



ISC Views and Voices

“Education is not a preparation for life; education is life itself.” - John Dewey

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Adults: A Role of Supportive Non-Interference

by Dan Greenberg, SVS Founder and Staff Member (excerpt from Sudbury e-mail list)

The following was written by Dan Greenberg, a Sudbury Valley School Founder and Staff Member. It was sent to demstartup (an e-mail list for Sudbury school staff members and Sudbury school startup group members). The ‘you’ below refers to a member of the startup group of a new Sudbury school in Puerto Rico.

There seems to be a serious difference of approach between what you are doing and what we seek to do here. I do not, however, want to rush to such a conclusion, but only to explore the matter a bit more deeply.

Certain phrases in your letter seem to be key to this discussion. I would like to consider a few.

You say, “I do not see the harm in authentic adults (adults who know when to interfere and when not) guiding children through the process [of finding their passions and inner path].” That sentence contains a significant assumption – namely, that there exist certain adults “who know when to interfere and when not” in the thought processes and emotional progress of other people (whether children or not). I do not believe such knowledge can reside in another person. I do not believe that there exists another human being who “knows when to interfere” in my development, or in that of my child, or in that of any other person,

young or old. Each human being is a unique entity with a complex intellectual and emotional makeup; our present state of knowledge yields no concrete understanding of an individual’s personality, potential, stability, or innate intelligence. To me, it is the height of presumption for someone to arrogate to him/herself the right to enter into the developmental processes of a child, on the assumption that s/he “knows” the proper time and way to do so.

Of course, none of this means that we cannot, when asked for advice, give it, so long as we await the readiness of the other person to ask, and so long as everyone is quite clear that we are giving our own personal, flawed opinions, and not some “expert” opinion deriving from “authentic” or pure knowledge. To me, any other course is fraught with danger, and seriously undermines the development of self-confidence in the child – self-confidence that is essential to the child’s successful functioning for the rest of their lives as independent adults.

The same considerations apply to another phrase in your e-mail. You ask, “Why can not... staff come up with an idea of activities, classes, and children join in if they want?” Of course, staff can come up with ideas, in the same way (and ONLY in the same way) as they might with their friends or acquaintances – not for the purpose of guiding them, but for the purpose of enjoying a joint activity. Once again, the problem is the ease with which adult initiative can undermine the development of children’s initiative. It is, after all, so seductive to a child to have an adult arrange all the necessary factors for entertaining them and keeping them busy and happy. But what good is this in the long run? What lesson does this teach the child, who expects other people to be at

hand to make sure they are not bored, or floundering, or struggling? What happens when they grow up, and there are no willing adults standing by waiting to relieve them of the burden of their struggle? Where will they have learned to undertake the hard work necessary to find their own way in life, rather than waiting for others to lead the way?

I am not arguing with you, but rather trying to present more clearly our perspective on the proper role of the school in the lives of children – a role of supportive non-interference. By far, the greatest majority of people in schools feel the way you seem to feel, if I am not misinterpreting your letter. Most people are convinced that benign adult guidance for struggling children, given by adults who “know when to interfere” or who “can see when it is and when it is not appropriate” to initiate activities, is a good thing, and is part of any legitimate school. We do not agree. Emphatically so.



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Blessed with Trust

by Nicolette Groeneveld

I am watching Tim walk toward the barn with our newest student, 5-year old Liam. They are heading off to build a jet plane. It's an absolutely beautiful sight: this tiny little guy with Tim, a giant in comparison! As they're walking, Liam initiates a little walking game of some kind; Tim plays along.

Watching this, I think about the following piece I recently read in John Taylor Gatto's *The Underground History of American Education*:

You aren't compelled to loan your car to anyone who wants it, but you are compelled to surrender your school-age child to strangers who process children for a livelihood... Your great-great-grandmother didn't have to surrender her children. What happened?

If I demanded you give up your television to an anonymous, itinerant repairman who needed work you'd think I was crazy; if I came with a policeman who forced you to pay that repairman even after he broke your set, you would be outraged. Why are you so docile when you give up your child to a government agent called a schoolteacher?

Obviously, at ISC, staff are not government agents, but we are the adult individuals in whom parents place their absolute trust. What we say to our students, how we interact with them, the experiences they have with us here at the school will impact them—there is no question. We have the power to uplift or damage each child, and each new enrollment we get tells me parents find Ric, Tim and me worthy of the trust parents require in order to “surrender their child/ren” to our care. I am awed by this and feel, to my core, the honor in this.

