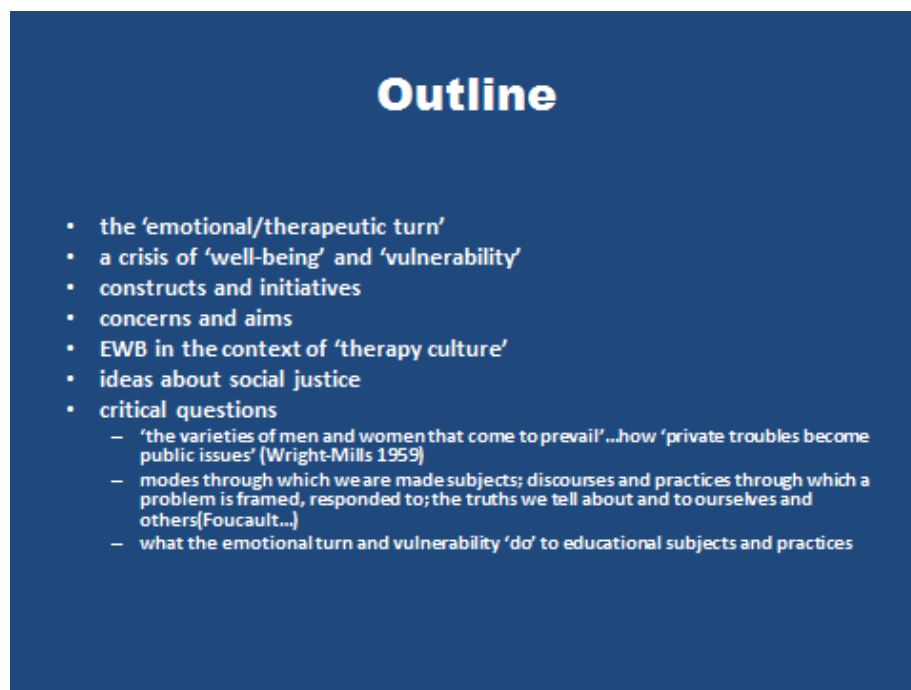
Mills argued that addressing these questions requires social scientists to shift between the political and the psychological, and between small personal everyday experiences, to larger social and historical shifts. This helps us to understand how individuals and social groups are products of the wider society in which they live.

Of course Mills presaged Michel Foucault who was preoccupied with the modes through which we are made subjects, the consistent ways we see ourselves and

others, how discourses and practices both frame a problem, how a problem creates those discourses and practices, how discourses and practice create human subjects.

Unlike Mills who was from a pre-therapeutic culture, Foucault takes us directly into the realms of the therapeutic and its disciplinary yet empowering role in defining and governing us as subjects. As many Foucauldian scholars looking at therapeutic education observe, we have all, to a greater or lesser extent, internalised therapeutic discourses and technologies of the self in everyday practices of confession, disciplinary power, performance and bio-politics. And as Stephen Ball observes, all discourses and performances are simultaneously empowering and constraining: therapisation is no exception – a point I shall return to later.

So we need to think about the discourses and practices or enactments of vulnerability, and their links to the therapeutic turn in education policy, in complex ways.



I'll start by defining briefly what I mean by an emotional and therapeutic turn, and then show how vulnerability both arises from and responds to that turn.

The 'emotional/therapeutic turn'

- preoccupation with emotion
 - in processes for teaching and learning,
 - as barriers to learning
 - a focus for research
 - a curriculum subject in its own right
 - a counter to dominance of intellect and rationality
 - A concern with social justice
- 'therapeutic culture/therapy culture'
 - ways in which ideas, claims, narratives, mindsets, ways of thinking and practices move from psychoanalysis, counselling, psychology and self-help therapy into popular culture, everyday life and policy
- the 'DSM-ification' of society
 - categorising, syndroming and disordering

The 'vulnerability zeitgeist' (Brown 2014)

- 1997 Law Commission
- 2000 Care Standards Act
 - from specific, confined categories of those unable to look after themselves or vulnerable to abuse or exploitation, to many categories including those receiving health or palliative care including counselling....
 - *risk, resilience, survival, vulnerability are inextricably intertwined...*

Official government definitions have expanded hugely since 1995 when the Law Commission defined vulnerable people as someone who is, or may be, "in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, of age or illness and who is, or may be, unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation".

The Care Standards Act of 2000 and Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act of 2006 widened the criteria to include those in care, sheltered housing or lawful custody,

receiving any form of health care, receiving prescribed welfare services, requiring assistance in the conduct of her or his affairs.

The last 3 criteria expand vulnerability significantly because they include counselling or palliative care alongside other forms of prescribed support provided by an independent hospital, independent clinic, independent agency or National Health Service body.

In her review of Labour and Coalition government approaches to vulnerability between 1998 and 2010, lecturer in social policy at York University, Kate Brown, argues that these malleable definitions reflect changing government priorities: enhancing state and professional power through therapeutic and disciplinary interventions, appealing to a particular idea of citizenship, and justifying new anti-social behaviour mechanisms and reductions in welfare provision.

So in policy terms, the young man at Wellington was right to see vulnerability as irrelevant to him. But although policy definitions create new meanings, the much more inclusive everyday examples I started with come from wider cultural and social concerns and the responses that schools, universities and colleges have made to these concerns. A key influence is a perceived crisis of emotional well-being.

2. A CRISIS OF EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Pupils' wellbeing neglected in pursuit of exam success, charity chief warns
January 2011

School lessons in self-control 'are as important as numeracy'
May 2009

Wellbeing: a poor state of mind
March 2009

Mental problems among young 'twice 1930s level'
June 2007

Labour's answer to school discipline: Teach lessons in 'happiness and emotional wellbeing'
September 2007

Kid-life crisis February 2002

Can children as young as three be depressed?
September 2010

More children are suffering from mental health problems, says report
April 2008

Children's depression stores up trouble for the future if untreated
December 2009

