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What's Essential About Elementary Schools?

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CESPublications 

Never Arrive: Teachers Reflect on A CES Elementary School

by Mary Helen Spiri and Pamela J. Ayres

What is a Coalition elementary school? In the Chesapeake Coalition of Essential Schools network, each of our schools has made meaning of the ten Common Principles in very different ways. However, because our schools came to us not necessarily through the philosophically noble pursuit of principles, but through the funding opportunity of Comprehensive School Reform, CES journeys within our network have been especially warty. Our schools are all regular public schools in regular public school districts, in a state with a strong state voice in both funding and directing public schooling. Our schools are not smaller than neighboring schools, nor managed with any greater degree of autonomy, nor exempt from state testing or district curricula that prepare students for proficiency in such testing. Students enroll in our schools because they live where the school is, not because their parents are looking for something different or better. Teachers and principals, likewise, generally find their way to our schools through normal district hiring practices, some of which are less personal than others.

Despite these realities, many of our elementary schools have grown into fine examples of what CES brings to pre-kindergarten through fifth grade schooling. Principals, teachers, community members, and sometimes district administrators have come to see the value in centering education not on a checklist of purported “best practices” – implemented step-by-step and without reflection – but rather on a philosophy of schooling that requires and inspires teachers to redefine their expectations for themselves, their colleagues, their students, and their communities. This has proven the most difficult aspect of the CES journey in our elementary schools, where too many teachers have had too much experience with basal readers, mathematics pacing guides, and myriad expectations for teaching that disempowers both teachers

and students. You don’t implement CES, you embrace it; there is no standard set of predefined outcomes, but rather the possibility of remarkable changes in the very heart of a school community.

Comprehensive School Reform

Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD, later modified to CSR), a federally-funded initiative, provided competitive grants to schools from 1999-2007. Schools were awarded funds based on needs assessment and willingness to partner with an “external provider” that brought research-based, focused opportunities for change in response to the school’s needs. States structured CSR differently; in Maryland, schools could elect to partner with a broad range of providers and grant awards were typically \$150,000 each year for three years.

One such community is Salem Avenue Elementary School in Hagerstown,, a small city in western Maryland. Salem Avenue joined CES in 2004. Its staff of fifty teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators serves 650 students. Two-thirds of these students live in poverty; one-third is African-American



or Hispanic. As in many Title I schools, the staff members have been somewhat transient. The school has weathered three principals in the last four years; during the same time period, many teachers have been promoted to district leadership roles or transferred from the school for other reasons. "So much change," bemoans Vicki Kane, a kindergarten teacher who has been at Salem Avenue for 15 years. "It's been almost impossible to stay focused on anything." Nevertheless, at this point in their CES journey, Salem Avenue's teachers can speak thoughtfully about the hard work involved in becoming a principled elementary school.

What Makes a CES Elementary School Different from Other Schools?

Teachers at Salem Avenue describe the differences between a CES school and other schools in terms of student engagement, expectations, and support. Amanda Weighley, a second grade teacher who began her career last year, describes the difference between her CES experience and her training to teach: "There's a lot more student centered learning; it's not all about the teacher. Students get more out of their learning because they are responsible for it."

Linda Green, a veteran teacher of 28 years on the same second grade team, believes, "You're involved in the learning process, but the students take ownership of what they learn. They want to do it. You present them with a door, but you're not the leader going through that door. They're running toward it; they want to do it. Now teaching is interesting. If you could see how much second grade students can accomplish!" Craig Eicher, a first grade teacher who began his career as a high school teacher, adds, "Students are engaged – they're hands-on, reflecting on their work, talking about their work. As their teacher, I try to go for something different, think outside the box, something to prove that students can do it. Once you try it, it's like, 'Wow!'"

Craig's expectations of himself and his students are central to Salem Avenue's success. Sandy Burger, a fifth grade teacher with 23 years of experience, describes it this way: "When you see the kids coming in you think they might not make it. You get rumors from lower grades. Every teacher makes predictions and develops a mindset that CES helps you get rid of. Every kid can learn. You just have to find the way that's best for them, get them involved. With CES you give every kid a chance to be engaged in learning. Every kid has an opportunity." Rebecca Bland, another highly experienced fifth grade teacher, adds, "When it comes to students exhibiting their learning, they work so much more diligently. They don't mind increasing rigor if they know that their thinking is honored and valued in the community." Capturing

Salem Avenue in a Nutshell, 2007-2008

Rigor

- Year-long essential questions in reading K-5
- Focus questions per reading theme
- Six schoolwide habits of mind, developed in collaboration with parents

Purposeful Collaboration and Reflection

- Daily grade-level planning
- Regular opportunities for collaboration across grade levels
- Peer observation supported by administration
- Clear processes for collecting, making meaning of, and responding to data
- Disciplined action research projects at each grade level PK-5

Attention to Issues of Equity

- Strategic disaggregation of data, including student work
- Heterogeneous grouping in all classes
- Structured intervention programs, including extended school year
- Parent participation database; outreach to those underrepresented
- Frequent use of National School Reform Faculty protocols as part of classroom instruction to increase participation

Rethinking community engagement

- Schoolwide exhibitions of learning twice each year (community attendance 750+)
- Parent attendance at Fall Forum sponsored by school
- Math forums for parents of students in grades 3-5

the kindergarten perspective, Vicki Kane offers, "How much kindergarteners are able to do shocked me. There's no room for 'You're not going to get this because you're only five.'" Dan Fowler, a second-year third grade teacher, captured the intersection between his expectations of himself and his students: "My goal this year was to personalize and differentiate, especially for my students with disabilities, and I did that by expecting more from all kids. I'm proud of what they accomplished in the classroom and on the state test."

Purposeful collaboration among teachers, and, to a lesser extent, among parents, is key to Salem Avenue's CES journey. "We share instructional ideas and ways to motivate individual students. If we think we understand how a certain student ticks, we share. We don't have to be the monarch of our room. We send students to each other's rooms if they need another touch for a while. We are very welcoming of all students," asserts Rebecca Bland. Sandy Burger, another member of the fifth grade team, adds, "We got better about planning. We had to work around

Salem Avenue Elementary School Habits of Mind

OWNERSHIP

In what ways have I shown that this work is important to me?

UNDERSTANDING

How clearly have I stated what I know and what I think?

SELF-DIRECTION

In what ways have I demonstrated responsibility for my own learning?

MOTIVATION

Have I taken enough care that this work reflects my best effort?

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Have I taken time to revisit, reflect about, and assess my own work?

CONNECTIONS

Can I explain clearly how this learning connects to other learnings?

county assessments and their objectives and could pull out big ideas. We started planning on Friday nights until 7 or 7:30. You have to let your guard down and share and cooperate. The team has to be willing to work together and work across grade levels as well." Dan Fowler offers, "We allow each other to come into classrooms, which is a huge step – so much feedback from other people, not how well you did, but a different spin, also cool feedback. We respect the differences in each other. We trust each other."

The Ten Common Principles at Salem Avenue

During the 2005-06 school year, as appreciation for the power of the CES Common Principles began to grow, Salem Avenue's teachers and parents reached consensus around six school-wide habits of mind which form the core of instruction at the school. Honoring these habits of mind is challenging in an elementary school, where much of the early instruction in reading and math is skill-based, but teachers work diligently to marry essential skills and content to the lives of the community and the children.

The habits of mind have helped the school community to understand the Common Principles as philosophy rather than checklist. "Both teachers and kids have to be motivated to think continuously about using minds well. And getting students to use their minds well now drives our teaching and planning," states Linda Green, second grade teacher. Sandy Burger asks students always to ask themselves, "What is it I need to be able to do to think and learn?" This question

reminds her that "every student is valuable, worthwhile, special. They are the most important part of their own education." Amanda Weighley adds, "The habits of mind are in the forefront. When we do planning, we make sure that work is personalized; we have students reflect on their work." Kindergarten teacher Vicki Kane understands that positive habits of mind begin by "letting students figure out if they were right or wrong. With teacher as coach, I am not the only person talking, the only person whose opinion or experience matters." Dan Fowler adds, "The principles are interrelated. I like 'less is more' best. Once you put something out there for the students, you can extend from it, not pushing or rushing, which is where tone of decency comes from. The problem with other approaches is trying to fit too much in, in too little time."

Rebecca Bland describes her understanding of the Common Principles in this way: "I know the spirit of them and feel that this spirit is alive in my teaching. I am constantly thinking about habits of mind, expectation, motivation, and ownership of student learning. I am becoming aware of individual students and what would help them become engaged. I work to build enough of a relationship with students to understand how they learn best, and then I communicate that to the student. That's what they can take with them rest of their life. I cry for all the times I didn't know that, all the times kids have been discouraged because I didn't know to help them learn how they learn."

As a CES affiliate center, Chesapeake CES respects

Chesapeake Coalition of Essential Schools

Chesapeake CES opened its doors in June 2002. We work with schools, clusters of schools, and school districts in Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania. Our relationships with schools and districts vary, with some schools seeking "affirmation" as CES schools (schools are affirmed in our network following an intense, three-day site visit by CES educators from the national network who determine that the school is deeply embracing the Common Principles) and others using our services for professional development in support of specific goals. Regardless of the nature of this relationship, we ask our schools to assess themselves always in terms of four broad areas: rigor, purposeful collaboration and reflection, attention to issues of equity, and rethinking community engagement.

and celebrates the character of each of our schools. We encourage school communities to explore and embrace the Common Principles, and, like the Salem Avenue staff that is so invigorated at discovering

what students can do, we are continuously impressed at the quality of the adult work that transpires. We believe that CES is more journey than destination. We believe that a school is able to call itself a Coalition school when its people begin to speak in terms of this journey, and when the journey is grounded in ever-deepening understandings of the Common Principles.

