

CPI *Unrestrained* Transcription

Episode 57: Paul Dix

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Host: Terry Vittone

Terry: Hello, and welcome to *Unrestrained*, the CPI podcast series. This is your host, Terry Vittone. And my guest today is Mr. Paul Dix. He is the founder and executive director of Pivotal Education, an award-winning education consultancy working in the UK and internationally. Hello, and welcome, Paul.

Paul: Hi, Terry. Hello. Thank you very much for having me on the podcast.

Terry: Our privilege; thank you. Let me tell you a little bit about our guest. Paul Dix is a speaker, author, and notorious teacher wrangler. He is currently in huge demand. And as a teacher leader, and a teacher trainer, Paul has been working with the most difficult behaviors in the most challenging urban schools, referral units, and colleges for the last 25 years.

Miraculously, Paul trained at Homerton College, Cambridge, after countless attempts to sabotage his own education, working on to move in tricky schools in East London, Nuneaton, and Birmingham. Paul and his team at Pivotal work with thousands of head teachers in schools worldwide who use the Pivotal curriculum as the core foundation of behavior practice. All right, Paul, let's start today by having you tell our listeners about the founding, the mission, and the history of Pivotal Education.

Paul: So, we started Pivotal Education because, as teachers, we were just frustrated constantly by the poor quality of teacher training in schools. You know, somebody would turn up, they'd flip out 100 PowerPoint slides and they'd start reading them to us, and we just were appalled. Not only that, it was quite obvious in the very challenging schools that we were working in, that there was very poor training in behavior management, inconsistent, different people had different amounts of training in different styles with different philosophies. So, you're just dealing not only with the chaos of children's lives, but the chaos of the training that the adults have had.

So, we reached a point in 2001 where we just had to do something about it. And we didn't really want to leave the classroom, but I got together with a friend of mine, who was also teaching in the same school, and we hatched a plan to leave. We gave up our jobs. We had no business forthcoming. We just dived into it because we knew, having been practicing

teachers, that we could deliver something that was more enticing, more engaging, less PowerPoint, and more relevant to the lives of the teachers and children in the classroom.

Terry: So you had a leap of faith at this moment, back in 2001, and just decided to put a different paradigm in place then?

Paul: Yeah, we did. I mean, literally, we had a planning weekend by a beach somewhere in North Wales in Great Britain. And on the Monday morning, we both went in and we resigned our posts. And the principal said to me, "What are you doing? Where are you going?" And, you know, some people were very kind and enthusiastic, and other people, you know, felt odd about us leaving and going to set this thing up. You know, were we too young? Were we too ambitious? You know, why are we leaving the classroom? Lots of questions, but we felt absolutely driven to do this.

And, you know, it was very, very hard at first. You know, we didn't dive into lots of work and consultancy, we had to grind it out. And for the first two or three years, I think I probably earned a third of the wage that I was earning as a teacher. But we had a mission. We knew what we wanted to do and we knew what we wanted to achieve.

Terry: Mm-hmm. Did you have other peers cheering you on as well, recognizing the need that you had seen?

Paul: Yeah, we did, but you always remember the guys and the people that . . .

Terry: Yes, the naysayers, right?

Paul: Yeah, that say, "Well, you know, you're going to be a substitute teacher within a week." That was a comment from somebody that hung with me. And I never needed to work as a substitute teacher; it just drove me further on, I think.

Terry: So, kind of an unwitting stimulus for you was this comment, "You're going to be substitute teaching in a week." It's like, "No, I'm not."

Paul: Absolutely. Well, I think, you know, my career is a string of those comments of people telling me I can't do something, and then, finding myself just utterly determined to prove them wrong.

Terry: Excellent. And we're going to get to something very close to that at the end of the interview, something that you've included in the book that I think our listeners will be very entertained by and will relate directly back to what we just mentioned. Let's talk today, right now, to preface our talk, about Pivotal Education, which is doing extremely well. And I said you were in great demand to work with different schools to turn them around and to manage challenging behavior in a new and more effective way than they had known before. And then, CPI came in and offered to join with Pivotal Education. And what about

CPI's mission and methods made you say yes? Why did it seem like a good fit to join with CPI?

Paul: I think two reasons, Terry. I think, firstly, because their values as a company fit our values at Pivotal Education. You know, of course, we're interested in, you know, expanding the training for teachers, creating real quality through those training programs, and a real consistency across them. So, it was clear that the work that CPI was doing, both in the UK and in the US, was, you know, in terms of the values, was absolutely in line with what Pivotal was doing.

