



# ISC Views and Voices

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

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## You Get Paid To Do This?!

by Nicolette Groeneveld

A few weeks ago on a very quiet Friday, I was stretched out on one of the upstairs couches reading a book. Tyler came up and, seeing my extreme level of comfort and relaxation, said, “Quite the job you have!”

Quite the job, indeed! Besides all the magic I get to witness on a daily basis at the school, the last little while has offered me a string of adventures outside the school!

The first of my recent adventures started with Nathen asking me, “Nicolette, do you want to take us to the mall?” ‘Hmmm...’ thought my old teacher self, ‘The mall... what’s educational about the mall?’ My new staff self asked, “What do you want to do there?” “Go to Playdium!” said Nathen. “I’ve got a card – I’ll “pay” for your games!” So, logic said: if they play games at school, what’s wrong with playing games outside the school? I told Nathen I’d take him and his friends to the mall.

I would never have imagined my Toyota Celica would become a transport vehicle, but it did happily carry our Playdium party to the mall. There, I got to experience Playdium for the first time. I sat in a race car that actually shook while I watched it barrel down the video screen road, I tried Dance Dance Revolution – which I now absolutely want to become good at! – and I even tried a “shooter”

game to see what that was about (intense!) Playdium was an experience that stretched my horizons!

The next day, I was approached again. “Nicolette, could you take us to the mall? We want to go bowling!” I hadn’t been bowling since grade five, so I was up for that experience and had a great time once again!

A few days later, it was an after school experience I got to enjoy. Lael, Rebecca, Kris and I went to Quizno’s for supper, then to Petsmart and SuperPet and eventually to St Albert to watch a 7:00 beginner’s Bujutsu class. We laughed together through most of our pre-class experience (especially when Kris was teaching traffic rules to the two fish Lael had bought), and at the class we were especially wowed by the orange belts who were doing some very sophisticated-looking attack-and-defense techniques. Not that that was enough, though; we’re planning to go watch the “Advanced” class to see the brown and black belts in action!

Back to more “peaceful” pursuits, the next agenda item was the Provincial Museum. Pit stop at Booster Juice for Jessica, Amanda and Rebecca and then we were off to see how the Romans lived.

Some people worry Sudbury students won’t learn much. I’ve learned all kinds of new things in the past few weeks, and I’ve done it somewhat by default! Hard for any “regular” student not to do the same!

## Delights at the Campus



Amanda shows me her bunny.



Lael is very creative too!



Logan and Kris try to beat the computer at “Worms”.

### In this issue:

The JC—Students as Judge, Jury, Prosecution and Defense

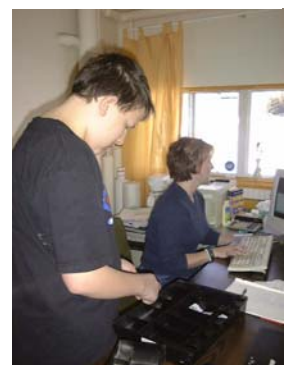
A Detailed View of the Sudbury Transition

Highlights and Announcements



Kassie tapes up Sam after creating a spider web in the art room doorway.

Nathen learns accounting from Corinne after setting up his pop machine.



# The JC—Students as Judge, Jury, Prosecution and Defense

by Nicolette Groeneveld

Pretty much all youth who hear about the Sudbury concept think the school is a dream – doing whatever they want all day – wow! Of course, I think the school is a dream too, but that doesn't mean it's smooth sailing all the time. Every community has its problems, and that's why we have our Judicial Committee.

The JC exists to take care of rule infractions by students and staff, but it is not meant to be a punitive or painful process. People, in general, don't respond well to being hammered on so we always keep our focus on remaining respectful and reasonable. Students and staff also understand that no one will change his/her behavior unless s/he wants to and is ready to, so we begin by gently trying to bring rule breakers to a place where they are motivated to change. Rule breakers have the first option to determine their consequences (and we stress *consequences* rather than *punishments*) and if they don't know what to suggest, they can ask for ideas from JC members. First offenses—depending on their severity—are always treated lightly, but consequences get harsher as rule breakers repeat their offenses.

