



ISC Views and Voices

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

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New and Improved!

by Nicolette Groeneveld

Two months into our seventh year, the dust is finally beginning to settle! We successfully moved into our new building this past summer, and now, after two months of initial renovations, we're finally in a place where our new building is mostly presentable and functional! It's been a whirlwind of change on a physical level, and we're excited about how our new building is coming together!

Equally exciting are all the operational changes we've made! This past summer, Staff Member, Tim, and his wife, Denise, went to the Sudbury Valley School's Summer Conference (celebrating SVS's 40th anniversary!), and they came back with both a deeper understanding of the Sudbury model and many great new ideas! The following are some highly significant changes that have been voted in at Campus Meeting over the past two months:



We have taken our Campus's level of democracy to a much deeper level. All decisions are now made democratically

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via Campus Meeting or Committees, including the Campus's finances. The Campus now has "open books" as far as its finances are concerned. Students have voted on how much Staff are receiving in wages, whether or not families requesting alternate payment arrangements are approved, and all Campus expenditures. Students know how much the Campus is bringing in and how much is going out; everything about the Campus's money is now the students' business.

We have also followed the example of other Sudbury Schools and created a Lawbook instead of relying solely on our "One Rule". Being respectful, responsible and reasonable is now the cornerstone of our Code of Conduct, however, specific laws that are spelled out in our Lawbook now offer our community very clear, objective guidelines for conduct and for the Campus's operation. The Lawbook tracks all motions made in Campus Meeting that define the Campus's operation and expectations so there are no longer "grey zones" or areas where answers to questions can be left up to an individual's personal interpretation. This deepens the Campus's democracy.

Within our Lawbook, we have created new policies that have significantly increased the level of responsibility and accountability of community members. For example, we now have a very specific swearing policy that limits swearing to certain spaces and also limits what swears students are allowed to use. (The meeting to create this policy was without a doubt one of the most hilarious meetings we've ever had!)

Being in the City now, we also have a very specific Off-Campus policy. The area around the Campus is divided into Zones, and each student has to get approval through Campus Meeting to go to each Zone. The Lawbook spells out what

is expected of students when they go Off-Campus, and they can only be approved if the whole community believes they will live up to those expectations.

To deal with the messes we had at the Campus over the last few years, we've also instituted two other new policies. One is the "free eater" policy, where students and staff have to petition Campus Meeting to get permission to eat anywhere in the building. Non-Free-Eaters must eat and drink only in the kitchen area (with the exception of water) and Free Eaters are allowed to eat anywhere. Students can lose their Free Eater status if they don't clean up after themselves, so food messes are pretty much a thing of the past!

We also now have something called the Booty Box, in which all personal items are stored that are left lying around at the end of each day. If students want to reclaim items from the Booty Box, they have to either do a chore or pay \$1 per item. Items that are unclaimed at the end of four weeks go to a charity. Everyone is now more careful to check the building for personal items before leaving, and the Campus is much tidier!



Another highly significant change is one that has come into our JC. The JC now officially charges people with breaking specific laws in the Lawbook, and it

also has the right to charge *anyone* it feels has been part of the problem leading to a write up, rather than just the person who was written up. So now *everyone* in a conflict is accountable, rather than just the person whose name appears on the write up form.

Corporations have changed as well in that they now have Staff Members as Directors rather than students, until any student proves him/herself capable of the strong, committed and fair leadership that is required of a Director.

Finally, in order to ensure we have a truly positive and safe Campus environment, we have very specifically defined what we as a Campus consider bullying, and these descriptions have shaped the anti-bullying laws that now figure in our Lawbook. Within this we have solidly drawn the line where physical violence is concerned so any physical violence is now an automatic suspension. The case does go through the JC, but if a person is charged with an act of violence and pleads responsible, there is only one option for the consequence. Bullying can also result in a suspension.

