

When it comes to education – what if common sense and instinct prevailed?

In this high tech, political, and cerebral world that we live in, imagine for a second what it would be like if schools were run based on common sense and instinct. I had this revelation while walking our 100-lb, 3-legged Akita, Maximillian the other day. Stay with me, there is a connection.

Max could be thought of as a phoenix rising from the ashes, a miracle dog who was rescued a few years ago, mortally ill, freezing and starving. He rebounded to full and robust health, only to be stricken with a deadly tumor of the humerus, which required the amputation of his leg. But the truth is, as much as we all admire Max for his enormous will to live and energetic rehabilitation back to running and romping as ever before, he is not a miracle or a phoenix. He is a creature following his instincts and thus, not only survives, but flourishes.

When schools were founded in colonial towns and then out on the prairie in this country, they were designed on the basis of practicality, common sense, and, yes, instinct. Since then, US schools have been changed in every way, destroyed, rebuilt, meshed with corporate and military strategies, ping-ponged from one political party to another, redefined by every experimental practice applied to them, and to what end? A decent level of competence in reading, writing, and arithmetic for every school child has become a major goal for school across the country. It is the focus of countless tests, enrichment programs, millions of dollars of investment and huge political movement and laws culminating in Federal laws including No Child Left Behind and Race To the Top. These subjects were mastered in austere one room schoolhouses centuries ago with nothing more than paddle books, slate boards, chalk, and hard wooden benches and tables.

It seems to me Max has it all over the politicians, reformists, pundits, curriculum specialists and the rest when it comes to getting what needs to be done accomplished in the simplest way possible, with priorities in order. Two days after his entire leg at the shoulder was removed, he walked unaided to the car from the veterinary hospital and figured out how to climb into the back seat. He knew instinctually that he had to walk to live, and so he did. Once home, aware that he needed to eat and drink to survive, he brought himself to his feet, incisions and all, and when he had to go outside, he took what he had at his disposal, three legs and all our love, and he made it work.

In the old days, before all the technology, politics, and over thinking were so popular, children went to local schools, surrounded by children that lived in their neighborhood, some poor, some rich, some in between – the school was actually a unifying factor for them. Teachers were hired and paid by the local community, and the school (because education was so important to its future) was at the heart of the community – everyone was vested in its success. Children demonstrated what they learned publicly to the community that supported them on special days of celebration, science fairs, and recitals for just that purpose. All the people of the community rejoiced and had pride in the accomplishment of the students and the school in which they felt a part and as stakeholders. The fact is that at the point

that schools became political fodder and testing laboratories for the *next big thing* instinct and common sense were set aside.

Max, the “tri-pawd” Akita and American schools have something in common. They have been mortally challenged to survive and flourish. Max is using his instincts and by all appearances is succeeding in every way. When it comes to education – what if common sense and instinct prevailed?

By Rosanna Pittella, Co-Director, One Voice