Perhaps it is because I don't have

children of my own that I am not aware of the processes parents go through to come to this level of trust. I only know the protective feelings I have felt for children in my care, and I imagine I would have to multiply that by a hundred to understand the feelings of a parent.

I remember a Talkabout we had this year where several parents spoke about their child/ren feeling very accepted at ISC, and parents expressed their deep sense of their child/ren being safe. I was very happy to hear that! But then Tim said, “For me it's so totally the opposite! I feel my children are absolutely NOT safe here!” I was surprised, but Tim explained that it's a “real life” kind of lack of safety—one where kids are not just sitting at desks being drones. Rather, they are actually “in life” - out there doing things, stretching their edge, testing their limits, but doing it all safely and



responsibly right in front of the adults, rather than having to do it sneakily behind the adults' backs.

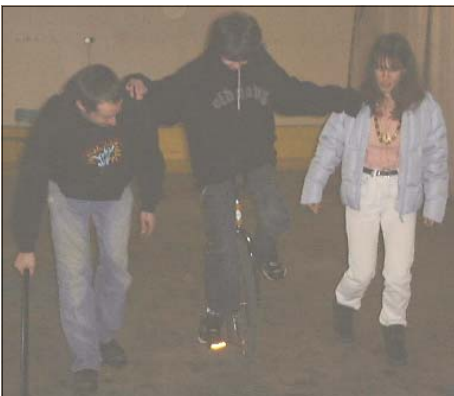
Students are also in “real life” when it comes to relationships and emotional safety. They have their conflicts, and they get their feelings hurt, but the various “systems” we have for dealing with those situations create safety: in mediation and JC, students have a place to express feelings, vent frustrations, voice hurts and find solutions. And the honesty and wisdom I witness in those cases is remarkable!

So just as our students aren't necessarily 100% physically safe—even with the safety guidelines we have in place—they

aren't 100% emotionally safe either. They are exposed to *real life*—uncut, uncensored, *but they are supported and that*, I think, is what is making the difference in who our students are being and becoming! The more I see our students' wisdom, compassion and willingness to work things out and make things “safe”, the more I realize that we adults really best serve children when we practice responsible non-interference.



So, hats off again to the parents who trust us enough, first of all, to have their children with us, and secondly who trust our hands off approach! We are truly honored by the parents who are able to let go and trust enough to give their children the Sudbury gift of freedom with responsibility. Maybe parents aren't so much “surrendering their children” to us but to “real life” as we offer it here in this little microcosm we call ISC.



A moment of deep gratitude:

As I cut and paste photos for this month's newsletter, I think back to when our school did not yet exist and I would browse newsletters and websites from other Sudbury schools and see all their students who were strangers to me. Putting together this newsletter and looking at the photos of our students, I feel *so blessed*; these are the magnificent individuals with whom I have the pleasure of interacting every day! Parents, please know how much I delight in your children and how grateful I am to know them and witness—every day!—all their beautiful individuality in bloom!



Quotable Quotes:

“Animals die faster than humans because humans have to learn their lessons in life. Animals already know.” Al-yassa talking to Mei-fah.

Mars had her hand on Little Logan's head and was gently twisting it back and forth. “You're changing my mind!” said Logan.



Kylen: “God is a world renowned imaginary friend.”

So beautiful!

Bretton came to ask me about a piece of metal that had been spotted somewhere on the property; he wanted it so he could spray paint on it. I stepped out the garage door to point him in the right direction, and several of our younger boys were standing around the picnic tables. Of course they started asking all kinds of questions as to what we were doing and where we were going. Gaian and Logan joined Bretton and me as we headed off, and right behind us were Little Logan, Dakota, Josh and Kelson. At the edge of the cement, I told Bretton where I had seen the metal, and he and his friends headed off in that direction. As I walked back toward the school, I turned back to witness this beautiful group of boys, younger and older, chattering away and tromping along toward the fence line. Using words, it's hard to do an image like that justice, but moments like those are magic to me—they melt my heart!



Harnessed to the “dog sled” and ready to pull!



Wrestle-Mania Returns!

by Nicolette Groeneveld

"You sure get a lot of exercise at this school!" exclaimed Kelson one day as he was wrestling and pillow fighting with his friends. Indeed! Wrestle-mania has returned, and this year it's more intense than ever! Kris and Kylan started it, and now almost everyone is game to join in!

