



**Episode #223**

**Dewey Rosetti Talks About Parenting Bright Kids Who Struggle in School**

August 25, 2020

Debbie: Hello Dewey, welcome to the podcast.

Dewey: Thank you so much for having me, Debbie.

Debbie: I'm excited to get into this conversation with you. We were just discussing before I hit record how similar our journeys are. And, and even I just have to say before I introduce you or ask you to tell us more of your story that you were one of the first resources that I found, PEN, what you created when I had a really little differently wired kids and I had no clue what to do or where to turn. So I'm so excited to just hear your story and share the resources you've created in your new book with my community.

Dewey: Well, thank you so much for that. And even though PEN is not operating under that name anymore, it's now under the Children's Health Council, which is an organization that we all greatly respect and it's a much bigger organization that can support it better. I have to say it's just thrilling to hear that you came across us all those years ago... Makes me feel good all over again.

Debbie: Awesome. Well, it was a godsend. But let's go back, I'd love for you to share some of your personal story. Because, like me, it has informed really so much of what you've done in your world. So tell us a little bit about yourself.

Dewey: Well, thank you. So my story is actually written down because I could hardly write about this field without talking about the child who pulled me into it. Very much like you and a lot of us who work in this field now started with our children. But I tell the story in the first two chapters in order to let parents understand that I know fully all of the ups and downs are roller coaster of how you find out about your child, be neuro diverse, and I'm going to start to practice using those words instead of learning disabled, which I think is such a bad word, baby because it doesn't mean anything and it certainly isn't accurate, but My child came home for her second week in kindergarten and said she couldn't sound it out. And that was the clue. And I had her in that school for four more years because they thought they could help her, help her learn to read. But when we took her out my third grade, her personality had changed dramatically. And this was she's 30. She'll be 30 in August. So this was a while back 25 years ago, and I spent the rest of my, well, I changed my direction then because I had been a business person and I changed and shepherded her through until we found the right school. And then I started PEN, with a group of other concerned parents whose kids had learning differences. And we found a common problem, that we really didn't believe that any of the descriptors of kids with learning differences, describe them.

First of all, the term learning disabled is so inaccurate, especially for kids like yours. You know they're gifted and I have one of those two, that gifted kid, twice exceptional. And then there was my daughter, who was so dyslexic that she couldn't learn to read, even through four years of school. And when I got her to

the Charles Armstrong School, which was the right place for her, that's when everything changed in my world, and my whole focus of what I was interested in changed. And it was a wonderful school and I, I not only became impassioned with the topic of how different kids learn, and how people misunderstand them so much, but also she of course, thrived because she got what she needed and all the kids they're doing and they had all failed once before in another school. I've gotten there. Whenever you could get them there. I got my check. Daughter in the fourth grade, she graduated in the eighth. So she was there for five years. And then with parents from there, we created what we talked about at the time as life after Charles Armstrong school because it was so nice to be able to talk to other parents with honesty. And to find out, you know, we were surrounded by a community of people who understood and got it, what our kids were like, and how bright they could be, and how bright they learned. And we were constantly getting good science information in order to explain our kids and for me, they came out understanding who they were. So we created PEN, and that was in 2002. And it went on until 2016 when it became part of the Children's Health Council. Now, come back around and when I stopped working with PEN, I found myself with more left to me about helping more people because I just thought the message was so important for parents to get that these are not broken kids. And that's when I wrote my book. Well, I shouldn't say that is when my book was in the works for a long time.

Debbie: It takes forever, right?

Dewey: I had no idea how long it took to write a book or what it took. But it just came out in May. And it's called Parenting Bright Kids Who Struggle in School. And that's my story.

Debbie: That's awesome. I get to talk to people like you on this podcast, a lot people who created what they needed, and then it just changes the trajectory of their life in the best possible way. And so PEN stood for Parent Education Network, is that correct?

Dewey: Yes. Yeah, exactly.

