

Loss of Love for Learning Inquiry

Submission by Dr. Sue Roffey: Honorary Associate Professor at University College and Director of Growing Great Schools Worldwide. My expertise is on the various dimensions of school and student wellbeing and I have written extensively on related issues such as behaviour, school culture, belonging, relationships and social-emotional learning. I have been a teacher, educational psychologist and academic and have worked both in the UK and internationally. I am now on several national and international advisory groups including the OECD and the Education Policy Alliance.

I am currently co-editing the Handbook of Wellbeing in Education: Research Transforming Practice which will be published by Edward Elgar 2026. What is clear from the chapters being submitted is that many societies are struggling with the same issues in education but some are doing well and engaging young people who are happy at school. There are also pockets of good practice in the UK – though the majority are in the independent sector where curriculum and accountability restrictions are less marked. The Times Education Commission *Bringing Out the Best* (2022) chaired by Sir Anthony Seldon and Rachel Sylvester mirror the same issues.

I would be very happy to come and talk with the committee about what I have learnt about engagement in learning. This would also address other pressing concerns in the media around racism, misogyny, school absenteeism and teacher attrition.

Terms of Reference:

The Inquiry seeks written evidence in response to the following questions:

1. Is there a current decline in the love of learning amongst students and teachers?

That is clearly the case and the evidence suggests that it gets more severe as children go through school.

Bekker C. I., Rothmann S. & Kloppers M.M. (2023) The happy learner: Effects of academic boredom, burnout, and engagement. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 13. DOI=10.3389/fpsyg.2022.974486

<https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.974486>

Furlong, M., Smith, D., Springer, T. & Dowdy, E. (2021). Bored with school! Bored with life? Well-being characteristics associated with a school boredom mindset. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*. 5. 42-64. 10.47602/jpsp.v5i1.261.

Gallup Student Poll 2004, 2013, 2015 in Jason, Z. (2017) Bored out of their minds. *Ed. Harvard ed. Magazine*. Bored-Out-of-Their-Minds-Harvard-Graduate-School-of-Education-1.pdf

2. What are the key factors involved in this decline, and are they more structural or societal?

Agency:

There is very little acknowledgement in schools that students are not empty vessels to be filled by those in authority. Young people are active learners and yet have little opportunity, especially in state education to bring their own experiences, understanding, creativity or ideas to the learning environment. A need for greater student agency is also a concern of the *OECD (2019) Future of Education and Skills: A conceptual framework for student agency for 2030*. Self-determination theory is linked to intrinsic motivation and learning for its own sake rather than for extrinsic reasons, such as passing exams.

Ryan, R.M. & Deci, E.F. (2001) Self-determination and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development and wellbeing,

There is appreciation that agency matters in the early years but this does not extend across sectors.

Department for Education (2021) Development Matters; Non-statutory guidance for the early years foundation stage.

Safety:

Many young people do not feel safe in school and that is a thread running through the book *Square Pegs* edited by Fran Morgan and Ellie Costello (2023). They cite the Facebook page *Not Fine in School* which has 430,000 followers. Young people who are neurodiverse are often not catered for in school, others fear being losers in a competitive environment and there are children who experience bullying, both in person and on-line.

Morgan, F. & Costello, E. (eds) (2023) Square Pegs: Inclusivity, Compassion and Fitting In, :

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/bullyingandonlineexperiencesamongchildreninenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2023>

The focus on testing across a school can exacerbate anxiety and fear of failure. Some parents also pressure their children to perform well so learning may become something to endure rather than enjoy.

Pamungkas, A. F. A., & Muhid, A. (2020). Perfectionism, Shame, Social Support and Fear of Failure in High School Students. *EDUTECH: Journal of Education And Technology*, 4(2), 276-288. Retrieved from <http://www.ejournal.ijshs.org/index.php/edu/article/view/144>

Positivity

Negative emotions interfere with cognitive pathways and positive emotions enhance creativity and problem-solving. When pupils have a negative sense of self, feel unhappy

about others and the world around them they are less likely to be enthused about learning. It is therefore relevant that positivity is actively promoted in the classroom

Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden and-build theory of positive emotions. American Psychologist, 56, (3), 218-226

Part of a healthy child environment is play and playfulness. This has been eroded in schools where the focus is on ever more academic input, even to the point of reducing playtimes. My own experience with adolescent girls suggests that they enjoy face to face games which gives them a sense of having fun together.

