

## Touching the Future

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### **Part I (Carol):**

In this first decade of the twenty-first century, the third industrial revolution and the new forms of globalization that accompany it are radically reshaping our societies, confronting us with many new challenges. The world and the human adventure appear richer in potential, more complex and more interdependent, but also more uncertain than ever.

We stand at the threshold of the future, equipped with many answers. But are they the right ones? Many questions spring to our lips. But are they still relevant? To paraphrase the Russian-born physicist Ilya Prigogine, ***We cannot predict the future but we can help to shape it. For the future in the nature of things is not scripted.***

Isn't this concept of the future a gift to Mercy Educators – we who as teachers touch the future every day in our classrooms and lecture halls throughout the world? Of course, the future does not depend on us alone; it rests in large measure in the hands of each of us and is shaped by the sum of the acts of all of humanity.

We are living at a most interesting time, but also in a very dangerous period, marked by dualities and paradoxes. One is reminded of the opening phrase of *A Tale of Two Cities*: ***'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...'***

Globalization has generated enormous wealth (we are three times wealthier than we were 30 years ago), but only one-third of humanity has benefited from this increased affluence. Yet another paradox: we live in times of peace and yet there has never been so much insecurity.

As Deirdre outlined in her presentation, educating students to become GLOBAL CITIZENS is only possible, ***if*** we, who are educators, are serious in our efforts to try and stem the flow of hatred, misunderstanding and greed which so permeate the present. Educating for Global Citizens is about ***Touching the Future*** with a view to making a difference.

In the course of this presentation, Deirdre and I shall recall the four fundamental aims of Education and how they inform – or are informed – by our understanding of Mercy education.

- *A brain well formed rather than a brain well filled.*
- *Teaching about the human condition*
- *Learning to live*
- *Training in Global Citizenship*

The main challenge to knowledge, education and thinking is the conflict between global, interdependent and worldwide problems on the one hand, and our increasingly fragmented, disjointed and compartmentalized way of knowing. This problem, which was identified in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, will become more acute in the 21<sup>st</sup> century if it is not addressed soon.

The biggest obstacle facing educators in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to conceive the world globally, while at the same time also understanding its constituent parts and needs at village or local level.

As long ago as the seventeenth century, Blaise Pascal was pointing out this particular dilemma?

**”I hold it impossible to know the whole if I do not know the particular parts.”**

In other words, neither fragmented knowledge nor holistic and globalist perception enable us to grasp something completely?

Knowledge has to shuttle between the local and the global, taking into account the retroactive effect of the global on the particular. Thinking, therefore, must be capable both of putting what is special, particular and local into the context, and of making the global specific, i.e. relating the global to what is partial. However, where the global and the context are concerned, we are doubly blind. For one thing, ethnocentric attitudes lead to a retreat to individual, national or religious identities.

For example – and here I am referencing Deirdre’s experience in the North of Ireland – children are doubly divided at age 11. They take a state exam called the eleven-plus which divides children into two academic tiers. The top 20% attend Grammar Schools while the rest go to secondary schools. The children also attend separate schools – either mainly Catholic or state run Protestant Schools. Deirdre’s experience as an educator working in that part of the world was that, many children never met a person from another tradition and this surely contributed to the labeling and mistrust of the other and contributed so much to the “troubles” of the past 30 years, which, thank heavens, seem to now be at an end. The need to connect is quite clear. How we got to this stage of disconnect and fragmentation is also important.

Up to the eighteenth century, European universities followed the medieval theological pattern. Reform prompted by Alexander von Humbold and originating in Prussia, a country on the edge of Europe, led to the establishment of universities divided into departments that did not communicate with each other. This sort of compartmentalization trickled down to high schools and so we got the type of curriculum offered in most schools today, with departments vying with each other for time, grades and prestige.

With these few comments as a “background” and context, let me turn now to those Aims of Education I mentioned earlier:

### 1. 'A well formed brain rather than a well filled brain.'

This first requirement of education was first expressed by Montaigne back in the sixteenth century. Education should not aim at the accumulation of knowledge, but should organize it along essential, strategic lines. The aim is not to reduce global phenomena to their elementary parts, but rather to distinguish between them and link them together. For example, the concept of culture appears with the creation of society out of the links between people. It nevertheless retroacts on people, who thus develop as individuals. The concept of system thus provides us with a way of organizing knowledge.

