

TINY VOICES TALK

EDUCATION, ENGAGEMENT, EMPOWERMENT

TORIA BONO

TINY VOICE TALKS

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Tiny Voices Foreword

We live in a loud world. Make a fuss. Make some noise. Make a scene. Be heard. Be loud. Get followed. Give a monkey a megaphone and it becomes the loudest animal in the jungle. It doesn't make it the smartest though. Build a following, be controversial and turn online bullying into a spectator sport – that's the way to make people listen. You'll get a book deal out of it too, if you're quick.

Loud is good. Louder is better. Want to be heard? Speak up. What's wrong with you?

Of course, as with everything in the beautiful world of education, there is always another way. And Toria Bono's Tiny Voices platform is one such way.

Quietly, carefully, without a fuss, she has created an online space where people – lovely, caring people who also happen to be wonderful educators – can meet, talk and share. Through her Twitter community – #TinyVoiceTalks – she has made it possible for over 30,000 educators to have their voices heard. Quiet voices. Tiny voices. Voices with something to say, not shout.

I had the pleasure of being interviewed by Toria during the second lockdown, for Teacher Hug Radio. We talked education, childhood, grief, well-being, bird watching with your ears in magical woodlands. She has her own *Tiny Voice Talks* podcast too. Many of the contributors to this book have had the pleasure of being interviewed by her. Follow the QR code link on the following page or visit tinyvoicetalks.com to have a listen. In these podcasts, she has also interviewed many 'names' from the world of education. But even big voices use their 'inside voice' when they are talking to Toria.

From a fabulous hashtag and an ongoing series of podcasts that never cease to inspire and inform, we now have this book. Tiny voices talking through the page. Surprising voices and helpful ones. Informative voices and supportive ones. Voices that sound like yours. Voices that sound nothing like it. Voices that make you laugh. Voices that move you. Voices that sometimes rise up in a challenge, but never a shout.

Once you have found a quiet moment to read this book, I then recommend you take time to listen. There are tiny voices all around you. In our loud world, they are easy to miss. You might be in the staffroom. Or in a classroom. You might be in an assembly or among parents. You might be in a large meeting. You might be in a small one. When you stop listening just to the loud ones, you hear what the tiny ones have to say. You'll be amazed.

You might even hear your own tiny voice in that way too.

*Ian Gilbert, founder, Independent Thinking,
Rotterdam*



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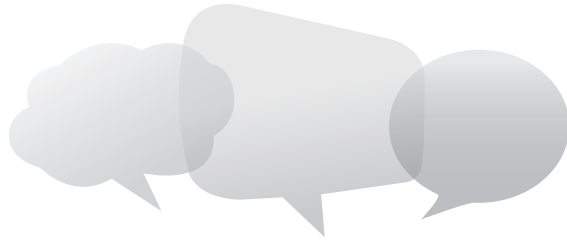
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Introduction

Toria Bono

Possunt quia posse videntur
(They can because they think they can)

Virgil

Have you ever heard of the butterfly effect? The idea was conceived over 45 years ago by Edward Lorenz, a meteorology professor, who wanted to demonstrate that small, insignificant events can lead to much larger significant events over time. Lorenz proposed that the simple act of a butterfly flapping its wings in Tokyo could lead to a tornado in Tennessee. He didn't mean it quite as literally as some have taken it, but the idea is nonetheless a powerful one. The simple act of a butterfly flapping its wings could lead to a small change that eventually could create a significant event. Butterflies, therefore, have more power than at first supposed. All they need to do is start flapping their wings!

Related, in a tenable way, is my fascination with creatures that fly. When I was growing up, my dad had a picture in his office. The picture was of two seagulls and it said "They can because they think they can." That picture fascinated me but it wasn't until much later that the quote (from Virgil) made much sense to me. Birds, like butterflies, don't wonder if they can fly. They don't sit on a branch, cogitating about whether they are going to successfully fly or, indeed, look as good as their peers in doing so; they just do it.

