



ISC Views and Voices

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Spontaneous Science!

by Nicolette Groeneveld

Imagine a school where students pick up road kill on their way to school and dissect it... It's recorded in Sudbury Valley material! Now, lo and behold – we have our own version of that!

As you may remember from previous newsletters, Kassie and Anna Marie love going for walks around the Charles Camsell hospital. In the fall, during one of their walks with Ric, they found a dead pigeon which they brought back to the school and dissected. More recently, they found a dead jackrabbit!

News spreads quickly in our small community so I went to the door and discovered Kassie and Anna Marie each holding the rabbit by two legs, swinging it as they walked. It was too late in the day to start a dissection, so they left the rabbit outside, tucked away in a secluded corner of the building.

The next day, as soon as both Kassie and Anna Marie had arrived, the dissection began. Measurements were taken and some initial discoveries were made; for example, did you know that a rabbit's lips don't run together? They are split at the nose. Also, our particular rabbit was 22" long from nose to tail, had 8" front legs and 12" rear legs. The rabbit's ears were 5" long and its tail 3". Students wondered how the rabbit might have



died; there was nothing to suggest it was killed, as the body was completely intact and there was no blood anywhere, so old age seemed the most probable cause of death.

After the initial surface investigation, Ric got the job of cutting the rabbit open. From there, it was an all-out dissection with highly detailed, anatomical explanations from Ric. Students covered their noses when the intestines came out – the smell was terrible! The kidneys were



found, the lungs were laid flat, the heart was removed and cut in half so the chambers were visible, and Victor managed to stick his finger into one of the chambers! Continuing along, students saw the spinal cord and the molars at the back of the rabbit's mouth, Anna Marie insisted Ric cut out the tongue for her to hold, Ric

carefully removed one of the eyeballs which was also most fascinating to Anna Marie, and finally, Ric sawed his way through the skull to find the rabbit's brain (at various moments, the sound of crunching bones made me squirm!)

Throughout the dissection, students came and went. Many stayed to watch for an extended time and one or two came in, said, "Oh gross!" and left! Amanda video taped the whole thing, and, of course, I stood by with the camera.

Spontaneous science... A recent visitor asked Ric, "At this school, are students ahead or behind?" In this case, a 5- and 7-year old doing a dissection definitely qualifies as ahead!

More Sudbury Spontaneity:

Amanda asking to go to City Hall to hear the debate on the new smoking bylaw.

Anna Marie's impromptu geography class.

Chris Iselin's on-the-spot decision to do a visiting week during his first school tour.

Victor getting a lesson from Ric on how babies are made.



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Trust the Process—Build the Foundation

by Ric Rosborough

In grade eight, I found that school got harder. They stopped putting pictures into the readers, and I could not read the words nearly as well as I could “read” the pictures. In elementary, I had been diagnosed with dyslexia and placed in “special classes”, but by grade eight, I was still better at reading pictures than I was at reading words.

With hard work and a lot of extra time spent studying, I managed to get through my B.Ed. degree at the University of Alberta, and I began a public school teaching career in 1980. However, in the regular school system, I never really found a passion for learning. It wasn't until I was 28 years old that I found information that was interesting enough for me to read and study on my own time, for my own purposes; something happened in my life that raised my interest in reading and learning from practically no interest at all to an all-out life-long passion.

The students at Indigo Sudbury Campus, and other schools like it, are lucky to have the opportunity to find their passion

early in life. I wonder where I would be now if I had found my passion for learning when I was young?

Indigo Sudbury Campus students have the opportunity to develop a solid foundation for self-initiated learning based on a powerful, positive self-esteem and an unshakable self-image. By living in a school social structure that promotes responsibility, respect and reasonable thoughts, behavior and actions in an atmosphere of peace, our students practice living and constantly learn who they are and what their interests are.

I know there are parents out there who are concerned with the lack of teacher-to-student transfer of information, especially “the three R's”. I also know there are some who have not been able to deal with the fear that their child will not be able to compete in society if they do not get their basic skills in the same way Mom and Dad got them. I would remind the reader that F.E.A.R. is also known as: False Evidence Appearing Real. And I would also like to point out that when looked at from the highest perspective, fear is (most of-

ten) excitement without breath.

The Sudbury educational approach is different. It is new. It is unusual, but it is also exciting. So breathe and remember that, “Faith the size of a mustard seed will move mountains”.