Salem Avenue has entered the 2007-08 school year with 10 new classroom teachers as well as many remaining staff teaching in different grade levels or intervention positions. However, for the first time in three years, the administrative team will return to the school. This strength, coupled with notable gains for students in state testing for the first time in many years, has brought a sense of qualified optimism to the school community. While administrators and teachers continue to believe in the power of the Common Principles and the need to continue their CES journey, they acknowledge the added challenge of so many new staff in their plans to move forward.

School leaders are strategically retooling plans for engaging teachers and parents in continued reform. Salem Avenue's staff spent its first day together in August at a local ropes course, developing the adult relationships so essential to continued success. Each grade level team will engage in a carefully constructed action research project that supports the Common Principles. And the PTA president, a vocal but novice advocate of CES, will join the school/district team attending Fall Forum in Denver. Interestingly, the challenges inherent in so much change are actually helping school community members to revisit, clarify, and protect that which they believe is essential at Salem Avenue. Salem Avenue has learned the great secret of the power of CES: a school never arrives. It continues to revel in the ride, the bumpier the better, arriving at a place only to discover that an even better place awaits.

Pamela J. Ayres serves as Associate Director of Chesapeake CES and Director of the NSRF Maryland Center of Activity. She retired from Carroll County Public Schools in Maryland in 2004 following 30 years of work as a teacher, reading specialist, principal, and most recently Director of Minority Achievement and Intervention Programs.

Dr. Mary Helen Spiri, an educator with 25 years of experience, has been a teacher, principal, and central office administrator in rural, suburban, and urban school districts ranging in size from 1,800 students to the School District of Philadelphia. She is the Executive Director of Chesapeake CES.

The Promise of CES Elementary Schools

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heights. And it must start with the very young so that we don't spend the second half of schooling having to undo the first half!

Deborah Meier is on the faculty of New York University's Steinhardt School of Education, as senior scholar and adjunct professor. She is a board member and director of New Ventures at Mission Hill, director and advisor to the Forum for Democracy and Education, and on the Board of the Coalition of Essential Schools.

Congratulations to the Summer 2007 Theodore R. Sizer Dissertation Scholars Grant Program Award Recipients

Doctoral students Camille A. Farrington of the University of Illinois at Chicago, Leah Lembo of the University of Delaware, and Shannon K'doah Range of Stanford University have been selected as the Summer 2007 recipients of the Theodore R. Sizer Dissertation Scholars Award.

Presented by the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) and named for its founder and chair emeritus, the Sizer Dissertation Scholar Awards encourage a new generation of scholars to conduct research on CES schools and further an understanding of the effectiveness of innovative school practices. Award recipients receive a grant to conduct research or complete their dissertation, as well as a stipend to present their research at the CES annual conference.

The deadline for the next round of the Sizer Scholars program for current doctoral students is December 1, 2007. For more, including information about past award winners, visit www.essentialschools.org/pub/ces_docs/about/org/DSP_cfp.html

Nature's New Educational Mandate: No Child Left Inside

by Jodi Paloni, Marlboro School

It's 11:30 am, and the energy has shifted in the third/fourth grade classroom. Eyes begin moving from math work to the clock on the wall. Students begin whispering the "R" word. Even students who have not yet mastered telling time with an analog clock know that "the big hand on the 9" means it's time for recess.

I'd like to be able to say that my exciting math curriculum has the ability to stem the recess tide, but we all know, recess is a powerful force. We've all heard the universal response to the question, "What's your favorite subject in school?" And, at The Marlboro School, a K-8 rural public school, in the foothills of the Green Mountains in southern Vermont, recess is "way cool."

Here, young children roam the woods, make mud bridges in the stream, climb trees, and play tag among the meadow thicket. Older kids play a variety of sports on the playing field and hang out on student-made wooden benches. In winter, there's sledding, snow sculpture, and snowball fights. Kids return to the building for lunch 30 minutes after the long awaited release, red-cheeked, smiling, and chatting about plans for the next recess. But is 30 minutes of outdoor time in a six and a half hour school day really enough?

According to child advocacy expert and author Richard Louv, 30 minutes isn't nearly enough. In his book *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*, he discusses the events which have led our culture to move indoors and the subsequent consequences, a national trend of childhood obesity, depression, and Attention Deficit Disorder. Louv highlights the increasing difficulties in getting kids outdoors: competition with screens, media-exploited fears, more homework, and a decrease in natural areas.




But there is hope! With a little understanding, some risk-taking and careful planning, courageous teachers can strongly influence the opening of windows and doors for our nation's children while keeping up with mandated standards, personal ethics, and the CES Common Principles.

The results? Healthier, happier kids with increased creativity, broadened thinking skills and, according to Louv, better GPAs and higher standardized test scores! The benefit is kids who will grow up to shape the success of our relationship with a world in which we hope to survive. It's a great book. I wish I had written it. For the past 25 years, I have been dedicated to environmental-based experiences and curriculum. Indoors and out, with kids of all ages and with adults preparing for a teaching profession, I'll try to persuade anyone who will listen.

In the teacher-training course I offer at Antioch New England University, one activity asks adult students to access one of their most vibrant middle childhood memories and express the experience in a creative presentation. In all cases, memories involve a special place or treasure, almost exclusively nature-related.

Whether it's a neighborhood tree fort, a family vacation on a lake, finding a bird's nest with a broken egg, or engaging in some covert ritual in the elements, each memory is brought alive in the present due to its



sensory-potent content. People describe the essence of memory vividly and often comment on the loss they feel in "growing up." Never has a student described a school-based experience.

In my classroom, we bring nature news and outdoor treasures from home for our over-populated science table, keep ongoing personal nature journals, and write poems about spotted salamanders. We traverse the streams and rivers of our local watershed because kids discover in a morning meeting that their homes are all connected by it and get an idea. "Hey, Jodi! Let's walk it as far as we can!"

They learn Vermont history from reading the stone-walled landscape, math by building bird boxes, and computer skills designing field guides. They read *My Side of the Mountain*, play with solar-powered cars, and tell stories from the point of view of a frog. And all the while, we are well within the boundaries of the duly noted and ever-present standards.

One cold November day last fall, I found myself standing around a fire with 21 eight, nine, and ten year-olds, cooking moose meat and venison on sticks, listening to kid-perfected Abenaki storytelling and passing around a birch bark basket full of seeds and berries. I paused, realizing we were in the center of a quintessential teaching moment that I've since used as a touchstone for why the natural world and academic skill development are inseparable.

That day was student-directed, strongly hands-on, expansive in the principle "depth over breadth," and steeped in academics. It was an event culminating a trimester-long Vermont Studies Unit on the Abenaki people. The preparation for this event involved reading, writing, research, oral communication, and computer skills. Each student became an expert on one aspect of Abenaki life and presented work to the class. This approach personalizes the learning as kids chose topics in which they find personal meaning. Students presented an interactive demonstration or activity, thus incorporating the "exhibition" approach, and each student learned and retold a story from the Northeast Woodland tradition. Creating curriculum that involves a variety of activities makes the content accessible to all students.

The event involved community interaction as well. Parents fed the fire, local hunters sent in freshly-harvested meat, and a trip to the local food co-op yielded dried herbs and spices from wild plants which can be identified in our local plant communities. Bringing history to the "here and now" for the nine year-olds by connecting it to the forest they use every day at recess takes print-based curriculum to a tangible dimension. This is the "stuff" that sticks. The excitement leading up to the event kept a potentially inaccessible topic alive for three months. This

is where embracing "less is more" pays off. After kids understood who lived here before us, how the Abenaki people stewarded the land and learned from the animals, they spent the next four months immersed in the natural history of the forest community and publishing a field guide to the Marlboro School playground.

On the last page of *Last Child in the Woods*, Richard Louv tells about his own quintessential moment and writes, "These are the moments when the world is made whole." Not every day in my classroom is like the day around the fire, and I can assure you I didn't spend any extra time outside my regular teaching week making this happen. But a large part of my every day work is devoted to the co-creation of a variety of experiences that connect people to the outdoors and each other.

Nature writer Thomas Berry wrote, "Teaching children about the natural world should be treated as one of the most important events of their lives." Crafting clay identification markers for the nature trail at our local park, producing an original musical that highlights integrated learning from a year-long thematic study on water, and interviewing a neighbor who manages his five acre meadow for Monarch butterflies are just some examples of how progressive education in the elementary grades can keep kids place-based and grounded in the natural world. We are forging instructional memories for kids to draw from as they become the land stewards of the future.

What's truly needed is a full-on infusion of nature-based literature, projects, learning stations, field trips, and systems-based year-long initiatives into the lives of our nature-starved children. It's what kids do naturally when the screens are shut down and the doors left open. Let's not forget the very basic yet endangered experience of simply breathing in some fresh air. Fresh air is essential for healthy bodies and brains, encouraging the flow of oxygen in supporting all tasks in a school day. Get kids outside, moving their bodies and interacting with their surroundings and you will notice more focus in reading circle and math class. Courageous teachers are the ones to do it!

And while figuring out just how and when to make this all happen, don't forget that recess is just around the corner.

Jodi Paloni lives and teaches third and fourth grade, surrounded by the beautiful and diverse forests of Marlboro, Vermont. She wants everybody to know she's taught lots of urban/suburban kids, too! She welcomes responses to her thoughts at jpaloni@verizon.net.

writers; differentiated instruction to meet diverse learning need; intensive support to the most at-risk students; varied forms of authentic assessment to inform day-to-day lesson planning; time for students to engage in authentic reading and writing while the teacher acts as a coach; and ownership and innovation on the part of teachers.

