

Hidden Curriculum: The Intangible Value of HSP's Teachers, Part 5 of 5

by Tommy Curtin

Dear Parents,

Millions of teenagers (at other schools, of course) will spend this evening plugging into the social media-sphere. After all, they don't want to miss anything! They will access Facebook via laptops, Twitter via iPads, and Instagram via iPhones. Who are they talking to and reading about? Other teenagers, mostly. Status updates will inform them that "Martin is still watching *The Walking Dead*," and "Susan is repainting her nails orange. LOL." Some of them will pause thoughtfully before endorsing Martin's update with a "like." Meanwhile, Susan waits for someone, anyone to notice her. Carefully selected peer pictures will convince them that everyone else is having more fun than they are and spends 75% of their summer at the beach. Just before bed, the news that Justin Bieber has unretired will start trending on Twitter, and they will retweet it.

The relative value of social media is hotly contested, but one truth should be beyond debate. Social media has allowed teenagers to spend more time than ever watching each other's lives. It's not just at school. It's at home and even in the car on the way home! The end result of this is that teenagers spend less and less time observing and engaging the words, actions, and choices of grownups. Whereas we lived in a vertical world, theirs is horizontal. And in a horizontal world, there is no one to look up to.

We parents pray our children will grow up to be mature, responsible, hard-working, faithful adults. However, what models has society provided them for this grand undertaking? If we asked our teenagers to name the adults in their life they most look up to, what would they say? Naturally, we hope they would say mom and dad. But anyone else?

I can't speak for the millions of teenagers at other schools, but I am quite confident that teenagers at HSP's Upper School would name their teachers on the first or second ballot. Don't take my word for it though; try it out! Ask them and I bet you'll start to hear some familiar names surface: Mr. Radosta, Mrs. Askins, Mr. Reger, Mr. Rondeau, Dr. Deen, Ms. Stedman, Mr. Rosenzweig, Ms. Rombalski, and Dr. Schreiber. There are many more names I could mention, but it doesn't really matter which teacher your student sees as a role model. The point is that, during the day, your son or daughter has connected in a meaningful way with someone who exemplifies what it means to be a mature, responsible, hard-working, faithful adult.

As a parent it's often hard to know whether our kids are in greater need of our friendship or good, old-fashioned tough love. We err on the side of being a buddy, though, because we are afraid of losing that all important positive relationship. After all, we fret, if they stop looking up to us, whom will they aspire to emulate? This is why it's so critical for teenagers to have teachers they know and respect personally. The presence of those role models allows us parent to do our job, even when that means administering some tough love. As my son Becket grows up, I expect there will be many times when my high expectations and consistent enforcement of rules earn me poor reviews on Facebook. Perhaps he'll even "hate" me and my wife, Kaitlyn, at the same time!

When this inevitably happens, I will take solace in my confidence that I have done everything in my power to place him into genuine relationship with awesome adults who share my values and my hopes for his development. His life will be full of models of success. Authentic success, not the superficial Hollywood version he is likely to access through Google Glass.

This is a letter about the hidden value of HSP's faculty. I know I haven't done enough to extol their respective virtues. They are truly superb men and women who work hard because they love the students. Even so, the value of HSP's teachers might not be fully realized until well after graduation when a college junior, at sea in the flotsam and jetsam of university life, looks back and suddenly realizes she's known all along just what she needs to do to get back on track. She needs to be as passionate as Mr. Radosta, as pleasant as Mrs. Askins, as thorough as Mr. Reger, as earnest as Mr. Rondeau, as courteous as Dr. Deen, as expert as Ms. Stedman, as inspiring as Mr. Rosenzweig, as dedicated as Ms. Rombalski, and as forthright as Dr. Schreiber.

As I conclude this fifth and final entry in the Hidden Curriculum series, one fact is becoming clear. Your student probably doesn't need to be as verbose as Mr. Curtin! However, I do sincerely hope these letters have provided welcome opportunities for reflection on the intangible value of a Holy Spirit Prep Education.

As always, HSP considers you, our parents, as partners in this great mission of educating the next generation of Catholic Christian leaders.

Thank you for everything you do to make our school such a wonderful place.

Yours in Catholic Education,

Tommy