Child mental health problems 'to double'
January 2009

Early help 'key to tackling mental health problems'
February 2011

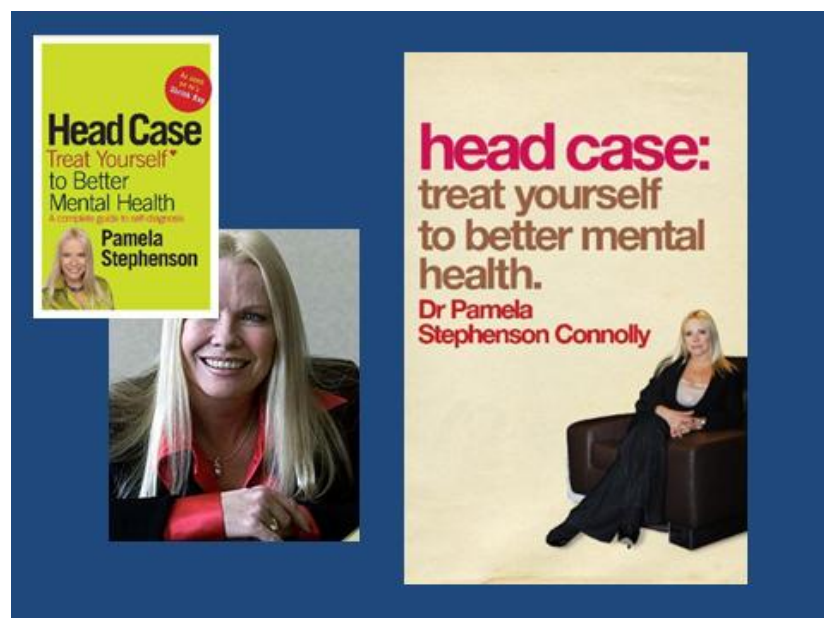
I've selected only a tiny number of examples from a deluge of reports, academic studies and media articles since 1998. The UNICEF survey into child well-being was

widely publicised in 2007, claiming to show that British young people report the highest levels of unhappiness in Europe.

A study for the Nuffield Foundation in the same year reported that more than a million children have mental health problems, doubling the numbers of a generation ago. A survey of over 8,000 children for that study found that a third of those aged 14-16 had 'conduct disorders', such as aggressive, disruptive or anti-social behaviour. 4% of children aged 5-16 had emotional disorders such as stress, anxiety and depression, 2% had hyperactive behaviour or attention problems, 6% had conduct disorders, and 2% had more than one type of disorder.

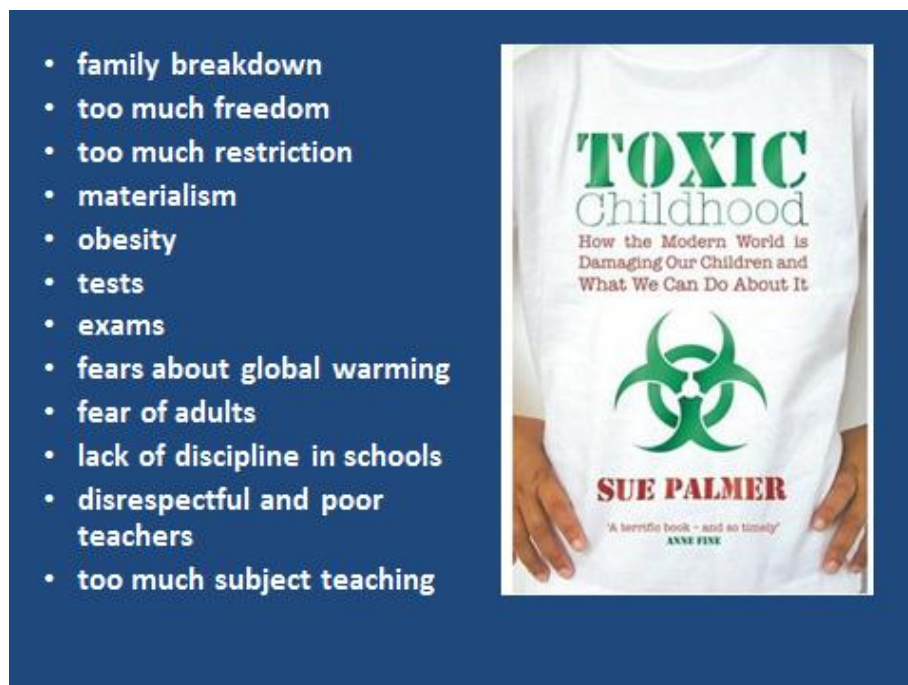
Michael Little, Director of the Dartington Trust, an enthusiastic supporter of therapeutic interventions in British schools, claimed that children diagnosed with a conduct disorder at 5 are 20% more likely to be unemployed and to have relationship and health problems.

Such sweepingly confident assertions are not only very common but also rarely challenged. Yet predictions, estimates and definitions of problems vary enormously. The book *Nurturing Emotional Literacy*, written by educational psychologist Peter Sharp, tells parents and teachers that *"approximately 1 in 4 of us will have a mental health problem at some time in our life, requiring treatment or support from the caring professions... and therefore vulnerable."*



In one of many popular guides, Pamela Stephenson-Connolly claims that 40% of the British public will “*undergo psychological difficulties at some time*” defining a mental disorder as when someone has “*disabling psychological symptoms, an emotional or behavioural problem or dysfunction in thinking, acting or feeling... all of which can cause distress and may impair how someone functions*” (2007: 6).

The causes of these very slippery emotional problems are also very wide-ranging.

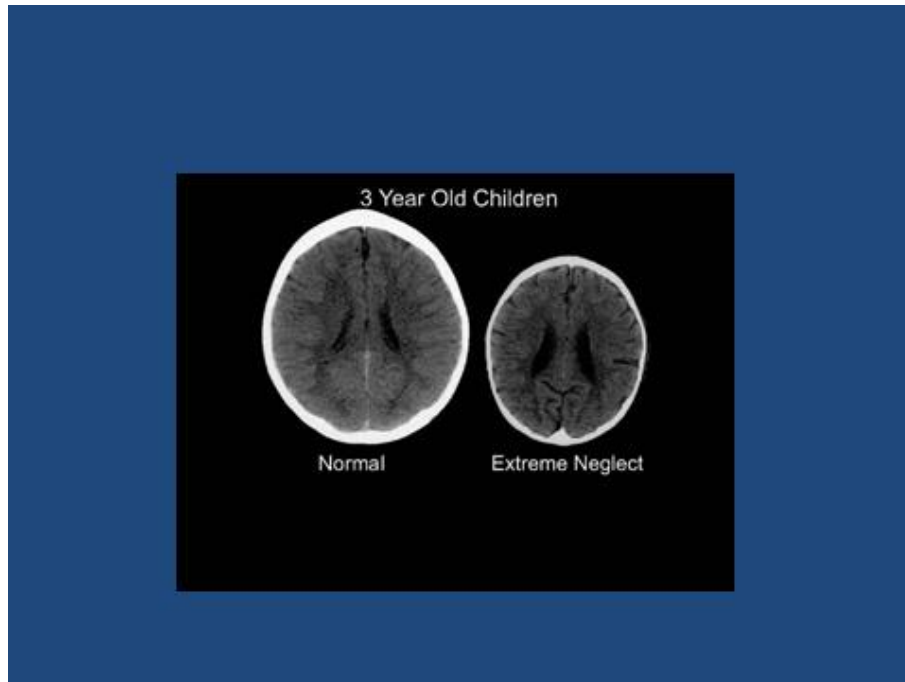


The book ‘Toxic Childhood’ by psychologist Sue Palmer, widely publicised in 2006, warns that children’s lives ‘are being poisoned’ by all these things.

