



ISC Views and Voices

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

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Celebration!

by Nicolette Groeneveld

I remember when I was teaching in regular school, June was always a weird month. There was excitement in the air around the year almost being over, but at the same time, people's irritability levels were high. Despite the end of June being so close, everyone wanted the year to be over already; patience and tolerance decreased; teachers were more snappy, and students were less motivated than ever. Teachers were trying to cram in the last of the information that would be tested in the final exams, and students were trying to force themselves to re-memorize all the material they had forgotten after the last test they'd had on it.

So there I'd be in my classroom trying to do review while all my students (and me too!) were staring longingly out the window wishing to be enjoying the nice weather and the feeling of freedom that the summer breeze was teasing us with as it floated in through the open window.

Like the other teachers, my patience levels would be lower, and the students who had tried my patience throughout the year would seem even more energy draining. Trying to be entertaining so the students would stick with me as I tried to transfer information to them was also more demanding.

Like everyone else, I was counting down and hoping the summer would last forever.

This year, without the year even being over yet, I'm already looking forward to September! Rather than, "Oh, thank God! I can relax now!" I'm thinking, "Hmmm... what am I going to do with myself all summer?" ISC is my daily joy, it's my passion, it's what I love to do... What will I do while school's out for the summer? The Sudbury philosophy will apply to me as I try to find a secondary passion.

And yet it's *way* more than having something to do and somewhere to go. I absolutely delight in our students! I will miss them these next two months! There are so many things I smile about every day: Boomer's constant wandering presence, Bretton's theatrical antics, Greg's spontaneous bursts of "cool guyishness", Yusuke's gorgeous drawings, Amanda's out-of-the-box creativity, Logan's laughter, Tyler's quick wit, Dylan's maturity and wisdom, Michael's delight in wrestling, Charles's bright-eyed enthusiasm, Brodie's all-out joy, Rebecca's requests to do all kinds of things, Kassie's limitless energy, Lael's curiosity which brings on *many* questions, Nathen's cheerful "Hi Nicolette!", Sam's beautiful sensitivity, Kris's entrepreneurial spirit, Kennedy's singing, Jessica's excitement, Alexander's little routines... Then there's Ric, Corinne and Jason: I'm going to miss seeing them! Add to that that I'm going to miss going to the skateboard parks, I'm going to miss the great conversations in the library, I'm going to miss dragging couches outside to sit in the sun, I'm going to miss the deep discussions about school issues, I'm going to miss chatting with parents and having Talkabouts, I'm going to miss the catchy little tune from the video game *Zelda* (believe it or not!), I'm going to miss the magnificent displays of responsibility and wisdom in JC, I'm going to miss our students' stories

and great ideas... It's endless, all I'm going to miss! I'd better reread *The Power Of Now* to help me appreciate the summer "present". In the meantime, I'll just overflow with all the gratitude I'm feeling!

This first year of ISC's existence has been so absolutely magical and I am so thankful for our magnificent students and the great foundation they have laid for our school! I am also so thankful to our parents who took the risk of signing up with a completely new school and kept the faith, despite the growing pains that came up for most all of us. I am thankful to all the people who supported us this year, making donations, spreading the word, responding to our e-mails... I am thankful to our volunteers, Corinne and Jason, for the endless hours they spent in service to the school and our students. I'm thankful to Ric for *all* he's brought to the school—especially his solid focus on peace which has helped reinforce the respect, responsibility and reasonable behavior we expect of our students. Finally, whatever I've contributed to the school this year, I simply feel blessed to have had the opportunity to do so. Standing in the middle of a dream come true is definitely one of life's most beautiful gifts! And getting to continue living it day after day, and seeing the amazing impact it has on all the people involved in it takes the dream into the realm of "more amazing than I would ever have imagined!"

I am looking forward to even more magic next year! Please continue spreading the word about us—your promotion is the most powerful and most effective advertising we've got!

Cheers to a wonderful summer! We'll see you in September—or if we move, maybe we'll see you in amongst our piles of boxes!

Blessings be...

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Reinforcement—We’re on the Right Track!

by Nicolette Groeneveld

You’ve probably heard of the movies *Dumb and Dumber*, and *Dumb and Dumberer*? How about the *reality* in *Dumbing us Down*? The latter is the title of a book written by John Taylor Gatto who was the feature keynote speaker at the Parents On Guard conference. What a conference! Among other things, it strongly reinforced to Ric and me that what we are offering at ISC is an *essential* alternative to the regular school system!

When I arrived at the conference, one of the keynote speakers was in the middle of his presentation. In the main lobby, manning our table, Ric was listening to the talk via the intercom system.

“Nicolette,” he said, “This presenter is describing current education systems as coming from three different approaches: the conveyor belt, the professional and the leadership.”