<https://researchers.westernsydney.edu.au/en/publications/aboriginal-girls-circle-enhancing-connectedness-and-promoting-res>

*Louise Tidman (2021) Chapter in the Palgrave Handbook of Positive Education
ihhttps://www.researchgate.net/publication/368876838_Building_Positive_Emotions_and_Playfulness*

Roffey, S. & Hromek, R. (2009) Games as a pedagogy to promote social and emotional learning: 'It's fun and we learn things'. Simulation and Gaming 40.1.

A positive sense of self is constructed by what a child hears about themselves. Language matters. This means two things - helping young people identify their strengths (not just academic abilities) and encouraging the use of the word 'yet' which indicates that learning is a process and therefore achievable.

O'Brien, M. & Blue, L. (2018). Towards a positive pedagogy: designing pedagogical practices that facilitate Positivity within the classroom. *Educational Action Research, 26(3), 365-384.*

Inclusion

A feeling of belonging is now acknowledged as critical to psychological and emotional wellbeing. Prilleltensky (2021) talks about 'mattering' which is defined as not only being valued but being given opportunities to be of value – making a recognised contribution. School belonging is also aligned with purpose and progress in learning. Unless students can appreciate the relevance of the curriculum to their own lives and perceive themselves as making progress, school as a hub of knowledge and understanding has little meaning for them.

Allen, K-A., Kern, M.L., Vella-Brodrick, D.A., Hattie, J. & Waters, L. (2018). What schools need to know about fostering school belonging: A meta-Analysis. *Educational Psychology Review, 30(1), 1-34.*

Prilleltensky, I. & Prilleltensky, O. (2021) *How People Matter: Why it Affects Health, Happiness, Love, Work and Society.* Cambridge University Press.

Respect

Respect means valuing the whole person. Every individual is both complex and unique. There is a risk we underestimate young people because we do not tune into the full potential

of their development. This includes cognitive, social, emotional, psychological, language, spiritual, creative, and physical dimensions. When only cognitive dimensions are overtly valued in a school those who have other strengths to offer and develop are likely to feel marginalised and lose motivation to pursue mastery. Getting better at something that matters to you is a driving force for learning,

Universal respect is also treating others with consideration, kindness and empathy, honouring their dignity. Despite beliefs that autocratic practices focused on achieving targets are what is needed in schools, there is now a considerable body of research on effective leadership that indicates that it is the soft skills that empower and motivate staff, leading to better learning and wellbeing outcomes for all (Scott, 2003).

Scott, G. (2003). *Learning Principals - Leadership Capability & Learning*. University of Technology, Sydney. Commissioned Research for NSW DET., March, 2003.

The quality of relationships in a school is critical to the level of respect experienced by both individuals and groups. John Hattie's meta-analysis of effective education concluded that it was the teacher-student relationship that mattered most for educational outcomes.

Hattie, J. (2008). Visible Learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement. Routledge.

Allan, K-A., Slaten, C.D., Arslan, G. Roffey, S., Craig. H & Vella-Brodrick, A. (2021) School Belonging: The Importance of Teacher-Student Relationships in Kern, P and Wehmeyer, M. (eds) The Palgrave Handbook of Positive Education

Equity

For all students to do well in education, we must think differently from the 'one size fits all' approach, as this clearly does not work for everyone. Some children have chronic disadvantages, while others have issues in their lives that impact on their learning and/or behaviour at any given time. School systems may need to become more dynamic in the face of economic and societal challenges. For young people to have equal opportunities to flourish and be engaged with learning, we need both education policy and schools to be adaptable, flexible and fair. This is the basis of equity.

The factors that influence pupil engagement with learning and therefore attainment are many and varied. This includes socio-economic factors, discrimination on the basis of race, religion, gender or disability, family dysfunction, geographic factors, loss and trauma. Since Covid many young children enter school without sufficient language or socialisation so that access to joyful learning is limited. The greatest input therefore is to support the early years, both in families and in pre-school settings. The demise of Sure Start has had implications for learning as well as behaviour and family relationships. Reach Children's Hub in Feltham is replicating some of the good practice demonstrated in Sure Start in supporting families with young children

Competition, often fuelled by social media and a discourse that privileges individual success may promote extrinsic motivation to learn but for many who rarely feel 'good enough' in comparison with others may see learning tasks as risky and potentially threatening to their

sense of self rather than as something to be embraced as enjoyable. Competition between schools may also reduce the collaboration that benefits all.

Armstrong, P.W., Brown, C. & Chapman, C.J. (2021). School-to-school collaboration in England: A configurative review of the empirical evidence. Review of Education, 9, 319-351.