How many times have you sat in a meeting with a good idea developing inside your mind? How many times have you considered sharing the idea but found yourself silent instead? If you are like me, it will be many, many times. I have wanted to share my ideas but have found myself overthinking about how others would respond and ultimately have decided that the best thing to do is remain silent.

This happened on Twitter too when I started my journey on there in January 2020. Every word that I considered tweeting I deleted, for fear of failure or judgement. I wanted to join in, but was scared that my 280 characters would be the wrong ones. In February 2020, I started #TinyVoiceTuesdayUnites on Twitter (now #TinyVoiceTalks) as a way for the quieter voices in education to have their say. I flapped my wings and others joined in. The #TinyVoiceTalks community continues to meet on Twitter every Tuesday and it is wonderful to see people finding their voice and the courage to be heard. What is even more wonderful is the power of the community that is listening.

That community led me to start the *Tiny Voice Talks* podcast in August 2020. The podcast is devoted to hearing the quieter voices – giving them a platform and letting them know that their voice matters. What I discovered, as I spoke to more and more people from the world of education, is that so many of us have things that we want to say but are fearful of expressing for a myriad of reasons. Instead, we just keep quiet and nod agreeably with the bigger voices – even when we disagree. What became clear to me, though, was that when tiny voices talk, three amazing things happen:

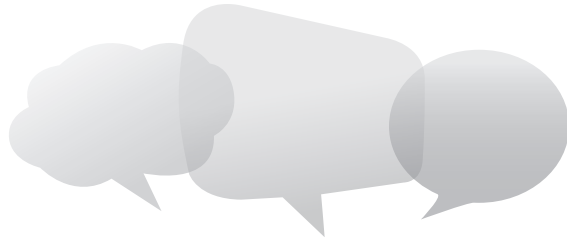
1. They share surprising insights and ideas.
2. They realise they are not so tiny.
3. They empower other tiny voices to talk too.

I think the Tiny Voice Talks effect is very similar to the butterfly effect. When we find our voices and use them, even if we are only whispering, change happens. I have received so many messages from people who have spoken up and instigated change in their classroom, school and professional lives. Spurred on by Tiny Voice Talks, they found their voices and started using them.

The power of our voice is incredible and that is why we now have this book. When I asked for submissions, I wrote this:

This book is going to be a great resource full of practical ideas and little wins from tiny voices across the educational spectrum. Where tiny voices talk to tiny voices. Although we will have many tiny voices covering many different topics, the *Golden Thread* that holds it all together – and what will make this book truly special – is what it also reveals about the power we have when we find our voice and use it.

And that is what you have – a great resource, full of practical ideas and little wins; my hope is that it will help you to find your voice too. I have given you space for your voice at the end of the book. For those of you just finding your voice, here are my top tips – write down things that resonate with you, consider why they do so and then think if you need to make changes because of this. It may be that you want to make changes to your approach to teaching and learning. It may be that you want to make changes to your leadership style or it may be that you want to make changes to your life. Whatever it is, write it down and then (and this is important) start flapping your wings and finding your voice. Voice what you are thinking and change will happen. If you doubt yourself, remember that birds never wonder if they can fly; they just do.



Part I

Tiny Voices Talk About Being That Teacher

At the tender age of 12, I was in an art lesson and my work was held up. Now, I wasn't a confident artist and I was so proud that the teacher had chosen to show my piece to the class. I sat there filled with a mix of anxiety and excitement. 'This is what not to do,' she said. I was crushed.

Not all my teachers were like this. I was lucky enough, on occasions, to have 'that teacher.' You know the one. The one who saw you and who heard you. The one who really understood you.

When I was 8, I was taught by Mrs S. She knew that I was a chatterbox (not a lot changes there) but she also knew that I wanted to try hard and do my best. In her class, for the first time in my school life, I felt seen, heard and understood.

When I was 10, we moved to California for a brief period and I went to school in Santa Monica. This all sounds very glamorous, but it wasn't really. I was away from my friends, my school and everything familiar. My fourth-grade teacher was Mrs D and she believed in me. This completely changed my experience. By the time I left that school, I was confident and happy to be me.

