

Louise van der Merwe (below), managing trustee of The Humane Education Trust, was privileged to be invited to present our humane education work at the **Sixth Annual Oxford Animal Ethics Summer School** between 21 – 24 July this year. The focus this time: **Humane Education - Increasing Sensitivity to Animals and Humans.**



Louise van der Merwe stands outside the **Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics** in the UK. She says: “Being part of this event was the absolute high point of Humane Education’s three-decades of endeavour for a kinder world. I learnt so much from this event and was immensely inspired by it.”

Louise thanks Clair Linzey, deputy director of the Centre, for putting together this immensely inspirational event, attracting delegates from all over the world. Our thanks too to Clair’s father, Reverend Professor Andrew Linzey, the centre’s founder and director and Louise’s inspiration for all of 30 years.

Centre’s website: [www.oxfordanimaethics.com](http://www.oxfordanimaethics.com)

Journal of Animal Ethics:

<http://www.press.uillinois.edu/journals/jane.html>

We thank veteran teacher Vivienne Rutgers (right) without whom our pilot humane education programme, sponsored by the **Latham Foundation**, would never have got off the ground.

<https://www.latham.org/>





This was Louise's presentation:

**The Five Freedoms for Animals is a basic learning requirement for all young people, along with their 123's and ABC's.**

For three decades The Humane Education Trust has tried to create a kinder society in South Africa through awareness and education.

However, it is only in the last two years that we feel we have had a breakthrough and are actually reaching meaningfully into the hearts and minds of our children.

To give some background as to who we are, we have to go back to the late 'eighties when the sight of debeaked hens was shocking enough to launch me into a career that would open my eyes to a devastating world of callous exploitation of animals, human entitlement and disregard for animal suffering. With just a few supporters, we launched our magazine 'Animal Voice' aimed at creating awareness among consumers of cruel practices in the food chain. At the same time, we focused on education. Animal welfare simply did not feature in any part of the national schools' curriculum and it is this aspect of our work that I focus on now.

Over the last three decades, The Humane Education Trust has published readers, produced up-beat video documentaries like 'Becoming Dog's Best Friend' and 'Proudly Human'; today, 23 of our resources for teachers as well as learners, are included in the Department of Education's 2019/2020 libraries catalogue.

Over the decades, we have conducted dozens of teacher workshops on the need for empathy; we've worked determinedly with school children offering prizes for good earth-keeping or in other cases, responsible pet ownership.

One high school principal who had buried a dog alive on school premises because it was a nuisance, received a prison sentence which the magistrate suspended on condition he take our course in humane education. At another school, Golden Grove in Rondebosch, the principal gave credit to Humane Education for a 20% increase in marks in the Grade 7 class of learners in which we worked for three months.

“How do you know it was our influence that increased their marks?” I asked. And he told me: The language that they use now is all yours!”

We have put our hearts and souls into bringing about a kinder society, firm in our belief that with enough effort, enough love, enough commitment, enough staying-power, we would succeed in revitalising the nation’s seemingly abandoned sense of humanity.

At the turn of the century, with struggle-icon Kader Asmal as Minister of Education, we were invited to include animal care in the Department of Education’s compilation of a new curriculum that would now include the environment – and for two years we gave our time freely to the Department towards this end. When the new national curriculum came out in 2012 with animal care included (even though in a limited capacity) from Grade R (five year olds) right through to Grade 12 (17 year olds), we thought we were well on the road to success in reaching enough South Africans to make a difference.

What we had not bargained for, was that the teachers would not know how to teach animal awareness issues and would not necessarily see the virtue in teaching it.

The truth is that no matter how much love and how much energy and how much commitment we have expended – and continue to expend - on trying to build a kinder and more just society, we are up against a monumental edifice: a culture of human entitlement.

Our society is apparently becoming ever more violent and callous. Cape Town spends R6 million annually euthanizing and burying as landfill healthy pets that are stray or handed in to the various welfare organisations because they are no longer wanted. We send thousands of cattle on treacherous 10-day sea journeys all the way to Mauritius for informal slaughter on arrival. And it’s not just the animals. This month, the army has been deployed to try and contain the gang warfare the police cannot quell. Last weekend, six young women and five young men were shot execution-style in one of these war-torn suburbs.

