

Principal Dr. Kennard's address at Morning Assembly, 4 September 2006

Co-Learners

At last Friday morning's assembly, I mentioned the importance of students and teachers learning together; be that learning in the classroom or during extra-curricula activities. I said to you that this is called co-learning and that we should all be co-learners at St. Paul's College.

The reason I spoke about co-learning was that also last week I was interviewed by the Wayfarer Committee for a small piece about the new Principal that will be included in this year's Wayfarer publication. A few days before the interview, the students concerned provided me with a list of well-crafted questions aimed at extracting my views on a wide range of topics. However, one of the questions read "do you believe that students and teachers should be co-learners?"

This was a very insightful question and I must say that I was a little taken aback. Of course, I imagine that they wanted me to say "YES, students and teachers should be co-learners" rather than giving an emphatic NO as a reply. However, the five students on the Wayfarer publications committee certainly had their fingers on the pulse. Their question prompted me to think about what the relationship between students and teachers ought to be like, and what really should be taking place in the classroom here at St. Paul's College.

"Learning is about building relationships with people – students and adults – and creating connections between ideas and the environment; not separating or isolating subjects, skills or people" (J. Daws, Flinders University, South Australia).

Dialogue between students is a key variable in this process. Research shows that students gain greatest personal meaning from their dialogue if there is a secure environment in the classroom and they are encouraged to talk to each other in collaborative groups.

Students are also more likely to express their voices when their individual ideas and interpretations are valued by the teachers and their fellow students. In fact, teachers have the responsibility of guiding students through their learning process and extending and enhancing the curriculum for each student's progress.

To form a sincere relationship with each boy and understand his specific needs, teachers must listen to students. To truly benefit from the reciprocal learning process, however, it is important for teachers to consider themselves 'active learners' as well.

Many of the teachers in the Hall this morning will know that this approach to teaching and learning is called the Reggio Emilia approach and was developed in Italy, particularly for primary school education.

Educators view children as active learners, and purposefully place them in relation to others to allow them opportunities for social interaction. Students are given the opportunity to revisit, reflect and interpret their learning experiences. Through this process, children not only learn to become better listeners, but feel empowered by knowing that their work is taken seriously and their interests are considered important.

At St. Paul's College, our goal is to create an amiable school, where boys, teachers, and families feel at home. Such a school requires careful thinking and planning. It must embody ways of getting along together and of intensifying relationships between students, teachers and parents. We want to create a new way of teaching and learning at SPC. Simply presenting material, giving out problems, and accepting answers back, is not a good enough means of communication for boys to learn efficiently.

Learning together means sharing knowledge, experiences & ideas. Learning together also makes change easier & safer. Experiences, be they good or bad, are shared by the class. Also, shared achievement leads to shared celebrations of success.

Life-long learning

You might be interested to know that many of your teachers are still studying. Some have gone back to university to take Bachelor or Masters Degrees or Diplomas so that they can keep up with new developments in their subject. Other teachers are taking courses in other areas simply out of personal interest. This is what is meant by 'life-long learning'.

However, nobody can compare with the world's oldest school pupil, Kimani Maruge. Mr. Maruge, from Kenya in Africa, did not have the opportunity of attending school when he was a young boy because of severe poverty in his family. However, a government scheme in Kenya in 2004 to allow anybody, regardless of their age, the chance to attend primary school, saw Mr. Maruge enrolling in Year 1 at his local primary school: at 85 years of age. Not only has Mr. Maruge been going to school each day, he has also been invited by the United Nations in New York to address an international conference on the importance of free primary education.

The 85-year-old is urging help for some 115 million children denied education because of poverty. "To me, Liberty is going to school and learning," he said. Mr. Maruge also said "You are never too old to learn". Just try to imagine the co-learning that must be taking place in his primary school: where his teachers are up to sixty years younger.

Shared Achievements over the Summer Holidays

So what have been some of our more recent shared achievements?

Firstly, our School won the following titles in the 39th Joint School Science Exhibition:

1. Best Booth Design - Champion

2. Best Project Holder - Champion (So Kin Ming, Wilson, of 7C)

3. HKIE Biomedical Division Award - Merit

Secondly, So Kin Ming, of F.7C was awarded a silver medal in the 37th International Physics Olympiad which was held in Singapore from 8 to 17 July, 2006.

Thirdly, Chan Hiu Kwan Hugo, in 7A was awarded a scholarship to attend the Hong Kong-Japan Eco-Cultural Exchange Program and visited Japan over the summer.

I would like to acknowledge the success of these students and their teachers (Mr. Lam and Mr. Ha –retire; Ms. Yu and Mr. Au Yeung; and Head of Science Mrs. Cheung,). I can think of no better examples of what I mean by students and teachers being Co-Learners.

Congratulations!

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