



# ISC Views and Voices

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

Volume 2 Issue 2

November 2003

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## Where “Phys. Ed.” Truly Is Sport!

by Nicolette Groeneveld

People think that if given the freedom to decide every moment of every day what they will do, youth will sit in front of a computer or TV and play video games non-stop. Along with all the anxieties that idea engenders, people fear for children’s health. “Kids need exercise! They need to move! You can’t just let them vegetate in front of a screen!”

Believe me, even our most enthusiastic gamers don’t vegetate all day, and none of them lack physical activity! What they are free of, however, is *forced* physical activity.

We have numerous students who say they couldn’t stand phys.ed. when they were in regular school. Yet watch them here!

As soon as it got cold, Dylan’s desire to play hockey kicked in. He and Kris checked into getting a hockey rink set up in our school yard, and when that didn’t go anywhere, Dylan picked the next best option which was to go to an existing rink. First a group of us went skating at Millenium Place for an afternoon, and thereafter, Dylan organized a real hockey game for as many students as wanted to come. This field trip involved renting the ice for an hour, determining the cost per student, writing a letter to the parents, enforcing the use of equipment and organizing parent drivers. Dylan took care of it all, and did a tremendous

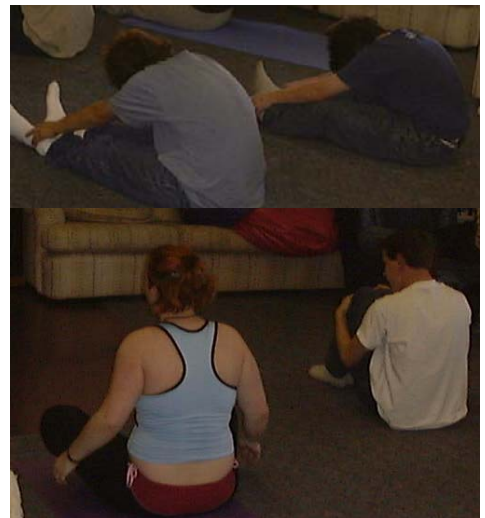
job! As for the hockey game, Logan and Boomer could skate circles around everyone and the game itself wasn’t the caliber of play Dylan was hoping for, but all the students who went had fun!



experiencing “lift off”!



Last but not least, the Ashtanga Yoga several of our students took up led to a curious experiment!



Yoga took on a Houdini flavor and reinforced that we are an “out-of-the-box” school!



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Then there’s the activity that inspires tremendous creativity: rebounding! We have two rebounders at the school and not only are they used for gentle bouncing, they are used to experience flight! Whether it’s flying to slam dunk a basketball, flying to leap over a stack of couch cushions, or flying to land on a stack of pillows, the rebounders are the tools for

# Have You Let Go?

by Ric Rosborough and Nicolette Groeneveld

Despite the tremendous growth in the homeschooling movement, there continues to be confusion around the difference between home schooling and unschooling; are you confused too? Home schooling is the approach that maintains parental control and direction, and usually curriculum is followed. In unschooling there is a belief in the ability of the child to “find his or her own way” and unschooling parents generally ignore curriculum in favor of their children learning what they’re interested in.

At Indigo Sudbury Campus we take the unschooling approach. We set children free to choose for themselves what they will learn, and we have faith that they will make the right choices for themselves in the short run and in the long run. We know this will involve our students making mistakes, but we also know our students will become better, more prepared adults because of them.

The best possible thing for our students is for their parents to have the same faith in them that we at ISC do. Sadly, however, we have heard rumors of parents forcing their children to do math when they are not at the Campus. Other parents are rumored to be bribing their children to do some curriculum by promising them “X” if they will read a book, write a story or... Certain behaviors we have witnessed in students also point strongly at parental pressure. Via all these signs, we conclude that there are parents who are feeling their children need more guidance than what we provide at ISC.

The problem, however, with adult guidance is that it is often really adult interference. Parents who try to exert a certain control over their child’s ISC education do three things: Firstly, they covertly tell their children, “We don’t trust you – we say we do, and, well, we sort of do, but not really.” This results in the children feeling they can’t trust themselves. “I’m supposed to make my own way,” they say, “but I can’t *really* do it.” Inertia and apathy are the result.

The second thing adult interference does is take the responsibility off the shoulders of the students. Students claim not to like the control their parents exert, and they may even mildly rebel,

but ultimately, they are secretly happy they don’t *truly* have to take responsibility. Again, inertia and apathy are the result.

