

Along the track

Cradles of Hope

The school bell has been silent for these last weeks but now it is inviting this community to gather for another year, another adventure, to more challenges. A school doesn't work, it can't fulfil its purpose without a community, students, parents, carers, teachers and those who make it a place of welcome, support and adventure. I went to a small country primary school. There were eighteen of us there and it was a wonderful education. But then, some years later the numbers dropped and the school was closed and the heart and soul of the community went with it. We had no place to gather, no reason to raise funds or raise fun either. Schools can be and should be much more than just about the three Rs.

I read this definition of a person many years ago:
I am a person - I am unique
I have a unique set of experiences,
I am a combination of needs and possibilities,
Dread and desire, smiles and frowns,
Laughter and tears, fears and hopes
An inexhaustible resource of possibilities.

We are complex creatures, and we carry a lot with us – gifts and talents, memories, some baggage we perhaps would best discard and so on, but underneath it all, we are an inexhaustible resource of possibilities, no matter what age.

As parents or carers and as teachers too, we want our children to enjoy a full and happy life, to experience all the wonderful things this world has to offer. We want them to feel safe, that they can step out into the unknown, to try new ways and experiences. That's what education is about. We want them to learn the skills to manage through the hard times and the good times, exploring possibilities and what life has to offer. We are all on about making a life, rather than just making a living.

A school community prepares them for life by giving them an experience of life. So what kind of message do we speak in our homes and in our schools? In the world we parents, teachers and all those who work here show them, is it a place where our students meet God and are formed by God? Do they come to know that God loves them here? Is this a place of imagination, a place of wonder and celebration? Do we help our children imagine what world they might create? Way back in around the 550 BCE the prophet Jeremiah wrote these words that God had spoken to him to tell the people:

I know the plans I have in mind for you... It is Yahweh who speaks... plans for peace, not disaster, reserving a future full of hope for you. (Jeremiah 29 11-13)

In our homes and in the school, will our students come to know that? Schools should be places that challenge the imagination of the community they serve. Imagination has the capacity to surprise and delight not just the students. Such an education can be both life-giving and a powerful instrument of hope in a troubled world. What do we hope our students will experience in their time with us? And how do we encourage them to hope, to dream of better things, how do we help them come to know that they can make a difference? In a world where so many young people feel powerless and disconnected, each action to connect them to each other, to their communities, to show them that their future is not predetermined, can make a difference. By intentionally fostering a sense of belonging, purpose, and exploring pathways to the future, parents and teachers can help young people rediscover hope. Without wanting to load teachers with more tasks, I wonder what would change if we measured success by the hope and connectedness students carry into the future, as well as by their test scores?

What sort of message do we speak to this place, what words of encouragement, what actions of ours inspire and challenge, comfort and bring hope? Who are with winners we acknowledge and what message does that convey?

What sort of a world are we handing on? The major task of each generation is to prepare the world for the next generation and to prepare the next generation for the world. We bring children into being, we prepare them for life and, in due course, we hand over to them the world we have shaped. But you begin to ask yourself, is the world we are leaving our children better than the world we were given?

But then again, where would life be without a few challenges?

Regards
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