Literacy Instruction in the Classroom

The LRR model depends on a skillful and committed approach. Our teachers must understand the strategies used by proficient readers and writers, use assessment to identify their students' learning needs, and plan instruction that meets these needs. The model requires a high degree of personalized teaching, collaboration with colleagues, and ongoing reflection.

In our classrooms, we have a daily two to two and a half hour literacy period with the following elements:

Readers' Workshop – approximately one hour

Writers' Workshop – approximately 45 minutes

Phonics/Word Study – approximately 15 minutes

Interactive Read Aloud – approximately 15 minutes

Readers' Workshop and Writers' Workshop consist of a focus lesson, reading/writing and conferring, and a group share. The daily Focus Lesson is a short, whole-class, teacher-directed lesson that often involves teacher demonstration or "think aloud," followed by a "guided practice" in which students try out what they have just been taught. During the Reading/Writing and Conferring phase, students practice the strategies from the focus lessons, while teachers work with them individually or in small groups. Teachers plan their large- and small-group lessons based on careful analysis of the notes they take while conferring with individual students. The workshop ends with a brief Group Share during which students share their work and their use of the targeted literacy strategies.

Phonics/Word Study is taught on a daily basis through short, teacher-directed lessons emphasizing decoding, encoding (spelling), word recognition, and vocabulary development. Because research shows that phonics is best taught systematically, LRR includes detailed lesson plans designed to help children master the phonic elements in a logical sequence.

During Interactive Read Aloud, the teacher reads high-quality children's literature to the entire class, and then engages students in thoughtful, reflective discussions in response to these readings.

These structures allow us to realize the principle of "Student as Worker, Teacher as Coach." Students spend much of the Readers' and Writers' Workshop blocks reading and writing independently, practicing literacy strategies while the teacher confers with individuals or small groups. During more teacher-centered

components, explicit instruction and modeling precede opportunities for students to practice what they have just been taught while the teacher "guides from the side."

A Coaching Model of Professional Development

A coaching model has also been central to our professional development in literacy. Coaches from CACD work side-by-side with our teachers in their classrooms, demonstrating lessons, co-teaching, and providing informal feedback. They have also worked with us as we plan lessons and organize instruction into lesson trajectories and units of study. As we enter year seven of our partnership, we continue to refine focus lessons, improve guided reading and writing groups, and ensure we meet the needs of all our students.

Over the years, we have increased the abilities of our own staff members to provide coaching within our school. Two master level teachers serve as full-time content specialist coaches, working closely with the principal to enhance instruction, monitor student progress, and implement interventions as appropriate. They collaborate closely with the CACD coaches to identify areas of need within the school and assist teachers who have questions about particular instructional practices.

In 2006-2007, we expanded the roles of our school-based coaches and developed two Laboratory Classrooms, one for literacy and the other for mathematics. Each coach plans and delivers the workshop

Thanks to the continued support of our superintendent, Dr. Wilfredo T. Laboy, the partnership with CACD has been a key element of our commitment to the CES Common Principles of CES. For more information about the LRR model, contact Lynn Schade, CACD Program Director, Tufts University, 177 College Avenue, Medford, MA, 617 627-2892, ase.tufts.edu/cacd.

instruction daily to a selected group of third and fourth grade students. Teachers in the school visit each "Lab Class" three times during the year, for a total of nine observations. During the visits, they use a reflection summary tool to record their experience and learning. Following the visits, they meet with the coach for debriefing and discussion. These Lab Class visits have proven to be a tremendous catalyst for teacher learning. Because the coaches and students get to know each other in a personal way, teaching and

Continued on next page

learning becomes authentic, and lessons can build upon one another over time. Teachers apply their observations to their own daily practice. The Lab Class model provides powerful opportunities for teachers to act as coaches both to their students and to their colleagues.

Monitoring Our Progress

Another key component of our partnership with CACD/Tufts University as an LRR school has been the use of Learning Walks to review our school-wide progress in growing our literacy instruction and to create additional opportunities for teacher reflection and learning. Twice each year, the principal creates teams of observers that include teachers, administrators, and a CACD coach. The team visits several classrooms, timing the visits to observe particular instructional practices (e.g., writing focus lessons or guided

themselves. Classroom libraries are rich in genre studies, author collections, poetry selections, chapter books, and read aloud titles. Teachers utilize professional development, coaching opportunities, peer observations, and collaborative teaming to consistently improve their practice leading to incredible levels of refined practice and sophistication of lesson delivery. Support structures, including tutorials and guided reading groupings assure that struggling readers are receiving additional daily instruction. Our school feels alive with literacy, full of children who love to read at school and at home.

Our efforts to implement a balanced literacy model have helped our school to achieve Adequate Yearly Progress in English Language Arts for several cycles. Although state and federal mandates are making such goals more and more difficult to reach, we are confident that our commitment to continued professional learning and growth, along with our Common Principle guideposts, will help us ensure the success of each and every one of our students.

Related Resource

For more on the South Lawrence East Elementary School, see "Personalization, High Standards and the Assessment Debates" in *Horace* Volume 18, Number 2, Winter 2002. This article is available online at www.essentialschools.org/es/resources/view/ces_res/219.

reading groups) that had been identified as focus areas for professional development.

We do not use Learning Walks to evaluate individual teachers. Instead, administrators and the CACD coach look closely at the literacy instruction taking place across the school to determine the impact of professional development efforts, to identify any confusions teachers may have, and address areas that require continued attention. Teachers who participate in the Learning Walk team use the visits as opportunities for peer observation and self-reflection. Following Learning Walks, "feedback sessions" provide additional opportunities for deep, meaningful discourse regarding teaching sophistication and learning nuances. Teachers are asked to complete the following sentences about each lesson observed:

I just loved the way...

Other teachers should come into this classroom to learn how to...

Observing in the classroom helped ME understand more about...

One thing I'd like to ask this teacher is...

We Have Come So Very Far

Our task is far from finished, but we have come so very far. Children love to read books they can select

Mary A. Toomey began serving the Lawrence Public Schools, in Lawrence, Massachusetts, as a teacher of special education in 1978. Ms. Toomey holds a Masters degree in Educational Administration from Rivier College in Nashua, New Hampshire, and a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study in Leadership from Salem State College, Salem, Massachusetts. Currently, Ms. Toomey is a student at Nova Southeastern University working on a Doctoral Studies Program. During the last 15 years, Ms. Toomey has applied her classroom experience, graduate level studies, and collegial influences to the practice of school leadership as principal of the South Lawrence East Elementary School. After almost 30 years of commitment to the field of education, Ms. Toomey continues to be inspired and renewed by the power of collaboration and the excitement that comes with helping each child to succeed.

Life Is About the Work You Do: *Horace* interviews Ron Berger

Ron Berger works with Expeditionary Learning Schools (ELS) as Northeast Regional Field Director. ELS is a comprehensive K-12 educational design that combines rigorous academic content and real world projects—learning expeditions—with active teaching and community service. Expeditionary Learning is now being implemented in more than 140 urban, rural, and suburban schools, including a strong representation of CES schools.

Berger's books, *A Culture of Quality* and *An Ethic of Excellence*, have inspired many Essential school educators to reach for what's best in their students and themselves. Berger talked with *Horace* editor Jill Davidson about his deep roots in progressive elementary education, concentrating on the importance of students of all ages doing meaningful, enduring work.

Horace: Talk about your involvement with progressive education and with the Coalition of Essential Schools.

Ron Berger: I taught public school for 28 years, mostly at Shutesbury Elementary School in rural western Massachusetts. We had a commitment to CES principles even before the publication of *Horace's Compromise*, with which Ted Sizer brought CES work public. Shutesbury was a unique opportunity. Because it was the only public school in a small town, it couldn't publicly define itself as progressive. That would alienate some people in the town. We had to make progressive practices evident in terms of values like perseverance, authentic work, courtesy, and responsibility. This was what the old-time Yankees valued; those were the values that matter in real life. What we might call progressive are the values that working class people in the town cared about. It was a privilege to work there.

We were a one-school district, and teachers were trusted to create curriculum that was not part of a large mandated approach. We created curriculum that had local roots, connections to local history, and addressed local environmental conditions. This curriculum made contributions to the town; it was of real value. Doing that is hard within a mandated district curriculum.

Horace: What projects emerged from the Shutesbury curriculum?

Berger: In our rural town, everyone has a private well;

most families are not sure if their water is safe. Fifth and sixth grade students set up a partnership with a local college that had a mass spectrometer. Elementary students tested water with the college students and prepared individual reports for families and a full report for the town. This was original science, high-stakes research that got kids who may not have been considering college working in a college lab. They were able to see that college is an amazing opportunity, and this project was powerful and authentic.

Other teachers in the school at all grade levels were doing similar projects. Third and fourth graders counted amphibians. They went into the wetlands and forests, and their counts contributed to the Massachusetts state database. This was original research and a very powerful opportunity. Kids got to do real work that they were really proud of and that was judged by professional science standards.

Horace: Talk about how the ideas that CES stands for matter when it comes to teaching and learning with younger kids.

Berger: CES was born from the great wisdom of Ted Sizer and Deborah Meier in seeing that the clutter and anonymity of many high schools prevented school cultures that could shepherd all students to success. Much of what they suggested, including smaller, more personal settings where students are well known and guided by adults, and longer periods of time to go deeper into project work and learning, came from the heritage of elementary schools. It's no coincidence that Debbie started as a kindergarten teacher, before her ground-breaking work with high schools.

Some of the CES principles are not as salient in elementary settings, because they exist particularly to establish the more personal and flexible context in high schools that many elementary classrooms already have. Some principles, though, are vital. Two CES principles that matter significantly in elementary settings are "less is more" and "depth versus coverage." Today's pressure is toward surface coverage of content to prepare for high stakes tests. The more that state frameworks grow detailed, the more this happens. It's growing more difficult to give students the opportunities to use their minds well as critical thinkers, to work as historians, scientists, mathematicians and writers.