So, is it working? Based on a survey I did, students, in general, feel the JC is effective. However, almost all students said consequences need to be harsher for repeat offenders. Students get really frustrated when they have to deal with the same people and the same complaints week after week, and they also complain when JC meetings go on and on and on. (Some JC meetings have lasted as long as two hours – and this with only 21 students!) One suggestion given was that the JC be more organized, that it run more like a real court. Our process is quite structured, but still it might benefit from the JC Chair being more strict about people staying on topic and not repeating things already said. People already have to do push-ups or sit-ups if they talk out of turn – perhaps that kind of “discipline” needs to be extended.

That is one of the beauties of being in

a democratic environment where nothing is set in stone. When things aren't working, changes can be proposed and implemented. In this, our JC has already seen a few changes since the beginning of the year. At first we had quite an elaborate process that was mainly adult directed. Now, the JC process is a lot simpler, and at every JC session, students are invited to run the meeting. Only older students volunteered to run the JC at first, but now younger students step up to the plate too.

Student comments around their heightened level of involvement reflected an appreciation of their equality in the JC process. Many students thrive in the leadership position and others, even if they're not the Chair, impressively display their wisdom through their contributions to the problem-solving discussions.

On the whole, I think the JC process is fabulous. We don't have everything ironed out yet, but still, the process is so valuable! Rule breakers are given a great, non-shaming opportunity to take responsibility for their choices and grow, and JC members gain highly valuable problem-solving skills! The involvement of the whole school community makes students and staff accountable to *everyone*, and I know for me, that certainly heightens my awareness of my whole environment. Finally, when it comes to being “on trial” among peers, I believe it's certainly one thing for students to get feedback from adults and totally something else for them to hear it from a friend or another student!

Students as judge, jury, prosecution and defense: give them the power and all they can do is grow!

**Consensus is...** From video games to the forensic science exhibition at the Odysium, the general consensus is: “If it's not challenging, it's boring.” Who says kids just want it easy?

# A Detailed View of The Sudbury Transition

by Deborah Lundbeck  
of Red Cedar School

One of the most difficult challenges facing students entering a Sudbury-type school is the transition from another schooling structure to one in which they are responsible for their own education. Although each student and family will certainly experience their own unique struggles in joining and adapting to a democratic school, over the ten years I've spent on staff at Red Cedar, I've seen some familiar patterns emerge. The purpose of writing this article is to reassure families, to the extent possible, that they are not alone in facing the challenges and upheavals of transition and that with patience and trust, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Whether the following sequence will reflect a given family's experience or not, perhaps the difficulty will be comparable and therefore reassuring.

Typically, students entering the school appear happy and excited to have signed up. Initially, they seem almost euphoric – the weight of their former schooling has been cast off, and they feel free and unburdened. Students during these first few weeks will often make a point of connecting with staff, sharing stories, showing things they've worked on etc. Frequently, in these first weeks, the parents will comment on how surprisingly eager their son or daughter is to come to school, and how happy and relaxed s/he seems. At this stage, parents usually feel great about having taken the risk of enrolling their kids and reassured by the ease of the transition. In short, everybody's happy!

During the next phase, it's often as though students shut down. Many begin to avoid staff, and if they do happen to cross our path or have to talk to us, they keep it as brief and cool as possible. They assiduously avoid eye contact. They will frequently choose to engage in one activity exclusively (boys have often chosen the computers, girls have sometimes chosen to read) but without any seeming sense of passion that true

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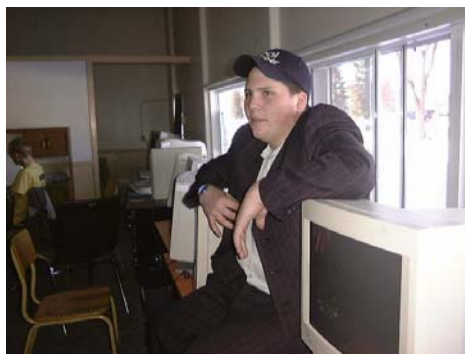


The next phase is hardly designed to reassure parents. In fact, this is often where the real challenge comes. Students who, in my view, are undergoing heroic struggle and re-assessment of themselves begin to wander aimlessly. They don't engage in anything but rather drift from room to room, constantly on the periphery of things. A frequent comment from students at this time is, "I'm bored, it's boring here." They appear uncentered, uninvolved, and sometimes angry. They avoid anything that is structured or that involves staff, and they continue to avoid adult eye contact and any type of relationship with staff. It is not uncommon at this point for students to act out at school with repeated rule breaking and a testing of limits that results in numerous Judicial Committee complaints. Parents frequently tell us at this time that their child has become very rude at home and that they are complaining that school bores them.