Then, back in the UK and doing my GCSEs, I went to the chemistry teacher and asked for some extra support. 'Frankly Victoria,' she replied, 'you are beyond help.'

This memory, alongside many others I could share with you, erased my confidence. By the time I finished school, I ended up with very little self-belief. I had learned by then that teachers can help children stand tall or crush them to the ground.

I wish I could tell you about more teachers who touched my life in a positive way, but I can't. To most of the teachers who taught me, I was invisible. I tried hard but I was a B-grade student. I behaved well (once I learned to stop chatting) so I went unnoticed. I was beige. I needed teachers like Mrs S and Mrs D who made me feel all the colours of the rainbow, not teachers who were content with me being beige.

Are you 'that teacher', like Mrs S and Mrs D? I really hope that I am. In my classroom I have a sign by my desk and it says 'Believe'. I keep it there to remind the children that I believe in them. And that they should believe in themselves too.

The chapters in this section are devoted to being 'that teacher' and the difference we can make when we are. At the end, take time to find your voice and write down what you do for the young people in your care. I know you care because you are reading this book. How do they know you do?



Chapter 1

Be That Teacher

Leanne Herring

Be that teacher: the one who is not afraid to veer from the plan; the one who gets excited to be directing an end-of-term show; the one whose enthusiasm gets the eye rolls in the staffroom. Be the teacher who discovers an old rusty key on the pavement and pounces on it to use as writing inspiration later. The teacher who dresses up in whatever it takes to get the class talking about the best flavour of ice cream – and knows how to stop them talking too.

Be the teacher who questions the things that don't make sense, who asks for the reasons behind a new incentive, who points out – when faced with yet another (purchased) scheme of work – that anyone can read from a script, but a teacher inspires beyond a text. Be the one who goes above and beyond to learn the skills to reach those children who may feel lost or overwhelmed in a bustling classroom, who brings into line the disruptive children seeking the attention they might not receive anywhere else, and who shows how far a love of learning can take us all. The one who sings, dances and performs, telling stories that make children laugh and jokes that don't; who runs around the playground in the rain – take that 'wet playtime'!

Children do not need another carbon copy of a previous teacher, delivering lessons that anyone could deliver. They need role models who encourage creativity and change and who express individuality.

Being that teacher is hard. At times during your career, it will feel like all you can do is jump through the right hoops at the right time, fall in line with the tick-box clip-chart culture and nod along to the things that most dishearten you. But within the walls of your classroom, you're the boss and those hoops can be whatever size and shape you need them to be to match the needs of those who matter most to a teacher.

Never be afraid to venture (back) into a child's world and embrace imagination and fun. What other job is there where you get paid to build a den, skip across a playground or make cakes out of mud? And how much more engaging is that than asking 30 inert children to turn to page 23 of a textbook with a forgettable title? Think about your own memories of school. Everyone remembers their favourite worksheet? I don't think so. We do remember that time Mrs Strong threw caution to the wind, the unexpected happened and we became truly excited not only about learning but about ourselves.

Never underestimate the power you have as a teacher, armed with your special weapons of awe and wonder. Always remember how you can build confidence in a wary child that no generic curriculum can ever do. Data, bar charts and statistics have their place, but they are not what counts. They just guide us to do what counts. Creating moments that matter is what being a great teacher is all about. And teachers who create those moments live forever.

Be that teacher.

Leanne Herring is a primary school teacher and writer based in Essex who has been teaching in the early years foundation stage and Key Stage 1 for the last 10 years. She has completed a master's in psycholinguistics and now works as an educational content creator specialising in phonics.



Chapter 2

Self-Esteem Is (Still) the Key to Learning

Dr Clare Campbell

In my very first essay as a primary teaching student over 22 years ago, I wrote 'Self-esteem is the key to learning.' I believed it then but I know it now.

Self-esteem is perhaps best defined as feeling both capable and lovable, and a child with low self-esteem is not in a good place to learn. How could they be? Learning involves having the courage to be open to new possibilities and take risks on the way. It exposes you. If you feel you are going to fail and people will like you even less when you do, you are not going to want to put yourself on the line to even try.