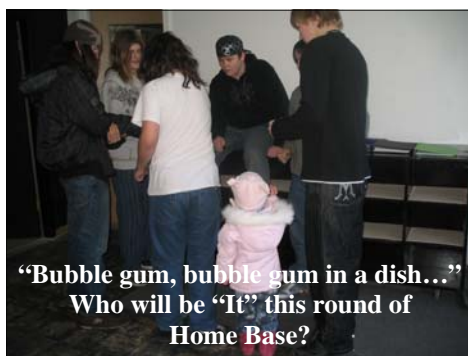
All these changes have “tightened” things up at ISC, and while everyone has had to adjust a bit to the new levels of accountability and responsibility, everyone does seem to see the value of what’s been adopted, and several students have expressed appreciation for the resulting improvements.

So we’re off to a fresh start here in our seventh year, and despite only having thirteen students, we feel solid and we’re excited about starting to grow once again! We have had some visitors through our doors, and we look forward to many more! We’re also doing everything we can to organize the purchase of our new building by February 2009, and once that’s done, it’ll be “up up and away!”— especially if we open up the

ceiling so everyone can get a full bounce on the trampoline again!

As always, we thank everyone who continues to support us, and we send a special “thank you” to all our current students and parents for keeping the faith and putting up with a building that we cheerfully call “a work in progress”!

Our dream is still fully alive and we look forward to its continued development!



Announcements

- Thank you to Mariel & Chris Helmers for all their help cleaning, painting, and drywalling! Thanks to Denise Moore for the same, and for the beautiful mural in our entrance! Thanks also to all those who helped us to move during the summer!
- Huge thanks to Mariel Helmers for the countless hours she put into our bookkeeping work!
- Thanks to Shona, Kaelyn, Kylan and Izzy for taking care of ISC’s booth at the Attachment Parenting Conference!
- Thanks to Nathen vanden Biggelaar for sorting out our Internet for us!
- Welcome Nathan Binnema, our newest volunteer! He is at the school Mondays and Fridays.



On Being Interested

by Daniel Greenberg—*Founder of Sudbury Valley School and SVS Staff Member for 40 years*

Few concepts have caused us more trouble than "interest" at Sudbury Valley. We use it all the time in our literature and in our daily conversations. It comes up in interviews, in family conferences, in public talks about the school, in chats with and among students. It is the starting-point for all discussions about self-initiated learning, which is the cornerstone of the school's educational philosophy. It is something the school is committed to supporting in every student, to the greatest extent possible.

Given the importance of the notion of "interest", you might think that we have developed a substantial body of writings elaborating on it, the better to clarify what we mean by it. Surprisingly, this is not the case. Aside from brief mentions and casual references, "interest" is not the focus of any of the writings we have produced. On closer examination, this fact turns out to be not so surprising. The truth is that it has taken us a while to get a good grasp on what we really signify by the word when we use it in its various school-based contexts; and, having finally gotten it clear in our own minds, we promptly forgot how hard that was to do, and assumed that now that we understand it quite well, everybody else has figured it out too. Since experience is showing this assumption to be quite untrue, it appears that the time has finally come to begin explicating what we intend to say when we talk about an "interest".

I have given some serious thought to the way this can best be done, and have concluded that a quasi-medical mode of discourse would probably be the most effective one to use. This is largely because, in the current state of our culture, we have adopted such a mode in many medically-unrelated areas. Health and medicine are currently so central to our society, that all of us have devoted much energy to understanding the vocabulary and methodology involved in presenting medical topics. It then becomes convenient to apply the same mode of thought to a lot of different subjects, from economics to history to belles-lettres, in order to spare

us the considerable trouble of developing whole new modes of discourse for each area we wish to talk about.

So I will address myself to the following questions: What do we mean when we say that a person is "interested" in something? (What are the symptoms of "interest"?) What is the appropriate behavior to adopt in the presence of someone who you feel committed to support - for example, a child or a student - when they show an "interest"? (What is the proper treatment for someone presenting those symptoms?) What outcomes can be expected from a situation where a person showing an "interest" is confronted by appropriate behavior from the supportive people around them? (What is the prognosis for someone presenting those symptoms if properly treated?) And, what brings about the occurrence of "interest" in a person, with special emphasis on young people. (What is the etiology of "interest"?)