4 years ago, the children’s commissioner in the Labour government reflected a very widespread view in education, that the constant pressure of tests, an ‘unengaging and irrelevant curriculum’, insufficient support for those with emotional needs, widespread bullying and lack of student ‘voice’ in school decision-making all increase stress and anxiety.

Research in Sweden shows very similar claims and views. The same ideas are beginning to appear in Finland too.

In Britain, harder explanations for this crisis come from the very selective use of ideas from psychology and neuroscience that started under the Labour government and is now embedded in social policy. Typical is a cross-party report on the need for early therapeutic intervention in families, written in 2012:

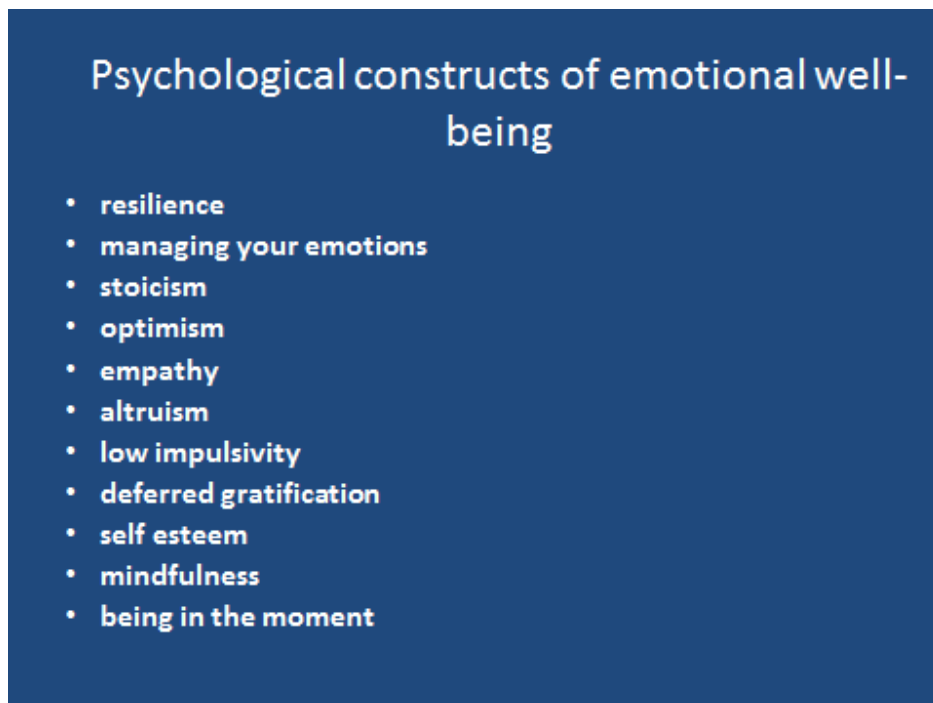


Deep, long-lasting, emotional attachment... has a positive effect on self-esteem, independence, the ability to make both temporary and enduring relationships, empathy, compassion, and resiliency... People who have doubts about others, cannot make relationships, shy from intimacy and aren't very trusting ... have avoidant attachment. Those who want to get close to others but have apprehensions about rejection.... hatitle report to Her Majesty's Government, 14-15).

Psychologists and neuroscientists disagree strongly about the scientific validity of these ideas but this hasn't stopped growing support for claims, expressed by Labour MP Frank Field for the Coalition government's review of social justice, that 'children's physical, emotional, language and cognitive development from pregnancy to age five are the foundations of the rest of their lives'.

All the main British political parties believe that adults are shaped irrevocably by their care in infancy and that the state must identify and 'support' inadequate parents and intervene in the emotional well-being of children and young people.

In her presentation to the All Party Parliamentary seminar on emotional well-being in classrooms that I attended in 2007, Professor Felicia Huppert, director of the Centre for Well-being at the University of Cambridge listed the psychological constructs of emotional well-being.



She asserted that about 40% of these are genetic traits, 10% are affected by material conditions and the rest are amenable to intervention as a form of 'emotional inoculation'. Other psychologists have different figures for the effects of material conditions but the overall claim that we can intervene to good effect is powerful.

The expanding categories of vulnerability add weight to these ideas.

3. RESPONDING TO CRISIS

A huge tide of very diverse concerns found a ready audience in the New Labour government. Starting with the work of its Social Exclusion Unit, Labour made the

emotional and psychological effects of social deprivation and exclusion a central focus for ideas about social justice and the role of the welfare state. Sociologist Anthony Giddens, one of the architects of Labour's 'Third Way' ideology, argues: *"welfare is not in essence an economic concept, but a psychic one;*

concerning as it does well-being....welfare institutions must be concerned with fostering psychological benefits, as well as economic benefits" (1998, 117).

So what responses have come out of all this in schools, colleges and universities, and how do they change educational expectations and practices?

In general, there has been a marked shift from targeted specialist interventions for those deemed to have problems, to a wide variety of universal approaches.

Last year, I and my colleague Lydia Lewis carried out a study of the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies Programme that the second largest city in Britain, Birmingham, has implemented in all its primary schools.

According to teacher-advisers in our study, PATHS creates a virtuous circle from children's ability to recognise 'uncomfortable' or 'comfortable' feelings, label and communicate them and then generate solutions. Children are trained in rudimentary counselling skills to help each other do this before applying their understanding to what might have made famous contemporary and historical figures feel vulnerable, and how they might have coped.

The second approach is very similar, but less prescriptive. The previous government's social and emotional aspects of learning strategy for primary and secondary schools, or SEAL, encourages schools to deal with the emotional roots of behaviour and to teach strategies and skills.



Examples of outcomes:

Primary

- I can change the way I feel by reflecting on my experiences and reviewing the way I think about them

Secondary

- I can see the world from other people's point of view, can feel the same emotion as they are feeling, and take account of their intentions, preferences and beliefs

Those of you who attended the excellent lecture by Liz Jones and Rachael Holmes on Friday last week will see immediately that this policy picture shows happy, idealised children with apparently good emotional well-being!