Debbie: And I think you know, like I said, I think Ash was probably like three or something. And I was just scouring the internet and I stumbled upon what was a listserv and I just started reading and it wasn't exclusively for parents of kids who were differently wired. Is that right?

Dewey: Well, it was when we first started because we were in the business of helping our own kids and then expanded it. And we basically, never, we never tried to be specific. So we said, if you use what we're talking about a strength based approach, and you focus on what kids can do, instead of what they can't do, and you help them, prop them up with where their weak areas are with their straights, well, that works for everybody. And so we tried to keep a much broader view of who we were helping. And the other thing is, at the time, very early on, people were into diagnoses and how can we fix what's there and we always tried to change that language from the very beginning and said, deal with

what you have. In the child and let the child deal with who he is. And we changed the conversation as the heads of the private school set here in San Francisco, because that's who we mostly started with, as advisors. They said, we changed the conversation on the lands over the landscape of the schools in the whole Bay Area, and even beyond, eventually, not me, but PEN. And in that we tried to give everybody the perspective of how it is helpful for any kid to have our approach period.

Debbie: Yeah, and then that is a nice segue into the book because I didn't know when I started reading your book that you collaborated with Todd Rose and took the ideas behind his work and brought it into the parenting world in this way. Todd Rose, I haven't had him on the show. I don't even know if I've talked much about him in other episodes, but he is a Harvard researcher. He had written about book called *The End of Average: Unlocking Our Potential By Embracing What Makes Us Different*, which this book came on my radar a few months ago, actually, with Ned Johnson, who co wrote the book, *The Self-Driven Child* was the one who's like, have you seen this guy? You got to watch this TED Talk. You gotta check him out. And I, I love his perspective. So I was so excited to see that there's so much of his work and perspective that you're bringing to parenting. So can you talk actually even about how you connected with him and why the work he was doing resonated with you and why you wanted to bring it to parents?

Dewey: Yes. So I love this story. Actually, I first heard about Todd when he was still 20 or so. I heard about him at a conference where someone was speaking for us. It was actually Sam Goldstein, and he lived in Utah where Todd did. And he talked about this kid as a case study, and how great he was, and he was on his way to harm And he had been, you know, an outcast in his school. And he had such bad ADHD Sam's specialty is his resume building resilience and kids. I don't know if your viewers know much about him, but he had my books to write a lot. And we had him as an expert, and he's a wonderful speaker. But we were stuck. We were struck by the story of this kid that I called a kid and that was Todd Rose. At about 10 years later, Catherine Ellison came up on our radar and wanted to speak because she had written a book called *The Square Peg*. I don't know, Debbie, if you've ever read that. I have not No. So interestingly, Todd was a student. He was still doing his, I think, probably dissertation at the time. And Catherine Ellison found and because of her child, and she wrote a book called *Buzz* about her child and we had a speaker at PEN and she brought up Todd Rose, and she said she went and listened to it. And his lecture on neuroscience at Harvard. And we all resonated because we had heard about him when he was young, and how he, you know, he had carved a path for himself when broken out of the mold of being a troublemaker. I don't know if you even know this story, but it was his original story. And we got to him and had him as a speaker at Penn. And then by then it was 10 years later, and he was already into his PhD. And he started out talking about how his younger life was so difficult for him, because he was brought up in a very small Mormon community. And all the kids were kind of made to be, I want to say humble genius. I don't know if that's a fair comment, but he stood out because of his restlessness and his ADHD and so forth. And then he dropped out of school at 80. And he had two children, with his girlfriend who still married, of course, after all these years, and he now has two children who graduated from

