

The logo for PIXL, featuring the word "PIXL" in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font. The letter "i" is lowercase and has a white dot above it. The background is a vibrant orange with various circular patterns, including a large circle with a grid of small dots in the top right and concentric circles in the bottom left.

IGNITING LEADERS
CHANGING LIVES

GIFTEDNESS

TRANSCRIPT

GIFTEDNESS

On the 24th November 2021, Encanto became Disney's latest hit and was the 60th animated feature in the Disney Animated canon. Having only recently become a Disney convert, Encanto is the only animation I have watched all the way through and multiple times!

According to the Walt Disney World magazine, Disney animated movies are commonly categorized into eras starting in 1937 with The Golden Age all the way through to the Revival era and just after that, in 2020, the start of the Streaming Era. Although I wasn't a massive fan of much of the early Disney stuff, the Revival Era films are, to me, more interesting, more nuanced, more focused on what it is to be human. To me, at least, the characters are not all just heroes or villains, they appear to be more complex than that. In Encanto, there are 2 characters that I find fascinating. Perhaps it's because I know these people, I've met these people and part of me relates to them. Despite being told **'we don't talk about Bruno'**, I want to do just that now!

The Disney Wiki site says that Bruno is, **'a quiet, shy and kind man who easily becomes nervous or suffers from anxiety'**. He is misunderstood. He also exhibits what is portrayed as strange behaviour. The official script says that the rituals Bruno repeats are meant to resemble obsessive compulsive disorder. People are so busy talking about him, or trying NOT to talk about him, that they fail to listen to him or understand him. The hit song, **'We Don't Talk About Bruno'** captures how they both do, and don't, want to talk about him.

Bruno, like most of the others in the family, has a gift. His gift is **'pre-cognition'**, or prophesy, but he is labelled as someone who **'makes bad things happen'**. He sees what others don't see, he speaks out what he sees and it lands badly with the people who hear it. He is labelled as someone who is odd, the bringer of doom and gloom and, as a result, he is so rejected by the family, that he leaves. He ends up hiding in the secret parts of the house. He locks himself away, seeing and hearing what his family are doing but not being part of it. He, and his gift, are locked away.

Then there is Luisa Madrigal, Mirabel's second older sister, she has the magical gift of super strength. The opposite of Bruno, others see her gift as a blessing and yet sometimes she sees it as a curse. In the song **'Surface Pressure'** she details her feelings about other peoples' high expectations on her and the pressure to always be the one who is strong even though she is feeling anything but. She sings about not allowing herself to feel nervous, feeling like her identity is wrapped up in how much she can carry. She is always on the look out for danger or disaster that she can go and fix and if she can't, she feels she is worthless.

A reminder, this is a kid's movie but some of the lines in the song **'Surface Pressure'** are some of the best descriptions you could read of how it feels if you constantly feel you have to be strong. Luisa talks about feeling worthless if she can't serve people and often thinks about her purpose. She talks about the resentment and despair involved in having to shoulder all the heavy things other people can't handle and yet she feels she is also at breaking point. No one notices that she is hiding her nerves, her low self-esteem and her perfectionism. In a devastating final verse, she says that no one ever wonders if the things that they can't handle may also be too hard for her.

The whole movie is about the relationship humans have with giftedness. How our gifts can save us and how the same gifts can sometimes damage us. How people feel with a gift and how they feel without a gift. Encanto explores what a **'gift'** even is in the first place. The moral of the Encanto story seems to be that we don't need to be superhuman, or super gifted to deserve love, security and belong.

APPLICATION

You and I know Brunos and Luisas. We teach them. We work with them. We are married or related to them. We may be led by them. We ARE them.

In Transactional Analysis, there are things called drivers. You will recognise them, as you are likely to have some of them. Drivers tell us a lot about how someone sees the world and behaviours they have established to feel safe. Some drivers are really helpful and, like balloons, help us lift up and out of situations we find ourselves in. But sometimes they are more like weights, weighing us down and causing us to be stuck. They can cause us stress and anxiety as well as be a strength.

The 5 drivers are:

1. Be Strong
2. Please Others
3. Hurry Up
4. Be Perfect
5. Try Hard

Bruno's driver was *'please others'* but what he said didn't please others, so, feeling the rejection, he left. Luisa's was *'be strong'* but it meant she felt she couldn't show any vulnerability. What we have to all learn is that it's ok to feel things and ask for help. It is OK to have boundaries and put yourself first. It's OK to slow down and appreciate the moment you're in. It's OK to be human, none of us are perfect. It's OK to switch off from work and do something playful and fun. In fact, it's essential.

The problem is that if we feel like people only value us because of our drivers, we may not want to give them up. It isn't easy to learn another way when we have been like this for most of our lives perhaps!

