

Cover Story

Malala Yousafzai: A Voice Worth Hearing

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Her name is Malala Yousafzai, she is 16 years old, and she is a hero.

She is no rock star, she is not a politician, and she has starred in no movie. She is no James Bond, working behind the scenes to bring down enemy governments. Malala Yousafzai is more courageous than that. She stood up in her native Pakistan, in the violent SWAT region controlled by the Taliban, and said, "...All I want is an education. And I'm afraid of no one" (Taseer, 2012).

She has been called the most famous teenager in the world, and has provided the spark for a growing world-wide movement to provide an education to every child on the globe. As people who are all about learning, we at *The Journal of Applied Instructional Design* (JAID) see her as *our* kind of hero.

I visited Pakistan as an educational consultant in 2003, working with a grade school there to develop a distance learning capability. There is a special place in my heart for the Pakistanis. The people I met were noble and gracious, generous to a fault, and believed that receiving visitors (like me) was an honor. I was humbled by their hospitality. They told me they were "shamed" by their few countrymen who were violent extremists. The Taliban had not yet gained the strong foothold it would grasp a few years later, but they were frightening even then.

I was struck when I first heard about Ms. Yousafzai's courage. I could picture where she was and the peril into which she willingly walked. I like to think of myself as having a modest measure of courage, but I could not imagine standing in the forum of such a brutal and senseless adversary, and speaking simply and in compelling terms about things that I know they would abhor. But she spoke her mind.

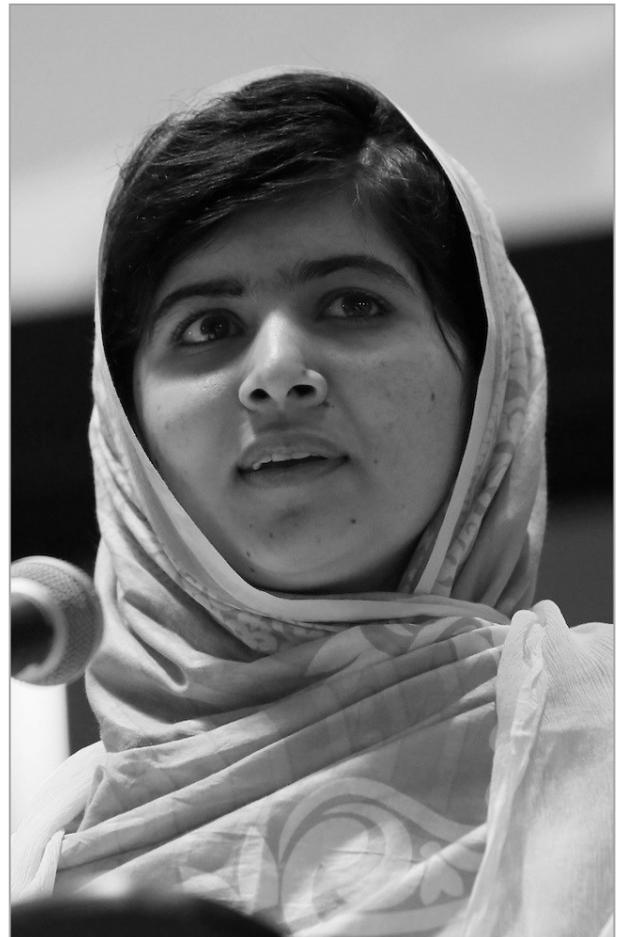
She paid for her boldness. On October 9, 2012 she was shot in the head and neck by Taliban who had boarded her school bus on its way back from school (BBC, 2013). She struggled to survive, remaining in critical condition for an extended period. Her countrymen were outraged. A group of 50 Islamic clerics issued a fatwa against those who tried to kill her. But, the Taliban continued to threaten her.

Malala Yousafzai spoke boldly into the profound problems of her beloved Pakistan, promoting education for women. She continues to speak out even after having paid such a steep price, and as a result the world is tilting on its axis: it is changing.

Her message is simple: allow children to grow, to learn the things they need to learn, to get an education.

We are listening with both ears to a young woman worth hearing.

She is a hero and we at JAID salute her. Would that the world were filled with people like Ms. Yousafzai.



InsiderImages/Stuart Ramson for UN

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