Cattan. S., Contil, G., Farquaharson, C., Ginja, R and Pecher, M. (2021). *The Health Impacts of Sure Start*. The Institute of Fiscal Studies. ifs.org.uk/publications/health-impacts-sure-start

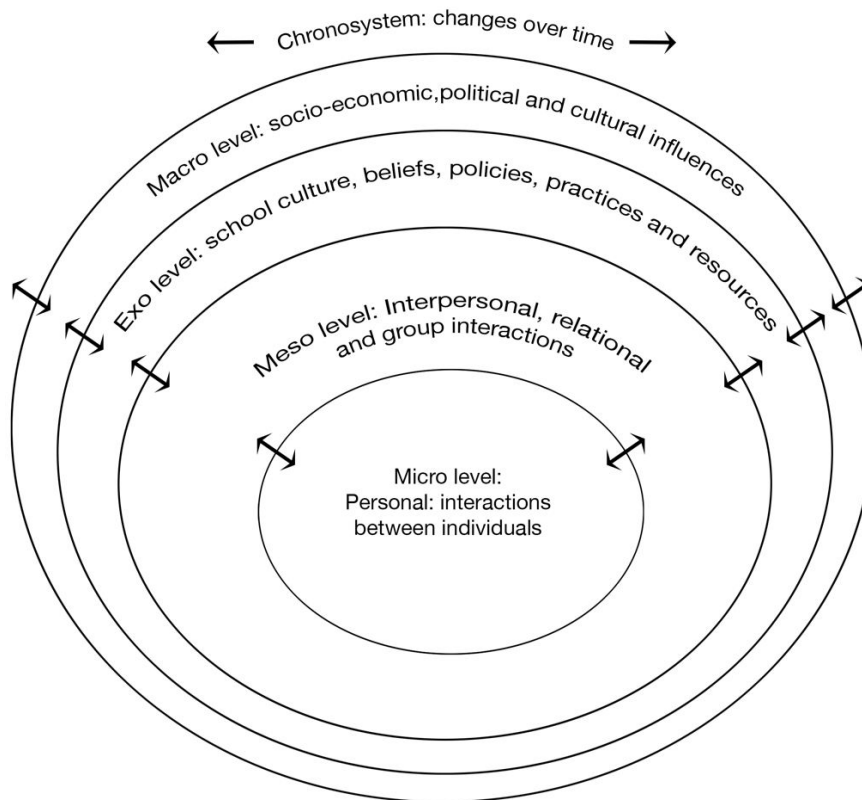
Leadsom, A. (2021). *The Best Start for Life: A Vision for the 1,001 Critical Days*. Early Years Healthy Development Review Report, Department of Health and Social Care

Quinlan, D. & Roffey, S. (2021) Positive Education with Disadvantaged Students. In M.L. Kern & M.L. Wehmeyer (Eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Positive Education*. Springer.

OECD (2023). oecdeditoday.com/equity-and-inclusion-in-education/

Roffey, S. & Quinlan, D. (2021) Positive Education for Disadvantaged Students in Kern, P and Wehmeyer, M. (eds) The Palgrave Handbook of Positive Education

In answer to the question about whether the loss of love of learning is structural or societal is that these factors interact. Eco-systemic theory (Bronfenbrenner) shows that what happens at the micro-level (for individuals) is embedded in other levels right up to the macro level of cultural/political/societal and the direction of influence is bi-directional and changes over time.



3. How can schools adapt to a changing society to serve as a better learning environment?

Our world has changed dramatically since the beginning of this century, Information is at the touch of a keyboard and young people constantly interact with social media. They are highly stimulated but may find it hard to focus on school work. It is not that they do not love learning – watch young children let loose in a park – it is the framework of learning that is the problem. Things need to change and the good news is that this is not only possible but in the interests of young people, teachers and the world they are creating. And some places are doing it, both countries and schools.

Adaptation needs the following:

Teachers as facilitators of learning, not simply founts of knowledge. This means that teacher training requires adaptation with a stronger focus on relationships, an understanding of intrinsic motivation and what constitutes healthy child development.

Teachers also need to know the tenets of cooperative learning so that all students take part - and how to promote reflective and critical thinking.

A more nuanced criterion referenced assessment system rather than a trust in short term memory, tests and exams. This does not replicate the workplace and also alienates students who are not academic or have high levels of anxiety.

A focus on the development of a positive school culture where everyone feels valued, has a voice and can fully participate. Authoritarian, highly hierarchical organisations are not optimal for an environment where learning flourishes or where teachers are trusted and have choices.

Much more focus on the pillars of 'learning to be' and 'learning to live together. Social and emotional learning (SEL) with a safe, strengths-based solution focused pedagogy enables young people to discuss things that matter to them and promote a sense of belonging as well as enabling stronger teacher-student relationships. Issues such as racism, homophobia, misogyny can be addressed in SEL giving students agency to promote inclusion, friendship and safety in their school environment reducing the factors that prevent a love of learning.