This is why it is vital that so much of an educator's job is about developing great relationships with their pupils, backed up by the quality of the pastoral care they give them. After all, children's mental health and well-being is paramount – even more so during a pandemic that has taken its emotional toll on us all.

Your job, then, is to do everything in your power to build up a child's self-esteem each day. And keep at it day after day. After all, self-esteem can be a very fragile as well as a fluttering thing. It can appear in one part of the curriculum only to disappear in another. The child who feels 10 feet tall in drama may feel tiny in a numeracy lesson.

That is why I love the creative subjects so much. Art, dance, drama, music, poetry and creative writing are areas of the curriculum where there are no

wrong answers. Through the creative arts, children can express themselves without the fear of getting it 'wrong'.

In my school we use art therapy for the children who need additional support and we employ an art psychotherapist part time to work with our children. Art therapy is all about making art while building positive relationships with the therapist as you do. The end product is not important. What counts is the process the children go through to get there: one they enjoy and through which they can really express themselves in a way they have been unable to with the written or spoken word.

Often our children discover an otherwise hidden natural talent in art and go on to pursue it as a hobby – something which gives them great joy and a sense of peace and mindfulness, and helps raise their self-esteem. When you are good at something, you see yourself developing new skills and unlocking your creative potential. It feels good. You feel good. And all children are good at something. As teachers, our job is to find out what that is rather than spending all our time focusing on what they can't do.¹

Linked to that, I think one of the most damaging things we can do for a child's self-esteem is to underestimate them. To have low expectations of them and impose a ceiling on their natural gifts and talents is the opposite of what teaching should be about. That is why, in my school, we are not driven by the data. Children are so much more than a SAT score, a phonics screening test outcome or a GCSE result.

Remember too that the education system sets one child against another. It's all about the achievements of the individual, not the group. For some children to do well, we need others to do less well. Yet, we have all seen the outcome when children work creatively *together* to produce incredible things.

During the early stages of the pandemic, our head girl, Emily, was diagnosed with leukaemia at the age of 11. What followed was a punishing schedule of chemotherapy, yet she was still attending online lessons from her hospital bed and completing schoolwork to her usual high standards.

Even though the lockdown rules meant we were all at our most alone, this little girl and her family brought our community together. We focused

1 Something to bear in mind at parent consultation events.

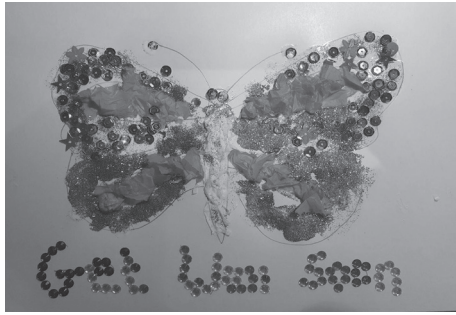
on a range of whole-school projects that could be completed in school bubbles, or at home by our 'stay-at-home heroes', and we made lockdown love hearts which they decorated beautifully for Emily, with messages and prayers for her recovery. We also made butterflies of kindness which we sent to her hospital ward to cheer her up. For those children who needed them, we sent art materials home, and we also sent supplies to Emily's ward so that her new friends who were also having cancer treatment could join in too. Children and families even sent in jokes and we compiled a huge joke book for her with the help of teachers on Twitter.

We also created beautiful artwork for her and then encouraged celebrities from all over the country to join in with a 'Thumbs up for Emily' campaign on social media. Stars from Emily's favourite soaps, *Hollyoaks*, *Emmerdale* and *Coronation Street* became involved, as did the likes of Gary Lineker, Lord Alan Sugar, Craig Revel Horwood and Joe Wicks. She is a Salford Reds rugby fan and her favourite player, Jackson Hastings, wore special rugby boots dedicated to her in one match and then gave them to her in person afterwards. We also created a whole-school art exhibition dedicated to Emily in the hall. Working with a local artist, Emma Evans, we decorated the glass entrance to the school with rainbow love hearts, each one representing a prayer said for Emily by our school family.