What are the symptoms of "interest"?

To begin with, we have to distinguish between two broad categories of interest. The first is "casual interest", which is exhibited when anything gives us pause and initiates some conscious thought on our part. I may walk by an elaborate spider web a thousand times without ever noticing it, or without ever remarking upon it to myself or to others. Then, one day, I spot it and it catches my eye. "My, what a remarkable spider web," I say. I have exhibited a casual interest in the web, which may quickly lead to all sorts of questions and comments that flood through my mind: I wonder what kind of spider made it? Where is the spider? Why did it choose this spot? Aren't spider webs graceful? How can I take a photo of this? How did the web survive the winds and rains that battered them last night? The list of possible queries is inexhaustible. At the lowest level of casual interest, the mind plays quickly with all sorts of wonderings, without stress or visible effort, trying quickly to fit the spider web - of which it has only just now become aware - into its overall picture of the world. Indeed, awareness is the key

to casual interest; the two are closely linked. The very act of becoming aware of something involves exhibiting a casual interest in it. The awareness quickly leads into an awareness of all sorts of other things, as exemplified by the various questions I listed above, each of which quickly manifests itself as another, and another, casual interest of the moment.

Now suppose I was with some friends of mine when this encounter with the spider web took place, and I voiced to them all the comments I have mentioned, perhaps with a note of awe in my voice. Suppose I paused for a moment as this was happening, stroked my chin, and gazed at the web; and then, having registered my reactions, shook my head with wonderment and resumed our walk and our previous conversation which had been interrupted by my noticing the web. Suppose all this happened, as it does to everybody a hundred times a day, in one form or another.

What response would I expect from my friends? A reaction as casual as my comments were. "Yes, that was quite a web," one might say; "It really is amazing how it survives," another would add; and so forth. No one accompanying me would mistake the casual nature of my interest. No one in his right mind would stop our walk and begin a learned discourse on one of the questions I raised - say, an outline of the various species of spiders and the different kinds of webs they weave. No one would look at me and say, "Those are very interesting questions you asked, Daniel; when we get home from our walk, let's take out a book and see if we can find the answers to them."

And certainly no one would have the poor manners to turn my expressions of casual curiosity into a "teaching moment". It would certainly be considered poor form by all concerned if one of the party turned to me and said, "What kind of spider do you think it might be? What do you think holds a web to the tree? Let's take out our little magnifying glasses and look at it closely." Such behavior would be laughable and rude, a clear example of patronization and, obvious to all present, a wholly inappropriate response to my comments.

Casual interest is our way of actively exploring the world around us. When we express it verbally, we are sharing our exploration with our companions, moving it along a little, perhaps tapping into their experiences. One of my friends might say, "You know, I saw something like that in the rain forest of Costa Rica, only it had an amazingly different shape." That in turn might launch into a discussion of Costa Rica, or the rain forest, or other amazing spider webs other people have seen elsewhere. Speaking about my casual interest can thus launch a broader and more sweeping rapid exploration into the world of my friends, to the extent that it elicits casual interest in them also, and leads them to think about broadly related subjects. By now you will have recognized casual interest as the moving force behind ordinary conversation, which is nothing more nor less than an exchange of casual interests among people, one triggering another, triggering in turn another, until the momentum of the conversation spends itself.

Children use casual interest in exactly the same way as adults, and at Sudbury Valley we are committed to responding to them no differently than we would respond to adults. As in so many other areas, our insistence on granting to children the same respect that is due to adults in our society creates a separation between us and other forms of schooling. The greatest contrast is presented by progressive schools, which hold that expressions of casual interest by children are openings that facilitate the administration of information by adults (especially by professional teachers) to the children. It is sort of like slipping medicine into a child's mouth when the child opens it to speak; the justification is that the medicine is "good for the child", and its mouth was open anyway . . . In the case of progressive education, the medicine is sugared, so its administration is accompanied by enthusiastic expressions of "Isn't it delicious?" "Isn't it fun?" by the adults. Eventually, sugar-coating everything that is taken in becomes the preferred mode, and both child and adult forget that there is any other way to ingest.

