

Insights and Oversights 2003

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Wisdom and Sensibility: A good old fashioned words!

Much is said, spun, pushed, promoted and pressured under the banners of progressiveness, modernism, and "with-it-ness". But quite plainly, not all that is new is necessarily insightful, well conceived, better or more efficacious. As I continue to enjoy the great privilege and satisfaction of visiting schools all over the place and of all kinds, my convictions are frequently confirmed when I am deeply struck by characteristics which I believe to be of enduring integrity. Each of us can make up our own lists of such things, and those lists will inevitably reflect our values, experiences, reflective thought and professional knowledge derived from successful practice. My list derives from all such considerations. It isn't complete, but for the time being, it gives enough to "go" on!

Characteristics and practices I see, support and believe during my observations and interactions with really good teachers, principals, schools and Boards of Trustees:

- The focus is on what best serves the best interests of the child – not the system!
- Childhood and childhood experiences, youth and youthful experiences, are protected against premature intrusions of adult ways and motives.
- Enjoyment and satisfaction from engaging in teaching and learning are of highest priority – and these include fun as well as hard work.
- Determined decisions are taken to focus on richness and depth of learning experiences, rather than a thinly spread coverage in the pursuit of curriculum compliance. More of less!
- Priority learning outcomes are always clearly identified, "short listed", and repeatedly communicated around the constituency of teachers, students, parents and Board. The school and its teachers sum up in plain language what they are helping children to learn *while the learning is taking place!*
- Assessment is directed at short listed priority (big picture) learning outcomes, and no one test is accepted as a sufficient measure for summing up or reporting student progress and achievement.
- Literacy and numeracy are as fundamental as the bones of a skeleton, but they are not a sufficient education for the development of a person.
- Bright ideas and inspiration are actively sought, generated and valued from within, rather than being constantly sought from outside.
- Professional development is an ongoing "process" which is internally referenced and regularly reviewed against identified needs and interests of the school, its students and staff.
- These schools actively challenge and question programmes, practices and use of time that do not have real benefits for teaching, learning, and the social and emotional climate of the school. They are schools capable of making up their own minds about what is good for them and what isn't good for them, what they need and what they don't need, what they will do and what they will not do!
- These schools with their communities are self-managing, self-initiating, self-directing and self-affirming. They are not dependent on the man from the Ministry telling them what to do, or the woman from the ERO telling them that they got it right.