### **VIDEO CLIP OF BOYS WHO STONED DOG TO DEATH**

This is the future that our children face unless political will for humane education suddenly and miraculously manifests itself to the point where it is fully supported in earnest by government, and the private sector sees the virtue of humane education and helps finance the way forward.

In his book, *Animal Rights Education*, Professor Kai Horsthemke who teaches Philosophy of Education at KU Eichstätt-Ingolstadt in Germany, is a Visiting Professor at the Wits School of Education in Johannesburg and is also an esteemed fellow of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics, says: "Virtually all education leaves students with the idea that there is a clear division between humans and nonhumans and that nonhumans are subordinate." Education, he says, desensitises children to the suffering of animals, reinforcing the prejudice that the value of an animal is dependent on its usefulness to man.

Yes indeed. The Education system seems blind to the fact that how we treat those who are at our mercy, is the truest reflection of who we are as individuals, communities and nations. Ultimately, humane education is about us. It's about our dignity. It's about the quality and worth of the human race itself.

So, where to from here?

I said earlier that we had had a break-through in our teaching of humane education. And this is it: Some time ago, Professor Horsthemke suggested that in the teaching of humane education, the emphasis should not be on kindness. Instead, we should teach:

**Justice - not just kindness**

**Respect - not just compassion**

**Rights - not just protection**

To my mind, the closest the world has come so far to Justice, Respect and Rights for domesticated nonhumans is the Five Freedoms for Animals. I believe these five principles are the closest we are to date, to eliminating from our psyche, our sense of callous entitlement to nonhuman lives.



## FIVE FREEDOMS FOR ANIMALS -

endorsed by the **World Organisation for Animal Health**

Unlike 'kindness' which can be given or withdrawn, the Five Freedoms convey a sense that it is the birthright of every living being in our care, to live comfortably and without distress.

There is a sense of justice in this that children readily understand.

Justice is akin to fairness. The concept of fairness and unfairness is innately understood by children and requires no prior learning. Indeed, science tells us that empathy and a sense of fairness are already evident in infancy.

With this in mind, The Humane Education Trust launched a pilot project two years ago based on The Five Freedoms for Animals. Central to the project is a puppet show performed by the children themselves. You'll notice the puppet show starts off with the concept of 'unfairness', something the children readily understand all too well.

**VIDEO CLIP OF PUPPET SHOW:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDkXnoOoloE>

Interestingly, these children all come from a disadvantaged background, yet they spontaneously extrapolated their understanding of the Five Freedoms not only to other animals, but to themselves too! It opened their minds to a whole variety of new concepts – like the meaning of 'sentient being'.

"Don't bully me," I heard one small girl say. "I'm a sentient being. I have feelings too." It was said in all earnestness. She understood the 5 Freedoms and the implications of the Five Freedoms better than she understood her own child rights in the South African Constitution. What she said was something no-one could argue about and the young bully boy was stuck for a retort!

Vivienne Rutgers, the teacher who spear-heads our programme in schools, says the pilot programme which started two years ago, has evolved a new understanding in the children. She explains, by way of example, that she overheard a discussion in the playground recently. A dove was sun-bathing nearby, extending its wing to catch the rays of warmth. Two nine-year-old boys saw this and the one said to the other: 'See! That's Freedom from Pain, Injury and Disease'. 'No,' argued the other. 'That's Freedom to Express Normal Behaviour.' The pilot programme had opened up a whole new window of curiosity for them that would otherwise have remained closed. Without it, the boys would probably not have even noticed the bird, or may well have thrown a stone at it.

She recalls another recent occasion: “We unlocked the classroom for the day’s schoolwork to begin, only to find a little bird had somehow been shut in all night. It perched on a rail on the wall and was clearly traumatised by the sudden surge of 46 children into the room.

