

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT: 24th October 2009

What is education for: responding to the changes

There is a dimension of the changes in educational policy that is disturbing me. The new national standards, focussing attention of teachers and parents on reading, writing and math, effectively narrow the goal of education to increasing the capacity of left brain activity: the logical, sequential systematic dynamics of the brain. As a priest concerned with spirituality and the capacity for faithful-living of the people in the community of which I am a part, this narrowing of education to reading, writing and math functions raises alarm bells. I do want all our young people to have facility with these functions but I also want them to have the capacity for spiritual wellbeing and faith development. These latter aspects of being human require the brain/mind to exercise its capacity for imagination, trust (relationship building and maintaining), and the strong self-confidence that accompanies being comfortable with our physical bodies. Art (including music and drama), physical education (understanding our bodies and their limits and capacities), and technology (including self-care and the manipulation of physical materials) are critical skills to be nurtured and valued in young children. If we are not nurturing these non-linear, relationship-building and self-confidence enhancing skills at this early age, we have missed the opportunity to introduce our future leaders to values and ways of being human that support interconnectedness: interconnectedness between people and the environment, and within the human community. We will fail to support the efforts of most parents to ensure that our physical bodies are healthy and that we have a healthy self-confidence. Faith and spirituality require imagination and trust, irrespective of religious tradition; they also require a healthy open self-confident person willing to engage respectfully with others. It is our duty of care to provide for our young people the circumstances in which these attributes can grow. They are necessary for human-flourishing,.