Another manifestation of casual interest worth mentioning here is one that is accompanied by wishful thinking. It is an expression of idle curiosity, followed by the thought that "it would be great if I

knew everything there was to know about it, right now." We come to a foreign country, and we wish we knew the language; we go to a resort, and we wish we could play tennis. This type of interest is a kind of Walter Mitty-ish role playing, where we fantasize ourselves as masters of all sorts of situations. We rarely, if ever, intend to put in the time and effort it takes to convert these fantasies into reality; their chief purpose is to refine our own picture of our place in the world. When I say, "I wish I could ski well," I am not really asking for hour upon hour of ski lessons; if I were, I would say so. What I am really saying is that the fantasy of being a good skier is pleasing for me to contemplate, but I realize it is not one I will ever make a reality unless I do what I am not willing to do - namely, work at it!

At Sudbury Valley, the issue of outside intervention becomes germane only in more serious cases of "interest" than casual ones. In the ensuing discussion, which will focus exclusively on "serious interest", I shall limit my use of the word "interest" to instances where a different level of attention is being shown by the person involved. With this in mind, I shall now turn my attention to listing and discussing the symptoms of "interest".

Concentration: Intense, sustained focusing on a particular configuration of ideas and/or actions, not readily interrupted by extraneous distractions or background noise. Often accompanied by



irritability when attempts are made to intrude on the person's attention. The person is zeroed in on what he is doing, and not randomly roaming the surrounding physical or mental realm. Expressed inquiries are directly to the point, and not sprinkled over a broad range of subjects.

Perseverance: Continued application of energy to the matter at hand, without consideration for obstacles or difficul-

ties. There is an element of stubbornness, often bordering on obsessiveness, to carry through against all odds until the intended goal is reached.



Timelessness: Obliviousness to the passage of real time, to the normal rhythms of life, to day or night. Regular routines are ignored or postponed. Constraints placed on the person due to the intrusion of any time-related factor are greatly resented - for instance, a requirement to terminate activity due to travel schedules, or to the closing of the facility at which the person is engaged in his activity.

Tirelessness: Postponement of the need to rest, or sleep, up to and often beyond the point of utter exhaustion. In children, this manifests itself in intense continuous activity at a level that would destroy the ability of a normal adult to function - followed by sudden and total collapse. All the normal internal mechanisms that register weariness, and that bring into play forms of relaxation, are shunted aside and ignored.

Self-activation: Self-initiation of vigorous activity directed at achieving whatever goals have been aimed at. There is a



strong driving force to carry through the project at hand by one's own efforts, to be the designer and implementer of the entire activity - to own the activity, in modern parlance. There is no thought of waiting for outside stimulation, and no regard for the presence or absence of permission

granted by others to pursue the activity. (Of course, if permission is denied, and the denier has the ability to forcibly prevent the activity from taking place, then the situation changes; a crisis develops, with concomitant anger, confrontation, simmering resentment, etc.) To the extent that other people must be approached or involved in the quest, their participation is viewed as a necessary evil, at best, and their disengagement is looked for as early as possible.

Impatience: Lack of willingness to postpone involvement with the matter at hand. If possible, it is attended to now; if that cannot be, then as soon as possible. Other activities that life's necessities interpose are barely tolerated, and are gotten out of the way with maximum dispatch. The aim is to get back to the activity, and to get on with it.

These symptoms are clearly recognizable in any person who presents them. Within a very short time, usually not more than ten or fifteen minutes at most, it is possible to detect all of them unambiguously. A diagnosis of "interest" should not be made if any one of the symptoms is missing; although usually, if one is missing, several will be, since the symptoms appear to be fairly closely linked. Nevertheless, persons presenting a partial list of symptoms can be said to be suffering from "partial interest", which can best be treated the same way as "casual interest" is treated - by totally ignoring it and leaving it alone.