“Deprogramming” from “regular school” is reported to take from 3 to 8 months at the 35-year old, original Sudbury Valley School. We are just finishing month 5 of the first Indigo Sudbury Campus school year. The “un-schooling” phase may end for our students in the next few months. Students' transition to finding their passion may be about to take place (and yet consider that if you have a younger child – even a pre-teen – s/he may just *play* for the next few years!)

It is time for us all to stand back and carefully observe (not push and prod), have faith in the children and the Sudbury process, and support students as they release the ways of the past and create their future. Getting out of the box is worth the wait, isn't it?

Trust the Process #2

by Nicolette Groeneveld

To begin, I'd like to offer you the following excerpt on life purpose from Deepak Chopra's book *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*.

“According to (the Law of Dharma), you have a unique talent and a unique way of expressing it. There is something that you can do better than anyone else in the whole world – and for every unique talent and unique expression of that talent, there are also unique needs. When these needs are matched with the creative expression of your talent, that is the spark that creates affluence. Expressing your talents to fulfill needs creates unlimited wealth and abundance.

If you could start children right from the beginning with this thought, you'd see the effect it has on their lives. In fact, I

did this with my own children. Again and again, I told them there was a reason why they were here, and they had to find out what that reason was for themselves. From the age of four years, they *heard* this. I also taught them to meditate when they were about the same age, and I told them, (italics added) “*I never, ever want you to worry about making a living. If you're unable to make a living when you grow up, I'll provide for you, so don't worry about that. I don't want you to focus on doing well in school. I don't want you to focus on getting the best grades or going to the best colleges. What I really want you to focus on is asking yourself how you can serve humanity, and asking yourself what your unique talents are. Because you have a unique talent that no one else has, and you have a special way of expressing that talent,*

and no one else has it.” They ended up going to the best schools, getting the best grades, and even in college, they are unique in that they are financially self-sufficient, because they are *focused on what they are here to give.*”



Kennedy is a talented singer. Here she is doing karaoke.

As far as I know, Deepak Chopra's children went to "normal" school. Despite that, Dr. Chopra always kept his focus, and directed his children's focus on what is truly important. I believe that's what we do at ISC too.

For those parents who are presently struggling with their children "still doing nothing", I ask you, with the highest respect for what you're going through, to continue through this deprogramming process. Your child *is* deprogramming and reconnecting with him/herself. Can you, as a parent, continue within yourself to deprogram and connect deeper into the trust the Sudbury philosophy asks of you?

As a Sudbury parent, continuing to support your child and continuing to tell him/her, "*I trust you. I trust you will make something of yourself, somehow, someday*" is the highest form of trust and the greatest show of love you can offer your child! For many, it's not easy. And you've already taken such an enormous leap of faith – being the risk-taking parents, willing to commit at least a year of your child's life to a brand new school with a totally different approach to education! But still, I ask you, don't give up before the miracle happens! Even if it takes right into *next* year to happen or even a few years from now!

And I dare ask you this because we *know* this process works. Sudbury Valley School has been proving it for 35 years. Parents, please take a deep breath and recommit to your original enthusiasm for this new approach to education. With the highest respect, I recognize it's *the life of your child* we're talking about; yet I've got 19 lives on my shoulders - 14 families to answer to - and even so, not

for one moment has my belief in this process faltered. I've heard you tell me your children are changing, growing; the children themselves have told me they're changing and growing.



Johnny tries Dance Dance Revolution.

So, Parents, please keep the faith. Don't start pressuring now. Take another deep breath and step back yet again. Allow your child, if s/he's older, to reconnect to that amazement for life. I see it in Kassie and Anna-Marie all the time – never stop-



Anna Marie just never stopped trying to figure out what else she could add to her hamster house.

ping, always wanting to know about this, and what's that, and how do I do this, and help me with that, and what more can I do here, and let's make this harder next time... *That's the natural state* of all human beings! It's just that so many of us have lost it or have had it pressured out of us by the expectations and norms of traditional schooling.

Parents, your fears are normal, and I honour you for the courage you're displaying and the efforts you are making. Just remember, the way we were schooled is not the only way to gain an education, and it is not even, in so many people's opinions, a very functional way to be educated.

So feel your Sudbury-parent fears, honour the courage you've shown just being willing to try this at all, and talk to Ric and/or me and/or read SVS's *Legacy of Trust* or *Kingdom of Childhood* (we have both for you to borrow) and somehow bring yourself back to a place of trust. In me, trust whispers to me all the time; from every cell in my body it tells me, "Our students will be fine... As a matter of fact, they're going to be *great!*"



Nathen, who wanted to create a video game that included ISC students, caught Logan for a photo.