And I think also, you know, Terry, I'm an educator. I come from classroom practice. I come from working in schools. And we set up a business that became hugely successful. And with the best school in the world, my skills are, you know, I explained that, but I needed help to expand the business to the level of ambition that we want to expand it to. And I don't have that expertise, but, of course, in CPI, you know, they're steeped in their expertise. They've got 35 years of growing a business as well as helping teachers in the classroom.

So, we saw that not only did they fit our values but that actually, they would be the catalyst to help us expand this program, you know, not just a sort of a boutique consultancy serving, you know, a few thousand schools, we really wanted to expand this worldwide, and particularly into the US.

Terry: Well, excellent. And I can see how you can see the marriage of the CPI business model really helping the need for Pivotal, because after I read the 2017 book of yours, it's called *When the Adults Change, Everything Changes: Seismic Shifts in School Behaviour*, we're going to talk about that in detail in this interview, I found it illuminating and entertaining. And just the dramatic sorts of shifts that you got in the institutional cultures in these schools was just something that's palpable as you read through the book, and the effectiveness of it, and the brightening of students' lives and their futures is just something that emerges as you read this book.

And so, if CPI offers you a venue whereby you can share that methodology with more schools, it is a brilliant thing indeed. This 2017 title is, again, *When the Adults Change, Everything Changes*, and it is both a how-to book about effectively managing challenging student behavior as well as a philosophical approach to reshaping school culture through a methodology based in kindness, consistency, and restorative practices, as opposed to punishment, zero tolerance, and draconian and convoluted disciplinary policies.

So, let's talk about, if we can, before I go on forever here, one of the central ideas of your book. You write, "It seems that the behavior of a few leaders is pivotal to the success of behavior management initiatives." And, "The key difference between the schools with which we work is leadership." So, Paul, why is leadership so critical to implementing the behavior management techniques that you outline in your book?

Paul: You know, I think, the way that teachers manage their classroom, manage behavior of children, is absolutely pivotal to the culture of the school. You can't make changes in classroom management practice without changing the culture. And in order to do that, you need very brave leaders, because brave leaders embrace innovation and change, and then [they] progress. It would be easy as a leader just to stick with your discipline system and say, "Well, it's too risky to change it. You know, everybody knows what it is. It might not be perfect but we'll just kinda keep it."

I think, actually, when you really want to transform an educational setting, and you really want to take a bite out of a culture and really change that up, I think you need incredible leadership in order to do that. It's not a program that we run that just kind of evolves from small bits of classroom practice. As a school leader, you've really got to take the behavior management, the classroom management, by the scruff of the neck, and realize that when you do that, things will happen in the climate and culture of your school that you're also going to need to pay some attention to.

So, it needs leadership because what we do is not just one day of training—it's not just a wham-bam thank you. This is about embedding change over time. And along that journey, there are some ups and downs, you know. Let's be honest, when you wanna make real change in school culture and in classroom behavior, you have to go through the eye of the storm sometimes, and that takes great confidence as a leader to be able to do that, you know. You'll have people knocking on your doors within a few weeks saying, "Ah, can we go back to the old system," before the new system is even bitten.

You know, the teachers who will complain like crazy about the current system, and as soon as you make change, they start complaining about the changes. So, you need broad shoulders as a leader to be able to make those shifts. You know, I was with Judith Schubert and Marvin Mason from CPI and we were presenting at the ERDI [Education Research & Development Institute] Conference in St. Louis just a few days ago. And those supervisors were looking at our program and we were talking about the same thing, you know, "The program is fantastic, the program is excellent, but without great leadership, any program, any training that you do with teachers is just bound to fail, so we need those two things."

Which is why a lot of the work we do in the UK is directly with principals before we even introduce the program to staff, because we need to get them on board and we need to be able to show them how to lead this before we start innovating.

Terry: One of the most gratifying things about the book, I think, was the change in leadership from this dubious sort of reluctance to this eventual astonishment from the results that they were seeing through implementing the Pivotal behavioral techniques. In the first chapter of your book, "Visible Consistency, Visible Kindness," you write, "The best schools have absolute consistency. And it is not necessarily an issue of resources. It is an issue of

commitment and focus for the school and of absolute consistency." Could you talk about why consistency is so critical to effective behavior management in schools?

Paul: I think, Terry, you know, if you're in a school where every day, your teachers and the adults around you give you the same clear, consistent, and safe messages, and you imagine having those same messages ringing, you know, for 100 days, suddenly, the consistency goes beyond what we might ordinarily understand as consistency. Suddenly, adults stand together so you couldn't put a cigarette paper between one and the other.

