

2018 IMCH Christmas Address – Carmel Ellis

Good evening ladies, gentlemen and children and welcome to our annual Christmas Concert.

In September this year I had the very great privilege of attending the Edmund Rice Education Australia Congress in Melbourne. Congress is a time where the national EREA community is able to come together to listen, reflect, celebrate, and determine new horizons for our family of schools.

Central to Congress is reflection on the 4 Touchstones of EREA education: Liberating Education, Gospel Spirituality, Inclusive Community, and Justice and Solidarity.

Congress has provided me with an opportunity to once again reflect on the defining elements of an education in the Edmund Rice and Montessori traditions, and tonight I want to share with you some thoughts (not all original I hasten to add) about the first Touchstone - Liberating Education - and its relationship to a Montessori education and IMCH in particular.

So what do we mean when we talk about a “liberating education” – and how does that relate to the educational practices at IMCH?

First and foremost, one of the primary goals of a Montessori education is to create an environment where children are free to follow their natural instincts to learn; an environment which stimulates, provokes and engages children so that their natural creativity and inherent desire to learn can flourish. An environment that encourages a love of learning, instills universal values, develops global understanding, and inspires a tradition of service to others.

Education at IMCH begins with one basic theory about the child: that children will learn of their own accord. Take for example, walking and talking: because it happens to all of us, we forget how incredibly difficult it is. Yet children will expend tremendous effort to do it, with amazing stubbornness, trying over and over until they get it right.

This natural drive goes on – until it is sometimes snuffed out. If a child is taught that they must learn only because of the threat of punishment or for the prospect of reward, the most powerful engine of motivation is essentially wiped out. The natural drive to learn is largely hard-wired within children, and because of the freedom of a Montessori prepared classroom, children will naturally pursue those activities that are right at that pleasurable edge of their comfort zone, where they have most focus and energy.

Trying to teach skills on a rigid schedule will only make children frustrated or despondent whenever they have to do things that are either too hard or far too easy. And this is what we mean when we talk about Liberating Education at IMCH. Where tasks are challenging but doable, not only are children better able to perform them, but they find them positively thrilling.

A liberating education is also grounded in the Gospel. It is geared towards 'positive freedom' or the idea that freedom does not mean the power to do whatever you want to do, but rather freedom from the negative tendencies that will lead children to mistaken choices, giving them the ability to do what they have been called to do.

This is the embodiment of a Liberating Education: the exercise of freedom within an ordered framework. This framework does not, of course, happen by accident. It requires the commitment and vision of many people working together to create a liberating educational environment. I would like to acknowledge the enormous contribution of two groups.

First point of contact for parents and children of IMCH are the staff, who, quite simply, are magnificent. Their care and concern for all our small charges is outstanding and every day they go the extra mile for the children in their care. I am very grateful to them for their dedication, professionalism and their willingness to embrace all that IMCH stands for.

We are also blessed with a body of parents which in some ways changes every year, but remains constant in its generosity and its willingness to be involved in the IMCH community. I thank you individually and as a group for your continued support which is an integral component of our success.

I wish you all a very happy Christmas and a new year full of peace and promise.