Anyone who spends time at Sudbury Valley will detect on any given day a great many cases of interest among the student population. These are age-independent, especially in students who have attended no other school. If you include in your sample population students who have spent considerable time in other kinds of school, then the frequency of appearance of interest drops off with advancing age; the older students, many of them refugees from other schools, usually take longer to develop interest and often do not ever have cases as severe as those carried routinely by the younger children.

There is no simple typology of the kinds of activities which attract interest on the part of students. As far as we can tell, based on twenty-five years of experience, virtually any kind of mental or physical activity is as likely as any other to be the focus of some student's

interest. We have seen interest displayed in basketball, mathematics, soccer, plasticine, Lego construction, skating, physics, pottery, biology, hiking, writing, reading, war games, history, drawing, painting, cooking, skiing, fishing, karate, dancing, role playing games, computer games, programming, business administration, making money, photography - I could go on and on with the list. In all cases, the students involved have displayed a fully developed set of symptoms.

It is often a matter of distress to outsiders (and even to the students themselves) that the object of the interest displayed by a student is not something deemed worthy of interest by professional school people, by members of the student's family, or by



general observers. This is a separate matter, and has been dealt with adequately in other school publications. My concern here is in recognizing what interest consists of.

Armed with a complete symptomology it is possible for people at school, or others who are somehow related to students, to differentiate quickly between cases of genuine interest which require some attention and all other cases of lesser degrees of interest, which require benign neglect. I have already pointed out above that it is a sign of lack of respect, indeed a sign of lack of manners, to intervene in cases that are other than the real thing. If for some reason intervention is requested by the student in such situations - as when, for instance, a student who is clearly not manifesting the symptomology of interest approaches a staff member and says, "Please do this or that with me; I'm really interested" then intervention is as counter-productive as is standard medical intervention (i.e. the provision of medicines or other treatment) in cases where a patient who is clearly not showing signs of disease insists he is ill and demands treatment. In both cases, if the person approached

agrees to intervene, the result will be harmful to the client; at the very least, such intervention will encourage the petitioner to believe in his illness (or in his possession of interest), and thus destroy his ability to recognize within himself the difference between the presence or absence of the real symptoms. Children who receive the same kind of attention from adults whether they display casual or real interest in something rather quickly lose the ability to tell, on their own, whether or not they have an interest. The result is almost invariably a person who, as he emerges from childhood, "doesn't really know what I'm interested in".

What is the proper treatment for someone presenting those symptoms?

Once we detect a person with an interest, how are we to react to him? The most important thing to realize when considering this question is that outsiders are not automatically called upon to intervene at all when faced with a person displaying an interest. Manifestation of interest per se does not imply the necessity of outside involvement.

The cardinal principle governing the handling of persons displaying an interest is to do everything possible to let the case run its own course with no interference, or with the least possible interference. Displays of interest are a normal part of human existence. The mind and body have been designed by Nature to deal with them, to utilize them in a manner that enhances growth and effective survival. Interest is a "normal" configuration of symptoms, much like losing baby teeth, or getting pregnant and delivering babies, or undergoing the changes of puberty.

Moreover, the natural tendency of people with an interest is to avoid at all costs interference by people or other factors in the environment. Such people want more than anything a chance to be unhampered in allowing their interest to develop to its fullest potential in a manner they themselves determine to be appropriate. Any educational institution devoted to supporting the maximum effective realization of the interest-determined goals set by students will, first and foremost, devote itself to getting out of the way of the students as they go about their affairs. Indeed, a school that did nothing other than leave students alone would do

more to help children in developing into lively, creative, energetic, imaginative, and intelligent adults than any traditional school in existence today.

There are times when the student displaying an interest finds that he needs some sort of support from the surrounding environment that he cannot figure out how to obtain on his own. The very nature of the symptoms of interest - especially the one I have called "perseverance" - guarantees that in such instances the student will make his needs known, and will continue doggedly to make them known until they have been addressed and somehow met. People who have worked for any length of time at Sudbury Valley School as staff members are keenly aware of the extent to which they will be pestered and hounded by children relentlessly pursuing an interest; and, more significantly, are equally aware of the amazing extent to which these children seize every morsel of assistance that they can wrest from adults and use it to further their interest with an effectiveness and efficiency that seems almost miraculous. Over and over again staff members find that a brief suggestion, a casual comment, a one-on-one session lasting a few minutes, will send the impatient student scurrying off happily to utilize whatever assistance he has obtained - the full import of which has completely eluded the adult who has provided it.