The programme defines 42 learning outcomes for three to eleven year olds and 50 for secondary school pupils. In pre and primary schools, these include:

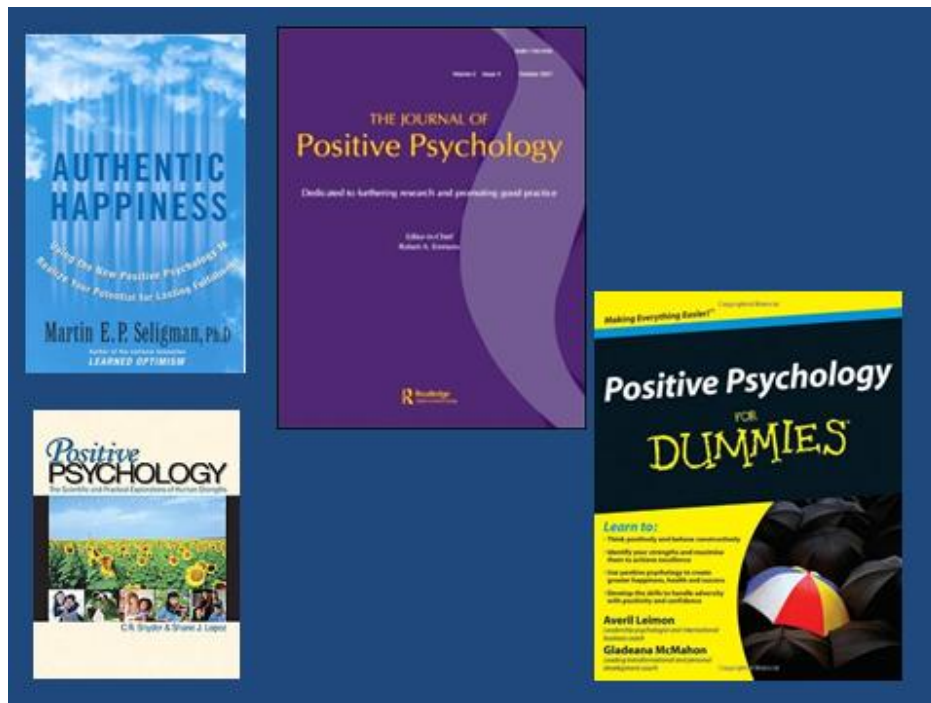
“I understand that changing the way I think about people and events changes the way I feel about them”

In secondary schools, outcomes include:

“I can make sense of what has happened to me in my life and understand that things that come from my own history can make me feel prone to being upset or angry for reasons that others may find it difficult to understand”

and “I can see the world from other people's point of view, can feel the same emotion as they are feeling and take account of their intentions, preferences and beliefs”

I don't know about you, but I'm sure my friends, family and colleagues will testify that even this very emotionally literate 58 year old is still, as we say in the world of competence-based assessment, 'working towards'.....



Both PATHS and SEAL combine bits of Cognitive Behavioural Psychology, emotional intelligence and positive psychology. Supporters present them as a progressive alternative to targeted interventions because they don't single out those deemed to have problems. Instead, their inclusive approach identifies the social and individual constructs I listed earlier and builds on the assets and strategies that already exist in individuals and groups rather than pathologising those who lack those capabilities.

Specialist and universal interventions

- **Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning Strategy 2005-10, PATHS, Penn Resilience Programme**
- **peer mentoring, anti-bullying, drama-workshops, emotional audits, PSHE, EL strategies, circle time, diagnosis of self-esteem, learning support and counselling services, resilience and 'happiness' lessons, restorative justice and reconciliation strategies**
- **'mental toughness training'**
- **'life competence'**
- **nurture groups, EBSUs, psychological assessments, interventions for category disorders**

Positive intervention

- **'positive mental health'**
- **prevention and 'inoculation'**
- **early intervention**
- **argument that EWB comprises genetic factors - about 40% created by individual traits, material factors - 10%: the rest can be affected by interventions**
- **an overwhelmingly behavioural and psychological meaning**
 - **embedded in and promoted by 'therapy culture'**

My colleague Lisa Procter's compelling study of SEAL in primary schools, Val Gillies' study of young people in an Emotional and Behavioural Support Unit in urban secondary schools, and the official evaluation of primary SEAL by researchers at the University of Manchester, illuminate children's responses.

Some embrace the new assessments of their emotional identities and capabilities. Others say that their new emotional literacy skills are useful for getting their way

with parents. Others gain status from teachers singling them out as emotionally capable to mentor those who aren't. Some simply decide to take on this role.

Some are frustrated that the emotional strategies SEAL offers are useless for dealing with the profound social and economic realities of their lives. Some resist well-meaning but often casual judgements about their conduct disorders, disaffection from class teaching, poor social skills, emotional difficulties and lack of 'emotional literacy' and speculations about their emotional histories. Others welcome a diagnosis, or at least find a benefit from having one.

Others resist the activities and the motives behind them. In data I collected in 2007 for my book, the *Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education*, Lee, then 6, described his feelings about circle time: 'sometimes she starts with asking what we did at the weekend. I don't mind that – I say that we played football or something – but then she goes onto private things. I don't say anything about that.' Me: why not?. Lee – because it's none of her business'.

4 years later, Lee still adores school and his teacher. He has also come to resist speculations about his emotional state. Waiting eagerly for his parents to return from parents' evening, he asked what Miss Robson said. 'Well' said his mother... she says you're one of the best children in the class but she's worried that you're anxious because you're always asking what we'll be doing next, how long will something take, what will we do after that?' Very indignantly, he said '*Anxious?* No WAY am I *anxious*. I'm just very pedantic'.

Other children are enthusiastic. From the same programme that Lee took part in, a 7 year old boy embraced its emotions vocabulary. Now 16, 'feeling stressy' or 'being anxious' remains part of his repertoire.

In her study of therapisation in Finnish rehabilitation programmes for young adults, my colleague Kristiina Brunila shows that similar responses of resistance, compliance, indifference and enthusiasm are all evident amongst young people who are made to take part in pseudo-psychological diagnoses of their disorders, emotional problems and the supposed causes of those problems.

In Britain, the Coalition government withdrew formal support for centralised programmes such as SEAL in 2011 and opened schools to a growing market of emotional well-being products. A few weeks after the Department of Education archived its SEAL guidance, American actor Goldie Hawn met the Secretary of State to promote her mindfulness programme. A few months later, I attended a conference where Brigadier Rita Cornum from the United States army promoted the American army's 'resilience training programme – 'resilience work-out' to an enthusiastic audience of think tank researchers and private organisations running youth and education programmes before meeting the Secretary of State later that afternoon.