Victor tries the beginner level, while Yusu-ke can do the "maniac" level!



Sam and Mark have a game of chess.

The Way It Works—Naturally

by Nicolette Groeneveld

One Friday morning, Johnny came to me claiming he was bored and had no one to play with. I asked him, “If you had someone to play with, what would you want to do?” He said, “Play football.” I offered to be his football buddy, and he agreed so off we went to the gym.

I have read so many times in Sudbury Valley literature that one of the keys to the success of the philosophy is the fact that human beings don’t like to be bored and they like the satisfaction that comes with a challenge. I witnessed this firsthand with Johnny.

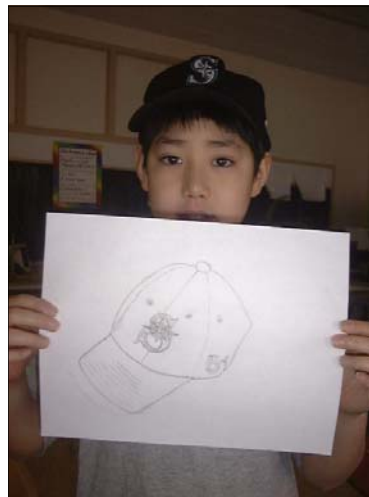
In the gym, Johnny and I began throwing a nerf football back and forth. While we did, Johnny talked about wanting to play on a football team. Suddenly he said, pointing with his hand, “Throw the ball more that way so I have to run for it!” I threw the ball just beyond his reach, and he stretched to catch it; he did the same with me. I asked Johnny what position he’d want to play on a football team. He answered, “Quarterback.” Shortly thereafter, our game changed again: “Throw the ball while we’re both running!” Johnny said. We both started to run, and I threw just beyond Johnny to where he was running, and he did the same with me; it was a stretch for both of us to catch the throws. When we were both winded, Johnny suggested, “Now, catch with just one hand!” We both tried that for a while.

At one point Johnny said, “How do you get that perfect spiral?” I showed him how I place my hands on the ball when I throw. He tried it, but the hand placement didn’t work for him. So he tried his own hand placements until he got a perfect spiral. “I’ve got it!” he exclaimed. He tried the throw again, making sure to place his hands exactly as he had the last time. Perfect spiral. He did it again. Perfect again. But on the next throw, it didn’t work. “Hmm,” said Johnny, “I guess I’ll just have to keep trying.” And he did.

But even that wasn’t where the challenges ended. We tried throwing with our non-dominant hand. Then Johnny

had me throw the ball to him while he sat on the skateboard rail. Then I had to throw the ball to him while he held his eyes closed. This all went on for about an hour and a quarter.

In observing children, one will quickly see that it is quite normal for them to try something, eventually get it – to the point even of mastering it – and then search out a greater challenge. Yusuke showed this



with his drawing. Bretton does it all the time with his skateboarding. Our video games gang gets tired of one game and

seeks out another. It’s human nature!

So, why do we fear that children will not do the same when it comes to “real” learning? They will! And they *do*! At the Sudbury Valley School, students *do* challenge themselves. They take on algebra, psychology, philosophy and every other imaginable “real school” subject. It’s always just a question of students being *interested* enough! (Though it has been noted in Sudbury literature that some students took on algebra, not because they liked it or were even remotely interested in it but just because they wanted to see if they could do it.)

From my perspective, though, “real” learning happens every day at Indigo Sudbury Campus. It’s not necessarily traditional-by-the-book learning or sit-down-at-a-desk-and-do-math-drills learning, but students *are* learning. Some people might not judge what I see as learning as “important”, but take the following example – what’s important?

A friend of mine who “unschools” her three daughters said one day: “My sister-in-law was telling me the other day that her daughter got honours on her report card and is top in her class in x-number of subjects. That sparked my fears around the unschooling we’ve chosen for our children. But then again, lately my daughter has been learning how to stand up for herself and say “no”. Isn’t that important?”

This leads me to ask you: what do *you* consider important? And what do *you* consider learning?

