

IT'S TIME TO SHARPEN THE PENCIL OF LIVING AND LEARNING THROUGH OUR VALUES



Donia Keith 5 April 2024

A photography firm apologised after parents were offered a choice of whether they wanted class photos with or without pupils with complex needs. The underlying issue has to be that separate photos were allowed to be taken in the first place.

CONTEXT

Is this happening in 2024? BBC Scotland reported an incident that occurred in March 2024 at a primary school in Aberdeenshire, Scotland. Details can be read here: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-68693874>

It rightly calls 'foul' to parents having been given a choice whether they wanted class photos with or without pupils with complex needs. Whilst the photography firm, the school, the local council authority, Scotland's First Minister, Humza Yousef, et al subsequently gave unequivocal apologies to the deeply hurt and distressed parents, surely the key issue is that the photos were allowed by attending teachers to be taken in the first place.

In fact, it was a golden opportunity missed by attending teachers to lead by example; to advocate for marginalised children and to demonstrate in practice what it means to champion the rights of all children, through the refusal for the photo session to commence until all pupils were present.

FOUNDATION BEFORE FRAMEWORK

This 'foto-fiasco' irrefutably shines a spotlight on what needs to be given fundamental focus within Initial Teacher Learning and Training, and in fact, to all pre-graduate courses within higher education in general.

The teaching and learning sector is a big user of what it terms as 'frameworks' to help guide design and delivery of curricula and its evaluation. The ethos and approach of the Caring on Campus initiative within LifeRoute is for the primary focus instead to be about foundation.

In other words, ***Foundation First*** and, only then, framework to follow.

A solid foundation has to be bedrock, not sand that can easily shift depending on how the wind blows - a metaphor here for external influences such as lack of time, workload, social and other pressures.

Within LifeRoute and Caring on Campus, we often refer to the term 'core human values' to describe the Foundation. These values encompass the basic emotional needs we all have in common and which, when fully met, then enable us to be completely in touch with ourselves so that we can then scale all learning Frameworks with confident agility and meaningful purpose.

To understand oneself at this level is like to both possess and to know how to use a compass in order to navigate properly through all circumstances, including the unforeseen ones that suddenly emerge, such as the actions at the school photograph shoot.

SHARPEN YOUR VALUES PENCIL

Situations can appear on the surface to be innocent and we can drop our full attention. When we develop the practice of living by our values, we recover quickly and can avoid or minimise any harm it may have led to. Living by our values becomes second nature. Like breathing. It becomes a subconscious reflex where we immediately know what has to be done, and how to go about doing it, so that any ill-advised action can be 'nipped in the bud' before damage is done.

We develop habits that become so intrinsic to our nature that our ways of dealing with things become automatic. However a habit can be a learned ability, rather than a random attainment. Just as the pencil does not on its own, randomly find itself engaged with the blade of a sharpener.

The clarity that comes to those who learn to choose their actions through the use of a values lens, is equivalent to being able to write the chapters of their life with a perpetually sharpened pencil. It creates the practice to step back, discern, decide and then how effectively to face or to 'give voice' to what is the right thing to do. This becomes an ingrained means to move our consciousness forward in a way that lies at the heart of what has to be the ultimate purpose of teaching and learning.