Many schools continue to use SEAL. Others have adopted their own programmes. A friend of mine's 16 year old son has had his Religious Education lessons replaced with 'mental toughness' training which will, he is told, make him better able to cope with and achieve in his exams. My university has just introduced resilience training for all trainee doctors who are told from the first day of their 7 year course that medicine is a highly stressful profession. Of course, medicine always has been a high stress profession, but now the assumption is that the trainees need training in resilience.

And although the British government doesn't like centralised training programmes for emotional well-being, the same government has just announced proposals to prosecute parents who cause emotional harm to their children: the desire of government to intervene in emotional well-being has not gone away.

Although there is strong criticism of these overtly behavioural approaches and some of the claims behind them, they are only a very small part of the emotional therapeutic turn in education.

Building on ideas about 'learning to learn' and building resilience, the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence is the first national education policy to make self esteem, a positive learning identity and resilience key goals of teaching in all subjects.

In other areas, such as mathematics education, some training courses for new teachers train them with methods to raise pupils' awareness of emotional fears and blocks to maths and to use a self-talk, problem-solving approach and feedback in lessons and on assessed work to change their negative effects on motivation and achievement and to highlight where pupils have shown resilience or not.

In adult education, Linden West advocates psychodynamic methods such as creative writing as ways of exploring the damaging legacies that come from previous educational and life experiences, and of unblocking emotions that hinder learning. In a recent article, he and colleagues argue that university teachers should address 'the profound but insufficiently understood psychosocial dimensions to misrecognition but also to recognition and transformative processes in learning' for non-traditional students (West et al 2014). I'm currently working on a project in the Arts and Humanities Research Council Connecting Communities programme which is exploring the implications of using mainstream adult education courses as vehicles for mutual support and recovery for adults with mental health problems.

Emphasis on emotional and therapeutic dispositions rather than learning subject knowledge is also evident in universities that increasingly encourage students to see themselves not as *students* of a particular subject but as *learners* who learn about themselves as lifelong learning learners and employable workers. Personal Development Portfolios, reflective diaries and journals, self and peer assessment, peer mentoring programmes, all encourage reflection on emotional barriers, strengths and weaknesses, confidence, resilience and self-esteem. In her study of university work-based learning programmes, Karen Willis shows that there's virtually no subject or workplace knowledge; instead, knowledge and narratives of the self are the focus.

So far, I've shown that a widening range of vulnerabilities permeates everyday life and education. I've argued that our preoccupation with vulnerability comes partly from a political redefining of vulnerability, and partly from widespread concern about a crisis of emotional and psychological vulnerability. I've shown some of the different educational responses that come from these changing meanings, and

argued that these concerns and responses embrace a spectrum of therapeutic ideas and practices that come in *ad hoc* ways from neuroscience, positive psychology as a new branch of cognitive and behavioural psychology, counselling, as well as from older traditions of child-centred learning and political consciousness raising. Part of the power of the therapeutic turn is its inclusive embracing of very different goals, traditions and practices.

Policy-based concerns for social justice

- **fostering emotional well-being/emotional health**
 - unprecedented crisis of mental health and well-being, emotional and behavioural problems
 - unprecedented stressful social and technological change
 - well-being as a human right- UNICEF, OECD etc
- **creating emotionally literate citizens**
- **countering effects of testing, targets and an 'irrelevant', alienating curriculum**
 - soft outcomes (personal capabilities/emotional capital/identity capital, confidence and self-esteem
 - the 'whole child' – bringing emotion and intellect together
- **compensating for the 'lasting legacies' of emotionally 'dysfunctional' families**
- **responding to young people "mind-numbingly bored" by, disaffected from, traditional education**

This inclusivity makes it a mistake to assume that behavioural interventions have no link to social justice. Their advocates present them in exactly those terms, including positive psychologists who are now acknowledging that perhaps their approach is too individualistic and overlooks social concerns. Recent research is interested in 'social justice commitment' as a psychological construct that is amenable to psychological training.

Positive psychology and social justice?

- long-standing theoretical premise that humility is essential for forgiveness, and forgiveness has positive associations with indicators of self-awareness and differentiation of the self (non-reactive, intentional negotiation between multiple selves) and emotional regulation AND social justice commitment (SJC)....
- no longer 'constructs' or 'capabilities' but 'virtues'
- 'further research on forgiveness, hope and other personal moral imperatives that may be related to social justice commitment can actualise the goal of understanding the dynamics of both personal and social well-being and inform training that has SJC as a desired outcome (Janowski et al 2014, *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 8, 5, 414-424)

Even a cursory historical analysis shows that the SEAL competence statements, reflecting on one's strengths, weaknesses and goals, recording them in personal development portfolios and journals, sitting in circles discussing emotional barriers to learning, using creative writing to unblock emotional barriers, or using mainstream subjects to develop emotional dispositions and skills are far from new. The rise of counselling based teaching methods that I was trained to use in the late 1970s with unemployed 16-19 year olds, and the expansion of counselling services in schools, colleges and universities are not new either. The 1979 Conservative government embedded voluntary and compulsory counselling in its employment schemes for adults and young people.

And through training in humanistic or person-centred counselling as a pedagogy, I, and many of my colleagues who began our careers in further and adult education and Access to Higher Education courses, were enthusiastic pioneers of what I've come to call 'therapeutic education'.

Therapeutic education and social justice

- **social problems are primarily individual psycho-emotional ones and amenable to intervention**
- **social justice comes from helping people overcome cyclical psycho-emotional legacies, preventative mental health before 'learning', 'engagement' and 'motivation' are possible**
- **'understand yourself before you can change the world...'**

A strong political dimension is therefore integral to therapeutic education. Coming from a long tradition of critical psychology, this political aspect aimed to counter the individualised training that behavioural psychology advocates. Although I didn't know about critical psychology in the 1970s, through feminist and radical politics, I saw myself in my early teaching career as part of a long tradition in that sees people's private troubles as public issues, where teachers and students help each other understand wider political and social factors that shape our lives. We assumed that we were taking part in political conscious-raising.

In the current context, these old radical interests in how education reproduces the inequalities of class, gender and race have also taken an emotional and therapeutic turn towards a focus on the ways in which inequality is lived emotionally and psychologically. Sociologist Diane Reay argues that teachers need to pay attention to 'the generative dynamic between thinking, feeling and practices' that illuminates 'the psychic landscape of social class' and the ways in which everyday and structural inequalities are framed and lived emotionally and psychologically (Reay 2005, 912).

Other feminist sociologists argue that teachers and researchers need to attend to 'the investments, feelings, fears, pains, pleasures and contradictory emotions entangled within the world of education' (Leathwood and Hey, 2009, 431/436).