The first round of wrestling I witnessed went on for more than 2 hours! It started with two people, then became three, then a fourth person joined in, and



before long, the living room was full of students pushing, pulling, falling, dragging, stopping for breathers, starting up again, challenging people walking by and dragging innocent bystanders into the mix (ie. me and parent, Chris!) At the April 1st sleepover, John's dad, Kevin, was put to the test and a few days later, a grand challenge was launched against "Sparky Marky" (Nicolette's partner).

At this point there are very few students who have *not* participated in the



"Exposure" at ISC:

Two of our youngest boys were playing in the "Little Kids" room. Logan and Kris walked by, talking about students who were involved in an activity outside.

"Hear that?" said one of the youngsters. "They're spray painting!"

"Let's go!" said the other, and off they went!

wrestling, and so delightful to witness, once again, is how careful the older students are when the ages on the "wrestling field" are widespread. Younger students are fully included, however great care is taken not to hurt them.

There have been instances where a student has gotten hurt, but the moment it happens, everything stops and everyone swarms around the hurt individual to give care and attention. A staff member usually swoops in to make sure injuries are not serious, and once the tears have stopped and the injured student is ready to move, the action starts again! The grunting, groaning, yelping and screeching resumes, and at the very end, students are left panting, sweating, calling for someone to open the windows and wishing they'd brought a change of clothes!

Who says exercise isn't fun!



Peer Pressure at ISC (by Amanda):
"Come on, Nathen, do yoga with us! You know you want to!"

Classic slip of the tongue:

Kris: "He was laughing historically!"



*"If you are in a position to diagnose a child's happiness in all its intensity
Then you cannot fail to notice that the highest level of joy*

Results from having overcome some obstacle—

*From a goal attained or a mystery solved
This is the happiness of triumph and the bliss of independence."* Janusz Korczak

Parents' Corner

Zigging and Zagging—On Her Own Time

by Roze Groeneveld

"Hi, honey."

"Hi Mom."

"How was school?"

"Good".

"What did you do today?"

"Nothing".

That was the typical after-school conversation Kylan and I would have every single day for the past few years. She might tell me about something that had happened during recess but otherwise I rarely heard anything about regular school. Now she's barely 2 feet in the door before the stories begin and I'm given a rundown of many of the things that happened during the day. It's all relayed with great enthusiasm and excitement, and I now know more about what happened in a single day at Indigo than I might about a whole other school year. My favorite after school conversation was when she came home and said "I did ab-so-lute-ly nothing at school today!" with a full smile on her face. I asked her if she had played pool and she said she hadn't even done that. It was the most relaxed and content I'd seen her to date.

There have been a lot of changes that have happened since Kylan's admission to Indigo. These changes have happened slowly but steadily and have just very subtly become a part of our household. The stress level has definitely gone down with the fact that there are no daily homework requirements or assignment deadlines, and her time is her own. This is also a great stress relief for me as I no longer feel like I'm always badgering and nagging her to do her schoolwork. Also noticeable is the fact that she's sleeping better at night. Unbeknownst to me, she would lie in bed sometimes for hours at night with thoughts running through her head and would be unable to easily fall asleep. No wonder it would take a lot of shaking in the mornings to wake her up. Now I barely even have to say "good morning" and she's awake. She has also created a morning routine that gives her a lot of time to get herself ready and get everything together for her day in a relaxed

and unhurried manner, which suits her.

Kylen mentioned to Nicolette that she is happy to be done with the stress of being in the regular school with bells ringing, changing of classrooms, changing of teachers, mandatory seating arrangements and the whole dictatorship of the system. To be able to walk around and be where you want at all times is a great relief. I think back to my high school years and remember what it was like to have this whole structured system, and I can certainly see how that would be tiring. For me it was just something we were conditioned to do so I did not even consider that it could be something that could be distressing.

It's wonderful to be able to sit back and watch Kylan come into her own. I love to hear her stories and watch the enthusiasm she puts out as she dives into one project after another, from welding to sewing to business classes. She has started to develop a stronger sense of independence, and I've noticed that she's starting to stick up for herself and say her piece a lot more. I am thankful that she has the opportunity to flex her wings on her own time and to truly follow her heart's passion. I am excited to see how she will continue to develop as she matures into an adult.



Daily yoga moves outside!



The reward of persistence

If you happen to come to the Campus and see Mars zipping along on the unicycle, know that it took her three days pretty much non-stop from the time she got to school to the time she left to master this skill! Unicycling is mighty tricky, but Mars can now go from pavement to grass to gravel without missing a beat! From not being able to balance without two shoulders to lean on to cruising along completely independently, Mars has proven once again that determination and persistence really pay off!