The precise amount of external attention that should appropriately be given to someone with an interest who asks for the attention is best determined by the petitioner, not by the deliverer. As I have said, a person with an interest is naturally driven to follow it up on his own, using his own internal guidance system to tell him where to go with it. Any appeal to outside help is a diversion from the optimal path he would prefer to choose; and the more quickly he can return to a condition of self-driven pursuit of his interest, the greater will be his satisfaction, and the greater the benefit of the diversion. There is no need at all to worry about whether or not the petitioner has gotten enough of what he wanted. He will be the best judge of that, and will return for additional assistance if he finds it necessary.

Everything I have been saying about children applies equally to adults, of course. There is no difference at all between adults displaying an interest and

children displaying an interest. If we adults think about those situations where we have been engrossed in some pursuit, we will acknowledge the validity of what I have been saying about the conditions under which outside assistance is desirable. Just think about the last time you were gripped with a passionate desire to do something - learn how to ski, build a model, start a collection, paint a picture, develop photographs, learn how to repair motorcycles, knit a sweater, read an absorbing book. Whatever the situation, try to remember honestly why, how, and when you sought someone else's participation in the pursuit, and see whether what I have said about it rings a bell.

When I speak of outside intervention I am not, of course, thinking about getting the cooperative participation of someone else in the project. That is a different question altogether, and not really within the scope of this essay. There are times when someone's interest is best furthered by engaging in a joint pursuit with someone else who shares the interest at that moment and who is equally driven to pursue it. In such cases, we get the phenomenon of group interest which, due to the synergy of cooperative effort, can display even more vividly the symptoms of individual interest. The appropriate response to group interest on the part of outsiders does not, however, differ from the response that should be made to individual interest.

Traditional school settings - including those of so-called "alternative schools" - have difficulty recognizing the manifestations of interest, and have no mechanism for responding appropriately to them. Such schools are usually incapable of getting out of the way of their students, and so find themselves interfering destructively with the pursuit of interest by students. Time constraints, location constraints, material constraints, and social constraints place insuperable obstacles in the paths of students with an interest. Nor is there a mechanism for appropriate adult response, which must be carefully tailored to the request. In all such school settings, adults have some form of ritualized means of interacting with students, governed by a curriculum or a generalized agenda, and there is no comfortable way to forget about these set pedagogical patterns and focus on the immediate nature of the students' requests.

What is the prognosis for someone presenting the symptoms of "interest" if properly treated?

Consider a child who has grown up in an environment where the following conditions have been met on a sustained basis:

(a) His many expressions of casual interest have been responded to casually, often indirectly, and sometimes with polite silence. In other words, the people around him have treated these as what they are: verbal expressions of simple curiosity, the significance of which is known really only to the child himself, and which therefore looks for no action on the part of the hearers other than respectful acceptance.

(b) His manifestations of real interest (which I have been calling simply "interest") have been allowed to develop unhindered by external obstacles to the fullest extent possible, so that they reach a state of fruition which satisfies the child.

(c) His appeals for specific outside intervention, while pursuing an interest, are met in a manner that approximates as closely as possible what it is that he is actually asking for - no more, no less - according to his own assessment of his need, rather than someone else's assessment.

Such a child, growing up in such a manner, can be expected to exhibit a number of personality traits as an adult. Through long practice and habituation, he will be comfortable with his own judgment of the nature of his own interests. He will continue to be a self-starter, as Nature intended him to be, since nothing will have intervened during his maturation to destroy this innate characteristic. He will be an expert at developing his own methods for pursuing his interests in a manner which gives him the greatest possible internal satisfaction. He will be a person with a deep sense of self-confidence, born of long experience with maneuvering through and around the shoals that surround any human goal. He will have high self-esteem, due to his being surrounded by people who have accorded him respect and have not worked to undermine the self-esteem with which he was born. He will feel that his life is, and has been, worthwhile, since he has been given freedom throughout his childhood to go after all the goals that he has judged to be worthwhile, and has

been given validation by the people around him for his judgments of what is and is not worthwhile.