### 2. 'Teaching about the human condition.'

The second aim of education was set out by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in *Emile*. What do we mean by the "human condition"? We mean our common human desire to love and be loved, to find meaning in life, to face failure and success, to find a way to live together despite our deep differences, and to arrive at the end of life, not in despair, but in hope that there is something – Some One – more beyond this life. The humanist need is assuming particular importance in our world at the present time, when humanity as a whole has a common destiny, subject to identical problems of life and death. With this framework, the link between scientific knowledge and the knowledge possessed by the humanities can be re-established. During the 1960s, there was a move towards multidisciplinary groupings taking the place of strictly compartmentalized disciplines. For example, these new disciplines enabled teachers to situate the human condition in the cosmos in both space and time. The gift of science to human culture thus consists in situating us in the cosmos. Traditional cultures like the Aboriginal Culture of the first peoples in this land have always reflected on their origins in this way, as part of the creation story.

### 3. Learning to live

Literature and poetry also introduce us to the human condition, complete with place and date. Learning is not just concerned with knowledge, techniques and ways of producing. It must also concern itself with relationships with others and with oneself. Literature, poetry and the great art of our century, the cinema, are the 'schools of life'. This dimension of education show us the person – the suffering, loving, hating – the whole whirlpool of human relationships. Young people have often learned to identify their own truths through reading novels, poems and the works of the philosophers. The novels of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are a way of entering the human world and understanding it. Music and poetry as expressions of our souls teach us aesthetic feelings and delight. Beyond that, they show us that our lives are always an alternation, one might say, between prose and poetry. Prose covers the necessary, inescapable, humdrum tasks that are essential for survival. Poetry embraces the moments of joy, love, friendship, rejoicing and communion. Prose enables us to survive, but poetry is what makes us live. This view of education enables us to reconcile scientific culture with the culture of the humanities, which has hitherto remained separate.

#### 4. Training in Global Citizenship.

People must be taught that they are both citizens of a nation and of the world. The idea of being a citizen of the earth stems from the nature of the human condition and is built on the foundations of a renewed humanism. Traditional humanism has two faces. As depicted by Bacon, Descartes, and Marx, there was the arrogant face of Man, the only being in the universe, destined to be the master of the world – a view which held sway until a few decades ago. The ridiculous nature of such an ambition then became apparent in a world of smallness which we discovered in comparison with the gigantic dimensions of the cosmos, and as we became aware that controlling the world was leading to the self-destruction of human beings through the deterioration of the biosphere.

The other face of traditional humanism, based on human rights and human dignity, suffered because of its abstract nature. This knowledge situates us in an earthly context by making us aware of the common destiny that links all human beings, confronted as we are by the mortal dangers arising out of the nuclear, ecological, economic and intellectual threats. Blind thinking leads us to catastrophe, whereas conscious intelligence brings us together in the 'homeland of the earth'.

The reform of thinking and how we educate is not an intellectual luxury but rather a vital need. It is one of the keys to safeguarding humanity, which is confronted by the powerful forces it has unleashed without yet being able to control them.

As part of this process, Mercy Education must ask some hard questions:

- What can Mercy Educators contribute to the above scenario? Looking at available documents and what Ursula Frayne and Vincent Whitty and the other early women of Mercy who came to this country tried to do, we believe that Mercy Educators have tried to mentor students to have ...
- A brain well formed rather than a brain well filled.
- *Mercy Students were taught about the human condition and their responsibility to engage with it.*
- They were taught the art of *Living* and they were encouraged to think and act in terms of
- *Global Citizenship*

“Catherine McAuley was a realist with a practical turn of mind and a shrewd observer who responded to the challenges of her time in a manner at once novel and relevant.”<sup>1</sup> Catherine had great respect for the faith tradition of others – Protestant relatives and friends, the Quaker beliefs of the Callaghans. This deep respect, however, never occasioned any lack of clarity concerning her own deep commitment to her Roman Catholic Tradition.

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<sup>1</sup> Helen Marie Burns, *Some Lasting Efforts, Mesa Conference, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1985*, p. 5.

When she opened the school in Baggot Street her primary motivation was “to fit the young women for earth, without unfitting them for heaven.” A *well formed brain, as opposed to a well filled brain* – was part of her thinking as she tried to provide education for Dublin’s slum dwellers whose plight could only be improved by providing them with the opportunity of an education. Equally strong was her conviction regarding the education of women...

