

# Attacking principals or teachers is a negative self-directed personal social choice which rewires the brain

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It has been recently reported in the media that school principals, and teachers, have been attacked by students and parents.

The only thing each and every school principal, school administrator, teacher, and all ancillary staff, want, is the best for the students that attend the school in question.

There is no excuse for these attacks by parents and students. The axiomatic fact is, that the responsibility for each-and-every-one of these atrocious attacks, against principals and teachers, remains with the attacker, i.e., the student and/or the parent.

Why do students attend school? The self-evident answer is to advance academic knowledge, skills, understanding, as well as helping with associated development of their social skills, knowledge and understanding. This clearly is beneficial for the student and society.

The evidence in the literature in the disciplines of psychology, sociology, pedagogy, the social sciences, and now also in the neurosciences, is one hundred percent unambiguous; academic knowledge, skills and understanding, and any associated development and advancement of skills, knowledge and understanding, can only be achieved and advanced by and through the application of the student. What this unambiguously means, of course, is: *that the student is responsible for what they think, do, say, choose and learn, and for the associated firing and rewiring of their brain.*

## Learning does not take place in a vacuum

Self-evidently, learning does not take place in a vacuum. Learning, at its simplest, takes place between the expert (the teacher,



instructor, coach, mentor, tutor, trainer) and the student. It is the expert who informs the student of what *the student needs* to do to advance their skills, knowledge and understanding.

The response, from the student, to this presentation of information (by the teacher) is for the student to then do all that is cognitively and physically necessary to advance their skills, knowledge, understanding, insights and abilities. This may include, but not be limited to picking up a pencil to write, to opening up a book, and reading, or switching on a computer, and then reading the required narrative, and completing the required tasks. The responsibility for these actions, exists and remains the sole responsibility of one person and that one person, is, of course, the student. As Anita Woolfolk points out: the 'responsibility and the ability to learn remains *'within the student'*, no one can actually learn for someone else.'

The intention, the action and the engagement, of and in learning, is a journey of the self, by the self, through the self, for the self. What this means is that the student needs to be self-motivated in their thoughts and actions. The student needs to be self-directing, self-regulating and self-managing, in their application to their learning. As noted: no one can learn for someone else.

**The alpha and the omega of learning is unambiguous**

The others in the life of students, such as their family, significant others, their teachers, their mentors, peers, and their friends, can only do one thing. And that one thing is to provide encouragement, information, support, and advice.

The alpha and the omega of learning is unambiguous: From the outset, the alpha, the teacher will present information and at the same time be supportive, offer encouragement and provide additional advice as required. The omega is the requirement of the student to then act on this advice, knowledge and information presented by the teacher. Learning and achievement can only take place when the student acts and undertakes all of the work that is necessary to advance their skills, knowledge and understanding. The student is the one who is not only responsi-

ble for their own learning, the student is the one who is responsible for their educational and personal destiny. All of this equates well with the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who wrote: 'The only person you are destined to become is the person you decide to be.'

Attacking school principals, or teachers, does not change the truth of what teaching and learning is all about. The expert (the teacher) presents the information. The student, if they want to learn (the key words being: *if they want to learn*), will action and then do all that is necessary to advance their skills, knowledge, insights and understanding.

**Inevitably and universally**

The psychiatrist and educationalist William Glasser, writing in his books *Control Theory* and *Choice Theory*, who examined the philosophical and pedagogical nature of learning, argued that the action of learning occurred as a result of the intrinsic motivation and personal attitude of the student; for *which the student was responsible*. By examining and reporting on student behaviour and student attitudes, in relation to their learning outcomes, Glasser found that unless a student was personally motivated to behave and learn, there really was very little anyone else could do except be supportive and offer advice. Inevitably, and universally, the student is the one who is responsible for their attitude, behaviour and learning (which requires action on the part of the student).

**There is no point in blaming principals or teachers if a student does not want to learn**

Glasser acknowledges that there is no doubt, that there are 'some teachers who are more skilful at motivating than others; however, there is no teacher, no matter how skilled, who can teach a student who does not want to learn.' It is time to accept the universal truth of what teaching and learning is all about: 'We can force ... students to stay in school ... but we can no more make those students work than we can make the



proverbial horse drink even though we tether him to the water trough' (Glasser, 1986, pp. 11–12). The only thing a principal or teacher can do is present the information, and offer support, encouragement and advice. Ultimately, and axiomatically, the responsibility of what takes place next (the action of learning) in colloquial terms, exists and is placed 'fairly and squarely' on the shoulders of the student. No one can learn for someone else. "You can lead a horse to water, but..."