For Dan Goodley and other disability researchers, vulnerability, like disability, has more radical aspirations because it disrupts the taken-for-granted, tacitly accepted, bounded rational learner at the heart of both mainstream and radical conceptions of education. For example, he argues, learners identified as having complex cognitive impairments, who might never be able to reach the highest levels of cognitive ability, trouble the end goal of much democratic and radical education because they *contravene the humanist premise that we all inhabit autonomous, rational, stable, and coherent subjectivities*. So there are deep philosophical and political imperatives for seeing vulnerability in a positive way.

THERAPEUTIC CULTURE

But it's also too easy to say that we're just seeing new versions of old social phenomena or new versions of old political commitments. Social scientists also have to think about what *is* new and why. Adapting Mills' famous slogan, I'm interested in why so few people disagree that private issues of vulnerability are public troubles that the education system must address.

For some, vulnerability explains an existential problem (life has no guarantees), an ongoing economic problem (shown by the indiscriminate vagaries of capitalism), pressures on the quality of life (we never have enough time to live), privatization of wealth and bankrupting of the state and the rallying call for political organization (we can't rely on the security of a welfare state that is being rolled back).

Yet while these factors are important, they're not the whole story. Unemployment, poverty, stress and alienation at work, social and technological upheaval, target driven systems, the fact that we will die or might get seriously ill, don't only characterise our times.

And while some countries such as America and Australia mirror many of the developments I've discussed, and Finland is beginning to do so, others with much worse social and economic problems don't. It also goes without saying that previous historical periods reveal very different ideas about well-being and vulnerability.

One explanation is the idea of therapeutic culture.



I first started to write in 2001 about the rise of therapeutic approaches to teaching and assessment throughout the British education system. My interest was sparked in 1998 by sociologist James Nolan in the States, followed in 2004 by Frank Furedi in the UK. Both showed how ideas and practices from different branches of therapy, psychology and counselling were emerging in popular culture, the media and everyday life, and were being taken up by policy makers in the welfare, education and legal systems of both countries.



In 2011, my colleague Ken McLaughlin examined how therapeutic culture has come to define claims for recognition of vulnerability in radical political and survivor movements. From an Australian context, another colleague, Katie Wright, presented the political and social benefits of a therapeutic society.

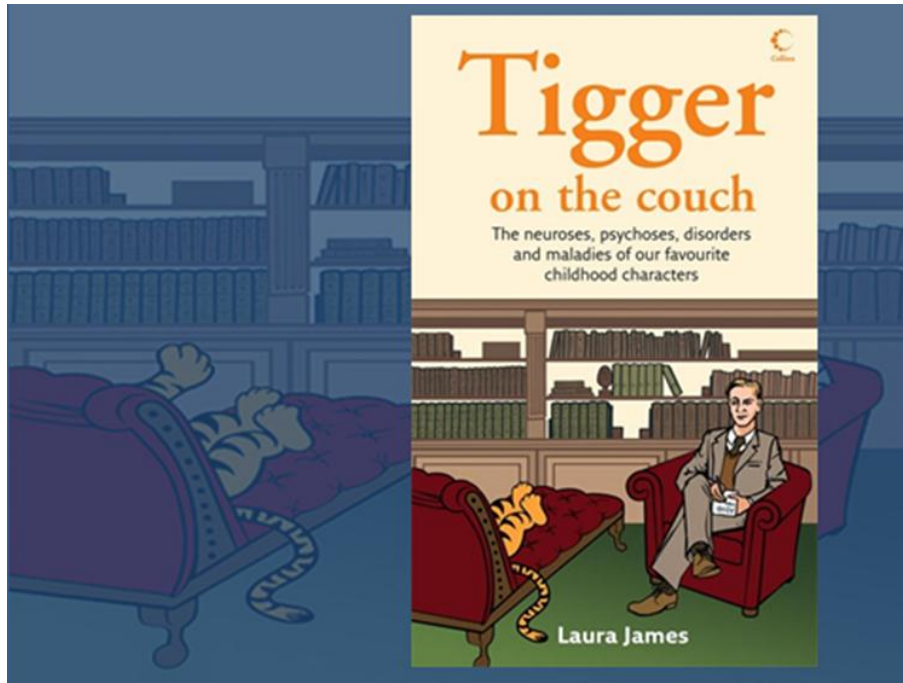
These texts all explore the social, educational and political effects of a therapeutic cultural mind set that embeds serious and humorous references to anger management/esteem/bullying issues and being a bit OCD/ADHD/Aspergers into our everyday lives.

Cultural therapeutic narratives

- emotional experiences are 'baggage' and barriers to life and learning
- more people are emotionally vulnerable than ever: 'we all have "issues"'
- many people are 'in denial' about the effects of their emotions on themselves and others
- therapeutic insights explain our unconscious motives and commitments
- we need support to express, discuss and manage our feelings 'appropriately'
- there are activities and explanations that develop emotional well-being for everyone

But more powerfully, therapeutic culture produces a compelling set of narratives that help us make sense of our experiences and responses, not just of ourselves but also family, colleagues, friends, public figures and celebrities. These narratives present the growing influence of psychology over many decades in a much more simplified, demystified everyday form. Vulnerability is at the heart of these narratives and the boundaries between popular and educational narratives are now completely invisible.

There are many popular examples of therapeutic culture I could have chosen but this is one of my favourites.

