A Liberating Education

One of the Touchstones of a Catholic Education in the Edmund Rice Tradition

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The Charter for Catholic Schools in the Edmund Rice Tradition has four Touchstones for authenticity:

- Liberating Education
- Gospel Spirituality
- Inclusive Community
- Justice and Solidarity

The Touchstone of Liberating Education rests in an understanding of liberation: our own and that of the other. This understanding will result in a continuous movement towards removing oppression and the building of a society where justice and peace are central for all. As educators we strive to educate in a way that builds awareness and skills with which our students critique and build a better world for all. Equally, we acknowledge that some of our students face marginalisation and poverty within our own communities. We aim to liberate them by providing an education which supports them to see and achieve beyond this oppression.

In understanding this, we look for liberation in our foundational stories. We aim to bring a notion of liberation into reality. We challenge schools to be liberating. We engage with curricular and pedagogy that equips students to be more self-aware, skilled in critical thinking and willing and able to take their place in society as agents of change.

In all of this we know that our own liberation and that of others are intricately linked.

We open hearts and minds, through quality teaching and learning experiences so that through critical reflection and engagement each person is hope-filled and free to build a better world for all.

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the young generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it 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.

Paulo Freire – Pedagogy of the Oppressed
Understanding Liberation in Our Sacred Story

We are inspired in our commitment to Liberating Education by our deep connection to our sacred story:

- The loving creator God
- The life of Jesus
- The charism of Edmund Rice
- Our own story

*In each we see liberation coming to life*

The creator God loved this world into being, gifting creation and humanity with the freedom to create our own history. The God who gives us freedom of choice but who continues to invite us into communion. The God whose life giving presence draws us towards the wholeness embodied in the life and teaching of Jesus.

Jesus the liberator, declaring his life mission, proclaimed:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” (Luke 4: 18-19)

We see Jesus the liberator throughout the Gospel. Through his stories and actions he opened the eyes of people to challenge the divisions of faith, culture and race. His inclusive embrace of all people enabled the healing of liberation to unbind the powerful from short-sightedness and those without power from the circumstances that denied them access to the fullness of life.

Edmund Rice was inspired by the Gospel of Jesus the liberator. He opened his whole heart to Christ present and appealing to him in the poor. He saw education as the way to liberate the young boys of Waterford from a future that held lifelong poverty, lack of employment and rejection. Through their education these boys would, in turn, seek ways to bring hope and liberation to others who were oppressed.

*We in our own story* are challenged to be liberated and liberators. Can we become aware of how we are not truly free? How can we overcome the oppression that affects the lives of many? How do we ensure that our hearts and minds are open to the ways in which we can be co-creators of a better world?

Our creation in the being and likeness of God gives us the potential of life in its fullest. Our relationship with Jesus nourishes our ability to liberate and be liberated. Our understanding of Edmund sets us an example.

A liberating education offers hope. It helps young people see how they can be a difference in this world and gives them the skills and mindsets to do so.

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He (Edmund) had a compelling passion to embrace society's rejects as the very image of God and he accepted that his mission was to liberate that image.

Denis McLaughlin, The Price of Freedom, page 72

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Engaging in a Liberating Education

Our Charter Touchstone of Liberating Education is richly described:

We open hearts and minds, through quality teaching and learning experiences so that through critical reflection and engagement each person is hope-filled and free to build a better world for all.

We open hearts and minds

to see that liberation of self leads us to be fully human and aware of the dignity of the other

to broaden horizons and release imagination about our own potential and that of others

to deeply listen to and be present to those who are made poor and who suffer oppression while critiquing the reasons for that poverty and oppression

through quality teaching and learning experiences

providing an education that is challenging, holistic and relevant

catering for the needs of students of all abilities or interests

giving all a chance to succeed

so that through critical reflection and engagement

inviting students to grow in self-understanding

empowering them to question, analyse and critique

encouraging appropriate engagement in service, advocacy and action

each person is hope-filled and free

realising that there is always hope for a better future

recognising the power each has as an agent of change

seeing the potential and opportunity that each situation brings

to build a better world for all

denouncing structures that undermine empowerment, dignity and meaning

creating space for new insights and ideas about a just and peace-filled world

being co-creators of the kingdom of God where love and acceptance are universal
**Being Faithful to a Liberating Education**

*A Catholic School offering a liberating education would ask these questions:*

How do we encourage all members of the school community to work to the best of their ability, to realise their potential and to strive for equity and excellence?

What curriculum choices and pedagogical responses will equip and skill our students to take responsibility for their own education and our Gospel mission to bring about the reign of God in our world?

Do we always serve the needs of each person, providing teaching and learning experiences that are authentic, relevant, dynamic and creative?

In what ways do we provide a holistic education integrating faith with culture and learning while giving an appreciation of the need to strive for the greater good of all society?

How are we challenging all to prophetic leadership within the school community and beyond?

What are some examples of how we enable students to experience and value a critical awareness of justice and peace issues through the curriculum, service and solidarity learning, environmental practices and the culture of the school?

How can our curriculum break down any dualism that would lead to a silo approach that separates faith and life and quality teaching and learning from a responsibility to be agents of Gospel change?

How do we promote ongoing renewal through providing opportunities for reflective practice, formation and professional development?

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*I have come that you may have life and have it to the full!*

*John 10:10*