ISC Diploma Procedure

*Here we are in our third year and we are delighted (and sad at the same time) to announce that Amanda will be our first graduating student! As Amanda is the first student to go through the Diploma Procedure, we actually had to decide what that procedure would be! A committee of volunteers got together, reviewed Sudbury Valley School's diploma procedure and came up with our own personalized diploma procedure. Here it is... newly approved by Campus Meeting: **ISC's Diploma Procedure:***

Preparation:

- Student must be enrolled at least 2 full years.
- Students may initiate the diploma procedure at any time during their second (or later) year but at the latest, they must present their Notice of Intention to get a diploma to Campus Meeting by April 1st.
- Thesis Committee is made of volunteers.
- Candidate submits to the Thesis Clerk, before the first Campus Meeting in May, a *signed* draft of a written thesis explaining *that they have taken responsibility for preparing themselves to be respectful, responsible, reasonable adults in the larger community.*
- Thesis Clerk makes available to the Thesis Committee (at a specific location) a copy of the draft (as submitted – no changes made) within two days of receiving it.
- Thesis Committee is notified of the availability of the draft through a notice posted on the main white board.
- Thesis Committee has one week to submit to Thesis Clerk signed and dated written critiques (including general ques-

tions and comments) of the draft.

- Critiques are given to the Candidate within one day of the end of the critique period.
- A second draft may be submitted for further critique if desired.
- Candidate submits to the Thesis Clerk a Presentation Version of the thesis and schedules with the Clerk a date and time for presenting the Thesis.
- Thesis Clerk mails to all the members of the Assembly the Presentation Version of the thesis.
- Two weeks must pass from the time of the mailing to the thesis defense presentation.

Defense evening:

- Candidate is responsible for ensuring the room in which the defense is being held is set up.
- Campus Chair arranges to have the defense chaired.
- People attending the defense are expected to stay until its conclusion. People may not enter or exit the room during the presentation.
- Video cameras are only allowed by permission of the Candidate.
- Thesis defense: Candidate is open to challenges, questions and comments from all present.
- Defense open only to members of the Assembly and guests invited by the candidate (a list of guests must be provided to the Thesis Clerk at least 48 hours in advance; Candidate may also list people who are not welcome.)
- The written thesis is *not* read aloud. Attendees are responsible for having read the thesis before coming.
- At the end of the presentation, all

members present vote via secret ballot on the question of whether the candidate has adequately defended his/her thesis.

- Thesis Clerk, Campus Chair and one witness count the votes and the Thesis Clerk notifies the candidate. (Ballots must be kept on file for 7 years.)
- If the candidate does not receive a majority of votes, s/he may present again after three months.

After the defense:

- Thesis Clerk presents the result of the vote at the next Campus Meeting and Campus Meeting has the final authority to approve the awarding of the diploma to the Candidate.
- If approved, the Candidate(s) may plan a diploma awarding ceremony. If none is planned, the Candidate will receive his/her diploma at the last Campus Meeting or Talkabout of the year.
- The Diploma will be signed by Ric and Nicolette.



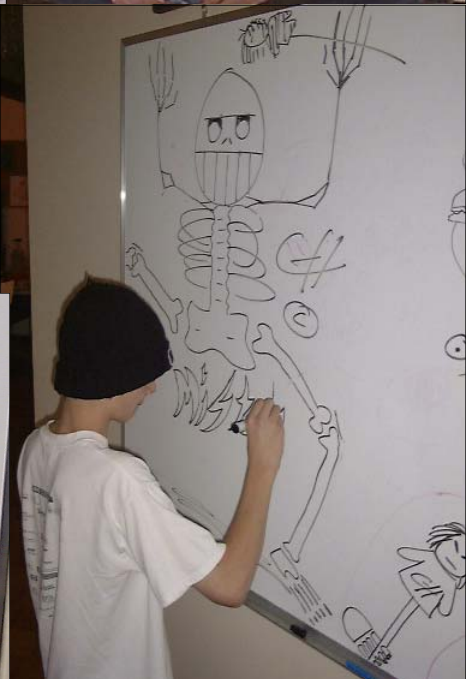
Amanda: a respectful, responsible, reasonable member of our community!

“There are some people who live in a dream world and others who face reality; and then there are those who turn one into the other.”
Douglas Everett

Announcements

Thank you to Reverend Julie Paul of Pahoa, Hawaii for her donation of \$100 USD!

Pirate Day is Thursday, May 12th. A reminder to parents attending the Potluck to dress up or risk walking the plank!





Prepared by Nicolette Groeneveld