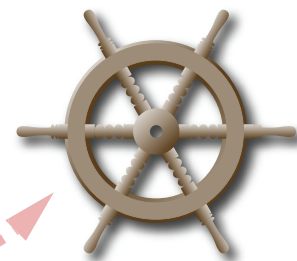


Charting Your Course FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



The Four Pillars of Education

by Ron Brunton, NSTU Executive Staff Officer, Research & Professional Initiatives

Just before the turn of the 21st Century, the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) published a seminal document, *Learning: The Treasure Within – Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century*. The report articulates four key objects for education: **The Four Pillars of Education: “Learning to Know”, “Learning to Do”, “Learning to Live Together” and “Learning to Be”.**

Learning to Know encompasses the tools we need in order to become life-long learners. These include being able to read and work with numbers. We typically understand the progress of literacy by talking about first learning to read that must progress to reading to learn. **Learning to Know** includes problem solving skills and analytical thinking. It encourages curiosity and research.

Learning to Do is the acquisition of the practical skills needed in the workplace along with the ability to contribute as part of a team and to demonstrate initiative.

Learning to Live Together refers to developing an understanding of others through dialogue which leads to empathy, respect and appreciation. It requires that we understand ourselves and how we can use our strengths in concert with the strengths of others to achieve common goals. Students should be encouraged to engage in cooperative

activities beyond the school that address social and community concerns.

Learning to Be is the conviction that education should contribute to every person’s complete development - mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic appreciation and spirituality. All people should receive in their childhood and youth an education that equips them to develop their own independent, critical way of thinking and judgment so that they can make up their own minds on the best courses of action in the different circumstances in their lives. Education should enable people to live fulfilling lives.

Across Canada and around the world there is an effort to limit public education to the narrow perspective of only **Learning to Do**. The rhetoric is about preparing students for the 21st century workplace, not the 21st century world. The emphasis is on the development of trades while not mentioning the role of citizenship, fulfilment and life-long learning. This is the language of some businesses, governments and right wing lobby groups like AIMS and the Fraser Institute. The aim is to de-professionalize teaching. This is being done for one reason; education is the next arena to make large, quick profit. And just like the deregulated housing market collapse and the financial crisis, the collateral damage to society is seen as incidental.

In order to make education into a high profit business it must be transformed

into a minimal-skill work environment that requires “trained” workers, not educated, professional teachers. If all we do is deliver a canned curriculum through a standard pedagogy, this is exactly what can be produced and packaged by Microsoft, Apple (the etextbook initiative), Pearson (PowerSchool), etc. and sold for profit. This is then further advanced by shifting the purpose of public education from the four pillars of education to just the one pillar that limits school to preparing children and youth for the workplace. We see this even in the language used by the Nova Scotia government when, on the rare occasions, it speaks of public education.

The most effective counter to this agenda is what we do daily. When we advance a broad agenda for public education that emphasizes the development of the person for a quality of life within an inclusive system we provide an alternate understanding of the role of public education. Teachers bring broad professional perspectives to students’ lives and learning. Nor is teaching and learning restricted to only what happens in the classroom while school is in session. Teachers spend much of their time away from school and campus preparing lessons, thinking about how to present material and engage students, worrying about the students who are having difficulty with the subject or social relationships and developing strategies for all students.

Teachers and administrators recognize the impact of students’ lives away from school have whether this concerns the home and community environment, cyberbullying from home or the rewards of going with parents to a museum or another country.

Parents want the public school system to address all four pillars of education. This is our mandate as well. When teachers identify the escalation of their workload, it is most frequently accompanied by the expressed desire to just be allowed and enabled to teach; to help students. The problem of workload is in reality a shift from a comprehensive education system that recognizes and mandates all four pillars of education to one that narrows that focus to only quantifiable and countable outcomes related to **Learning to Do**.

Our efforts, as individuals in our professional lives, and collectively through the NSTU, the Locals and the Professional Associations, must both advocate for and implement in practice a commitment to a rich public education system that addresses the needs of students and society as expressed by all four pillars of education. We all, as individuals and organizationally, need to engage our colleagues, parents, members of the public, business leaders, and, of course, politicians in a conversation about the purpose of public education.

This is our voice and our message.

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