But it wasn't all about helping Emily. Together we spread the support and positivity even further with Emily's classmates going on sponsored bike rides, shaving their heads, making and selling little bead angels and more. With the support of Emily's amazing family too, we raised over £4,500 for Royal Manchester Children's Hospital and Emily managed to buy every single toy on the children's ward wish list. Her legacy will live on in Ward 84.

It would have been easy to underestimate the resilience of a young girl who was diagnosed with a terrible illness. And that of her classmates. Yet Emily and the whole school did things that I never expected or dreamed they could do. But why wait to be faced with terrible adversity to discover what children are really capable of? We can all learn so much from our children about dignity, integrity, compassion and kindness. When we recognise this, and celebrate it each day, we can really make a positive difference to their self-esteem.

I am typing this after watching our Year 6 leavers' show, *The Greatest Showman*. It was a truly wonderful event with all children taking part. Emily, back at school and healthy now, sang a solo in her starring role and, of course, there wasn't a dry eye in the house.



Left: Emily in Manchester Children's Hospital with posters from her classmates
Right: Butterflies for Emily from children at St Charles RC Primary School



Emily after chemotherapy for childhood cancer

Dr Clare Campbell has been a head teacher since 2009 and a teacher since 1999. She has lectured in education at the University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University, Liverpool Hope and Tangaza University in Nairobi. She is the mother of two teenage boys. Her publications include A Year of Mindfulness, Drawn to the Word, Be the Change and What Is Beauty? She has written and illustrated children's books including The Q and Mousa the Homeless Mouse.

Three amazing things happen when tiny voices talk: they share surprising ideas and insights; they realise they are not so tiny; and they empower other tiny voices to talk too.

This is a remarkable book full of tips, insights and practical approaches from educators with small voices but big ideas. Drawing on the winning formula of Toria Bono's *Tiny Voice Talks* podcast, educators from across the educational spectrum have been brought together to share fantastic practice and a deep understanding of how to get the best out of children of all ages. From mentoring, metacognitive skills and period education to trauma-informed practice, nurturing curious learners and finding flow in the classroom, these voices speak quietly to practitioners everywhere.

What's more, this book is a call to action. Whoever you are, you have a voice too. Find it and use it! After all, big voices (and big egos) in education are just the loud minority. The majority consists of educators and leaders (like you) just getting on with the job. And always with children at the heart of things. This book will inspire everyone to find and use their voice – and when tiny voices talk to tiny voices, everyone wins.

Suitable for teachers, teaching assistants and school leaders in all phases.

Tired of the predictable positioning of so-called 'edu-celebrities', this group of colleagues write honestly and they write from the heart.

Dame Alison Peacock, Chief Executive, Chartered College of Teaching

The voices may be tiny but their messages are potent with possibility.

Dr Pie Corbett, writer, educational consultant and leader of Talk for Writing

Toria Bono has expertly curated a diverse and informed range of voices. I highly recommend this book.

Simon Kidwell, School Principal and Vice President of the NAHT School Leaders' Union

Whether you're looking for a fresh approach to teaching, leadership or life, there is something for everyone in this incredible book!

*Anoara Mughal, teacher and author of *Think! Metacognition-Powered Primary Teaching**

There are powerful points within this book that deserve to be shared with a wider audience. Bravo, Toria, for making this possible.

*Bukky Yusuf, Senior Leader, leadership coach and co-editor of *The Big Book of Whole School Wellbeing**

Toria Bono has empowered the voices of people who may otherwise be quiet and for that she must be commended. Read the book and hear the voices.

*David Whitaker, Director of Learning, Wellspring Academy Trust, author of *The Kindness Principle**

A treasure trove of wisdom from a myriad of voices in education; every single contribution has at least one thing that you can take away to ponder, reflect, use and share with others.

Sharifah Lee, Head Teacher, Dorney School



Toria Bono is a classroom teacher who has worked in a variety of educational roles over the past 20 years. Toria is passionate about helping those involved in education to find their voices. She believes that when educators listen to and learn from one another, the young people in our nurseries, schools and colleges benefit from the collective knowledge and wisdom shared. [@Toriacaire](#)

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