

Calm amidst the chaos

With the terror attacks in Manchester and London Bridge, and the horror of Grenfell Tower, children are watching tragedy and violence played out on the TV and social media. In this issue, we have discussed how teachers can react to this reality. Educator Dr Aminul Hoque gives his view.

I STILL recall a conversation with my daughter during the winter of 2015. We had booked a dream vacation to EuroDisney. But, in the aftermath of the Paris terror, she was reluctant to go and meet Mickey, Minnie and co. She was scared.

You will be really hard pressed to find any British-Western six-year-old who would not want to go to EuroDisney. But we are living through difficult, precarious and dangerous times.

My daughter heard about the Paris attacks at school amidst playground hyperbole, fiction and youthful conversation.

My wife – who is a secondary school teacher – and I faced interrogation: What happened? Why did it happen? Why do people kill? Is it safe to go to Paris?

We did not have any clear-cut answers.

And I suspect that this climate of fear, suspicion and trepidation has increased hugely since the recent terror attacks in Manchester and London. The Manchester Arena attack, in particular, struck a chord with children as it involved people like them attending a pop concert of a children's icon, Ariana Grande.

Picking up the pieces

Many of us teaching professionals are having to pick up the pieces and help our children through this difficult time.

In the immediate days after the horrific London Bridge attacks, many unconfirmed reports emerged of schools cancelling trips and parents pulling their children out of excursions.

Is this far-fetched? Or is it sensible and understandable given what is going on around us? How should we, as individuals, as humans, as teaching professionals, deal with this climate that we are all living through?



We do not live in an Information vacuum and, with the pervasive nature of social media and 24/7 news, our children are exposed to events around them, which affect them emotionally and psychologically.

So, how should we respond to our pupils, their parents and the community, and how do we deal with difficult questions that may arise within the classroom?

Sympathy, support, care

Over the past few weeks, I have been gauging teacher opinion over how they have been dealing with recent events.

They emphasise treating pupils with 'respect and dignity'; increasing the child's sense of 'safety'; developing an 'emotional connection' with children and their families; offering 'sympathy, support and care' and encouraging 'optimism'.

They also put great importance on continuous professional development and training, to help them help our children.

It is also important to reiterate that it is OK to be scared and frightened. Teachers are not robots and have emotions. They are also living through this period of fear and anxiety. These are traumatic, sensitive, emotive and controversial events.

It is also OK not to have any answers. These acts of terror emanate from multiple complex sociological, political and ideological issues exploited by a warped criminal minority who carry out such acts fueled by a perceived sense of injustice.

We, as teaching professionals, cannot be expected to solve these issues. But what we can and should do is remain calm amidst all

the chaos and uncertainty, and reassure our pupils that everything will be fine.

Further, we should create a 'safe space' within our schooling institutions that encourages our pupils to discuss, write about, explore and debate these deep emotive issues without any fear. The role of the teacher must remain one of key confidante, facilitator, non-judgmental, deep listener and mentor.

This may not always be possible given the constraints of the controversial Prevent strategy, but we must not forget that it is the lived experiences

of our pupils that enriches our teaching and their learning.

Democratic citizenship

Young people do not leave their sociocultural worlds, their fears and anxieties behind once they enter the school gates – and nor should they.

As educators, our energy must centre on the moral and civic development of our pupils, focused around democratic citizenship, dialogue, political literacy, respect for human rights and intercultural understanding.

It is only through such a stance will we challenge the rhetoric of division and the ideology of hate that has contributed to these recent violent events.

We must maintain our humanity throughout and the clear message to all our pupils must be, in the words of the late Jo Cox MP, 'we are far more united than the things that divide us'.

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