Horace: But conditions these days for many schools present so many challenges to the practice of "going deep" with kids.

Berger: One positive thing about NCLB is the spotlight it sheds on achievement of students in low income communities; that spotlight is good. But if those schools in low income communities aren't

The Coalition of Essential Schools: Common Principles

Demonstration
of mastery



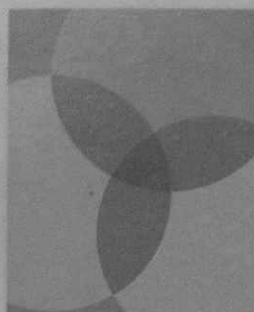
Commitment
to the entire
school

A tone of
decency
and trust



Goals apply to
all students

Resources
dedicated to
teaching and
learning



Less is more,
depth over
coverage

Learning to
use one's
mind well



Personalization

Student-as-
worker, teacher-
as-coach



Democracy
and equity

The Coalition of Essential Schools

Imagine schools where intellectual excitement animates every student's face, teachers work together to improve their craft, and all students thrive and excel. For more than 20 years, the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) has been at the forefront of making this vision a reality. Guided by a set of Common Principles, CES strives to create and sustain personalized, equitable, and intellectually challenging schools.

The CES network includes hundreds of schools and 26 Affiliate Centers. Diverse in size, population, and programmatic emphasis, Essential schools serve students from kindergarten through high school in urban, suburban, and rural communities.

Essential schools share the Common Principles, a set of beliefs about the purpose and practice of schooling. Reflecting the wisdom of thousands of educators, the ten Common Principles inspire schools to examine their priorities and design effective structures and instructional practices.

CES was founded in 1984 by Theodore R.Sizer and is headquartered in Oakland, California. Please visit our website at www.essentialschools.org for more about CES's programs, services, and resources.

Horace

CES publishes its journal *Horace* quarterly. Combining research with hands-on resources, *Horace* showcases Essential schools that implement the ten Common Principles in their structures, practices, and habits. Within four focus areas—school design, classroom practice, leadership, and community connections—*Horace* explores specific questions and challenges that face all schools in the CES network.

Subscriptions to *Horace* are a benefit of affiliating with CES National as a regional center, school, or network friend. We invite you to visit the CES website at www.essentialschools.org for information on affiliation and to read *Horace* issues from 1988 through the present.

Jill Davidson, editor of *Horace*, welcomes your comments, issue theme and story ideas, and other feedback via email at jdavidson@essentialschools.org.

Lewis Cohen
Executive Director

Jill Davidson
Publications Director

"Don't You Pick And Refuse Me"

by Katherine Clunis

"The stone that the builder refuse
Will always be the head cornerstone-a;
The stone that the builder refuse
Will always be the head cornerstone."

— "Cornerstone," Bob Marley

This fall marks my tenth year at the Mission Hill School. I have taught five through nine year olds. Each year there have been students with special needs in my classroom. Sometimes they have IEPs, and sometimes they don't. To me, the work has always been about getting to know the students, getting to know them as individuals, getting to know what makes them rock and what makes them roll.

Spending time with them at the beginning of the year is my favorite part of teaching. So willing and wide-eyed, they share who they think they are as learners. One of many moments from my teaching career that has stayed with me is when, on the first day of school, an eight year old came up to me and said, "I just need to let you know that I can't read, and I don't read." I pointed to a word in the classroom and asked, "Oh, what does that say?" He read it. I pointed out ten different words. He read all of them. I said to him, "I thought you said you couldn't read. Do you mean that there are some words that are hard for you to read?" He said, "Yeah, that's what I mean."

For that whole year, we had an understanding that reading was something that was hard for him, and we would work though it together. I never tried to hide that reading was the area he needed to work on. In fact, he felt so comfortable; he didn't just rely on me for help. He sought out his classmates and other teachers as well.

I will never stop being surprised by the fact at such a young age; children begin to realize that there is something different about them. Or they start to think there are things they cannot do. This is what keeps me teaching, no matter how difficult the student's

behavior, no matter how many children I work with, no matter what. I believe it is my job to help them see what they might not be able to see, or maybe even help them find the magic they forgot that is a part of who they are.

In 2006-7, I had the task of teaching the first substantially separate class at our school. Before this year, all of Mission Hill's students had been included in the classrooms. We have always had children with special needs, but before last year, we never had a classroom in which the students were told they had to be separate. Added because all Pilot Schools in Boston were assigned more students with special needs, the class is called a Primary Transitional Classroom, or PTC. It is designed in a way so that "hopefully" the children in my class will be transitioned into full-inclusion classrooms.

My class capacity is 12, but I had only five children assigned to my room. Me being me, I was confused about why three of the children were there. I really was unsure. I even thought there had been a mistake. And for the other two students, I understood how they would benefit from a smaller class size, but why not a smaller class that uses an inclusion model? I genuinely believe that all of the student in my class could have been in an inclusive setting.

I have never understood how someone looks at a five



year old and says, "You don't fit." I mean, who does? Though I do support smaller class settings for children who need them, I took the role of being the teacher of this class because I wanted to make sure that the children at Mission Hill would have classrooms that were as inclusive as possible. I also wanted to make sure the children who were coming into our school had a classroom that looked and felt like the sort of classrooms they would be moving onto, at our school and beyond. In other words, I wanted to create a kind of universal learning setting that would help them not just now, but in the future.

I had to be innovative if I was going to be able to do what I truly believed my job was, to help transition them into another classroom, not just at our school, but at any school they might attend. I worked with the other kindergarten/first grade teachers and introduced Racing Firecrackers drop-in (that's the name of our class, the Racing Firecrackers). Teachers sent children interested in spending time in my room to me. This was great; the students coming in were able to model behavior and provide opportunities for more conflict resolution strategies, and my students were able to act as leaders and feel successful in helping the other students navigate the space of our classroom.

Mission Hill is one of 20 Boston Pilot/Horace Mann Schools, a network of schools that began in 1995 as an innovative and unique partnership between the Boston Public Schools and the Boston Teachers Union. The Pilot schools focus on creating communities of learners, providing rigorous and meaningful curriculum, and ensuring that all students are successful. Boston's Center for Collaborative Education, a CES Affiliate Center, provides the Pilot schools with coordination support and assistance. Pilot Schools enjoy a high degree of autonomy and are accountable to high standards. For more on the Boston Pilot Schools, visit www.ccebos.org/pilotschools/bostonpilotschools.html.

I began to think about the PTC students who would be joining us over the course of the year. My biggest worry centered on how the incoming students would feel when they arrived. Would the current students make them feel welcome? Is there a strong sense of community? What happened was something I didn't expect at all. With every incoming student, it was like it was the first day of school all over again. Instead of my class holding their position, they regressed in their behavior and also, many times, took on the behaviors of the new students. While there was a big enough

student body to maintain norms and say, "Hey, we don't do that here," the process of welcoming and integrating a new student still took up a lot of time and energy.

Often, the incoming students were angry. While they had been moved from an environment that they knew, that past environment had not worked for them. They came in feeling unsuccessful, and had made up their minds that they were different. At age five, they had made up their minds that they were not going to learn, and the move to my classroom intensified the power of that decision.

Close to March, another new student came into my class after enrolling at Mission Hill. He had torn through our building from his very first day. He was so sensitive and so misunderstood that the slightest look sent him into a rage. I will never forget the first time I restrained him. He fought and fought until I felt his body relax. I said, "Are you ready to hug me now?" His eyes got big and he looked at me with such surprise, threw his arms around me, and hugged me for longer than I had restrained him. I have never, ever in my life been hugged like that. Within a couple of days he had gone from yelling, running, and cursing to politely asking, "Excuse me, Miss Kathy, can I go to the bathroom?"

With that hug, that little boy transferred so much emotion. It was in that moment, one of many moments, that I am constantly reminded why I love to teach, and I why love to teach at Mission Hill. I am given time to make those connections with children and peel away the layers that make up their complexities. I feel lucky to have been able to teach that little boy; in just a couple of months, he taught me years' worth of lessons about how to make sure I take the time to see what is behind the actions of all children.

As for this year, 2007-8, the PTC class will be a part of Mission Hill again, but it will look different. We are lowering class sizes and making the setting inclusive. We are not close to finished with our work. Our work is just beginning.

The children I teach are the head cornerstones. They reminded me that anything is truly possible, and that no matter what, there is a cornerstone in all of us.

"Don't you pick and refuse me,
'Cause the things people refuse
Are the things they should choose.
Do you 'ear me? Hear what I say!"

In her tenth year at Mission Hill, Kathy Clunis says, "I love my job with its joys and challenges. Working at Mission Hill has allowed me to follow loves: to be with children, to travel to learn about the material, and to snowboard each season. Without those three things my life would be a mess!"

On the Road Again: Field Research in a Rural Elementary School

by Francie Marbury

At 4:30 p.m. on a Sunday afternoon, the school parking lot is full. The yellow school bus labeled "Marlboro School District" sits with doors open. Parents and students mill around and bring duffels and packs to the back. Parent chaperones pack coolers of food and bags of groceries into the support vehicles. Finally, everything is packed and the kids are aboard, and the bus heads onto Route 9 to descend the mountain for Cape Cod, or New York City, or Washington, D.C., or Bradley Airport in Hartford.

This is a familiar scene at the Marlboro School, where "field research" has been an integral part of the curriculum since the 1960s. Marlboro is a small town, with a population of less than 1,000 residents, in the mountains of southern Vermont. In the early 1960s, several one-room schools combined to create a single kindergarten through eighth grade school. As with most rural Vermont schools, the student population has risen and declined since then. In the 1990s, there were more than 115 students in the school. This year, in the fall of 2007, we will open our doors on the Tuesday after Labor Day to 80 students.