And that doesn't create a sort of, you know, we're not talking about creating automatons and some sort of zero tolerance, you know, mantras for teachers that they just sort of say stuff and it worked. It's much more subtle than that. And, you know, what we're about is surrounding children with that safe consistency. I know that people listening to this will have heard of that kind of consistency but used in a different direction, so used with punishment, and with isolation, and sort of giving teachers tariffs, "If the child does this, then you must give them this punishment."

And, I think, over the last 10, 15 years, some schools have been sucked into the idea that you can have the consistency with the punishment. And what we've done is created the consistency that's just as strict, that has just as tight boundaries, but we don't do it with anger; we don't do it with aggression; we do it with a calm consistency that you'd find the best parents using with their children at home.

Terry: Well, let's talk about one of the consistencies that we can make tangible for people. To preface this question, and one of the motifs in your book is the rule three, is we see that number come up repeatedly in a different contexts. I think for the manageability of the number, something about our minds can manipulate those sets of choices, where if you start to add more, it becomes confusing. But why should schools aim for a set of three agreed visible consistencies, and what are some examples that schools can put in place right away?

Paul: Okay. So, three is the magic number, right, Terry? You know that, but, you know, we know that from the song.

Terry: Yes!

Paul: And that what we find is that schools are just, with the best intentions, they create huge lists of rules and codes of conduct that just confuse people. What we're trying to do is simplify it, you know, three rules for the school. If you would have spoken about the same 3 rules by 100 teachers for 100 days, things would start to change in terms of the boundaries that you imagine are there as a child, things would start to change in how you act yourself and how you interact with other people. And we don't like consistency to be invisible.

You can imagine a school where everybody stands up and says, "Yeah, we're going to be consistent," and then, they all go for their individual classrooms, close the doors, and have their own interpretation of what that consistency is. What we do is we create a behavior blueprint. And as you rightly described, we have three rules, three adult behaviors, three visible consistencies. Everything is in threes because we want parents, teachers, administrators, everyone to understand what those living behaviors are every day in those schools.

So, what we want are our adults not only to see behavior management as a team sport but to act like a team, beyond their doors, meeting and greeting, shaking and saluting, you know, give that positive entrance to the classroom, and to the school, and to the site that those children need and deserve. We might have a very visible consistency in terms of what teachers use to organize their classroom management. Why should it be different in every classroom when you're very often sending high school students to many different classrooms and different teachers?

You kinda set out this crazy situation, where each teacher has their own methodology, each teacher has their own classroom management practice, and you're asking children to remember and interpret every time they walk into a classroom, a different set of expectations. So, we want that to be visible, we want smiling teachers, we want handshakes. Does that mean we're soft and we're weak and we won't deal with poor behavior? No, absolutely not. But when you have a visible team that—you know, in some of our schools, every adult—and I mean every adult, this is not about just the teachers—every adult will come out of their offices, they'll come out of their classrooms, they'll come out onto the corridor just for two minutes in the morning, two minutes at lunch, and two minutes at the end of the day, and it's a tiny thing.

But suddenly, just for those two minutes, the corridors are swamped with adults. Now, that helps in times of mass movement around the school and just keeping everything calm, but it also helps because the children see that we're one, we can't be played off against each other, we're not there to find the gaps. And there's a consistency in language, in approach, in visibility, and there's a consistency, an audible consistency.

When you walk into a Pivotal school, you'll hear those same three rules: ready, respectful, and safe uttered by every adult, whether they're intervening with poor behavior or whether they're celebrating good behavior.

Terry: I have to say you make regimentation very palatable in this book. And I'm not going to give it away, but one visible consistency you described is something called fantastic walking, which I think a lot of teachers might be interested to learn about. Chapter two, you get a little more, I would say, provocative here. It's called "The Counter-Intuitive Classroom," and you write, "The great behavior management is counter-intuitive and the key to managing your classroom is to know you're counter-intuitive and refuse to be drawn by them." Could you explain that for us?

Paul: So, the biggest counter-intuitive is trying to deal with angry children with an angry mindset from the adult. And, of course, when children behave poorly, when they let themselves down, when they let the standards of the school down, when they let you down, it feels like you should be emotionally pulled towards it. But, of course, when you're emotionally pulled, you end up reacting not with logic and reason, you end up reacting with emotion, and that just fuels the anger or the distressed nature of the child.

Now look, you know, I've spent years in classrooms making all of those mistakes, and I understand, as a new teacher, how it feels very emotional, how it feels very personal. But in Pivotal schools, the rule is that we're calm, consistent adults. And despite the poor behavior of some individuals, we will not react emotionally, so poor behavior, we will not fuel that behavior of a 7-year-old by having a 47-year-old shouting and, you know, demanding their pound of flesh.