This period can go on for a long time. It takes a tremendous amount of courage for parents (who are usually questioning the philosophy themselves) to support their kids through this. It's very hard to see your child struggle, be unhappy, complain of boredom and yet give them the message: "*You'll make it through – I know you can.*" We can only guess at what each student goes through, but certainly they are grappling with some fundamental questions of Being: "Who am I?" "What do I want to do, what is this all about?" Sometimes at this point, students who are anxious or students whose parents are anxious will request a class or tutorial. As staff, it's very clear to us that the class is a reflection of worry and not true interest and that it only serves to prolong the pain of an-

swering to others' agendas, but we do it because they insist (though the classes seldom last more than a few sessions.) Parents are often tremendously anxious at this point, not only because they see their child as unmotivated academically, but also because they see their child drifting, and worry about them socially. This stage can severely test people's trust in their child's ability to determine their own education.

In the next phase, a remarkable transformation occurs. Sometimes this transformation is gradual and occurs so incrementally that as staff, we have to think back months to remember the dramatic difference in a student. At other times, we have been amazed at the rapidity of the change. Either way, students begin to exude self-confidence. Where before they felt tenuous and lost, they now seem to come from a place of increasing strength and calm. Their restlessness disappears and they appear to be drawn into things in a new and focused way. As staff, we begin to feel the student coming to terms with the equality of power in the school. There is generally a falling off of Judicial Committee complaints and a sense of clarity from the student about what we, as staff, will and will not do, and what they as members of this community and as autonomous individuals are free to do. They begin looking staff in the eye and developing a genuine and interested relationship with us. To see kids emerging as strong and centered after such a struggle is incredibly moving. It illustrates beautifully the courage and fierce drive of human beings who, when they are free to do so, will challenge themselves unceasingly to become the



best they can be.

For parents, though, this stage is often still uncomfortable. Students are not necessarily academically engaged or they are not spending their time in ways their parents feel they should. Tragically, the

school loses kids at this stage for a variety of reasons. It's always immensely sad to see the great struggle they've gone through unrecognized.

In the final stage, students appear completely comfortable in what they choose to pursue, whether academic or artistic, social or solitary, off-beat or prosaic. There's a depth of engagement and confidence that imbues with worth all they take on. Students immerse them-



selves in a great variety of pursuits, but what is notably similar is a striking absence of the hunger for adult approval that is so frequently seen in the traditionally schooled student. Some students become very involved in the running of the school, others not at all, but they all seem to have a great respect and high regard for the place that allowed them to



rediscover their own paths.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasize that all students are different. Some come to us greatly damaged by other people's agendas, others marginally so. But all students will need time to adapt to this type of school and this time can vary from several weeks to several years. This time is a gift to them, and the result of that gift is remarkable, self-assured human beings.

# March Highlights



Nicolette's nieces came to visit during Teachers' Convention.

- Amanda launched the hot lunch program by pre-selling tickets and then making hot dogs for her clients. Perogies are next on the menu!
- Yusuke spontaneously offered Nicolette a massage and proceeded to give her a 45-minute shoulder and hand massage!
- Nathen stepped into an entrepreneurial role by bringing his pop machine to school. Corinne taught him an accounting system, and he's been doing a great job keeping everything on track!
- While enjoying the Bujutsu class, Spring Break came up and Lael and Rebecca both indicated they'd be happy to skip it!
- The day after the Museum trip, Rebecca, Jessica and Amanda had to find yet another fun thing to do! The Odysium ended up hosting the three girls for the afternoon. Said Jessica, "I saw a real heart!"



Dylan wore a pin-stripe suit to school!

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# Announcements

- Lest anyone forget: **Spring Break** is the week of **March 31st to April 4th**. School will re-open on **Monday, April 7th**.
- **Registration forms** for the **Parents on Guard Conference** are included with this newsletter. You can also register on-line at [www.parentsonguard.com](http://www.parentsonguard.com)