Field research began as a way to expose backwoods kids to the wider world. Their parents may never have been out of Vermont, but, when Bruce Cole, the first principal of the unified school, came on board, he knew it was important for his kids to know there was more to the world. He loaded the whole school onto buses for outings to Cape Cod or Boston so they could experience the ocean or the city.


Bruce stayed at Marlboro for 20 years. Connie Barton, who started out as a teacher, reluctantly moved into the principal's position when Bruce retired. For the record, she's back to teaching now. Connie was principal at Marlboro for another 15 years. The longevity and common philosophy of these folks allowed a small public school to develop a unique approach to education, which was supported by the citizens of



Marlboro every March at Town Meeting when they approved the school budget.

At 2005 Fall Forum in Boston, I attended a Saturday morning workshop with Deborah Meier and Jane Andraiss. They showed a 1970s-era video of New York City's Central Park East Elementary School (CPE) that demonstrated how they conducted field research by getting children out of the school and taking advantage of their surroundings. They challenged us to think of ways in which our own schools implemented the principles and practices that directed CPE. I immediately thought of the field research we hold dear at Marlboro and was pleased to see the importance of this educational experience recognized as an important Essential school practice.

When you go to "principal school," you have to take a course in school finance. One of the things you learn is that your school budget should reflect your educational priorities. Any reader who has had to deal with this knows that it is easier said than done. Once you've paid teachers and put aside money to fix the furnace, there's not a lot left over. However, the Marlboro School Board recognized the value of getting these kids down off the mountain, of learning about other people and places, and of tying classroom learning to real life experience. And so, when I arrived at Marlboro as principal in 2002, I found that there was a line item in each classroom budget for "field



research.” And I quickly learned that this translated into week-long trips for the fifth and sixth graders to New York City one year and Cape Cod the next, and for the seventh and eighth graders to Washington, D.C. one year and an international destination such as London, the Dominican Republic, or Costa Rica the next. Committed teachers, town budget support, parent support, and, sometimes, fundraising and grant writing make this possible at our small, rural public school.

Marlboro’s field research makes student learning and skills durable and memorable as students go on to apply them in many different contexts. And it is a significant commitment. A week in New York City or Costa Rica is preceded by months of preparation and study and followed by more study and presentations of what was learned. As principal, I’ve had the opportunity to join classes in the planning and execution of field research trips, including the 2006 seventh and eighth grade trip to Costa Rica. A major impetus for choosing Costa Rica was that I had lived there for a year, teaching in the cloud forest of Monteverde on the continental divide. Connections are important when you do field research – whether they are connections with a school, a church in the Bronx, an Audubon Center on the Cape, or a homeless shelter in D.C. My connections in Monteverde provided a springboard for our students.

Students’ first steps in their journey to Costa Rica related to the connections between Vermont and Monteverde; students started asking questions and exploring topics. As the students gained some general knowledge about Costa Rica, they focused on coffee. Even though there is not a Starbucks within 30 miles of Marlboro, lattes, cappuccinos, and a good strong cup of coffee are parts of their parents’ daily rituals. They learned that coffee is grown in Costa Rica and exported to the U.S., and their essential question became, “Is coffee good for Costa Rica?”

With the help of Dean’s Beans, a local fair trade coffee vendor, we sold Costa Rican coffee to raise funds. Before we left for Costa Rica, as part of our Spanish class, we wrote a play about coffee growing: what it means for the people who work on the coffee farms, what the advantages of shade-grown coffee are for the environment and the economy, and the difference between large coffee plantations and small cooperatives. We then presented our play in school and to a community gathering, eliciting audience feedback as to how we represented the issues.

And while traveling in Costa Rica, we asked students, farmers, and coffee processors, “Is coffee good for Costa Rica?” For many years, Marlboro School has recognized the importance of environmental stewardship. We think it’s important for students to under-

stand where they live and to learn what they need to know to take on this stewardship. As we are all finding, what happens in our backyard is connected integrally to what happens in the backyard of our international neighbors. The students soon learned that their question had a very complex answer. Yes, the Costa Rican economy depends on coffee exports, but the loss of rain forest and cloud forest as land is cleared for growing is a major concern, as is the erosion of the soil. In their play, they promoted the value of shade grown coffee, and then found that local growers were coming to the same conclusions.

We stayed overnight with Costa Rican families, an event that transformed students’ relationship to their Spanish language studies. I’ve always been frustrated by foreign language instruction in the United States, and in Vermont, we have little opportunity and less need to practice our Spanish. During our homestays, we worked hard enough in one night to justify several years’ of study. Amy, Zoe, and I stayed with Rosalia and her family. Rosalia’s daughter was about the same age as Amy and Zoe, and the three of them spent two hours secluded in her room exchanging their life stories.

And then there was Davey. If Davey graduates from high school, he’ll be the first member of his family to do so. Davey didn’t study Spanish because he needed to use the time to work on reading and writing English. But Davey got a passport and went to Costa Rica. While there we stayed at the Ecolodge in the tiny farming town of San Luis. During an evening seminar, a presenter asked the kids what they wanted to be when they grew up. Davey announced that he’d like to be a traveler. Davey is the first in his family to ride in an airplane, and his horizons are wider due to this “field research.”

When we returned, the students presented their play again to a Marlboro audience. They wrote a newsletter with articles on different aspects of their trip. They presented a parents’ evening with slides, video, and excerpts of reflections from their journals. And, four or five years from now, when we contact them to ask how their education at Marlboro prepared them for high school and beyond, we know we’ll hear about Costa Rica.

Francie Marbury lives in Marlboro, Vermont and is happily beginning her sixth year as principal of the Marlboro School.

Defining CES Practices in an Elementary School

by Michael Rounta

The Common Principles, originally developed and applied to high schools, guide schools to evaluate what is happening and strive, through reflection and common understanding, to seek improvement. What distinguishes the application of the Common Principles in an elementary school? And what makes a CES elementary school different from other elementary schools? An examination of Windsor Elementary School sheds some light on those differences.

Windsor Elementary School is one of 13 elementary schools in the Elyria City Schools, a mid-sized urban school district just west of Cleveland, Ohio. Students are between kindergarten and sixth grade and include students with special education diagnoses ranging from learning disabilities to multiple handicaps. A Title I school, Windsor is one of the largest schools in the district. The school scores well on state achievement tests.

Windsor Elementary School began exploring the Coalition for Essential Schools in 1992 as a way to improve student performance at a time when state accountability was starting to come into practice in Ohio. Windsor became affiliated with the Coalition of Essential Schools in 1998 through an on-site review process conducted by the Ohio Center for Essential School Reform. Staff members embraced CES and have actively shared their work through attending and presenting at the Fall Forum. And CES has provided consistency during times of transition; the school has seen four leadership changes since first embarking on Coalition work. I was principal at the school until 2005, and the school continues to engage in CES work led by the current principal, Mr. Richard Ackerman.

As at other Coalition elementary schools, Windsor creates a culture that encourages staff members to be creative and willing to do what it takes to teach their children well. School improvement work within a CES framework must recognize the unique strengths

that individual teachers bring to the improvement process. Over the years, teachers have embraced a focus on helping students to use their minds well, setting high expectations for all students, personalizing learning, and creating a tone of trust because they experience a culture in which they examine their classroom practices, actively looking for strategies that improve student success. As teachers focus on "attending to individual student needs," they generate energy and professional pride.

Teachers support each other in their pursuits of excellence. Windsor currently has four National Board Certified staff members and a winner of the Ohio Technology Teacher of the Year award. Rigorous teaching and learning occurs with a constant eye on the whole child. Student as worker is a metaphor that applies not only to classroom work, but in artistic and musical areas as well. Teachers seek grants and take risks as they work to improve their craft. At various times during past years, Windsor teachers participated in building-based action research that studied changes in the primary grades curriculum, creating a focus of in-depth content work applied to first and second grade literacy in language and math, the use of student-led conferences for students as young as second grade, the addition of listening conferences early in the school year, and the application of technology by students to learn and create content arti-



facts.

A closer look at Windsor's practices and achievements demonstrates how the Common Principles are applied at Windsor and how CES looks at an elementary school.

Each student should master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge.

Several years ago, the state of Ohio revamped the state achievement testing process at the elementary level with a focus on reading and math skills. The initial assessment of student progress was at third grade with a reading test early in the school year. The question was: how best to prepare students to achieve well on the third grade test while preparing them to be eager, active learners?

At the time of the change the Elyria City Schools had in place a comprehensive curriculum for all elementary grades (reading, writing, math, social studies, and science). Could the curricular offerings in the lower grade levels be reduced to essential skills? How would this "less is more" approach affect the overall student performance if the curriculum in grades one and two were focused on reading and math literacy? How would a curricular change help to personalize learning?

Windsor teachers presented a proposal to the district superintendent, Dr. Jean Harper, which sought to reduce the curriculum in first and second grades to reading and math. In the process, teachers would be able to personalize education for each first and second grader through a balanced literacy approach to reading and a guided hands-on approach to math literacy. To assess effectiveness, teachers would match student state test performance results against similar district schools.

There was some risk in the proposed change, but teachers were confident that designing a first and second grade experience that limited the number of essential skills and areas of knowledge would benefit students in the long run. The staff members' response was pure CES work at it best. Creating more depth than breadth in the curriculum would allow children to build a strong foundation in literacy and math skills that would reap benefits later when students were exposed to multiple subjects and asked to demonstrate proficiency. Teachers were also willing to document their work and examine data to determine if the results were acceptable.