Such a prognosis, which is entirely supported by the experience of Sudbury Valley School, is one that would warm the hearts of many parents contemplating what the future holds for their children. To such parents, Sudbury Valley (and any school operating on the same principles) offers an environment which maximizes the child's chances for growing up to be the kind of person I have described in the preceding paragraph.

The prognosis is somewhat less certain for people who have had their expressions of interest responded to in ways different from those described in this essay, and who then enter an environment (such as Sudbury Valley, or some other real-life environment of similar nature) which shifts to the responses I have outlined. Such persons must shift gears, and try to readjust the behavior patterns they have developed over time for the purpose of accommodating to the inappropriate reactions they have been receiving in the past to their expressions of different levels of interest. Some people succeed better than others in making the readjustment. Such situations are common in traditional medicine; for example, people who have been used to consuming large quantities of prescription medicines in response to all sorts of medical symptoms often find it difficult or impossible to shift gears when they are told by a new more holistically-oriented physician that their minds and bodies would be in much more stable and healthy long-term balance if they abandoned the medicines and adopted instead a more wholesome way of life. People who have grown up from childhood with such an approach take it for granted; people who come to it at a later age have varying degrees of success in making the transition.

Still, it is better to try to change to a healthier environment - with the hope of complete or partial success - than not to try at all.

What is the etiology of "interest"?

Why do people get interested in something? Looking into this question is important, because it underlies any approach towards interest, as we shall see.

Nature has designed the human animal - as it must design any successful species

- in a manner that promotes its survival. Unless survival mechanisms are built into the very structure of the species, it will vanish quickly. Now, inasmuch as the human race did not design itself, it is impossible for us to know with certainty what basic survival mechanisms we have been endowed with. The best we can do is guess, by examining closely what behavior patterns are universal among humans, and by trying to decide which patterns are key.

From earliest times, thinking people have noted the presence of curiosity, and curiosity-driven interests, in all people. This has come to be widely accepted as a key survival mechanism of the species, which enables each individual to probe his environment and find out what he feels he needs to know about his environment in order to survive effectively in it. The fact that curiosity and interest arise from within the person spontaneously, from birth, and exist at all times regardless of the surroundings, makes it likely that Nature provided each individual with the ability to formulate inner guiding principles that propel his expressions of interest in directions that he thinks will be of most benefit to his survival. The fact that people still inhabit the earth leads one to the conclusion that the innate abilities of individuals to decide what interests best serve their survival are, on the whole, adequate to the task.

These observations have long convinced me that there is strong evolutionary evidence for the proposition that each individual, from birth, is by nature fully capable of developing from within those interests that best serve his needs. I have encountered no evidence, either in my life experience or in accounts I have heard of other people's experiences, that would lead me to believe that there exists any other person or authority outside the individual who knows better than the individual himself what interests best serve the individual's survival needs.

This view of what causes a person to display interests has been the basis for the material I have presented in the body of this essay. Someone who has other views of the origin of interests could well draw an entirely different picture of the nature of interest, of its symptoms, appropriate response, and prognosis. Thus, for example, a person who thinks that a child's deep interest, say, in watching TV shows is a manifestation of some

disorder, and runs counter to what the child should be interested in, will not agree with my view that such an interest is serving that child's self-determined needs in a manner that an outsider cannot and should not judge, and ought to be responded to in the same manner as an interest in, say, science or mathematics! This point cannot really be argued, as the different views stem from equally different understandings of the entire phenomenology of interest, and ultimately of human nature. I cannot prove my understanding to be "right", or even "better" than anyone else's, any more than any one medical doctor can prove that his view of the human animal is superior to that of a shaman healer or of some "alternative" healer or even of some other medical doctor with a different theory of medicine.