Does that mean that we don't hold the boundaries? No, not at all. We absolutely hold the boundaries. But, you know, great teachers have always managed to hold their boundaries through good relationships, through a rational response to behavior. And, I think, the more experienced you get as the teacher, the more you realize that much of what you do in terms of classroom management is counter-intuitive. And we will talk about punishment and restorative practice later. That's another [thing that is] counter-intuitive to what we're trying to do. But if the culture in your school is to react with emotion, and you see senior teachers doing exactly that, then when do you ever learn that calm, rational response that every great parent knows is at the core of their strategy as a parent?

Terry: So, it must have been further confirmation when you investigated CPI's behavioral models and constructs that the construct of Rational Detachment fits right in with what you're saying about the counter-intuitive classroom.

Paul: It's exactly the same and it's just a slightly different language. Talking to CPI about their products and learning more about the CPI way, we're constantly finding those connections and constantly finding that actually, as you said, it's the same thing we're both aiming for; it's just different description.

Terry: Right. You've got a chapter in the book, it's about something that you call botheredness, and I was very curious to read that title and I thought, "What is this going to be about?" And I'd like you to explain why botheredness can be a pivotal quality in showing students that their lives matter to their teachers.

Paul: Because, Terry, most of the children that come into our schools, they come in well-mannered, kind, polite, and ready to learn. And the issue is that, very often, some teachers just kind of get him in, teach him, and get him out again. And, of course, relationships with young people are so important, but the word "relationships" often sets people up to say, "I

haven't got time to, you know, I've got to teach, I've got content, I've got 15 classes a day, I don't have time to build these relationships.”

So, what we do at Pivotal is we use the drip feed of botheredness, that drip, drip, every day. And botheredness could be the smallest thing. It could be a handshake, a smile, a hello in the corridor, an open door, sitting and having lunch with your students. It's small stuff that just builds. And what we know about relationships is that relationships happen slowly, gradually, over time.

If you meet someone in the mall, and half an hour after you've met them, they're trying to arrange to go on holiday with you, it's too much, right?

Terry: Yes.

Paul: You back off. It's way too much, too fast. Relationships in our personal lives build over those small bits of botheredness: the text message you get, the postcard, the quart of milk that you borrowed. It's small stuff over time. And, I think, you know, people have got caught up in trying to build relationships fast, and you can't do that. So, what we do is we say to teachers to just be bothered, say hello. Don't have those great children, the ones that come every day, do the right thing, don't forget them either because they're just as important as the children who are loud and energetic and eager to bounce into your classroom.

So, those small moments of botheredness during the day, the shaking hands at the beginning of the classroom, or the positive note home, or the little bits of recognition, mean that every student is able to feel like they are connected to the teacher. And obviously, with some teachers, you know yourself, Terry, going to school, you build up fantastic relationships with, and others not so much. What we want to do at Pivotal school is make sure that each child knows that the teachers, the adults, are bothered about them. And it's small stuff done every day, not grand gestures.

Terry: I think we all remember a teacher that couldn't be bothered, as the phrase would go, to know us personally or to take an extra moment. But to really make that a drip-feed of showing that you can be bothered to do a kindness, to take an extra moment with someone who's having difficulty really has a cumulative effect that starts to change culture.

Paul: Yeah, absolutely.

Terry: All right. And you described one example of botheredness would be a positive note, and you talked about the incredible power of the positive note in your book. Could you talk about that for us?

Paul: So, Terry, we love digital, we love the digital world that Pivotal do, CPI do. They have lots of blended learning and lots of digital and technical innovation. But when you work with children in a classroom, there's some stuff that is just better when it's done in an analog way. So, a positive note is exactly that. It is a note given by the teacher to a student to take home, to say to their parents that that child has gone five days of over and above. Not five days of meeting the minimum standard, not one day of behaving well and four days they're really not good, but those children who come every day to do the right thing.

We wanna start flipping the idea that the most important children in the school are the worst-behaved, that the children that get the most attention are the worst behaved. So, the positive note rewards that consistent over and above behavior through the week. And every teacher in a Pivotal school would give one positive note and it's a note that's handwritten by the teacher. I mean, sure, you could print it off the internet, you could buy some from the Pivotal shop, or you could just write it on a plain piece of card, because, you know, those things—and, I think, you know, sometimes as adults, we realize that those little notes you get from people that just recognize what you've done. Even though you weren't making a fuss about it, and even though, you know, you weren't gunning for the note, it just arrives. I think those are some really incredible moments.

I still have notes that my students gave me when I was teaching, that other adults, teachers, have given me while I was working, and they mean a lot to me. So, it's that note that goes home to the child. They put it on the fridge, they talk to everyone in the community about how the school's changing, how the school is now recognizing good behavior, you know, that old cliché that some schools never contact home unless there's bad news, and then, they're very quick to contact home. We wanna flip that. We want schools to be contacting home with the positive, so that when there is an issue, so that when we do need help, the parents are on board from the beginning because they realize that our focus is the positive, and, you know, the poor contact with home, that the bad news is the exception.