The results of a three-year action research study demonstrated reading and math test scores that were among the highest in the school district. Simplifying the academic goals in first and second grades proved to be successful and led to a reduction of curricular content and essential academic focus throughout the

school district. Over the past several years, the gains identified in first and second grade continued as these children moved through various grade levels. Building a strong literacy base when students are young allows teachers and students to dedicate more time to challenging academic inquiries in subsequent years. Students could now be "workers" in the upper grades.

Students should have opportunities to exhibit their expertise to families and the school community.

Students work hard in classrooms every day. How can that work be highlighted? How can parents and others see the results of student academic effort in ways other than reviewing report card grades? At Windsor, there is opportunity for students to "show off" at each grade level through exhibitions. Beginning in kindergarten, students are given chances to demonstrate to parents and other students what they are learning; kindergarten students are invited to "read" to older students as they begin their academic career. First grade students are paired with sixth grade students to exhibit their work products. First grade parents are invited to school to see the types of work students are doing using technology, and students are asked to show their parents what they have done in the computer lab.

Second grade students construct Power Point presentations on inventions and biomes and invite younger students to see their work products. Second grade students also hold an exhibit evening for parents. Parents are asked to participate in the grading of biome presentations using a rubric that guides students as they construct their presentations. Third grade students create an event called Kid City, a recreation of Elyria in the gym. Students learn about the community and construct miniature homes and public buildings that are placed on a large outline of Elyria. Students then invite other grade levels and parents in for tours, giving the third graders an opportunity to exhibit what they have learned about the history of the community.

Fourth grade students have classroom exhibitions with reports about the state of Ohio as the focal point for presentations. Again, younger students are invited to see the exhibitions and parents are invited to attend class presentations. Fifth grade students hold science exhibits and presentations in social studies. Student journals and art work are on display at an evening exhibit that is based on an outdoor education field trip. Fifth graders also present readings from their journals for parents, family, and other students, and they participate in student-assisted parent conferences, demonstrating what they are learning using Power Point presentations and other learning artifacts.

Continued on next page

By the time students reach sixth grade, they have participated in a number of exhibitions and presentations in a number of different subjects. Sixth grade students conduct student-led conferences in the fall. They also support younger students as those students develop and prepare for presentations in first and second grade. An evening Egyptian exhibit and countries of the world presentation serve as culminating presentations for parents, family and the rest of the school.

Once a year, the school building is turned into an art museum during the spring fine arts exhibition at which they present a strings concert and songs from around the world. Parents are invited to tour the building and observe the display of work from students at all grade levels.

The school's goals and expectations should apply to all students.

Coaching teachers to work across grade levels and disciplines toward the same goals requires time and patience. A key to creating this commitment was the Collaboration for Student Success (CSS) group. On their own time, teachers meet to discuss classroom goals and share pedagogical strategies in reading and writing. At times, every grade level was represented as topics and student work at different grade levels were discussed and examined.

Under the guidance of first grade teacher Ken Hughes, CSS work examined ways to improve student literacy. Teachers worked to develop a reading resource area where teachers at any grade level could access texts organized by reading level. Teachers volunteered to digitally record student reading groups as they examined the use of essential questions as guides for their reading and literature classes. The recording was placed on a DVD and was available to other teachers to share techniques and test new ways of organizing the classroom for increased student performance. The result was a commitment throughout the building to emphasize reading and writing literacy at all grade levels. Teachers developed a building curriculum map, and sought links to literacy and writing in other content areas.

Staff members also collaborated in implementing new technology and creating technology opportunities for students at all grade levels. Teachers at Windsor see technology as a motivational and creative tool for students to apply content work. Encouraged by Mary Karlovec (Ohio's Technology Teacher of Year in 2007), Media Specialist Anne Michael, sixth grade teacher Laurie Lakocy, and fourth grade teacher Carrie Ziegman, technology is an essential element of all student exhibits staged by all grade levels throughout the building.

The tone of the school should be one of trust and decency.

Trust and decency begin at Windsor when families first send students to school. Teachers ask first grade parents to attend listening conferences in early September. At the conferences, parents talk about their children – what they like, who they are, what they are good at – and teachers just listen. The conferences are the first step toward creating trust with families and building home-school relationships. Listening conference opportunities are extended to parents at other grade levels as well.

Developing student demonstrations and exhibits, creating opportunities for parents to attend activities during and after school, linking literacy practices and technology to content curriculum maps and examining student work and classroom practices take a great deal of time and energy. It takes commitment and dedication from teachers to personalize teaching for students and improve the craft of teaching in thoughtful and purposeful ways. While these examples cited from Windsor Elementary School occur in various manifestations at other CES elementary schools, they are distinctly different from the "typical" elementary school experience and are a clear expression of the Common Principles in an elementary school context. At Windsor and other CES elementary schools, a culture of trust and respect springs from a dedication to examining teaching practices using the Common Principles as the framework and springboard for a learning community that believes in its efforts to create the conditions for all students to succeed.

Dr. Michael R. Routa worked for the Elyria Public Schools for 32 years. During that time he was a special education teacher and intervention specialist, union leader, junior high school administrator, elementary principal, and school reform consultant with a non-profit organization working with other schools in northeast Ohio to facilitate change and develop leadership. He has been an adjunct professor in the Graduate School of Education at Ashland University since 1995 and works with pre-service teachers as a University Supervisor for Student Teachers. This fall, Routa will be presenting on leadership development at the Fall Forum in Denver and the National Staff Development Council in Dallas, and he is on the ballot for a spot on the Elyria City Schools Board of Education.

The Coalition of Essential Schools Announces "It's Elementary" a PreK-8th Grade National Initiative

by Steve Bonchek

In March 2006, Deborah Meier asked Harmony Education Center (HEC) in Bloomington, Indiana to lead a national effort to engage more pre-kindergarten through eighth-grade schools across the country in the work of CES. Debbie believed that although CES had always welcomed these schools, elementary educators felt that high schools had always received more attention and benefits from CES membership and participation at the Fall Forum. She said that HEC – home to a CES Center, Harmony School (a 200 student preK-12th grade school that has been a member of CES since 1994), and the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) – was well positioned to coordinate this national effort.

We followed up on Debbie's suggestion to collaborate with Laura Baker, Director of the Greenfield Center School in Greenfield, Massachusetts, in the exploration of this new CES initiative. After consultation with CES's Executive Director Lewis Cohen, I contacted Brett Bradshaw at CES National and collected statistics that described elementary membership and participation at the Fall Forum. Brett confirmed that fewer than 20 percent of all member schools were elementary schools and fewer than 10 percent of Fall Forum participants identified themselves as elementary teachers.

In July 2006, Lewis and I presented a draft of a plan for this elementary initiative at the CES Center Directors Meeting in Tacoma. After receiving endorsement of the plan, we formed a committee comprised of Debbie Meier, Laura Baker, Nancy Fenton from CES Michigan, Carol Foresta from the Progressive Educator's Network of New York, national NSRF director Steven Strull, and HEC senior fellow Daniel Baron. The committee organized pre-conference and closing sessions at the 2006 Fall Forum at which the "It's Elementary" initiative was discussed, further developed, and enthusiastically affirmed by more than 100 elementary educators in attendance.

The plan is that this new CES initiative will replicate some of the most powerful aspects of the CES Small Schools Network. We will refine a common vision of a strong implementation of the ten Common Principles at the preK-eighth grade levels. In addition, the elementary network will document and disseminate effective elementary and middle school practices, develop a common agenda and language for research in such CES schools, create partnerships, advocate for progressive practices, and maintain the gains of participating schools.

In May 2006, the Greenfield Center School in Greenfield, Massachusetts hosted the first meeting of the New England Center of Progressive Elementary Education, the New England Center for this national initiative. (For more on NECPEE and what's happening at Greenfield Center School, see Laura Baker's "Making Sense of the Principles: An Elementary Perspective" on page four of this issue.)

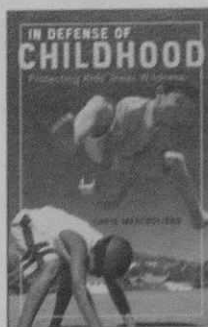
At the 2007 Fall Forum in Denver, there will be at least 25 elementary-focused sessions and a closing session on Saturday, November 10 to plan next steps in the exciting development of this national network.

As Debbie Meier wrote in the opening article of this issue of *Horace*, CES elementary schools should, in addition to reflecting the ten Common Principles, "focus on the connection between family and home, pay attention to the importance of the arts and imagination in defining what it means to use one's mind well, and emphasize the role of play, hands-and-minds, and self-initiated adventures. The responsibility of the "It's Elementary" initiative is the support, development, documentation, and dissemination of, as Debbie describes it, "a different kind of elementary and pre-elementary education."

Steve and Barbara Bonchek started Harmony School in 1974. The school has grown into a multi-faceted national organization that promotes democracy, equity and social justice. To contact Steve and Barb, please email harmony@indiana.edu.

To express interest in joining or for more information on "It's Elementary," please contact Scott Hutchinson at Harmony Education Center at hutchinson@harmonyschool.org or 812.334.8379.

In Defense of Childhood: Protecting Kids' Inner Wildness by Chris Mercogliano (Beacon Press, 205 pages, \$24.95), reviewed by Connie Biewald



Chris Mercogliano's most recent book, *In Defense of Childhood: Protecting Kids' Inner Wildness* is a welcome antidote to our current culture of fear. It is a powerful reminder of not only what children, but all of us, need to be productive, happy individuals: authentic, meaningful work and play; solitude; opportunities to take risks and learn from

mistakes; and connections with people and nature. Mercogliano describes current cultural trends and forces that make it more difficult for us to meet these needs, gives some historical perspective on how we got here, and includes sobering research studies that emphasize the importance of protecting our children and ourselves from the forces that can keep children – and all of us – from finding and growing into ourselves. Fortunately, he also has some effective ideas for achieving these essential goals.