Dobia, B., Arthur, L., Jennings, P, Khlentzos, D.S. Parado, R.H, Roffey.S and Sheinman, N, (2020) The Implementation of Social-Emotional Learning in N. C. Singh & A. Duraiappah (Eds.), Rethinking Learning: A Review of Social and Emotional Learning for Education Systems (pp. 157-186) Unicef/Mgiep.

Circle Solutions for Student Wellbeing 3rd Edition (2020) Sage Publication. Earlier editions 2006, 2014.

Roffey. S. (2017) The ASPIRE principles and pedagogy for the implementation of social and emotional learning and the development of whole school wellbeing. International Journal of Emotional Education Volume 9, Number 2, November 2017 54 -70

4. How can we take pressure off teachers to facilitate better class time, and what are the opinions of teachers on this point? If so how?

Curriculum co-ordinators can identify how targets might be addressed in project work where students work cooperatively. I have seen this happen where each half term each year group had a theme through which all learning took place. Younger children studied subjects such as Families or Animals and older children explored Earthquakes and Volcanoes or Communications. In secondary schools Problem Based learning has the same format but students look at ways to consider issues such as pollution or plant ecology.

Behaviour is an issue for many teachers and yet there are still many schools adopting a disciplinarian, behaviourist approach which does not have positive sustainable outcomes. Teachers need 1) trauma-informed training 2) knowledge of relational approaches to challenging behaviour 3) whole school adoption of restorative practices.

I have written many books/chapters/articles on ways to address behavioural issues in schools. The following are just a few of these.

Roffey, S. (2019) The Secondary Behaviour Cookbook: Strategies at your Fingertips Routledge

Roffey, S. (2019) *The Primary Behaviour Cookbook: Strategies at your Fingertips* Routledge

Roffey, S. (2011) *Changing Behaviour in Schools: Promoting Positive Relationships and Wellbeing*. London: Sage Publications. (Danish translation)

Roffey, S. (2011) *New Teachers Survival Guide to Behaviour*. 2nd Edition. Sage Publications (Polish translation)

Roffey, S. (2010) *Classroom Support for Including Students with Challenging Behaviour in Rose (ed) Confronting Obstacles to Inclusion – International Responses to Developing Inclusive Schools*. Routledge

5. How can technology be harnessed to support richer and more engaging educational experiences.

See above re project and problem-based learning using technology for research. Groups of students present their findings to others who quiz them on the process and outcomes of their learning.

Also flipped learning is where students watch a program / video or similar and then present teachers with questions and discussion points in class to embed the learning.

6. To help the APPG create a practical set of approaches and recommendations:

- a. What examples are there of schools doing particularly well in fostering a good learning environment for students and teachers?

Roffey, S. (2024) *ASPIRE to Wellbeing and Learning for All in Early Years and Primary Schools: The principles underpinning positive education*. Routledge

Roffey, S. (2024) *ASPIRE to Wellbeing and Learning for All in Secondary Settings: The principles underpinning positive education* Routledge.
Safety

In these books published last year there are numerous examples in both this country and overseas where good practice is taking place. I have selected the UK examples who are exemplifying one or more of the ASPIRE principles.

St Bernard's Roman Catholic School in Cheshire
Queensmead Primary Academy, Leicester
University of Cambridge Primary School
John Ray Primary School: Essex
Flakefleet Primary School. Lancashire
St Ebbe's Primary School, Oxfordshire
Glade Primary School, Ilford
St Michael's Church of England Secondary School, Sandwell
Westhoughton High School, Lancashire

Balerno High School, Edinburgh
St Ambrose Barlow Roman Catholic Secondary School, Salford
Spaghetti Bridge Special School, Southampton

b. What examples are there of schools dealing with youth mental health in a particularly cogent way

Whole school promotion of wellbeing as a universal pro-active concept is a more effective use of time and resources than a reactive approach to individual need – though there will always be students who need something extra.

This involves much of what has gone before in this submission, but I would emphasise the following:

- Regular social and emotional learning as a way of promoting agency, positive relationships, school belonging, resilience and responsibility
- Opportunities for creativity
- Behaviour policies that align with wellbeing
- Opportunities to learn from nature and the environment – there are some great examples of forest schools
- Empathy development – such as Roots of Empathy programs
- Having teachers believe in the best of each child not focusing on high test scores

In addition, the APPG for Education would welcome details of any relevant research carried out by your organisation which it would be willing to share with the Inquiry.

N/A