

How to be Professionals Without Being Experts A Few Wise Reminders From Else Göttgens – April 2005

While on tour, visiting dozens of elementary classrooms every year, Else has shared that she has regularly observed a certain “lack of professionalism” in some classrooms.

As Class Teachers in the elementary grades, no one expects us to be certified experts in all of the many academic subjects that we teach – That kind of expertise is reserved for (and is expected at) the high school level, where teachers should only teach within their field of expertise... As elementary school teachers, we are generalists.

This does not give us permission, however, to be ignorant or incompetent in any of the subjects that we teach (which leads to sloppy results). Rather, we have a very clear responsibility to be professionals with our students at all times. Without a doubt, to remain professional, we will need guidance from the pros: the experts...

Else asks that we remember the following example when bringing anything new to the children in our classrooms:

A teacher about to teach his class how to write need not be an expert calligrapher. Yet that teacher has a professional duty to get adequate training so that he will give a proper introduction of the subject. Imagine the damage (and poor results) if he were to just “wing” it!

Professionalism dictates that a teacher unfamiliar with a skill that he/she wishes to teach should first get advice from an expert. “You don’t have to become a pro yourself” she adds, “but get a proper introduction”.

In our example, this means: learn to hold the pen properly, proper posture, proper technique, proper tool care, etc.

“You must get *into* the art. Ideally, let it teach you! Let it *use you* to get across what and how it wants to be conveyed...”

Apply this approach to singing, writing, knitting, speech, etc. in the lower grades; and to acting, clay work, painting, archery, etc. in the upper grades. Always get the professional advice first, then bring it to your students in an age appropriate way.

Remember the old adage: If you really want to learn something, you will need to teach it. As teachers then, we first have to learn so that we can teach properly. When we make the effort to learn from experts, that is professionalism!

P.S. Do not forget the Specialty Teachers on your faculty. These are often experts in their field: Music, Eurythmy, Speech, Crafts... Parents, too, can be exceptional expert resources! It really *does* take a village...

For additional “Else’s Gems” for teachers, visit www.waldorfinpractice.com