As I read this book, several people noticed the title and, picking up on the word “wildness,” made negative comments about poorly behaved children. As Mercogliano makes clear in different ways in the various chapters, inner wildness is not a euphemism for bad behavior and protecting it is not a euphemism for permissive parenting (or teaching). It is a thoughtfully chosen phrase that describes a person's essential being: one's fundamental human needs shaped by one's very particular individuality. If we don't see children for who they are – if we don't honor this essential being, if we don't provide time, space, and appropriate challenges – their development is seriously affected.

Though these ideas are not new, some of the research Mercogliano includes is, such as studies on television, video games, and the brain. It seems, too, that in our materialistic, fearful, competitive culture, we need all the reminders we can get to slow down and trust our children and ourselves. This readable, comprehensive book makes the case that we can and must do so. Teachers and parents will find it informative and inspiring.

For the past 18 years, Connie Biewald has been both a librarian and a Growth Education resource person at the Fayerweather Street School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In her Growth Ed role, Connie works with children, parents, and other teachers exploring the essential topics of human development such as self esteem, the use and misuse of power, altruism and community service, sexuality, and appreciation and understanding of differences.

Studio Thinking: The Real Benefits of Visual Arts Education by Lois Hetland, Ellen Winner, Shirley Veenema, and Kimberly M. Sheridan (Teachers College Press, 128 pages, \$24.95), reviewed by Kyle Meador



Studio Thinking looks inside the “studio classrooms” of five visual arts teachers (including Beth Balliro, Kathleen Marsh, and Mickey Telemaque of CES Mentor School Boston Arts Academy) to discover that arts education benefits may not be

what we have been told recently. In reaction to the increasingly weakened position of the arts in our schools, many arts education advocates have posited that the arts are important because they improve student performance in those subjects heavily scrutinized by No Child Left Behind. The authors argue that justifying the arts via this dubious and secondary utilitarian value is likely to be ineffective and frustrating.

Studio Thinking provides a framework for the value of arts education itself. When two of the authors recently published a study concluding that arts classes do not necessarily improve students' overall academic performance, the backlash was bitter. With *Studio Thinking*, these researchers maintain and expand upon their original thesis, stating that depending on content and teaching methods, students can develop “Studio Habits of Mind” – such as the habits of engaging and persisting, envisioning, expressing, observing, reflecting, and more – that are likely to transfer to other areas of their lives and academic achievements. Additionally, *Studio Thinking* sets the stage for studies on the transfer of arts learning to other disciplines, studies that would contribute to a meaningful case for the value of arts education.

Studio Thinking is not a recipe for teaching a studio class. Rather, it provides a set of lenses, “Studio Structures,” that support constructivist teaching in any discipline in which instruction keeps content-area work at the center of student learning. While the authors built this framework by looking closely at the practices of five high school visual arts teachers, the resulting description of studio classrooms is valuable to educators at all grade levels, disciplines, and contexts.

Kyle Meador is a School Development Program Associate at CES.

Life is About the Work You Do

Continued from page 17

doing well, there isn't a lot of thought about how to fix them. Drills, more hours, and more testing aren't thoughtful and careful ways to make those schools better. They don't need pressure; they need stronger school cultures and aligned strategies. How do you change the culture of a school and build instruction that creates student engagement? There's a lot of discussion about schools being low achieving, but not a lot of discussion about how to turn a school culture around to a vision of high achievement. CES and ELS embrace the notion that it's all about the culture of the school. Adding 20 minutes to the day and more tests will not solve the problem.

I think that my message and ELS's message has resonated most strongly when people actually look at the work that students can do. It's amazing work. It's deep, sophisticated research work and high quality writing and math, work that is hard to achieve if you're always in survey mode. Teachers require the opportunity to step off the coverage treadmill and provide authentic work for students. Not doing so is as much a danger in elementary as in secondary schools. I travel around the country with a suitcase full of incredibly beautiful and sophisticated student projects, created by students of all ages, races, income levels and geographic settings. This archive begins a dialogue: what conditions and school cultures help to create this type of high-quality work?

Success in life is about the kind of work you do and the kind of person you are. Looking at real student work changes the discourse from test measures to more authentic measures of what kids can do.

Related Resource

Horace reviewed Ron Berger's *An Ethic of Excellence: Building a Culture of Craftsmanship with Students* in Volume 20, Issue 4, Fall 2004. The review is online at www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces_res/353.

Where to Go for More

Fall Forum 2007, Elementary Spotlight

CES invites elementary educators to Fall Forum 2007. Join thousands of students, parents, and other leading thinkers to collaborate and inspire school transformation. This year's Fall Forum, "A Principled Stand," will take place November 8-10 in Denver, Colorado and features a strong and varied selection of sessions designed to address the circumstances of CES elementary schools.

These sessions include a number of authors and schools featured in this issue - authors Mary Helen Spiri, Pamela Ayres, Katherine Clunis, Deborah Meier, Laura Baker, Francie Marbury, Michael Routa, and Steve Bonchek will be facilitating workshops and interest groups. And look for the "Forming a CES Elementary School Network" interest group on Saturday, November 10.

Highlights of the 2007 Fall Forum of particular interest to elementary educators:

Additional November 8 day-long pre-conference sessions including: "Building a High Performing and Supportive Community of Learners in the Elementary Grades," "Teaching for Authentic Intellectual Work: Rationale, Research, Rubrics, Realities" facilitated by Fred Newman, "Supporting Learners in an Inclusive Classroom," and more.

Six Denver-area elementary and high school visits

Featured conference sessions including: CES Alumni Panel, "Authentic Practices that Promote Equitable Outcomes for English Language Learners," "The Impact of NCLB on Communities of Color," Deborah Meier and Jane Adrais on "Taking a Stand On Behalf of Play and Playfulness," and Ellin Oliver Keene on "Leading for Literacy Learning: From Effective to Artistic."

Registration is open now! Join us at Fall Forum to take a stand for the relationships, pedagogy, structures, and policies that create and sustain personalized, equitable, and intellectually challenging schools for all of our children.

Visit the CES website for all the details on registration, conference programming, and logistics: www.essentialschools.org

23.3 FALL 2007

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Notes on This Issue

Many thanks to the educators who, herein, offered their visions of and continued hard work toward what Essential elementary schools can be. For those who work in CES high schools, imagine what your students could achieve if they all arrived fully prepared to use their minds well. Your elementary colleagues' words will inspire you to connect with the elementary and middle schools from which your students come to create vertical CES pathways. When you do, *Horace* will be enriched by your wisdom and insights.

Jill Davidson
Editor, *Horace*

Go To The Source: More about the Schools and Other Organizations Featured in this Issue

Essential Schools

Capital City Public Charter School
3047 15th Street, NW
Washington, District of Columbia 20009
telephone: 202.387.0309
www.ccpcs.org

Greenfield Center School

71 Montague City Road
Greenfield, Massachusetts 01301
telephone: 413.773.1700
www.centerschool.net

Marlboro School

PO Box D, 2669 Route 9
Marlboro, Vermont 05344
telephone: 802.254.2668
marlboro.wcsu.k12.vt.us

Mission Hill School

67 Alleghany Street
Boston Massachusetts 02120
telephone: 617.635.6384
www.missionhillschool.org

Salem Avenue Elementary

1323 Salem Avenue Ext.
Hagerstown, Maryland 21740
telephone: 301.766.8313
www.weboe.k12.md.us/custom_pages/330/Main/index.html

South Lawrence East Elementary School

165 Crawford Street
Lawrence, Massachusetts 01843
telephone: 978.975.5970
www.lawrence.k12.ma.us/schools/sle.html

Windsor School

264 Windsor Drive
Elyria, Ohio 44035
telephone: 440.284.8014
www.elyriaschools.org/windsor

Other Organizations

Chesapeake Coalition of Essential Schools
106 E. Cecil Avenue
North East, Maryland 21901
telephone: 410.287.2720
www.ChesapeakeCES.org

Eliot-Pearson Center for Applied Child Development

Tufts University
177 College Avenue
Medford, Massachusetts 02155
telephone: 617.627.2892
ase.tufts.edu/cacd

Expeditionary Learning

100 Mystery Point Road
Garrison, New York 10524
telephone: 845.424.4000
www.elschools.org

Harmony Education Center

909 East 2nd Street
Bloomington, Indiana 47401
telephone: 812.334.8349
www.harmonyschool.org

Ohio Center for Essential School Reform

12943 Stonecreek Drive,
Pickerington, Ohio 43147
telephone: 614.751.9346
www.ohioces.org

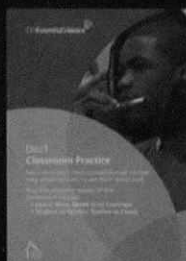
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If CES stands for what you believe in—personalized, equitable, intellectually vibrant schools—we invite you to affiliate with CES National. Affiliating with the CES network as a school, organization, or individual gives you a number of benefits, including subscriptions to *Horace* and our newsletter *In Common*, discounted fees and waivers to our annual Fall Forum, and eligibility to apply for research and professional development grants, and more. For more information about CES National Affiliation, visit www.essentialschools.org

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This Year in Horace

23.1: Exhibitions: Demonstrations of Mastery in Essential Schools

Horace focuses on the ways Essential schools use exhibitions, examining what is needed to implement an exhibition-based curriculum, analyzing exhibitions at various grade levels and within various disciplines, and discussing the impact of No Child Left Behind on exhibitions and vice versa.

23.2: Essential Mathematics Education

Essential school mathematics educators debate the advantages and challenges of responding to "less is more" and other CES Common Principles in mathematics, addressing what's happening now in Essential school math instruction.

23.3: What's Essential about Elementary Schools?

Horace looks at the latest thinking in the CES network about what defines CES elementary schools, inviting practitioners to discuss the way elementary schools express the CES Common Principles.