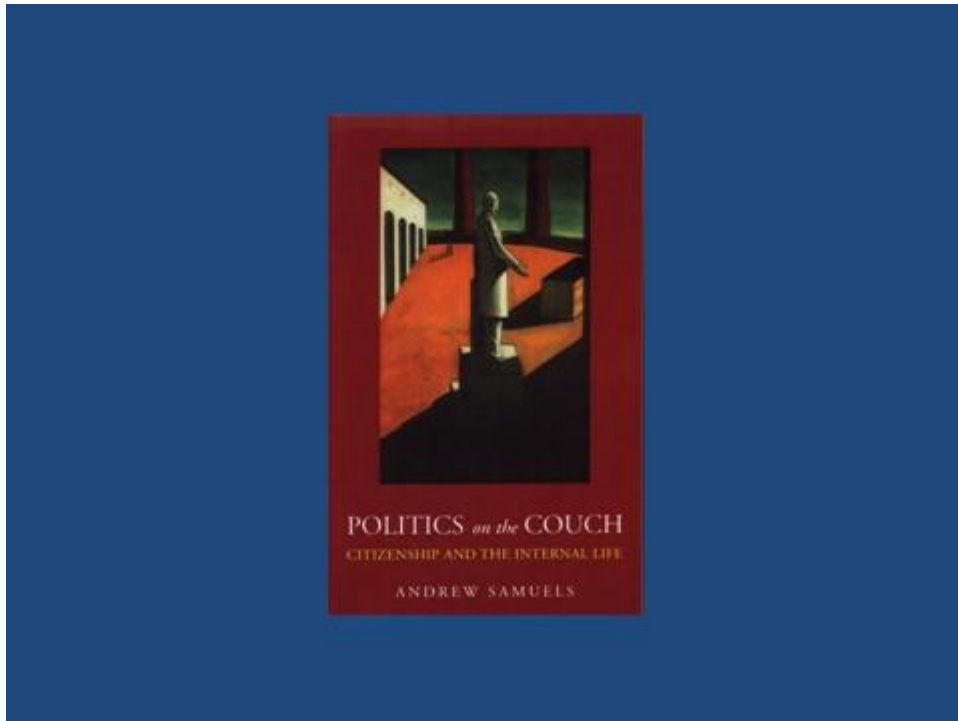


Published in 2007, this clever book aims to destigmatise mental health problems by psychoanalysing storybook characters and showing their various repressed disorders, syndromes and anxieties.

The author tells us:

... it's heartening to know that help is at hand and that [these characters] just need to be pointed in the right direction. That's true for everyone, whether they are living in a land far away or just round the corner....With a little kindness, professional therapy and perhaps some psycho-pharmaceutical intervention, there's every possibility that many of our favourite characters will indeed live happily ever after (James 2007: 12-13).

I'm sure you'll understand the emotional trauma that's come from learning that my favourite childhood character, Tigger, is not simply enthusiastic, optimistic, confident and exciting. Instead, he has Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder, is ego-centric, reckless and risk-taking, and could develop bi-polar disorder in later life.



Tigger's not the only one on the cultural therapeutic couch. It seems that even your political commitments and values can be explained by psychoanalysis. In his book *Politics on the Couch*, Andrew Samuels, Professor of Psychoanalysis at the University of Essex, psychoanalyses the motives and commitments of political activists. As I've experienced often over the past 12 years, therapeutic interpretations are used to 'explain' the unconscious reasons behind research and critique and also to fend off disagreeable views or just close down argument.

In 2009, Andrew Samuels told a large conference that my reasons for questioning whether schools should teach emotional well-being were rooted in my own 'esteem issues'. In a debate article in *Psychologies* on the same subject, Derek Draper, Labour party spin doctor turned psychotherapist, said that he hadn't decided whether I suffered from too little self esteem or too much (we'd never met) – either way, my 'issues' mean I am unqualified to offer an opinion.

In an article in *Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* in 2009, Carole Leathwood and Valerie Hey asserted that my critique of therapeutic education can be read psychoanalytically to show my own unconscious fears of the working class Other, and an elitist, masculinist disdain for non-traditional students (2009).

Well, I'm glad I've been able to share that with you.

SO, WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN FOR EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES?

When she was 8, I remember my goddaughter asking me with perfect comic timing in the middle of some long and intense discussion with my best friend, her mother (who's an educational psychologist) 'And your point is Kathryn?'. I think there has to be a point to academic research, beyond endless analysis and critique and deconstruction. I don't mean the instrumental 'what works' point either but a normative direction, somewhere to go and something to do with our research.

So I come to my last section. I've aimed to use at least a bit of a sociological imagination to show that therapeutic culture has a profound influence in changing the meanings we attach to phenomena like emotional well-being, depression, stress, abandonment, neglect, abuse and vulnerability.

But therapeutic culture also expands these meanings through the idea that, to a greater or lesser extent, all of us have 'issues' with at least some of these phenomena and, if we don't realise it, universal interventions will develop the self-awareness that reveals those issues and help us deal with them.

In the *Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education*, I and my co-author argue that a key factor in the emergence of therapeutic preoccupation with vulnerability is the end of collective political aspirations through trades unions and more radical political projects, and their corresponding shift to providing emotional support. In the *Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education* and other things I've written since, I relate the emotional and therapeutic turn to a deeper loss of meaning, a loss of authority, a loss of a certain type of human subject, the philosophical departure from knowledge to personal, local knowledge.

For Katie Wright, a therapeutic culture offers new possibilities to engage in political action by raising awareness of these phenomena, destigmatising them and exposing their effects. Many supporters of the educational responses I discussed earlier present them as part of a commitment to social justice.

Challenges to universal vulnerability and 'co-producing' therapeutic culture

- reject idea that we can make vulnerability a political springboard
 - 'personal is political' has already done much to undermine collective action
- an anti-materialist view of human progress
- a 'diminished' sense of self
- a debate framed around which therapeutic intervention is best
 - should the state intervene at all?
- the personal is the...personal, is the...personal, is the...personal
 - straitjacket not springboard

But for skeptics, including myself, the women and men that are coming to prevail in a therapeutic culture, in this period, have a diminished sense of self, where as Furedi puts it, individuals possess a 'permanent consciousness of their own vulnerability' and feel they can't manage without therapeutic expertise and ideas.

In this lecture, I've argued that this consciousness creates new types of educational experts and activities to help us manage everyday life, other people and our own individual histories as sources of emotional risk. The key change is that these experts and activities are no longer confined to a minority with serious problems; instead, we all have issues, we are all vulnerable.

In 1959 Mills warned that the growing influence of psychology de-politicises social problems and encourages social scientists and policy makers to see people as objects to be manipulated. He warned that the purpose of social science should not be to predict and control human behaviour, or to engage in human engineering. He argued that talking so glibly about prediction and control assumes the perspective of a bureaucrat to whom, as Karl Marx observed, the world is an object to be manipulated.

The personal is the personal is the personal....

- *“absorbing the self in the world and reflecting the world in the self”* diminishes individuals’ capacity for, and interest in, action in the world
- *“collective or community life is understood as held together not by common experience or activity, but through the ability of individuals to ‘disclose’ themselves to each other”* (Panton 2012, 167- 168).
- a therapeutic culture offers a sense of collective being but one which is confined to the orthodoxy that *“if there is no psychological openness, there is no social bond”* (see also Sennett 1976, 2003).

In a therapeutic culture, in this period, a powerful and pervasive discourse of endemic vulnerability leads to the idea that we can engineer our emotional well-being. But as Foucault argues, we don't just speak a discourse, it comes to speak us and permeate our everyday practices and assumptions. Vulnerability changes how we relate to each other, making the personal and the vulnerable the basis on which our authenticity and our commitment to social justice, are judged. Yet as James Panton and Richard Sennett have argued, in the drive to create stronger social and political bonds, this demand undermines them. James Panton argues that political and social preoccupation with *“absorbing the self in the world and reflecting the world in the self”* diminishes individuals’ capacity for, and interest in, action in the world. Rather, *“collective or community life is understood as held together not by common experience or activity, but through the ability of individuals to ‘disclose’ themselves to each other”* (2012, 167- 168).

