

February 2017

# A Message from the EREA Executive Director Wayne Tinsey

## **Friends and Colleagues,**

It is a privilege to have the opportunity to share a few thoughts with you as we begin another school year.

Liberating education is one of the four Touchstones of the Charter for Catholic education in the Edmund Rice tradition.

Recently I had the privilege of meeting with our student leaders for 2017 at their gathering in Sydney. What an extraordinary group of young people! We had the opportunity to discuss ideas on leadership as well as reflect on what a liberating education means for them.

These young people, and the thousands of others we educate, have inspired me to offer the following thoughts about how do we educate for liberation.

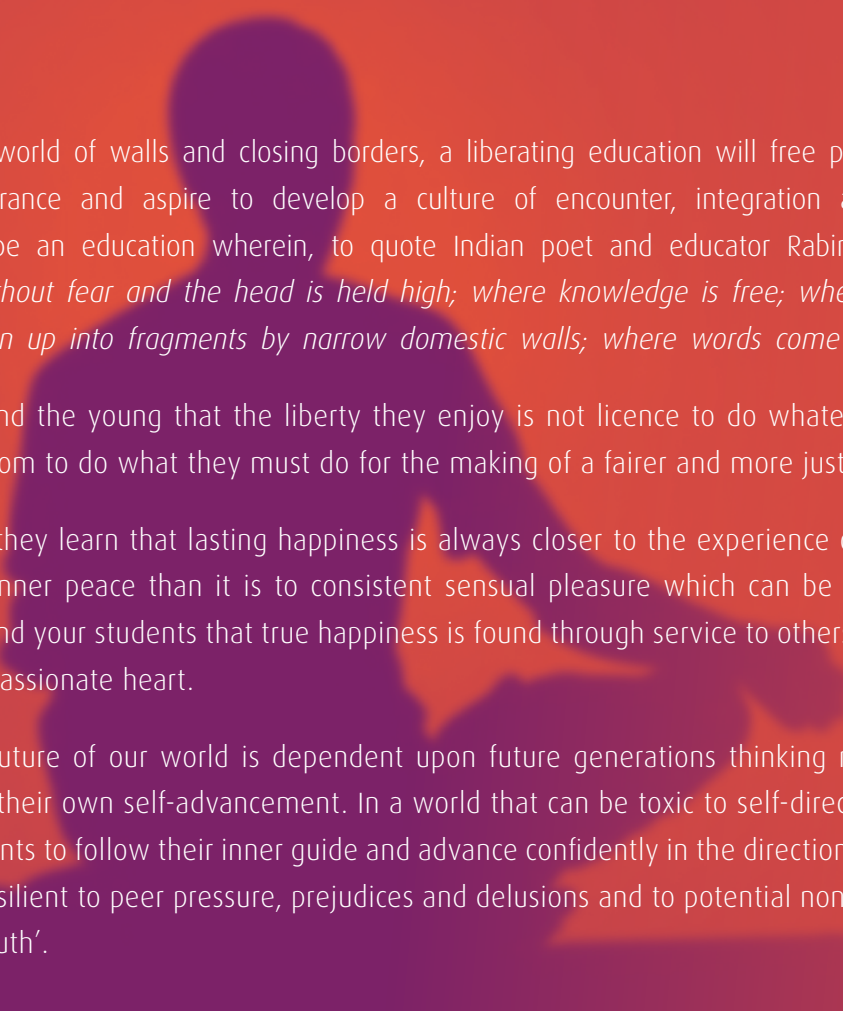
What lessons must the young learn if they are to be really free and fully alive human beings?



Help our young to become co-creators of their own versions of the world in which they live. May their education not simply teach our students how to earn a living, but also how to live full lives, replete with meaning and purpose. No one is on this Earth simply to make up the numbers. Challenge the young to feast on the real food of deep engagement with life rather than settling for the empty calories of mere existence.

Encourage the young to enjoy their precious lives but to reject any sense of entitlement or feeling that others should not experience the same level of happiness and contentment as they do. History has taught us that the experience of deep and lasting freedom is not simply dependent upon which culture or economic situation one is born into. Rather, true freedom must be actively claimed by every individual in the daily conduct of their lives: the freedom to react, choose and engage with the world on their own terms.