college, which is amazing. And he found this way to get his GED. And then his brilliance started to show at University. And he gave a paper in psychology on I think it was probably tickling at this idea of he had found the nugget for his research, which is the science of the individual. And he started on it, I think, all those years ago because he was searching for an answer for why this why he as a young person was such a misfit and why by the time he got to Harvard and had started working on his PhD, his brilliant speed began to show and how he could help other people understand that if you look at people as individuals instead of the average, and that was kind of his theme, and he found a person called Kurt Fisher, who was his mentor at Harvard, and they did the original research together. And then this book came out about him, which was called *The Square Peg* and Catherine Allison wrote that book for him as a ghostwriter. But basically, it's a story as though you know, he came from this kind of background where he was a problem, too. Now this outstanding young man and now he Sir, I think in his early 40s, and he's made such a name for himself. And he has a third book, which is *Dark Horse*. And somewhere along the line, when we found him as a speaker, we had him speak to our board and I was always the one who went out and talked to the schools for PEN and tried to convince them and I you had to do it one school at a time. Because our schools then we're not accepting of kids who were different if they were bright. They were not, you know, wasn't accepted to think that maybe they didn't do everything perfectly. And he used to talk about a Jagat profile, which is one of the concepts of the science of the individual. So I went out preaching this. And then, when he came along and gave us the language, which is the three concepts of his science of the individual, and he tried to, you know, he explained to our board, and then we had lots of different meetings with them. And I can remember I said, you know, you have to get out of where you are, and start doing the research on this. So we can all start using it because it's such an important concept, especially for parents whose kids are different. And I actually helped him start and I had a friend and I helped him start his nonprofit, which has gone through a couple name changes, and at first it was tragic variability, because what he told us, which I so believed and what So happy that an intellectual I put a name to it, or an academic and put a name to it, and he called it this, you know, variability is the norm. And, and then he was working on his research to prove that there is no such thing as average and individualized education or personalized education was the only way to go. And what is actually wrong with our education system that isn't really perfect for anyone, unless they're in that perfect profile, which very few people are of what the school considers the way to learn. So that might be a long way of explaining, but it's been there since 2012, I think when I met him. And it's just been wonderful. He's become extremely well known. And he really does want to change the thinking nationwide worldwide on the average because so many of our systems and institutions that are based on their services are based on it, thought that there's an average person He just debunked that right out of the box, and continues to expand on that. So he gave me permission. I kept saying to him after we have worked together for a long time, I said to him, I've got to write a book called *Parenting the Square Peg*. And he said, Okay, I'll help you. And then about 2015 he came out to San Francisco. He lives in Boston. And he said, Let's, let's write it about, I think you should write my theories for parents, because they are never going to know about this. If they don't pick up my other book, it's not a parent

book necessarily. So I was absolutely thrilled and flattered that he would allow me to be the first to introduce this concept to parents. And just just so I complete my thought, which sometimes I don't. I want to make sure I say that there are three concepts here that are the basis of the science of the individual and the first one is that every person certainly Every child and student, but every person in the world has a jagged profile, doesn't matter how good they are, at some of their edges, they have some edges that are not as high as other edges. So there's a jaggedness. It might not be as broad as the jaggedness of a kid who's twice exceptional, which means a very high IQ or whatever term you want to use for that conceptual thinking. And then some problems, neurological things, that way their brain works that causes them to not show how intelligent they are off the bat. And the second one is that context works with that which means that there are various contexts in which your strengths will be stronger than they might be innate strength, like you might be born with an ability to be more alert. Your brain just works that way it fires differently. However, You might have a very slow processing speed, even though you might see things very quickly, you might not be able to explain them very quickly. And that is going to not show it's not going to allow how your brain fires and how alert and aware you are, and how bright you seem. So what people do is they automatically when they realize this, and sometimes it's very unconscious of their part is they find the best context for that maybe the best way to help your processing speed has to be in a room where you're not distracted, for example, or where you can work at your own speed and then tell the story later. at your own speed having practiced it. That's a context concept. And there are other really good examples of that and a lot of these are in my book actually. And then the third is pathways. and There's always more than one pathway to a conclusion, or to a solution, or to a successful way of doing something. And when you apply that to our kids, what happens is that it opens up your mind to say, to your child, it doesn't matter how you get to Harvard, for example, you don't have to go to a prep school, if Harvard is what you want to do. I mean, look at Todd. I mean, he had a very strange way of getting to Harvard, and really had to prove himself when he got there. And most kids, a lot of kids who go to Harvard are legacies, and they realize that their parents have told them from the beginning that they're cut out to go there. But how about the kid who starts out like Todd did and so many of our kids not succeeding? I have my older child, for example, has a PhD in psychology and she started out flunking preschool at age three, which my mother at the time said, How is that even possible before preschool because she was not on a pathway like other kids in the private school community that I'm in in San Francisco, and that I put her in. But eventually, she, you know, blossomed, it was probably around Middle School, fifth, sixth seventh grade, which is when that happens and everything caught up to her intellect, which was a very jagged piece of her profile, her intellect, you know, her IQ scores very high. And she had some other things that were not as high that actually blocked her way or obstacles in terms of her getting to where she needed to go. So she didn't go a normal pathway either. She didn't go to a, you know, a four year college graduate school with a big name. She went to a local one here Because she wanted to get into practice right away and do the practicums that they offered. And that's a different pathway than a lot of people take. So those are the three principles. And once you get them and understand them and start to apply them to your child to explain himself, it