So, you know, in some homes, the child would get rewarded for having a positive note. In others, you know, you don't need to be wealthy to make your child feel proud: you know, staying up late, watching a movie, having your cousins over for a weekend, you know. It's not about let's reward this child with money and stuff, it's about let's share some of that pride that the school feels, that the teacher feels, with the home. And incredible things happen, Terry, you know, when that happens. I used to have, you know, some parents coming to me at parent-teacher evening saying, you know, "You've covered my fridge with those purple notes," that the kids knew what they were, that they've never asked for them. They never demand them.

And it was a very subtle, personal, and rather magical way of just giving that really positive recognition. And, you know what it is about, the analog, Terry; it's that you can touch it. And that moment where you give the child a positive note, you are framing their behavior, you're pegging them in the moment, you know, one day you might need to come back to

that moment and use that moment to leave a better behavior when they've slipped a little. So, there's all sorts going on there. There's professional pride, there's pegging the behavior, there's reframing the student, there's positive contact with home, and it all comes from 30 seconds a week just to write a little note to give to the child.

Terry: The importance of something that comes from human hands, yes.

Paul: Yeah, yeah.

Terry: You talk in your book about something called a certainty, and you say, I think, we're kind of wading into the world of punishment here. [laughter] Why does certainty beat a sanction every time, and how can an educator introduce your concept of certainty when a child escalates?

Paul: Okay. So we know about certainty because we know about dealing with children—very young children, four-year-old, five-year-old children. Now, if you imagine you give a consequence to a child who's five years old, and you say, "Well, the consequence is going to be that you're going to go to bed early next Thursday." In a week's time, by the time you get to the next Thursday, there is no way that child remembers what that is connected with. It's way too far away.

So, I'm sure teachers who teach very young children know that it's not the punishment, it is about the distance between the behavior, and then what happens. So, you know, a child pulls the hair of another child, you would immediately separate them. You'd immediately give them some thinking time. You might leave them for a couple of minutes and then you come back and talk to them about the behavior before they'd had a chance to forget it and sorta move on with their life.

With older children, the gap can be longer, but the principle is still exactly the same. What we need to do is to connect the consequence to the behavior and big punishments don't do that. Big punishments build resentment, and they're difficult to administrate, and nobody really thinks they're effective. We just kinda do it because that's how we've done it. The two minutes for us is really critical. I've got a child who's engaging in poor behavior in my classroom. It's low level stuff. It's not something that I'd need to move them out of the classroom for, but they're not working. It's low level stuff. What I need to be able to do is find some space after that class to look that child in the eye and speak to them, maybe just for two minutes.

Now if I plan what I'm going to say there, if I know the exact thing I'm going to say there, if I'm clear about redrawing the boundaries and I think after about two minutes, we might be okay, then there's no need for me to layer on some other massive consequence. By the same token, if I speak to a student after class for two minutes and I don't get the reaction I want, and we're not ready yet, I might choose to delay that conversation till after lunch, I might choose to call them back for 10 minutes rather than 2 minutes. But I'm not going to

escalate it to an hour, two hours, or putting them in an isolation booth, or, you know, all the other sort of weird and insane punishments that we try and put on other people's children that we'd never put on our own.

An example I always give is, you know, if your child is badly behaved at the dinner table and you've got guests over, then you might send them to their room, right? And after you've finished dinner, you'd fill the dishwasher, and you'd go up to your kid's room, you'd knock on the door, and you'd sit down with them on the end of the bed and say, "Hey, you know, what on earth happened there?" You wouldn't send them to someone else to deal with the problem. You wouldn't send them to the next door neighbor to be locked in the garage for the next three days. You know, you have to deal with it yourself.

And I think, you know, schools are more complicated places. We have lots more children, but the same principles are absolutely essential, that we search for the smallest consequence in the moment, not the emotional acceleration of finding the biggest punishment off the top shelf in the vain hope that you might crush the behavior forever. I mean, you know, it might seem, again, counter-intuitively, like that works in the moment, but we know that it just builds up resentment over time and breaks the relationship. So, the power of that two-minute conversation, when you can do it well, and you've got a plan for it, and it's not just an improvised conversation.

We find with our schools that the need for bigger punishments, the need for larger consequences, reduces and eventually goes away. So, we don't come into schools and say, right, you know, "Just throw away all your punishment," what we do is we change the practice in the classrooms so that those large punishments are no longer needed. And a couple of years down the line, the teachers say the same thing. They say, "I can't believe we ever thought, you know—why did we ever think that holding children for hours and hours and making them do punitive punishments was going to work? You know, we don't need to do that.