All I can do is present my understanding, and subject it to whatever curiosity or interest someone else may exhibit towards it . . .



The Post-secondary Question

Students at the Indigo Sudbury Campus are registered with Education Unlimited, a home schooling centre that does not offer the Alberta Curriculum. So if ISC students cannot follow the curriculum and get marks, credits and transcripts, how do they gain entry into post-secondary institutions?

- Fact #1: Students do **not** need a high school diploma to gain entry into most post-secondary institutions.
- Fact #2: More and more post-secondary institutions are recognizing the tremendous strength of home-schooled students; as a result, they are adapting their entrance requirements so these students can more easily gain entrance into their institutions. For more detailed information, visit www.educationunlimited.ca.
- Fact #3: Students need to be *educated* as opposed to *accredited* in order to pursue post-secondary studies.
- Fact #4: Students have various options as far as gaining entrance into post-secondary institutions. The below offers a few examples.

Preparing for post-secondary

ISC students can prepare for university-level coursework by taking a wide variety of learning programs that cover all the “core” subjects—and more! For example, alternatives to the Alberta Math curriculum are Saxon Math and Math-U-See, two programs that take students from basic counting to pre-calculus. Beyond that, since students design their own educational program, they can begin studying the subject matter they wish to pursue in college or university, and they can begin doing work experience in their fields of interest. For example, a student who wishes to become a veterinarian can begin reading veterinary books and can volunteer at a veterinary clinic or other animal care facility. A student interested in mechanics can do an unofficial (or potentially an official) apprenticeship at a mechanic shop. All this can be done by an ISC student during “school” hours.

Challenging Diploma Exams

A mature student* may write any diploma examination in January, June or August without taking formal instruction in the course. The diploma examination mark will constitute 100% of the final mark. A program called “Rock The Diploma” is available to help students review courses, analyze exams and gain exam writing strategies in preparation for diploma exams so students who have learned course materials without taking the actual curriculum can be sure they are prepared for the diploma exams.

*A mature student, for Alberta High School Diploma purposes, is one who, as of September 1 of the current school year, is 19 years of age or older.

Athabasca University

Athabasca University is an online university whose *only* entrance requirement is that a student be *16 years of age*. So, as early as age sixteen, students can begin working on an undergraduate degree. Students can also work with other post-secondary institutions to determine which of their Athabasca University courses can be used as transfer courses. *Using university level courses as transfer courses eliminates the need for high school courses.*



University of Alberta

Students must meet the pre-requisites for the program they wish to enter. This can be accomplished by challenging diploma exams.

Students seeking admission who have not taken all five required Grade 12 subjects on first admission to another post-secondary program will be considered for admission if they have successfully completed these subjects at the post-secondary level.

Grant MacEwan College

Home School (ISC) students may be required to write Grade 12 diploma exami-

nations or, where accepted by the institution, substitute post-secondary equivalents. If students have taken alternate learning programs and have become proficient in the material covered by the Grade 12 exams, they should have no problems passing them. If they have taken courses with Athabasca University, they can find out which of their courses will be accepted as transfer courses by Grant MacEwan.

Grant MacEwan also has a “college prep program”; students take exams to determine their level of proficiency in the “core” subjects and then do courses to upgrade, if necessary.

NAIT

Home School (ISC) applicants must complete an application to NAIT to be considered for admission. They may include the usual prerequisites as required on the NAIT website, a combination of prerequisites and a portfolio or a stand-alone portfolio. NAIT staff will consider all submitted documents and will determine whether or not the applicant may be admitted to the program of choice. NAIT may require testing to determine that the applicant does have the skills to succeed at their program of choice or may offer upgrading alternatives.

University of Calgary

Home schooled (ISC) applicants can qualify for admission by presenting diploma examination results in appropriate subjects.

University of Lethbridge

Home School (ISC) applicants will be considered according to the curriculum they followed.

Renovations!



THE PROCESS



It started as our Computer Room and turned into our Main Entrance, with access to the two main bathrooms, plus the fun of a chalkboard wall (the bathroom doors will be our message boards!)