### **Free will exists. There is no excuse**

From a free will, behavioural, learning and personal choice perspective, there is no excuse for anyone to attack a principal or teacher. If any parent is unhappy with the academic progress, or presenting behaviours, of their child and/or student at school; the first line of enquiry, by the parent, is for the parent to ask their child, what they are doing in the classroom. If the student chooses to blame the teacher, rather than their own personal endeavours, or their own negative presenting behaviours; what this means is that the second line of enquiry, by the parent, needs to be again directed to the student. That is because it is the student who is responsible for what they think, do, say, choose and learn. As Prof Ken Purnell points out, in terms of application in the classroom: What the teacher does, of course, matters, however what the student chooses to do is even more significant (Ken Purnell, 2015). All of which has an impact on the neuroplasticity of the brain. For which there is both good news and bad news.

### **The good news and bad news about brain firing, rewiring and neuroplasticity**

From a neurological and brain plasticity perspective, the thoughts, the choices and the actions we initiate, fires and rewire the brain. All of this good news about brain plasticity and the ability for the brain to rewire itself, also brings with it what may be thought of as a 'neurological sting in the tail.' In their research dealing with neuroplasticity, David Kolb and his colleagues found that the brain responds neurologically in the same way to both negative and positive thoughts and behaviours.

### **Brain plasticity should be thought of as being 'a double-edged sword'**

What this means is that the thoughts and behaviours, that are being presented will be supported by the neurological wiring that will be take place, in response to these thoughts and behaviours. Therefore, brain plasticity should be thought of as being 'a double-edged sword' of neurological firing and rewiring. If individuals choose to persistently present negative behaviours, these negative thoughts and negative actions, will, at the neurological level, inevitably rewire the brain in a manner that supports these negative thoughts and associated negative behaviours. The same is true if positive thoughts and behaviours are presented. The biological brain does not delineate what is taking place. The brain is not a biological moral compass. The brain immediately provides the neurological networks that are necessary to support the thoughts and actions that are taking place.

### **The constructive neurological benefits of free will and constructive thoughts**

However, as noted, there is good news in this brain plasticity as well. This 'negative' neurological firing and rewiring can be changed to 'positive' neurological firing and rewiring. This change, however, can and will *only* take place, if the individual in question consciously and deliberately chooses to present and engage in constructive thoughts and positive behaviours. These new positive behaviours and positive thinking procedures will then begin to fire and rewire the brain to create new neurological processes that will support the new positive thinking and the new positive behaviours and learning that is now taking place. As the literature in brain plasticity informs, as neurological connections and pathways are being created and enhanced, through personally inspired and self-motivated thinking, and self-activated positive behaviours (such as replacing negative thoughts and behaviours with positive thoughts and behaviours), these new neurological connections will lead to the brain rewiring itself. This rewiring will then begin to support these new positive thoughts and constructive behaviours. As Norman Doidge points out: 'Everyday thought,

especially when used systematically, is a potent way to stimulate neurons' which can and does lead to changes in thinking and behaviours.

### **A positive cognitive, behavioural and neurological loop is being formed**

As a result, all of these new thoughts and behaviours, which will begin to develop and advance new neurological connections, will now not only begin to flourish, but all of this will help in the formulation of additional firing and rewiring, that then leads to the development of new neurons (neurogenesis), dendrites, synapses (synaptogenesis), axons, additional myelin wrapping, all of which leads to associated highly complex neuronal assemblies. In effect, a positive cognitive, behavioural and neurological loop is being formed; which begins to reshape and impact the mind. Therefore, the potential for positive thinking and constructive supporting behaviours will tend to become the dominant behaviour, because these new positive constructive behaviours are no longer, according to Arrowsmith-Young, being 'hampered by the interference of a learning' or behavioural 'dysfunction', that was previously presented.

### **Self-determined conscious application of free will changes the brain**

What that means (in terms of the neurological 'use it or lose it' principle), is that the previous presenting negative thoughts and behaviours, that initially led to the development of 'negative' neurological pathways, these 'negative' neural pathways were now being systematically being removed by the brain's own pruning mechanism. The brain is always meticulously pruning neurons that are no longer firing, through lack of use. This pruning of neurons, and the eventual elimination of previous neuronal assemblies, in due course, leads to the development of new neuronal pathways, new neuronal assemblies and new brain maps. The important point to note here is that all of this new neurological complexity began to be formed when, through the self-determined conscious application of free will, these constructive thoughts and behaviours became the presenting cognitive and behavioural social norm.