Another example: We have student “A” – a graduate from a regular high school who decides to take a year off and go traveling. We have student “B” – a student from Indigo Sudbury Campus who chooses to graduate from our school and decides to take a year off and go traveling. Student A has completed all the required Alberta Curriculum courses for an advanced high school diploma. She has an honours standing, however, her learning – as she expresses it – has consisted of memorizing, regurgitating and

promptly forgetting most of what she has learned. In striving for her high marks, she has endured abnormal stress levels and has had no time to work so she has had to borrow all her traveling money from her parents. Student A has no idea what she really wants to do with her life – nothing she covered in school really piqued her interest – so she’s hoping some traveling time will help her to figure out what she likes and where she’d like to go from here.

Student B, on the other hand, has not taken a single Alberta Curriculum course. Instead, she has been the Campus Chair (which has deepened her understanding of the democratic process and has sharpened her leadership skills), she has been the Judicial Committee Clerk (which has helped her in the areas of keeping accurate records, problem solving and human relations) and she has dabbled in a wide variety of activities, actively exploring and discovering which pursuits interest her and which do not. Having discovered one particular passion, she started an apprenticeship in that field which led to a part-time job, so she has saved up all the money she needs for her trip. In her spare time, she has also done extensive research on the countries she plans to visit, has explored all possible modes of travel, has gotten all the information she needs on accommodations, and has planned a basic itinerary for herself that includes all the key

places (museums etc) she wants to see. Upon her return from her travels, student B plans to enroll in university to get a degree in the area of interest she was working in. She knows she may have to take a few courses to gain entrance into university, but she’s confident in herself and eager to take on the challenge.

Student A got a traditional education. Student B didn’t even take a single high school course. *Who appears better off?*

Everywhere I go, people tell me the education system isn’t working. I agree, so I’ve done something about it. Yet for many people, Indigo Sudbury Campus is too much of a stretch. But I’m not worried about that. Ten years ago, angel stories, books that suggested you create your own reality and material similar to that of Neale Donald Walsch and Gary Zukav were quietly sequestered to “new age” bookstores where only “weird”, “fluffy” people shopped. Today, the same material is big news on Oprah and can be found in every Chapters and Coles store.

So we at ISC may be “weird” now, but – call me a dreamer – give society a few more years and we may just become the norm!



In a fully supervised situation, Johnny and Anna Marie try for an ever bigger flame.



Announcements

- We will have our 5th Talkabout on Tuesday, January 28th from 7:30 to 9:00 PM. All parents and students are welcome to attend!
- Mark your calendar: We strongly encourage all parents to attend February’s Talkabout on Tuesday, February 25th. Laurie Roberts from the Home Education Exchange will be giving information about the option of signing up with her board next year and the role she would play as facilitator to Indigo Sudbury Campus families.

Sudbury Quote:

“The best way to learn to be responsible for your life is to have responsibility for your life.”

From www.clearwaterschool.com

A Comparison

Source unknown

Mainstream School—USA

Teacher: Good morning, class.

Shawn (in unison with class): Good morning, Ms. Bhoreen.

Teacher: Today we're going to be talking about the Bill of Rights.

Shawn (thinking): No... please stop talking Ms. BORING!

Teacher: The United States guarantees basic rights to its citizens, like freedom of speech, freedom to bear arms, freedom of assembly...

Shawn (thinking): Ah, assembly. I wish we'd have one right now. Assembly... assembly...assembly...assembly...

Teacher: Let's read the list of rights on the board, then we'll talk about how there are limits on these rights, like how you can't scream 'fire' in a theater. Can anyone guess why... remember to raise your hand.

Shawn (thinking): I can't wait 'til the bell rings!

Later...

Teacher to Shawn's mom: Your son is having difficulties concentrating. If the problem persists, it may be wise to have him tested.

Sudbury School

J: Hey, Shawn!

Shawn: Hey J. What good-looking hair you're wearing this morning. Wazup?

J: Did you hear about the animal rights protesters getting arrested?

Shawn: No way! I thought that lawyer said they had a right to protest!

J: And they weren't even stopping people from going into the building like they were last time. The police act like those people have no rights!

Shawn: But I thought you said before it's unconstitutional to take away peoples' rights to free speech and assembly?

J: Not always, I think I remember my old teacher saying something like 'you can't scream 'movie' in a fire station'. Anyway, the protestors are asking their lawyer friend if their rights were violated. If so, they could sue.

Shawn: I can't wait to see how this turns out!

Later...

Shawn to his mom: You won't believe how our government is stomping on people's rights...