Before our programme, I believe the children would have caused pandemonium trying to catch the bird. Instead, they listened to me... I said ‘sit quietly, I’ll open the window and we will be patient while the bird finds its way out’. The little bird took a significant amount of time to do this but as it hopped nearer to the open window, one child whispered ‘nearly there’, as encouragement. To hear that whisper, all 46 children had to have been as quiet as mice. Then several of the children whispered ‘nearly there’ with every hop the bird took in the right direction. And we all whooped when it finally flew out. That ‘nearly there’ whisper of encouragement was empathy in action.”

As the UK’s award-winning Professor of Developmental Psychopathology, Simon Baron-Cohen, puts it: Empathy - or rather, lack of empathy – is the root of all evil. He adds: “The erosion of empathy is a critical global issue of our time. Empathy is the most valuable social resource in our world... it is puzzling that in school curricula empathy figures hardly at all.”

And empathy, of course, is at the core of humane education.

On the strength of the success of our initial pilot project, **The Latham Foundation**, a leader in humane education internationally, awarded The Humane Education Trust a grant to expand the project. This new pilot project is currently underway on a much bigger scale and we thank Professor Horsthemke for agreeing to assess its impact when complete.

This current pilot involves 600 children and is being conducted across the entire Foundation Phase (ages 5 – 10) in a disadvantaged school in a low-income neighbourhood on the outskirts of Cape Town. Domestic violence and other crimes like dog-fighting are rife. The children attending this school come from three language groups – English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa.

I would like to ask you to imagine a world where the basic building blocks of our intellect – our ABCs and 123s - are removed from the curriculum. The very thought makes no sense. These are tools for our intellectual development. Our IQ. People who have been deprived of this education are regarded as severely disadvantaged.

But what about our emotional development? Our EQ. As American brain surgeon James Doty says: “The mind and heart are part of one unified intelligence with the neural net around the heart being an essential part of our thinking and reasoning.”

The way we relate to the nonhumans who journey through life along with us, is a fundamental building block of our EQ. Major thinkers across the world are telling us there is urgent need to redefine our humanity. I tried to give a voice to some of the best modern thinkers in this regard, in the most recent issue of our magazine. See here:

<https://view.publitas.com/p222-12894/education-rewired-july-2019-vpkdw3g3plb6>

But it’s nothing new really. Aristotle is credited with having said it more than 2000 years ago: “Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.”

We invited the children to give us their thoughts on the Five Freedoms. A year after our initial pilot project with just 42 children, each one of them had excellent recall of the Five Freedoms. When asked if they thought it was important for learners to know about the Five Freedoms, 100% replied in the affirmative. These replies were among the reasons they gave:

- Because the Five Freedoms is something we need to know.
- Because if you help animals you will become very kind and help people too.
- Because the Five Freedoms made me feel like a hero.
- Because the Five Freedoms make us better people.
- Because I know now how to treat my dog.
- Because the Five Freedoms make you into a champion.
- Because people will become kind
- Because some people will become good from this learning
- Because now I can teach my uncle about the Five Freedoms when he beats his donkey
- Because I love the puppet show and everyone says I should be an actress when I grow up.



The Five Freedoms for Animals are a set of fundamental principles that are crucial to the education of our hearts and in a world beset by violence, abuse, bullying and cruelty, these principles should be given the kind of clout that plastic pollution has received in recent months.

The earlier our children are introduced to principles like these, the more likely it is that this understanding will become second nature as they mature. It is in this early period of human development that the limbic system of our brain is at its most active and experiences feelings that will intensely influence who we become and how we react to each other and the world around us, as we mature.

The Five Freedoms for Animals are a set of principles endorsed by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). They are so very basic, so elementary. While we put our heads together to develop something better, we ask the departments of education around the world to embrace the Five Freedoms as part of the new era in which we find ourselves – an era where mental issues include Nature Deficit Disorder; where we find talk of ‘the posthuman child’; where we are encouraged to **unlearn** some of what we have been taught; where psychologists embrace humane education to help heal children who have been psychologically wounded by violence; where leading economists urge the education of the heart lest we become “second-class robots and not first-class humans.” See Page 10 in the following link:

<https://view.publitas.com/p222-12894/education-rewired-july-2019-vpkdw3g3plb6>

I thank you.