Now, you know, we still hold the boundary, we still hold the line, but we do it quickly and efficiently. And, you know, it's almost quite similar for CPI's principle in terms of physical intervention, that you do something that's the least restrictive. Well, at Pivotal, we give consequences, you know, that are least intrusive to both the lives of the teachers and the lives of the students, and we get better behavior.

Terry: Mm-hmm. And I think this relates, I mean, as you have now, throughout the book, you take traditional notions of punishment to task in a very effective way. And you talk about something called the punishment road, and I think that relates directly back to what you were saying, but maybe you could flesh it out. What is the punishment road, and why is this such sort of a desperate and pernicious thing that persists to this day?

Paul: So, Terry, I have spent a lot of time working in youth custody with young people from the age of 14, 15, all the way up to 25 years old, who are being held in a custodian setting. And

it was quite clear to me, looking at those situations, having, you know, taught for a very long time in schools that the custodial setting, the prison service had the same idea of punishment that they may have had 100 years ago. What you do in a prison setting when somebody misbehaves is you restrict them, you restrict their liberty even more, you put them into segregation. I'm in a prison in the UK for young people—we call them young offenders institutions—and I was speaking to the head guy. And I said to him, "Look, what you got here is a mainstream prison, and then, you've got a segregation unit, what more could we do to help you to improve behavior?" And he looked me straight in the eye and he told me that what we needed was another segregation unit so the people that weren't behaving in segregation could be like in double segregation, you know. It's Seymour Skinner's detention block, right?

Terry: Oh, yes.

Paul: The punishment dream that we could get all the naughty kids and all the naughty people into a facility that just locked them away forever will solve the world, and it's just insane. So, the punishment road in schools is based on the same principle, that if a child doesn't behave, we'd kick him out, and then we kick him out to someone else who has to try and deal with them. And then, very often, if they're not in mainstream education, and they've not succeeded in special ed and special ed has not been able to help them, they end up in front of the police. They end up in front of the courts. They end up in front of custodial settings. And they do the same thing, they say, "Oh, if you can't behave in this situation, we're going to have to move you."

So, at the end of this punishment road are children locked in prison cells and they're not compliant. They haven't given up. They haven't had this sorta road to Damascus experience that says, "Well, I'm going to turn my life around because the punishment is too harsh." No, they're still screaming at the walls. They're still abusing everybody because nobody's dealt with their trauma. All we've done is just punish them for it. And when you look at those children, and they are the 2% of children who are in our schools, in our custodian settings, you know, the 2% of children we worry about most.

We're providing them with punishment, but actually, all of those children seem to share the same thing, which is, you know, they've had a traumatized upbringing that has consequences in their adult life. You know, I think an intelligent way to deal with that is to try to deal with the trauma, but I know, as well as restricting their ability to damage other people. But segregating them and punishing them even more does not solve the issue.

Terry: Well, it confirms the message that they're irredeemable that they've gotten ever since they first misbehaved.

Paul: Yeah.

Terry: It perpetuates that self-image, it seems to me.

Paul: I went, Terry, I flew into Philadelphia and I took the opportunity to go to the East State Penitentiary. I don't think that you've been there. That's the world's first penitentiary, where they believe that isolation was the cure. So, they put prisoners in hoods. And the prison was a silent prison. They refused to allow the prisoners to speak to each other. And they very quickly had to change that regime because the mental health issues for those people would just exacerbate and getting worse. You know, prison, or an isolation room, or a segregated room for a bit of reflection for a few minutes might be really useful, but to see that as a way of changing—to me, punishment says no, but then it says a whole load of other things that maybe we don't wanna communicate. So, what we do at Pivotal is we give that "no" and we make sure that no is loud and clear, but then we're more rational about how we deal with children who are clearly traumatized.

Terry: Mm-hmm. Let's talk about that change that Pivotal brings. And there's an interesting thought, I think, in your chapter on punishment, "Punishment Addiction, Humiliation Hangover" is the name [of the chapter], and you write, "When punishment is replaced with therapy, mentoring, coaching, and love, the children change. In short, when the adults change, everything changes." Some schools use isolation booths, also known as seclusion, as a punishment. Could you explain why you've written that isolation booths are called "the bleakest sign of an institution giving up?"

Paul: Because every child that sat with their face against the wall, with barriers either side of them, is not—I didn't wake up this morning thinking I'm going to be naughty, but they're not in control of their own behavior. They're not able to self-regulate. They're not autonomous. There's stuff going on for those kids, and I've walked into a thousand of those rooms, Terry, and every time I asked for, you know, "What are the additional needs that these children have?" And they've all got additional needs that are not being dealt with and that they're not being accommodated.