Ric explained: The conveyor belt model is for educating the masses. It is meant to prepare people simply for a job. It strives to train people what to think, make them followers and turn them into dependent, materialistic consumers. It does this by covering many topics in a shallow way and does little to promote real understanding.

The second model is the professional model which is basically a highly competitive version of the conveyor belt. It is meant to prepare people for a career. Its goal is to train “in-the-box” experts who have power over the regular conveyor belt graduates. It focuses on specifics and case studies but does little more than create higher class followers.

The third model is the leadership model which strives to give people a real sense of purpose—a mission. Its goals are to create leaders who are independent and self-determined, who have a passion for life and who live “power to” rather than “power over”. This model uses the classics (modern and historical) and focuses on each individual’s interests, talents and goals. Though the Sudbury model doesn’t promote the classics as such, we are obviously in line with the leadership model!

We at ISC are also an antidote to the problems John Taylor Gatto outlined in a handout he called “The Seven Lessons That Schools Currently Teach Through

an Invisible Curriculum”. Following are the seven lessons:

1. **Confusion.** Virtually nothing selected by schools as basic is really basic, virtually none of the school sequences is logically defensible, sane people seek meaning not disconnected facts. Schools teach the unrelating of everything.

2. **Class position.** Schools teach that children are born into a class and must stay in the class to which they have been assigned.

3. **Indifference.** By bells and other means, schools teach that nothing is worth finishing and hence nothing worth starting – except as a way to escape the intimidation of authority.

4. **Emotional Dependency.** By a skillful use of rewards and punishments, carrots and sticks, schools teach that free will, even in matters as basic as urination, must be subordinated to the whim of an authority figure.

5. **Intellectual Dependency.** In school, teachers tell you what to think about, how long to think about it, in what order to think about it, and what evaluation should be placed on ideas and their management.

6. **Self-Alienation.** By breaking children away from families, cultures, religions and neighborhoods – private sources of strength – and by the practices described in 1-5 above, schools teach that you must not trust yourself, you must wait for teachers to tell you not only what to do but whether what you have done is good or bad. William Torrey Harris, U.S. Commissioner of Education, 1889 – 1906, urged that schools deliberately teach self-alienation as the way to pedagogical success.

7. **You Are Watched.** Schools teach that you can’t hide, that there is no sanctuary from the oversight of the State father. Each action produces a numerically coded report, and the accumulation of these numbers and other anecdotal, personal histories produces a profile of behavior which tells the child and others who s/he is.

Reading these “lessons”, I realized I recognize a few more:

1. **Separation and Dislike of learning:** Students get the impression that learning happens only when you study a book, do drills or answer questions to pre-taught or

pre-read material. Students separate learning from living. Also, because all learning is graded, many “strong” students become dependent on their success in learning for a heightened sense of value, and “weak” students fear learning. This and the fact that learning is, in most cases, forced, causes many students develop a dislike for learning.

2. **Competition:** Students learn that they have to be better than others so as to avoid being judged worse than them. Students cannot appreciate themselves just for who they are, and they cannot appreciate an activity simply for the enjoyment it offers. Accomplishments are not evaluated in terms of getting closer to one’s personal goals and creating growth as an individual; rather, accomplishments are measured against others’ successes or failures. Students learn to fear others’ successes rather than celebrate them, and they learn to fear failure and avoid it at all costs.

3. **Learning disabilities:** Because things like reading are often forced on children when they are not yet ready for it, students have difficulties learning and end up with a complex around what they are “failing” to learn. Students are then labeled and will often go the rest of their lives living that label (ie. “I’m stupid” or “I’m a bad reader”.) Only strong personal motivation can help an individual succeed beyond the label s/he was assigned.

4. **Shame/Not good enough/Fear/Stress:** Competition in schools creates a fear of being not good enough and of being shamed. Insensitive teachers often humiliate students and create in them a fear of adults. Students learn to be followers, pleasers and performers in order to avoid shame. The constant need and drive to avoid shame creates tremendous stress in children which, in turn, leads to anger. The anger may be internalized, possibly leading to depression, or it may be externalized and create things like bullying, vandalism and truancy.

When (students) misbehave, if misbehave is the word, they are acting out their unhappiness...

- - Esther Rothman, Author of *The Angel Inside Went Sour*

Our First-ever Demo: Fencing!

by Nicolette Groeneveld

5. Age segregation: The fact that students are all grouped according to age often creates a situation where youth see younger children as inferior and older youth as superior. Any sense of unity and equality is lost.

The time Ric and I spent at the Parents on Guard conference was definitely heartening! John Taylor Gatto specifically mentioned the Sudbury Valley School several times throughout the weekend and when I met him personally, he congratulated me enthusiastically on having created a Sudbury school here. On my part, I thanked him most sincerely for the work he's doing to create awareness around the world about the problems in the regular school system and for his promotion of the Sudbury model.