makes you can't go back to this old way of thinking that, you know, there's 22.3% of people are different. I mean, that's just absurd. And he's broken this down so that we have ways of looking at everybody's profile. And what you find is just by definition, everyone has strengths. And they have strengths according to their profiles and you don't, you don't compare them to other people. You compare them to themselves, what are they good at? And what are their lower talents, so that you can use their strengths to prop up their talents. And it just makes so much sense. And once I heard it, my husband and I said, Well, there's finally someone here who understands this and who can explain it to the world. Let's, let's help them do that. Yeah. So I think he's just done so much for the field.

Debbie: Yeah, I agree. I agree. And I'm sure you know, listeners of this show are in full agreement to I mean, we're, we're very much on the same page here. And I really love that concept of pathways and the way you talk about that, I'm always saying there's no one way this parenting needs to look and it's just so freeing, right but it takes intention on our part to to really just question that.

Dewey: Well, it's the mindset piece. You know, in my book, I talk about Carol Dweck and the mindset, and that's because a lot of us are programmed to and he explains this a lot here. work now that we're all programmed to believe this other thing, that the only way to look at your success is to look at yourself as, as compared to other people on average and where you are and the average of anything you're looking at. So parents just buy into, and I was one of them and maybe you were to that if your child as soon as you hear the word, dyslexic you think, I mean people think it's a death sentence in terms of career. And that's why mindset is so important that the parent parental mindset is one that has a growth mindset, which is what you have is just talent to be practiced and built on and used. It is not the end, it's the beginning of where your success is going to start.

Debbie: Yeah, I think about growth mindset, and that was something I always was trying to explain to Asher when we were homeschooling. We had a chart, you know, like, we had the Part of what a growth mindset looks like up on the wall. But it's just such a good reminder that this actually needs to apply to us as parents like we need to embrace this growth mindset to it's not just something our kids need to work on.

Dewey: I almost think it needs to start there. And I also think it needs to start with teachers, because so many teachers, especially in the private schools, used to think I think it's getting better, but used to think that if the kid had an analogy, and a lot of parents think they're a learning difference, that they were going to drag the class down. I mean, that's just ridiculous.

Debbie: Yeah, and there's so much research about expectations or ideas about who gets to be gifted and who isn't and what that looks like. So yeah, absolutely.

Dewey: Right. And you can have a kid who has a different profile or so different social profile, and you might not look for the brilliance, which is often there.

Debbie: I'd love to spend just a minute talking about laying When you use the term that Todd uses as well, variability and, you know, we know, there's still so much messy language around learning differences, this is something, you know, I use the term differently wired, I get asked all the time, why do I use that? Am I against labels? You know, I know there are so many organizations out there who very publicly invisibly use labels that pathologize or language that pathologize is and I just would love to know a little bit more about where do you stand on labels? What work do you think we need to do to shift things?