And I just think that if that's what you've got as an institution, if all you've got for the most damaged children is more punishment, then I think it is a sign of giving up. I think it's a sign for the children, when they're sitting there in silence, it's a sign for the children that even the adults don't have any idea. I mean, you know, those kids need help. They don't know how to help themselves, and they rely on the adults being able to structure that support for them. Punishment isn't support for that. And it's always those children with additional needs that end up in those situations. And, you know, kids being punished for their autism, kids being punished because they're Asperger's, being punished because they've lived with domestic violence and neglect, you know.

In the U.K., I'm an administrator for 12 special schools. It's a voluntary job. So, I see those kids, day in, day out, and we see what works with them. And in our special schools, in our units that deal with the children that have been taken out of mainstream schooling, we don't punish them. And that's really surprising to a lot of people. We don't seek to punish; what we're doing is investing huge amounts of money in therapy and mentoring and

coaching, and everything that works. And, you know, if we thought punishment would work, we'd put every dollar into it, and we put none into it.

So, you know, what's difficult, Terry, is the transition from being a school that uses heavy punishment to a school that reduces and eventually uses barely any, but it is a journey that a lot of schools are on. And there's no quick fix there. It's a year, 18 months, to start really clawing back on that punishment. But once you're three years in, and you've got single figures of kids going into detention in a school of 2,000, you suddenly realize the power of relationships and the futility of throwing punishment at damaged kids.

Terry: Speaking to futility, in your book, you write persuasively and, really, I think passionately, about what prolonged and repeated seclusion really teaches children. Could you describe that for me?

Paul: I mean, I think, it is about the adults giving up and the adults not having an idea of how to help, right? And if all they can do is put you in a room on your own, then you're just living with your own thoughts.

Terry: Mm-hmm.

Paul: You know, imagine that as a seven-year-old child. And the capacity of a seven-year-old child to be able to heal themselves in terms of whether it's poor behavior, whether it's bad routines, or whether it's actually something, you know, that has a medical diagnosis, they have no chance to be able to do that. The child at seven with severe ADHD, I know why he ends up in seclusion. It's with the reason that, "Okay, well, I've got 30 other children that demand my attention more." But we have to, we have to address the issue of inclusion here. We have to address the fact that children with medical needs, and children with additional needs have just as much right to an education as a child lucky enough to be born with no obvious additional need.

Terry: Excellent. Now, to start a turnaround here, I really like the way the book is structured. There's a chapter that follows this called "Restore, Redraw, Repair." And in it, you write, "Twenty years ago, the thought that a restorative conversation could replace a detention would have been laughed at openly." So, what's changed?

Paul: Evidence. I think the evidence is irrefutable. And these people that insist that punishment works are so far down the rabbit hole, it's all belief for them, but actually the evidence is quite clear, that shifting people's behavior is not as simple as just punishment. I think, you know, haven't the prison service sensed that, you know, for 100 years? I'm sure in E State Penitentiary, they realize that isolation wasn't working, but they just didn't have anything else. Now, you know, there's an explosion of training.

When I started training, Terry, I used to have to travel three hours to go to a meeting that one or two other teachers might turn up at and I might be able to get, you know, some

materials from them or to share some practice. Now, I flip on my computer, I've got a million teachers I can collaborate with. I've got all the evidence there in terms of positive behavior management, restorative interventions. I've got it all. And it's very difficult for the punishment brigade to win the argument on anything other than an emotional appeal. And the world is full of evidence and teachers are intelligent people who can search and seek that evidence.

And I think that's why, you know, the world is turning, because I think people see the evidence around them. Notwithstanding that, if your kids were in a school five miles from a Pivotal school and you saw what was going on at the Pivotal school, you would no longer be happy as a parent for your schools to be dishing out punishment. You'd want a bit of that. And so that's what's happening as well: schools are sharing their practice. There's a school in Chicago that's done fantastic work on meditation with students. And it hasn't happened overnight, it's a long haul, but they've got incredible results in using meditation rather than punishment to get children to self-regulate, and to be autonomous, and to be able to think through their issues.

Terry: Speaking to the accessibility of a dialog about restorative conversations, could you put in a quick word about your podcast and where folks can find it?

Paul: Oh, yes. So, the Pivotal podcast is now on episode 202. We broadcast every week, every Monday. So, if you're in Monday lunchtime, it would come out here in the US. And every week, we have different guests, right across the world of education, right across the world of behavior. So, we have, you know, some big names, but also some people that are just doing fantastic work in their own school and want to share that as well. So, do have a look at that, www.pivotaleducation.com, and just click on the podcast button.