The third thing parent interference does is stress the children. Every second that is used to coerce, force or check up on an ISC student creates a duality. Students want to please their parents and they want their parents to believe they’re doing what their parents want them to do, but at the same time, they’re in an environment all day that says, “Do what you want!” That freedom ultimately calls much more powerfully to our students than their parents’ wishes so, come the end of the day, the children are in a quandary because they haven’t done what their parents wanted. The other possibility is that the children continually think of what they are doing or what they will say to their parents about the day, so they are not using their time and conscious thought to develop their ability to choose. Instead, they are in reaction and protection mode which makes it near impossible for them to use and develop their inner guidance system.

So how do we get to a place where what the parents want and what the children want are the same?

Parents often tell us, “I just want the best for my child.” Well, if the child is going to continue at ISC, make that “wanting the best for the child” the common denominator, while realizing that under the umbrella of the Sudbury philosophy, “wanting the best” means allowing children the full experience of freedom and responsibility!

The bottom line is that the Sudbury philosophy *cannot* be 100% effective if parents aren’t able to let go. So if you, as a parent, are struggling with this, perhaps a few tips can help:

Firstly, remember that what you look for is what you’ll find. If you’re worried your child won’t learn anything at ISC, that is what you will see—regardless of the reality! So, look instead for the growth—on every level—in your child, and you will find yourself encouraged!

A second suggestion is that you lead your children by example. Do the things you’re passionate about; spend time learning the things that interest you. It

will allow your children to know you better and show them what it looks like when a person *has* found purpose!

Thirdly, if you’re struggling with the faith question, borrow some of the Sudbury books and videos. Read the stories Sudbury graduates tell. Learn how they learned all they needed to be successful in life. There’s thirty-six years of history proving this educational approach works! If you’re doubting it, go back to the ones who have experienced its success!

And so we gently remind you, Parents. You either fully support your child’s ISC experience or you undermine it. ISC students are told their lives are in their own hands, but they need to *experience* that. With unconditional love, support, powerful leadership through example, and reasonable boundaries, ISC students have the best opportunity to learn and succeed in school and in life. With time, trust and repeated trial and error, your children will find their way. Have faith in the system and in your children, and you will be happier with the process. Refuse to trust the system, and your children will be the ones who pay.

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## What Does Letting Go Look Like?

We have had parents ask us, “Well what do I do when my child does X?” Ask yourself, “Is X life threatening, immoral or illegal?” If yes, intervene! If not, but if X is something that pushes your discomfort buttons, lead by example and face your feelings. Discuss your concerns with your children but ultimately remember the faith “keys” the Sudbury philosophy asks of you:

- Trust your children and prove it by allowing them the choices they make.
- Recognize when your children are trying to assert their independence. Rather than getting into a power struggle, give them the room they’re looking for while maintaining the family structure they need.
- Wait for your children to ask for help instead of offering it or stepping in to take over.

# Preparing Children For Life

by Nicolette Groeneveld

- Remind your children that they are responsible every moment of every day for their choices and for their success in life.
- Allow your children room to fail and to learn from the natural consequences of their choices.
- Rather than reaching out to catch your children if they're falling, be there for your children to reach out to.
- Let your children know you love them. Say it often and show it through physical contact and the time you spend with them.



## Great quotes!

Jared, with great enthusiasm, as he, Sam and Kassie went to take a phone apart, "This is not a boring day, people!"



Michael: "What time is it?"

Nicolette: "3:21."

"What?! How come the day goes so fast??!"

Most people coming out of the traditional school system have heard the all-too-common idea that today's education system is "preparing children for life." Let's reflect on that for a moment.

Thought #1: If we are preparing children *for life*, and doing so between the ages of, say, five through 18, does that imply that life only begins at age 18?

Thought #2: If we are *preparing* children for life, does that mean children somehow have to be 'gotten ready' to live?

Thought #3: If *we* are preparing children for life, does that mean that we, adults, who are doing the preparing, know absolutely what's best for each child and know what each child needs to be successful in his/her adult life?

#1: Joseph Chilton Pearce, a well-known author and public speaker, says, "The first thing I would say about any true educational system is that it is *not* founded on the notion that we are preparing a child for life... The idea that we're going to train a child at seven to get a good job at age twenty-seven is a travesty of profound dimension."

What if we, adults, were forced to spend all our adult years in "adult school" in the name of "preparing us for our retirement"? How ridiculous would that be? We would say, "Hey, I'll put some money in an RSP, but leave me alone! I've got a life to live NOW!" Yet, we force our children to sit in desks for 12 years and tell them, "Cheer up! It's so you can have a good life later!"

So, we take children out of the present, focus them on the future and what do they learn? Is it possible that at some level, they learn to discount their childhood – that their childhood is not important, that it's more or less just a necessary phase they go through? Is it possible that they come to believe adult life is where *real* living happens so they look forward to being grown up rather than enjoying their childhood? Is it possible that children put themselves "on hold" until they're older and thus miss the lessons and the magic of their youth?