*“No work of Charity can be more productive than the careful instruction of women.... Since whatever station they are destined to fill, their example and their advice will always have great influence.”<sup>2</sup>*

This model of education seeks to cultivate rather than programme minds and its aim is to develop the critical faculties of young women. We need to educate our young women to be humanly responsible for their world and also to be sensitive to issues involving human rights education. Both must be a part of the Mercy Curriculum. Concern for the other and the well being of the other is part of the Christian story and has been an integral part of our Mercy heritage. What value was it that called to Ursula Frayne and the early women of Mercy to leave their kin and cross two oceans to come to this land? Like her sisters in other parts of the globe, those early women of Mercy set about starting schools for those in need.

In her essay, **“What Makes Catholic Schools Catholic?”**, Monica Hellwig said that our Catholic schools,

*“are called to be immediate instruments of witnesses to social justice and peace by the values they espouse – by enrolling minorities and immigrant students into a society that is not always hospitable to them.”<sup>3</sup>*

Isn’t this what our Catholic schools should be and exemplify? We think so!

And Deirdre and I would be bold enough to suggest that Catherine McAuley in Dublin, Francis Warde in the USA, Francis Creddon in Newfoundland, Ursula Frayne and Vincent Whitty in Australia, and Sisters of Mercy in many parts of the world continue to think so, which is why they and their collaborators in Mercy include the excluded: they value the dignity of the human person.

Today, our challenge as Mercy Educators is to continue to uphold this role of value education by championing the rights of all human beings. The twentieth century was the century of the Nazis’ ‘Final Solution’, the Cambodian genocide, Rwanda, Kosovo and Darfur. These horrendous events stand as reminders of the urgency of our work as Mercy educators. Let us not forget that the 20th century was the century is also the century of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which proclaims the shared hopes of all humanity. It was the century in which technology, communication and shared values brought all human beings closer together. But it was also the century in which millions of children died of hunger, thousands of refugees were crammed together in camps, and civilians were used as targets by armed soldiers. It was a century of paradoxes, in which the best and the worst of times were fellow travellers. The 20<sup>th</sup> and

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<sup>2</sup> Catherine Mc Auley, *The Little Book of Catherine of Dublin. ALBC,2005* p. 102.

<sup>3</sup> Monica Hellwig, *What Makes Catholic Schools Catholic? Quoted in Burns, MESA, 1985*

now the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries are and were a stark reminder that there should be no bystanders on the road of life.

As the American poet Maya Angelou eloquently put it:

We, this people on this small and drifting planet  
Whose hands can strike with such abandon  
That, in a twinkling, life is sapped from the living,  
Yet those same hands can touch with such healing, irresistible tenderness  
That the haughty neck is happy to bow  
And the proud back is glad to bend  
Out of such chaos, such contradiction  
We learn that we are neither devils nor divines  
When we come to it  
We, this people, on this wayward floating body  
Created on this earth  
Have the power to fashion this earth  
A climate where every man and every woman  
Can live freely without sanctimonious piety  
And without crippling fear  
When we come to it  
We must confess that we are the possible  
We are the miraculous, the true wonders of this world  
That is when, and only when  
We come to it.<sup>4</sup>

When we educate, we teach students that which is at the heart of *living*. The wider our scope of interest and knowledge, the greater our awareness of the many ways in which we can foster freedom and growth for all. The future is tied to action. As the Buddha said:

**“You are what you have done, and what you will be is what you do now.”**

The American educator, Richard Schavell argues...

Education . . . becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.<sup>5</sup>

If we believe that Mercy Education is about transformative and value based education, we need to critique some of our present systems and what we actually teach beyond the call of the fixed examination curriculum.

Now, in Part II of this presentation, Sister Deirdre will look at ways in which we can educate our students to become global citizens.

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<sup>4</sup> Maya Angelou, *Learning to Live Together - Keys to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, UNESCO, 2001, pp. 269-270.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Schavell, *Preface to Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Friere quoted in Burns, MESA, 1985, p.20

## Part II (Deirdre):

In educating our students to become Global Citizens, we need to ask:

- What do our Catholic (Mercy) students really need?
- Are we using the right maps to lead them on their gospel way?
- How do we know?

If we believe that Catholic education really makes a difference, then we must show them a way that is different from power and profit at any cost.

We need to teach students the skills that question Darwinian economic and biological stereotypes rather than simply accepting them. Encourage them to blend OUT instead of blending in.

When they leave us, our students should be willing to envision that another world is possible.