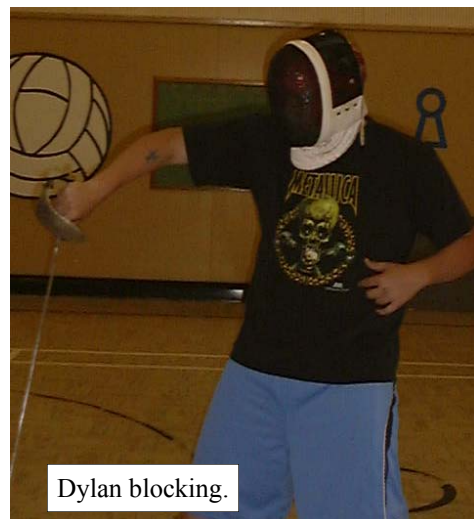
At the end of our last Open House, a parent came to me and said, "Well, Nicolette, I'm sure convinced that you're convinced!"

Oh, I am! And the conference only reinforced my conviction! A grand Thank You to Laurie Roberts for having made the conference happen!

In April, Rebecca came to me and said she'd like to get some information on Fencing. So we looked up some fencing clubs and went to watch a class at the U of A; most of the club members were busy with final exams, however, so we didn't get a very accurate idea of what a class would be like. Nevertheless, Rebecca's subsequent discussions at school about fencing generated interest in a few other students so we decided to see if we could get a demo at the school.

After many weeks of waiting, Sergei, a fencing coach from Russia who now coaches the U of A team, and Sherman, one of the club members, came to teach us about fencing. The demo was held in the gym, and *all* the students attended! Sherman started by explaining the history of fencing and how it became a sport, and then he and Sergei demonstrated a few basic moves. Thereafter, any student who wanted to don the mask and sword was invited to take on Sergei. Sergei gave each student instructions as to how to attack and how to block and then the move was practiced.

It was a fun activity and the result was that a few students are considering taking a fencing class. Perhaps in the fall, if we have enough interested students, we'll look into having a class here at the school!



Dylan blocking.



Kris's overhead block.



Bretton "attacks" Sergei.



Jason gets instructions.



The great end of education is to discipline rather than to furnish the mind; to train it to the use of its own power rather than fill it with the accumulation of others.

-- Tyron Edwards



Awaiting their turn...

The Legend (and value) of Zelda

One very quiet Friday, Ric sat down with the boys who were playing the video game, *The Legend of Zelda*, and decided really to observe the game and what was going on for the players so as to determine what value there might be in playing this game. Below is a list of the things he discovered:

(Played with 2 players and many observers)

Positives:

- problem solving
- memory
- planning
- strategy
- teamwork
- communication skills
- observation
- spatial memory
- power of observation
- deductive reasoning
- cooperation
- hand-eye coordination/timing
- positive self-esteem
- self-image
- self-confidence
- ability to face fears (courage)
- tolerance
- trial and error
- perseverance
- attention to detail
- positive feeling tone
- sense of humor
- reading comprehension and speed
- dealing with frustration
- focused attention
- pattern identification

Possible negatives:

- virtual life vs real life
- surface talk

** Did you see the front page article in the Edmonton Journal on May 29th? It was entitled *The Games Boys Play Are (Cringe) Good For Their Brain*. From what I remember, the gist of the article was that today's youth may become better drivers since video games get them used to constant visual stimuli flashing at them from all directions!



Brodie



Sam

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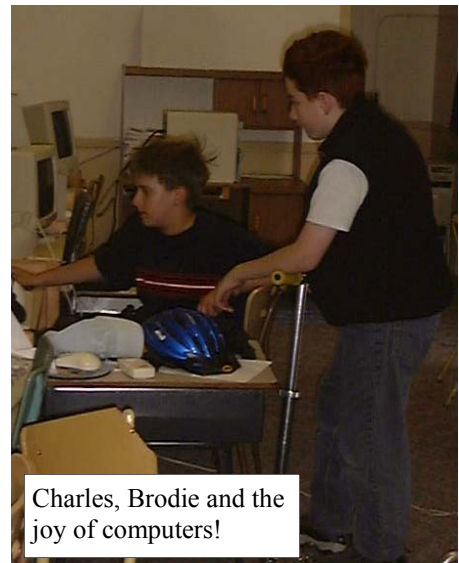
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Dylan and Brodie super soak!



Boomer gets the water gun ready for loading.



Charles, Brodie and the joy of computers!



Car shopping



Jason's dog came for a visit.

Announcements

- School will resume on Tuesday, September 2nd! We will keep you posted during the summer as to whether we're moving or not (sorry for the uncertainty, we're working hard to make the move happen!)
- We will be in and out of the school during the summer. If you need to speak with a staff member urgently, call Nicolette at 435-9204.



Prepared by Nicolette Groeneveld