An even greater tragedy: in "preparing children for life", the whole concept of the present moment is lost. Anyone who has read Eckhart Tolle's

book *The Power Of Now* knows true living happens only in the present moment. Both the past and the future are but thoughts in our minds; *right now* is the only thing that is real.



In observing young children, we see that they are locked in the present moment. They don't worry about tomorrow or next week; right now is all that matters. Then along comes conditioning, magnified a thousand fold by schooling, and our once-present children spend the

rest of their lives trying to re-master the moment-to-moment living that was once natural to them.

#2: Promoting the notion that we are *preparing* children for life, gives the message that children are not enough as they are but somehow need to be "gotten ready" for adulthood. Children are subtly taught that they need to *become* something in order to be okay. The idea that children are born with all the natural instincts and drives they need to propel them towards functional adulthood is negated. Children are seen as incomplete beings who need to be "done to" and "done for" by outside forces rather than being trusted already to possess all the qualities they will need to become functional adults.



Anyone who interacts with children, however, can tell you that, provided their original sense of being powerful is not damaged, children *are* highly functional just as they are! They

are naturally capable problem-solvers, honest and skilled communicators and brilliant, creative thinkers. They are also highly self-motivated, adventurous and

fully desirous of learning, challenging themselves and stretching into more of what they can be.

The school system doesn't seem to believe this. It tells children they aren't enough and had better acquire all the government's prescribed knowledge and skills so they can "be something" when they grow up. Children are also pressured to figure out as early as possible what that "something" will be. This creates "not good enough" feelings in children, and they begin to fear the future because if they don't succeed at gaining whatever knowledge and skills are prescribed, and if they don't figure out what they want to "be", they'll be lost as adults and not be able to "live". School and learning thus become a matter of survival rather than a joyful means for discovering the world.

Joseph Chilton Pearce says that in a true educational system, "We don't prepare for life, we equip children with the means to live fully at whatever stage they are in." This kind of education eliminates the emphasis on the future and allows children to live fully in every moment. Children maintain their natural ability to live in the "now", and they are free to enjoy themselves and their world exactly as they are.

#3: The idea that we adults should be the ones preparing children for life is, in my opinion, terribly arrogant. Who are we to believe that we know what's best for every child? And how is it that the government officials who prescribe the curriculum presume to know what each child will need in order to fulfill his/her life purpose?

Returning to my "adult school" example, if some government official were to decide what I need for my retirement, part of my curriculum might be to learn to play golf, drive a Motorhome and swallow medications. Ridiculous! That's not a direction I see my life taking, not to mention that those are things I'm not at all interested in learning! Yet we prescribe a blanket curriculum for children, tell them it's good for them and tell them that even if they're not interested in X, X and X, they may be "some day" and besides, those subjects "will prepare them for their futures".

We of the Sudbury persuasion, on the other hand, say, "Remove 'imposed exposure'". The response: "But if we don't show kids what's out there, how will they know what they want to do with their

lives?" Alright, I say, expose them to things, but if you want to be fair, unbiased and without any agenda of your own, expose your child to *everything!* Impossible, of course! So why not just trust that your child will naturally be drawn to the things that will serve his/her greatest learning? Adults are not the only ones who experience "coincidences"; a child, too, can walk through a library and have a particularly pertinent book fall off the shelf in front of him; a child, too, can go to a friend's



house and fall in love with the art form the mother "happens" to be busy with; a child, too, can impulsively turn on the television and be instantly fascinated by the subject under discussion.

But people are concerned that children won't learn the many important and interesting things out there "in time". Define "in time"? Sure, it's easier for a child to pick up a second language, but that doesn't mean an adult driven by passion cannot become proficient in a new language. Sure, when you're younger your chances of being a terrific gymnast are better, but that doesn't mean an adult can't enjoy gymnastics or find another activity that offers just as much pleasure and satisfaction.

Then comes the argument, "Well, my child has a natural talent for \_\_\_\_; if I don't push her, she won't reach her full potential!" This makes me think of a story about a child at the Sudbury Valley School who had a talent for piano. When he came to the school, he was not at all interested in playing. Instead, he was fascinated with math and spent most of his time studying that. No one pushed piano on him, no one said, "Oh but you're so good at it!" and eventually he picked up piano playing again on his own. What could have happened had people pushed him? He would most likely have resented the people forcing him to play, he probably would have grown to dislike playing, and he would probably have abandoned the piano altogether. Or he would have played in the

manner I've seen so many "talented" children play: without any feeling, as though just going through the motions.