The development of VALUE BASED education is not only a matter of class exercises, or verbal learning or peer exercises. The data is in and the data is clear: students cannot rise to another level of moral or social consciousness unless they see it modeled in someone else – in parents, in teachers, in adults who ‘walk the talk’. We who are the educators of the next generations must ask ourselves a few hard questions, too:

- What life map will we use to chart the way for the next generation?
- What questions and values will I/we use as we make our way through the curriculum? How will my/our own personal witness to give vision and courage to the citizens of the future stand up to scrutiny?
- What road map should I/ we be using to find our way in this world of paradoxes?

The answer to that question is quite clear: Lead them down the road of the one who said... “I am the Way.”

- In geography, lead them down the road of life where today the UN estimates there are 200 million refugees. Teach them to question why a country which displaced and uprooted its indigenous peoples is once again so tight about bringing in ‘the other’ in this ancient land of space, when so many other countries, far more poor, far more crowded are far more open?
- Ask them as you map their way through history how it was that the European settlers who came to this country, and who called themselves ‘Christian’, could disenfranchise and in the name of religion rob children of their parents because they thought they knew a better way?
- Take them down the road to Galilee where Jesus fed the hungry and defended the poor, and then show them the faces of the 28,000 thousand children who will die today of hunger in a world of plenty.

- In Social Science, show them the poor of this country and ask them to question how it is that in a land of plenty, the average life expectancy of the indigenous people is 17 years less than for non-indigenous Australians.
- Take them up to Mount Tabor and introduce them to the ‘dadirri’ ... that inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness which is the Aboriginal gift to the world and may well be the antidote we so desperately need to overcome our culture of busyness.
- Take them to Jerusalem where the boy Jesus asked some hard questions. Encourage them to question and to ponder whether the reason why Australia has not opened its borders to new immigrants is because as a nation you have not dealt with the racism in your midst.
- Take them to the well where Jesus meets the Canaanite woman – and show them the meeting of two cultures, which is respectful and a place of deep and lasting meaning. Jesus is moved to change his focus by this foreigner and the persistence that her faith gives her. Encourage them to do the same with ‘the other’ who may have another point of view.
- But most of all, teach your students not to despair. Teach them to scrutinize power in a world where the creed of the few is destroying the planet. The aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people know what the ancestors of Jesus knew: that you can’t continue to exploit the land and the sea if you want them to be fruitful for the next generation. God has given the land as a sacred trust; it demands respect and care.
- Lead your students down the road to Emmaus, where community happens – as it did for the disciples in the breaking of bread and where no one is excluded from the feast. Insist that they question the statistics of this country which read like those of a Third World country when it comes to their indigenous brothers and sisters: Lower life expectancy/ higher infant mortality/ higher hospitalization for preventable diseases/ alarming rates of kidney disease and diabetes.
- Then teach them the power of the word, of personal power, and to question – How can this be in this land of plenty?
- Education for Global Citizenship demands that we teach our students about this world of power and profit, sexism and economic domination, that we teach our students to question why this is and lead them to the truth that another world is possible.

The Chinese philosopher Chuang Tzu says, “How shall I talk of the sea to the frog who has never left its pond?” Educators, take your students out of the pond and bring them to the sea.

Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister says –

“YOU are what makes Catholic different. When I was a young Catholic School teacher we suddenly realized that we had ghettoized ourselves to the point where we were teaching from ‘Catholic’ Arithmetic; ‘Catholic’ History books; ‘Catholic’ Geography books. But I have come these years to think it might be a great new act – totally consonant with 100 years of Papal Encyclicals on Social

Justice... if there were indeed a Catholic Arithmetic that concentrated not on the splitting of apple pies to teach fractions but on the distribution of the food of the world to others.

A Catholic Geography that taught who was taking whose resources and at what cost to them.

A Catholic History that taught the sin against conscience of the authoritarian state.

A Catholic Science that taught the full humanity of women.

A Catholic Economics that taught the sinfulness of the ill-gotten gains of sweatshops. And, oh yes, a Catholic speller that spelled "male" and "female" equal in the language of both State and Church so that we had at our disposal for the building up of the reign of God everywhere – in politics and international economics and law, in all seminaries and synods and sacristies of the world,.. all the resources of the human race rather than simply half of them. Maybe then we would be doing twice as well as we are doing now."<sup>6</sup>

You as Catholic school teachers shape the future. Decide what kind of future you want to help create and remember that past heroes/heroines were also crucified. But whatever you do, do not give up! And when the going gets tough, remember the *dadirri* experience of the ancient peoples of this land - that inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness. Listen to that voice which is telling each of us who dares to listen, that yes, another world is possible.

Thank you and may God Speed you on your way.

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<sup>6</sup> Joan Chittister, NCEA Address April 2001.