Dewey: Well, my book, I think, is kind of my statement of where we need to start to shift things because I think the language, the pathology of the language and is not going away yet. And this business of diagnosing dyslexia is such a misunderstanding and a very misleading, you know, it's all the language of medicine. You know, it comes from the deficit perspective. And that's one of the big things I think about Todd's breakthrough is his language is so much better, which is a jagged profile that applies to everyone. And variability is the norm, meaning we're supposed to be different. And there is a continuum and it goes from very different to not very different and actually, that doesn't really matter because there is no such thing as average. And what that applies to is different from an average Well, what is an average what is normal? You know, I don't know if you know, John Mooney, but he has a book out now, that's called normal sucks, because he grew up as a very different kind of thinker, another real A guy who writes about his own theories, and we had him as a speaker a lot. And Jonathon Mooney is another one, we need those people out speaking, which is what we did, as much as we could append, we need to make people more aware of them. And we need to change the language and the language that Todd uses a jagged profile, you know, what is your best context for giving a presentation, for example? I mean, something as simple as that. Do you like to give presentations? Yes, I like to give them to about 30 people in a small room, in a classroom. That's what I'm used to, and I can really connect with them and get my points across. I don't like an auditorium of 500 for example, I'm just saying `` Look at how much more helpful that is to someone who's listening to you than it would be to say, I'm not good. I'm not a good speaker. I'm in fact disabled in the speaking department, you know, public speaking, I am not good at that. And then the third is the pathway, you know, I choose to go towards where I want to go in my life, and specialize in this or that through this different pathway. This is the way I want to get there, not through the normal channels, and you start using these words, and they're extremely non judgmental, and they're not pathology words. They're just words that give you a much better idea of what the person is like.

Debbie: So good, so good. I want to ask you a question. That's very current to what's happening in the world right now as we're recording this. states in the US are releasing their plans for going back to school in this time of COVID And schools have been forced to teach differently. There's remote learning. I feel like this is an opportunity where systems that we've just accepted for so long are starting to be questioned not just by parents of differently wired kids, but all parents. And I'm just wondering what your thoughts around that or if you're seeing opportunities here, as well in shifting the way education and differently wired kids intersect?

Dewey: That's a really good question. And I have been asked that question on several different webinars and so forth. And I tell you, I don't always have a good answer for it. When things are this dramatically different for cetera for a long time? I think there are opportunities. Absolutely. And maybe some people are starting some homeschooling that will turn into a curriculum that can be enlarged and scale to a bigger classroom, because a lot of people are desperate to get their kids can Even in someone's home, I just heard the other day about a parent he a school here, a little school, who his parents are rotating in their homes and trying to have a class every day. And there are 30 kids in a class and the woman who was telling me he's part of the group, but she said, you know, where there is 30 rooms big enough in their house, not everyone. And so it has to be done in a way that doesn't leave any people out. Because I'll tell you, it's not that you can generalize about kids that much, but an awful lot of people and kids cannot learn our mind. And the parents are going crazy, as we all know. And the teachers are working double time to try and figure out a new way of delivering their product, which is the lessons and the lesson plans. And I was a teacher for a year and I'll tell you I can't even imagine trying to pick out how to do that. And the hours are all spent in frustration by the kid by the parents, by the teachers and by the administrators trying to solve the distribution problem of getting the product out. And then you have these children who need I mean, I just heard a story the other day about a little guy who was doing so well at the Charles Armstrong school and all of a sudden, with this homeschooling, he can't, you know, he's in tears every day. And he's regressing because he doesn't have the support of the teachers that he's come to rely on the support of connecting with his friends who, at a school like that it's a community of kids who learn differently, and so he gets a lot of support from that and online at home. He doesn't. So I'm hoping so because it's disruptive, right? Yeah, it's needed. disruption. And maybe it'll be productive. In the end, I could only hope that some good forms and more acceptance of personalized education and ways of doing personalized education will come out of it. But I can't, you know, I'm not in a position to have those ideas at the moment. First of all, I'm not talking like I used to when I was part of PEN, I used to talk to school administrators all the time. And teachers, well, I don't even know what their issues are now, because they can't. They don't have a minute to talk to anyone. You can't get anybody on the phone because they're too busy trying to do what I was just talking about. So it's a moment of disruption. It's a big disruption. And maybe, as often happens, something good will come out of that and personalized education will, somebody will come up with how to do it on a bigger scale.