Any child who is passionate about something (and whether highly talented in that area or not) never needs to be pushed. Passion is the driver and more often than not, parents have to slow a child down, remind her to eat, remind her of bedtime. Passion redirected or interfered with by an outside force quickly shuts down. As this happens, the child, too, begins to shut down. So, should it not be our job as adults to make sure children's passion always remains strong and free?

Youth often complain that their parents have forgotten what it was like to be young. When it comes to schooling, I think that is especially true. We conformed and performed our way through school, we failed our way through school, we hated our way through school, we skipped most of school, we stressed ourselves on our way through school or we just tolerated school, and yet come the time to make the decisions for our children's education, we go back to what we know didn't work for us. Is it only because we don't know any other way of educating? I'm afraid that's no longer an excuse. Too much research has been done, too many books have been written, and too many alternatives have been tried and tested...

It's no longer about "preparing children for life". We know better than that. It's about having the courage to break the mold we were brought up in and offer our children a healthier, more "organic", more life-sustaining and joy-maintaining way to be *as* they grow up.



# The Child's Perspective

Author unknown

Teacher: "Why are you late?"

Student: "Because of the sign."

Teacher: "What sign?"

Student: "The one that says 'School Ahead, Go Slow'."

Teacher: "Why are you doing your math multiplication on the floor?"

Student: "You told me to do it without using tables!"

Teacher: "How do you spell 'crocodile'?"

Student: "K-R-O-K-O-D-A-I-L."

Teacher: "No, that's wrong."

Student: "Maybe it's wrong, but you asked me how *I* spell it."

Teacher: "What is the chemical formula for water?"

Student: "H I J K L M N O."

Teacher: "What are you talking about?"

Student: "Yesterday you said it's H to O!"

Teacher: "George, go to the map and find North America."

George: "Here it is!"

Teacher: "Correct. Now class, who discovered America?"

Class: "George!"

Teacher: "Willy, name one important thing we have today that we didn't have ten years ago?"

Willy: "Me!"

Teacher: "Tommy, why do you always get so dirty?"

Tommy: "Well, I'm a lot closer to the ground than you are."

Teacher: "Ellen, give me a sentence starting with 'I'."

Ellen: "I is..."

Teacher: "No, Ellen. Always say, 'I am...'"

Ellen: "Alright... I am the ninth letter of the alphabet."

Teacher: "Can anyone give me an example of COINCIDENCE?"

Student: "My mother and father got married on the same day, at the same time."

Teacher: "George Washington not only chopped down his father's cherry tree, but also admitted to doing it. Why didn't his father punish him?"

Student: "George still had the ax in his hand."

Teacher: "Do you say prayers before eating?"

Student: "No, I don't have to. My mom is a good cook."

Teacher: "Your composition on 'My Dog' is exactly the same as your brother's. Did you copy his?"

Student: "No, Teacher, it's the same dog!"

Teacher: "What do you call a person who keeps on talking when people are no longer interested?"

Student: "A teacher."

Sylvia: "Dad, can you write in the dark?"

Father: "I think so. What do you want me to write?"

Sylvia: "Your name on my report card."

## Announcements

1) Following are the dates for all the **Open Houses** we will be having this year. Please be reminded that these Open Houses are meant for people who are newly interested in ISC and would like more information on our school. Many thanks to all of you for continuing to spread the word about us!

- \* Tuesday, December 2nd
- \* Tuesday, January 13th
- \* Tuesday, February 3rd
- \* Thursday, February 19th
- \* Tuesday, March 9th

- \* Thursday, March 18th
- \* Tuesday, April 13th
- \* Thursday, April 29th
- \* Tuesday, May 11th

2) There will not be a Talkabout in December. January's Talkabout will be a potluck supper. Please join us on Tuesday, the 27th of January anytime after 5:00! Supper will begin at 6:00.

# On Unschooling...

Sandra Dodd

People learn by playing, thinking and amazing themselves. They learn while they're laughing at something surprising, and they learn while they're wondering "What the heck is this!?"

If unschooling can't work in the real world, nothing at all can. People will say, "How will they learn algebra in the real world?" Is there algebra in the real world? If not, why should it be learned? If so, why should it be separated artificially from its actual uses? 'Why?' should always be the question that comes before 'What?' and 'How?'

The way adults tend to learn things is the way people best learn – by asking questions, looking things up, trying things out and getting help when it's needed. That's the way pre-school kids learn too (maybe minus looking things up), and it is the way 'school-age' kids can/should learn as well. Learning is internal. Teachers are lovely assistants at best, and detrimental at worst. 'Teaching' is just presentation of material. It doesn't create learning.



Prepared by Nicolette Groeneveld