Terry: Excellent, I wanted to get that in there. In the chapter "Some Children Follow Rules, Some Follow People," you write, "Angry children follow people first, and then, they follow rules." Why is that?

Paul: Because they're seeking connection and they're seeking relationship. And many of those children have attachment issues in their own homes and they're not able to self-regulate, because when they were younger, you know, the neglect they suffered didn't allow them to attach to different adults. So, when they come to school, being able to get that connection with them and be able to attach with them is everything. You don't get an angry child, who's angry at the world and wants to tear the place down, you don't get them to conform by just threatening authority and threatening big punishment, because all you get is more confrontation.

I mean, the school-to-prison pipeline is a bit of an example of that, you know, and that issue is as alive in the UK as it is in the US. And a lot of the issues are around, you know, the attachment of that child. It might just be to one person. It's one adult, one teacher that can save that child. But they've got to be determined to get the connections first

before they start—you know, the idea that you could have a school, classroom management or behavior policy, and that every kid that comes in, regardless of their background, their experience, or what they've been through, will immediately conform to that policy is madness.

There'll always be children who need to have really strong relationship and connection with the adults who can then lead them into being able to manage within that policy. And I think too many schools do it the wrong way around. They set the policy, they stomp their feet, they demand compliance. And then, when those small percentage of children can't do that yet, they kind of throw their toys out of the pram and they don't know what to do, so they grab for the punishment. Actually, the best teachers recognize those kids and they think, "Look, before I start," you know, "before I start throwing the book at them, I'm going to try and get to know them and maybe give them a little piece of me so that they know something about me first."

You know, none of this is new; none of that is groundbreaking, but I find so many children who are screaming, you know, in emotional pain, just find themselves at the wrong end of a punishment code with no way back.

Terry: When a little bit of botheredness could have really righted the ship if they would have seen that instead.

Paul: Yeah.

Terry: Well, throughout the book, *When the Adults Change, Everything Changes*—I enjoyed this book thoroughly, and I think if I was an educator myself, it would be a road map that I would want my administrators and other teachers to read if I wanted my culture to have a seismic change as you described—throughout the book, you include, and I think this is really, really telling, and I think it's really brave, and also really entertaining, that you included graphic inserts that include one of your teacher's notes from back, I believe they're from secondary school, of your behavior during your teenage years.

Paul: Yeah.

Terry: And, for instance, I'll give you an idea of what they said. The first one reads, "It remains noticeable that even if he is not positively disruptive, the atmosphere and the set is more amenable when he is absent than when he is present. Paul Dix' school report, age 14." And, I mean, all the inserts, I mean, you hand-picked these, I can tell, because all the inserts remark on behavioral challenges you presented when you were a student. And why did you put those in the book?

Paul: Why did I put them in there? You know, I think, Terry, that the comments my teachers made about me when I was young are so appalling, they're so dreadful, they're laced with aggression and real nastiness.

Terry: Yes.

Paul: I felt that it was somehow sweet that I could use them and publish them.

Terry: Yes.

Paul: Yes. Where they'd been given to me as a kind of a, in spite, essentially. When I went to school, I'm sure, you know, it's similar with you, Terry, that the onus was on the children, that the teachers would just blame you if you failed. It was nothing to do with them, nothing to do with the way they taught, or delivered, or cared for you, nothing about that. So, there's this complete separation between them coming to work every day and us getting a good education. You know, it was by accident if anyone managed to do that. And people always say to me, "Oh, pick out that best teacher who really changed you, Paul," and I constantly say, "I didn't have that." I mean, I really didn't have that and there wasn't anyone there for me.

And so, I've put those report comments in because it's kind of cathartic for me. It kind of gets them, you know, it's full cycle. They were given to me in spite. I've now given to other people in pleasure. But, also, I think it gives readers just that hint into, you know, I've seen all sides of this. I've been the kid that got kicked out of school. I've been the kid that was just all over the place in terms of behavior for many, many years. Then I taught in genuinely chaotic schools in real raw poverty. And then, you know, the training teachers and parents to do the same kind of brings me full circle. So, yeah, you know, they're funny, I hope, to the reader. They're a little insight into what it was like in my world in the 1980s. And yeah, and it's a slight snub to my teachers to say, "There you go. What you thought was going to hurt me actually drove me on."

Terry: Brilliant. Well, my guest today has been Mr. Paul Dix. We were lucky to have him. He's the founder and executive director of Pivotal Education; that's an award-winning education consultancy working in the UK and internationally. Thank you so much, Paul.

Paul: Thanks, Terry.

Terry: You're welcome. And thank you all for listening.