A therapeutic culture offers a sense of collective being but one which is confined to the orthodoxy that *“if there is no psychological openness, there is no social bond”*. This prohibits external explanations and the social action that might flow from them (ibid).

I'll end with 4 examples of some practical consequences of vulnerability in the everyday practices of British universities, followed by questions about the educational implications of vulnerability.

In this leaflet handed out in the induction week for new students in one British university, students are told.....

InHealth Care, some people in the caring role at work can mean they are always seen in this role... and so it can become hard to attend to their own needs and feelings which may go unmet.... [in their work] students are faced, sometimes on a daily basis, with loss ...and this can make it doubly hard if they are dealing with their own losses, such as a relationship ending or bereavement....

The pressures of life in schools dealing with the issues of young people can make considerable emotional and physical demands...

Students...in the disciplines of Psychology, Sociology, or the Expressive Arts may find themselves re-examining areas of their lives which have previously seemed unproblematic to them.....

The University of Wolverhampton's Institute for Learning Enhancement tells lecturers:

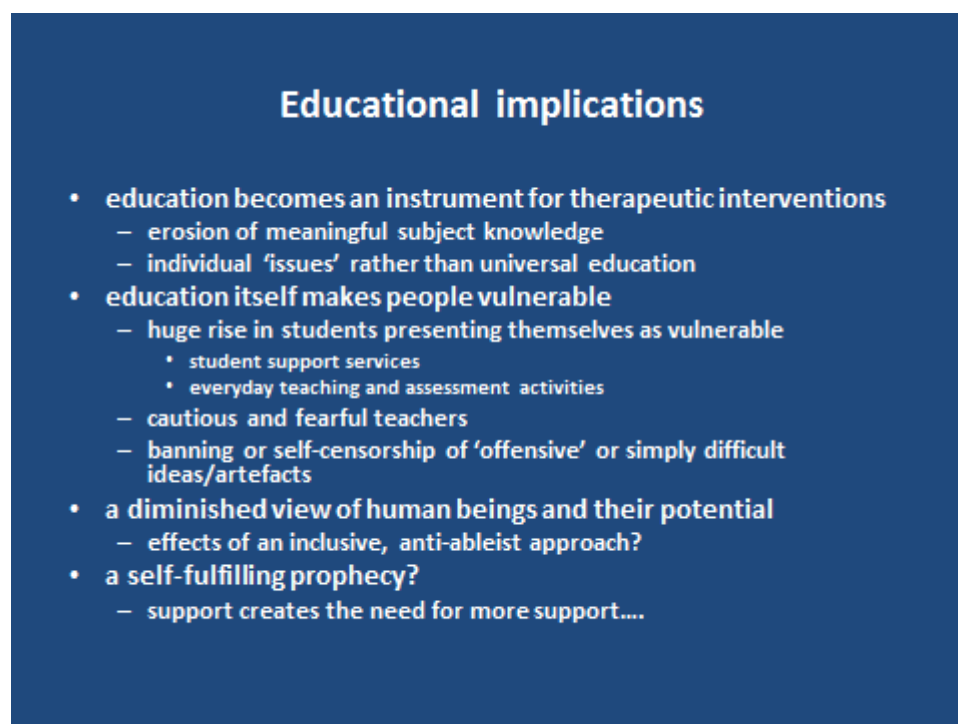
Unwieldy briefs.....

- *research shows that attainment levels can be associated with the quality of the assignment brief: students report that unclear and unwieldy briefs produce learner anxiety: students spend days trying to decode the brief rather than getting down to the assignment (Institute for Learning Enhancement, University of Wolverhampton)*

I don't know if you any of you have unwieldy and unclear briefs but if you do, you're making students vulnerable.

The final example is from the University of Nottingham's counselling service, also handed out in freshers' week. It offers workshops in building self-esteem, learning resilience skills and preventing perfectionism and procrastination. Like many academics, I strive for perfectionism even if I never achieve it, and I can't imagine academic life or indeed any high level, difficult endeavour without this as a goal. But now I know I'm vulnerable to perfectionism and I need help. I'm definitely vulnerable to procrastination!

But assumptions that being exposed to new ideas, striving to do your best work, assessment comments, makes vulnerable, undermines what's left of education. I question assumptions that we need to make students aware of new threats and risks, even before they have thought of them, and that these risks and threats are universal or at least very widespread.



Educational implications

- **education becomes an instrument for therapeutic interventions**
 - erosion of meaningful subject knowledge
 - individual 'issues' rather than universal education
- **education itself makes people vulnerable**
 - huge rise in students presenting themselves as vulnerable
 - student support services
 - everyday teaching and assessment activities
 - cautious and fearful teachers
 - banning or self-censorship of 'offensive' or simply difficult ideas/artefacts
- **a diminished view of human beings and their potential**
 - effects of an inclusive, anti-ableist approach?
- **a self-fulfilling prophecy?**
 - support creates the need for more support....

As I've shown, there's strong disagreement about whether such approaches are educationally and socially progressive. Are we creating a self-fulfilling prophecy of vulnerability and diminishing people's sense of self, or offering new forms of identity

and capacity for agency? Is attention to emotional threats a springboard for building resilience, or does it make it difficult to differentiate between serious and trivial claims of vulnerability, and to allocate scarce resources for those with problems?

And finally, do assumptions about vulnerability undermine our confidence in challenging and engaging students in difficult work? How should we respond to claims that as academics, we, or our work, are distressing or uncomfortable? What happens when, instead of opening the doors to new knowledge, our subjects and our passionate commitments to them become sources of vulnerability?

Students have grown up in a therapeutic culture. In an age of vulnerability, I think it's crucial to challenge its effects because universities have a key role in helping to shape the varieties of women and men that are coming to prevail in them.

Future research plans

- **in collaboration with the Nordic Centre for Excellence: Justice through Education (JustEd)**
 - **the impact of therapeutic interventions on teachers' identity and professional values**
 - **international comparisons of the therapeutic turn in education policy (England, Finland, Sweden, Australia)**
 - **'policy commissions' in each country**
 - **genealogy of therapeutic interventions**
 - **the 'work' that TE 'does' and its discourses and practices**
- **the vulnerability zeitgeist in British universities**
 - **project funded by the Student Health Association**

And to conclude: here are some plans we are currently working on in the Nordic Centre for Excellence: Justice through Education in the Nordic Countries (JustEd). Thank you.

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