

## Notes on *The Heart of Education*

By Mark Selle, Ph.D.

[mselle@valley.k12.wa.us](mailto:mselle@valley.k12.wa.us)

WSASCD, Spokane, WA

15 October, 2010

### Quotes:

*"Untethered to any genuine philosophy of education, our current reforms will disappoint us, as others have in the past."* –Diane Ravitch

*"The ultimate end of education is happiness or a good human life, a life enriched by the possession of every kind of good, by the enjoyment of every type of satisfaction."* –Mortimer Adler

*"Education is formation of the heart: A work of beauty painted on a living canvas."* –Mark Selle

*"Education has for its object the formation of character."* –Herbert Spencer

*"The human body is the best picture of the human soul."* –Ludwig Wittgenstein

*"You don't have a soul. You are a soul. You have a body."* –C. S. Lewis

*"Character is higher than intellect."* –Ralph Waldo Emerson

*"People do not lack strength, they lack will."* –Victor Hugo

*"A virtue is simply a good habit."* –Mortimer Adler

*"We sit down in our thinking chair and think, think, think."* –Steve (or Joe), Blue's Clues

*"Character is like a tree and reputation like its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing."* –Abraham Lincoln

### Works of Art:

*School of Athens*, Raphael

*Snap the Whip*, Winslow Homer

*Drawing Hands*, M.C. Escher

*100 Cans of Soup*, Andy Warhol

*MC Mechanic*, Shane Willis

### Notes:

\*In a word, education is an *art*.

\*An *art* requires a medium, an artist, and an artwork.

\**Art* has a broader meaning and many categories like *fine art* and *manual art*. This we can speak of the art not only of Vincent Van Gogh, but also of the art of a musician, a potter, a cabinet maker, or a tradesman working on a skyscraper.

\*Aristotle first identified a unique category called *cooperative art*. Aristotle distinguished between the vegetative soul, the animal soul, and the human soul. Thus, he distinguished three cooperative arts corresponding to each one. In this way, the farmer, veterinarian, doctor, and teacher can be called *cooperative artists*. Each artist works in the medium of life to produce a work of art in a process that can be called *formation*.

\*A teacher practices *the art most noble* because the medium is the human soul, a soul unique in its distinguishing characteristic, a trait Aristotle linked to the Greek word *logos*, the human ability to use words, tell stories, and reason.

\**Virtue* simply means *a good habit*. Thus, the *art* of education produces the *formation of virtue* in the soul.

\*Based on the idea that human beings are distinguished from other animals because they are both rational and free, philosophers have distinguished two corresponding aspects of the human soul: *Intellect* and *will*.

\*Philosophers have distinguished *Intellectual* and *Moral Virtues* corresponding to each aspect of the soul.

\*While Aristotle analyzed good habits, Aquinas, the student of Aristotle *par excellence*, perfected his analysis and distinguished the intellectual virtues.

\*Aquinas distinguished *Speculative Intellectual Virtues* from *Practical Intellectual Virtues*.

The *Speculative Intellectual Virtues* are: *Understanding*, *Knowledge*, and *Wisdom*. *Understanding* is the habit of considering first principles of truth. *Knowledge* is the habit of grasping the truths of different subjects. *Wisdom* is the habit of rightly judging all things and setting them in order in terms of first causes.

\*The *Practical Intellectual Virtues* are: *Art* and *Prudence* (note that, as an *art*, education is a *practical virtue*). *Art* is the habit of right reason about the good works to be made. *Prudence* is the habit of right reason about what to do or avoid.

\*The traditional moral virtues, tracing back to Plato's analysis, are *Prudence*, *Justice*, *Temperance*, and *Fortitude*. *Prudence* is both an intellectual and moral virtue and is defined above. *Justice* is the habit of giving others their due. *Temperance* is the habit of sacrificing for the greater good. *Fortitude* (often called *courage*) is the habit of facing hardship for the greater good.

\*The beginning of a sound philosophy of education, its definition, the heart of education: ***Education is the cooperative art whereby a teacher works with the heart and soul of a child to nurture the formation of virtue, both intellectual and moral.***

#### **Recommended Books:**

Diane Ravitch: *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education*, Basic Books (2010). *The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Students Learn*, Alfred A. Knopf (2003). *Left Back: A Century of Failed Education Reform*, Simon & Schuster (2001).

Yong Zhao: *Catching Up or Leading the Way: American Education in the Age of Globalization*, ASCD (2009).

Mortimer Adler: *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, Collier Books, (1990).