As leaders, how do we help other people get to the place of knowing that they are not just their gift, that they can ask for help, slow down, admit things are messy, put themselves first, take a moment of pause and take time away from work. How can we do the same with our young people, our colleagues and ourselves?

1) Create cultures of belonging

Bruno was part of his family, but he did not belong, he was not accepted, there was no place for him. Luisa was a part of the family but she felt like she had to hide her own vulnerabilities. At the end of the movie, nearly all the characters have a moment of realisation that they are not their gift: they are complex, nuanced and human. Belonging isn't something you can pretend and it can be tokenistic if what's behind it is not genuine, but there are things we can do.

We can watch how often we say *'I'* and how often we say *'we'*. We can remember peoples' names and their birthdays. In staff meetings, we can celebrate other's success as all our success and not be embarrassed about it. We can watch our language, ensuring we are not making goodies and baddies. We can use symbols, slogans and straplines to remind the whole community what they belong TO and what they belong FOR. Is what we want people to belong to, worth belonging to?

2) Create time to really listen

'We don't talk about Bruno' is the hit song from Encanto. They didn't want to talk about him, talk to him or listen to him. Sometimes we have to work with people like Bruno, people who may present in ways we find challenging. How do we handle that? We often talk about the marginalised or we often try and avoid talking about them. Perhaps we need to stop the talking about them and perhaps just try and listen.

Kate Murphy in her book, *'You're Not Listening'* says, very powerfully, that *'listening is the experience of being experienced'* and that *'listening is your gift to bestow'*. Had the Madrigal family stopped talking, or not talking, about Bruno and actually listened, they may have realised that he wasn't at all what they thought he was. He had become a terrifying figure in their minds and one they were ashamed of. Yet, he wasn't what they thought at all, when they finally listened.

If we asked the *'Brunos'* what they could see in our schools, they may have something helpful and revealing to say, something that is perceptive and profound even if it is said in a way we don't always find palatable. If we asked the Luisa's what they needed to be able to carry a little less, we may find that there are opportunities to grow others and to spread the weight. If we are the *'Brunos'* or *'Luisas'*, then where are our moments to be listened to? Where can you create the space to be heard too?

3) Make moments where we can see people.

A key theme of Encanto, is *'I see you'*. Of course, what they see at the start isn't the truth they see at the end. As teachers and leaders, we have a gift, but we are more than our gift, who we are as is as important as what we do, perhaps even more so.

Leadership is of course, about what your team is DOING but it must also be about who they ARE. Leadership is about seeing their character, their behaviours, who they are and caring, challenging and encouraging them. It is the same with students, we see their work which is very important, but we also need to see who they are and who they can become.

There are *'Brunos'* in our schools who have been misunderstood their whole life, don't feel they fit in, are perhaps lonely and are trying to find connection and belonging in all the wrong places. There are Luisa's who are young carers who are old before their years and some Post 16 students who have to work to bring money into the family due to the pressures of the cost of living. We often only see what is presented to us until we take the time to look a little further.

QUESTIONS

At the end of Encanto, the family sing a song called *'All of You'* and it's like a fun confessional set to song. They all realise they all got it a bit wrong, didn't accept people enough, didn't hear or see who people really were and overemphasised the gifts rather than the person behind the gift. Things then start to change.

- 1) In our schools, we have people who are now on the edges of our community. They may feel isolated, rejected and forgotten. They may be open to all kind of unhealthy and unhelpful influences. How can we embrace our *'Brunos'* and help them belong? How can we change the narrative with them?
- 2) If listening is our gift to bestow, how good are we at giving it? Is your listening culture strong? How would you find out if the *'Luisas'* amongst your school community are struggling to carry the load?
- 3) How can we do more to *'see'* people? How much do we talk to parents before induction? How good is our transition and handovers when classes move up the school? As teachers or tutors, do we know vital context that may help us see people? Support them or celebrate them?

At the very end of Encanto, the lyrics encourage us all to learn we are more than our gift. That we can be brave and burn bright without having to over perform or outperform others. In a film, and a Pearl, about giftedness, remember, listener— you are the real gift.

WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THIS AREA?

Try these episodes of the PiXL Leadership Bookclub podcast:

[Everybody Matters](#)

[Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking](#)

[Please Yourself](#)

We also have some Pearl episodes on these topics:

[Querencia](#)

[Giant Slayers](#)

[The Wizard](#)

There are also relevant chapters work in these books:

[Time to Think: The things that stop us and how to deal with it](#)

How to know what you stand for and what you stand against

How to listen to understand

How to ensure that you are at your best more of the time

[Time to Think 2: The things that stop our teams and what to do about them](#)

How to help people feel brave and safe

How to work with yes and no

How to get the best out of introverts and extroverts



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