Help your students to see through the empty promises of a sometimes shallow, materialist society and its offer of happiness through things and material possessions. Persuade your students to reject versions of the world that define success solely in terms of money, accumulation of things and over-emphasis on status and security. Skill them to critique our culture and its version of what constitutes the good, the well lived, the important and the meaningful life. Help them to understand that not everything of true value in life can be measured. May the education we offer help free the young from unexamined opinions and inherited prejudices. Yes, may their education help them to judge and interpret, but always realising that sometimes the only appropriate response to our world's beauty and grandeur is simply wonder and awe.



In a world of walls and closing borders, a liberating education will free people from narrowness and intolerance and aspire to develop a culture of encounter, integration and of building bridges. It will be an education wherein, to quote Indian poet and educator Rabindranath Tagore: *'The mind is without fear and the head is held high; where knowledge is free; where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls; where words come out of the depth of truth.'*

Remind the young that the liberty they enjoy is not licence to do whatever they want. Rather, it is freedom to do what they must do for the making of a fairer and more just society.

May they learn that lasting happiness is always closer to the experience of acceptance, contentment and inner peace than it is to consistent sensual pleasure which can be fleeting and unsustainable. Remind your students that true happiness is found through service to others and abides in an open and compassionate heart.

The future of our world is dependent upon future generations thinking more of the common good than their own self-advancement. In a world that can be toxic to self-directed thinking, convince your students to follow their inner guide and advance confidently in the direction of their dreams. Help them be resilient to peer pressure, prejudices and delusions and to potential nonsense that can masquerade as 'truth'.



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Friends, yours is a sacred vocation and surely there can be no greater privilege and responsibility than assisting the emerging generation grow into full humanity. As educators, your contribution and most enduring success will be seen in the shaping of your students' values and priorities. I deeply admire the skill, dedication, commitment and passion you bring to this task.

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Urge the young to accept our Gospel's claims about the way in which human beings should engage in our world, about justice, about the way in which we are expected to relate to one another and about the dignity of every human life. Help them to realise that, in the end, it is not what we have done in our lives that is of ultimate importance. Rather, it is whether or not anything we have done was really worth doing. Did it make a positive difference in the lives of others? Did it contribute to the stock of the world's good? Challenge our young to commit to using their limited time on Earth wisely and be determined to leave the world a better place for their having been in it.

Challenge your students to occupy the space in the world that only they can. They should know that they need not be perfect and that our shared human condition gives us this concession. However, to be happy they must commit to service and authenticity, and develop a passion for self-realisation. They must learn from their mistakes and grow through their failures; not perfect but authentic, consistent with our inner moral compass.

Convince your students that they must use their unique gifts, study hard and always give of their best. Yes, they must aim high but also know that the results they receive at the end of the year do not define or limit them. Teach them that a truly meaningful life is built upon simple acts of decency and kindness which add up to something truly great over the course of a lifetime. They must know that excellence is a habit, a learned art, not an isolated act.



It can be a bleak world if one is subjected to incessant, unfiltered media and is focused on keeping up with others. In a world awash with constant chatter and endless facts of dubious ultimate importance, teach them to identify what is of lasting importance; the knowledge that is lost in information; the wisdom that is lost in knowledge. Assist your students to discover presence and stillness in their lives and take time to know silence. Much of the world has a vested interest in keeping us restless, craving for more and unknowing of when enough is enough.

May we educate the young to become heroes! The true hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than him or herself. Like the heroes of old, to become truly free, they must slay the dragon of envy; the dragon of fear to be different; the dragon that tells them that near enough is good enough; the dragon that tells them that it's OK to live a copied, inauthentic life. May our students learn that life's greatest adventure is not 'out there', but the journey within, the examined life lived on one's own terms.

Friends, yours is a sacred vocation and surely there can be no greater privilege and responsibility than assisting the emerging generation grow into full humanity. As educators, your contribution and most enduring success will be seen in the shaping of your students' values and priorities. I deeply admire the skill, dedication, commitment and passion you bring to this task.

I wish you many blessings for 2017 and thank you for all that you do for your students and for Catholic education in the Edmund Rice tradition.

*Wayne*