Debbie: Yeah, I was on a call yesterday with some people in my community and we were just saying we need a leader to emerge to kind of show us what the new education landscape could look like. Because I agree there. There is a lot of opportunity right now, but we need a vision.

Dewey: Well, I think a leader will, I mean, in our field, leaders to emerge, and it has to be somebody who, well, I'm not just thinking, you know, what about Salman Khan? When I say that in that way, what I mean is, I think of him all the time as having such an innovative idea of how to present ideas online. And he's been so

successful and he loves what he does. I mean, is he the type of thinker who needs to lead the disruption? I don't know who is the kind of leader. I think Todd is working on it probably quietly. I haven't talked to him a while to figure out what his particular projects are now, but I know he gets funded by various thought leaders. Who is trying to make change or disrupt? And so we'll see what comes of it, I hope, I hope a leader emerges and can change the landscape. That would be a big positive out of all this.

Debbie: Absolutely. Well, before we say goodbye, I just want to ask you, if there's one thing that you want, kind of your biggest hope for what parents take away from your book, or how they are changed through reading your book, what would that be?

Dewey: What I would like people to take away from it is, this is not a handicap. It is only a handicap if you're a child. And I'm not saying there aren't some very serious cases of autism, for example, where a child has a very hard time, self actualizing so children can't even speak, that is a gift. And I'm not talking about those kids. My heart is with every parent. But what breaks my heart more is people who think their kids are broken, and give that message in a subliminal way, if they learn differently, and it's such a misunderstanding of the science of how people learn, and what variability is in the population, and what brilliance is. And so I hope people come away saying, Oh, that's a different perspective. That's a new lens. For me. I like that lens. That gives me a lot more room. As you said earlier, it gives you a lot of freedom as a parent to say, I don't have to follow what all these other parents are doing. I'm gonna do what my child needs, and then it's very empowering for the child. So I believe that that is my message. And I hope that comes through

Debbie: Great, it definitely came through for me. And I really encourage listeners to check out Dewey's book. It's Parenting Bright Kids Who Struggle in School. And is there a place if listeners want to learn more about you or your book? Where should they go?

Dewey: Well, I have a website that's called Dewey, Rosetta 20 twenty@gmail.com. And then there's a bio on Amazon.

Debbie: Perfect. Well, listeners, I'll have links to that in the show notes page. And I'm also going to, we talked about a lot of different thought leaders and other books. And I'll include all of those. So if it went too quickly, and you're like, Oh, wait, what was that book? Or who is that person? I'll have that all included as well. And I just want to thank you so much. This was such a great conversation. Congratulations on the book. And I'm so glad that our paths have crossed in this way.

Dewey: Oh, I am too and I thank you back. And thank you to all people who are listeners

**RESOURCES MENTIONED:**

- Dewey Rosetti on Facebook
- *Parenting Bright Kids Who Struggle in School: A Strength-Based Approach to Helping Your Child Thrive and Succeed* by Dewey Rosetti
- *Square Peg: My Story and What It Means for Raising Innovators, Visionaries, and Out-of-the-Box Thinkers* by Todd Rose and Katherine Ellison
- *Buzz: A Year of Paying Attention* by Catherine Ellison
- *The End of Average: Unlocking Our Potential by Embracing What Makes Us Different* by Todd Rose
- *Dark Horse: Achieving Success Through the Pursuit of Fulfillment* by Todd Rose
- The Myth of Average: Todd Rose at TEDxSonomaCounty
- Dr. Kurt Fischer
- Dr. Robert Brooks
- Dr. Sam Goldstein
- Kahn Academy
- *The Short Bus: A Journey Beyond Normal* by Jonathan Mooney
- *Normal Sucks: How to Live, Learn, and Thrive Outside the Lines* by Jonathan Mooney
- Children's Health Council