23.4: Beyond Reform: Transformations

Horace explores the way communities interrupt the status quo and create the conditions for transformed schools. How do transformed schools—and their larger environments—sustain and evolve as student-centered, collaborative, academically challenging and equitable places of learning?

Cover photo: Marlboro School students learning and imagining in the Vermont woods.

The national office of the Coalition of Essential Schools gratefully acknowledges support from the following foundations:

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How Much Is Learned When We're Not Looking: The Promise of CES Elementary Schools

by Deborah Meier

In the mid-1980s, I discovered the soon-to-be-Coalition of Essential Schools as I was contemplating starting a secondary school in East Harlem, a follow-up to our successful little network of progressive-minded elementary schools: Central Park East, Central Park East II, and River East.

Through a series of lucky connections, we got Ted Sizer interested in our new venture, and thus was founded Central Park East Secondary School (CPSS) in the fall of 1985. Thus was also founded the (alas, now defunct) Center for Collaborative Education in New York City, a network of like-minded schools. At our height, we had about 50 small elementary and secondary school members, and we were the CES NYC affiliate center. With support from the alternative high school department and grants from a number of local foundations, we experienced a kind of spontaneous combustion; we were, we thought, a genie that could never be put back into the bottle. We were both right and wrong. Today, 20 years later, our slogans have been co-opted by the big guys – Michael Bloomberg, Joel Klein, the Gates Foundation, and so on – but our own stories and lessons too often have been forgotten. The slogans persist, in greater numbers than before we began our work, but even at their best, they too are stunted by the new paradigm, in which children are tools for beating the foreign competition.

One of the lessons of our Coalition-style elementary school work was the power of the connection between five year olds and 18 year olds, and the thread that runs through those years to produce a truly powerful educational experience. Today, in contrast, the worst aspects of the so-called “standards movement” have made almost unrecognizable what we meant in 1985 by the word standards. Alongside the dumbed-down notion of standards has come a distorted notion of intellectual rigor. Together, they

threaten what America truly needs and undermine the best of what we once were. A new K-12 drive to turn schooling into a business – with the bottom line being test scores, test scores, test scores – isn't even good for business. The new leadership of school reform, personified in NYC by Klein and Bloomberg, is driving schools to pay for results, offering financial rewards to children, teachers, and principals who improve scores (by any means necessary). Win or lose, we will pay a price.

It's not all new, of course. In the 1980s, I was attracted to the Coalition and to Ted Sizer's Horace's Compromise by the opportunity to use its good reputation to combat precisely such features of the old traditional system. Pay by results is a late 18th century idea that crops up again and again. It was back in style in the 1970s when we got our start. The wave of reform that the Coalition was part of in the 1980s was, we thought, an antidote to this. Little did I suspect that the New Wave of Reform would soon transmorph into an intensification of all that was wrong with the old ways of educating. Our little network of elementary schools in East Harlem's District 4 had managed to operate with a degree of freedom to try new things otherwise unknown in NYC. Thanks to an unusual superintendent and a distant central bureaucracy, we created three small PreK-6 schools that reinvented progressive education for public school children. Long a staple of NYC's finest and most expensive elite private schools, we offered progressive education (against everyone's advice) to the poorest of Latino and African American children. And it was so popular that between 1974 and 1985, the schools and the network grew, finally producing the natural idea of expanding into a secondary school.

The spirit of progressivism represented by Ted Sizer in his works on secondary education fit almost like a glove to our K-6 work. Of course, as the ideas appeared in the form of the Common Principles, we considered his 80:1 ratio between kids and teachers to be ludicrously too large, and the absence of much talk about the connection between family and home a missing link. We'd have paid a bit more attention to the importance of the arts and imagination in defining what it meant to use one's mind well, not to mention the role of play, hands-and-minds, and self-initiated adventures. And we'd have added a codicil about the impact of class and race on education aimed at building and nourishing a democracy. But the heart and soul behind his then-nine Common Principles fit our work and the soon-to-be-added tenth common principle dealt with the latter.

But we missed one thing, maybe an eleventh principle. Intellectual life doesn't begin at 12 or 14, but at birth. Infants' exploration of the world is essentially that of philosopher and scientist, making larger sense of

the details of their lives – the touch, smell, and feel of everything. Children are continuously reorganizing their conceptual maps of the world and trying them out over and over and over again, to our adult delight or irritation. Little ones have an extraordinary span of attention; their engagement is hard to interrupt and they take the world into their own hands, never waiting for someone else's agenda. They are, in short, indefatigable intellectuals-in-training. What's missing for many a 14 year old is not just good "reading skills" or basic arithmetic knowledge. What is worse by far, and harder to make up for, is the disengagement such youngsters have for discovering the world – not just written text, but the text of life. If that hasn't been disconnected, the make-up "remedial" tasks are hard but not insuperable; but if it has, then it is easy to see such kids as fodder for the job marketplace, trained to undertake tasks that range from routine so-called low-skill to low-judgment high-skill work (see Mike Rose's *Minds at Work* for more on these ideas). The latter sort of work, toward which teaching increasingly is being pushed, refers to work that has been pre-scripted so that skilled people can do it without exercising professional forms of judgment.

But if what we want is a nation of citizens prepared to be members of the ruling elite, "deciders" of matters of importance in their local as well as international communities, then a different kind of elementary and pre-elementary education is a must. The kind of thematic curriculum, the exploration of complex ideas, the sorting out of conflicting evidence that lies at the heart of Coalition secondary schooling starts long before and is harder and harder to "make up" for. Not impossible, and CPESS' intensity and single-mindedness had an impact on many of its students who had not attended Central Park East-style elementary school. But the ratio of adults to youngsters, and the intensity of those relationships required many sacrifices, and some were and are hard to justify. Similarly, the hours which both students and staff put into the "school" per se were greater and, over time, bound to be more expensive than anticipated. (Perhaps these contributed to the fact that CPESS is no longer a CES school.) Still I do not regret trying it, and discovering it was not a foolish dream.

I went from CPESS to Mission Hill, a K-8 school, because I remain convinced that we have regressed in our thinking about the pre-14 crowd at a great cost to what can happen after 14. And when we think about younger children we mostly think about stuffing them with "knowledge" and "standards" earlier and earlier. Like teachers of every age we tend to think the teacher before them "should have taught them x or y" so we don't have to do it. It starts early with complaints about what kids didn't learn at home to

what their fourth grade teacher forgot to teach them (when Columbus landed in America, their multiplication tables, long division or fractions).

The Coalition needs to rethink deeply the implications of its views about secondary education as they apply to younger children. We all need to be asking deeper questions about the links that are missing rather than blame them on others. We need to take seriously how much is learned when we're not looking, how much sheer delight motivates us to undertake the most frustrating and complicated learning tasks. We need to remind ourselves how crucial it is to be surrounded by those who already practice what we merely aspire to, and thus how useful it is to have eight year olds near 16 year olds, for adults to argue and discuss in the presence of the young, not to mention actually practicing their craft in all its particularities. We need to relink the world of adults to the world of childhood, in all its facets. Not just the world of adult leisure, but the world of adult craftsmanship.

The best kindergarten, I used to say, is what we want for learners of every age. To maintain the spirit of play requires a grounding in play, as well as the carrying over of its insights into the work to be done. Alas, we have increasingly taken the worst high school-classroom – in all its sterility – as the model for the modern kindergarten, and indeed as the model of good parenting, which is a chilling prospect. In *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, James C. Scott describes the dangers of a way of observing and acting on the world that encroaches into more and more spheres of human activity, with imperialistic pretensions to be able to replace our direct "seeing" with so-called "academic" rigor. Not only is this in keeping with learning "the basic skills," but it is precisely the driving force behind such skill building.

When a five year old child questions conventional wisdom, and questions why we call a rock "nonliving," or insists that a light object would fall more slowly than a heavy one, and on and on, we have a choice: to patiently celebrate and explore – over years – her approximations of knowledge or to undermine her intelligence. When we dismiss such theories it as "cute" or "wrong," we do just that. But in our drive to get higher test scores, we often feel powerless to do otherwise for fear that our own respect for the child's observations may interfere with getting the "right" answer.

The Coalition, from the start of kindergarten through the end of high school, must be a force to change this mindset and to set forth, asSizer reminded us decades ago, genuine standards of real-life quality work that can inspire all our citizens to as yet unachieved

Making Sense of The Principles: A Portfolio from Greenfield Center School

Compiled by Laura Baker

When we work on goal setting at Greenfield Center School (GCS), we have a practice of showing what the relationships, interaction, teaching practices, and evidence of learning look and sound like. Making theory more concrete helps us all to envision the work ahead.

In 2006, a group of elementary level Essential school educators developed a Statement of Values about our work. This statement, based upon the CES Common Principles, is guiding our work at GCS, and what follows is the start of a school portfolio documenting the implementation of these values. GCS teachers and their kindergarten through eighth grade students offer this evidence as a way to further the conversation of what teaching, learning, community, and life can be at CES elementary schools.

Habits of Mind and Heart

"Center Circle" is a social/emotional check-in meeting, an opportunity for a class to stop their busy work, come together, and appreciate one another for specific kindnesses they've enacted in school. Most classes do this appreciation circle about once a month, more if the class needs it and less if things are humming along. It almost always leaves everyone feeling more connected.

In Center Circle, younger students participate in a process called "Pretzels." Each student is given a small number of pretzels to distribute. One by one, publicly, students will present one of their pretzels to a classmate as thanks for a specific action. For example, "Thank you for lending me your pencils when I couldn't find mine." In the middle grades students do Center Circle without pretzels. Added to this ritual is the option to apologize. Students will either "thank" or "sorry" someone. They stand up, walk across the circle and



shake or "sorry" someone's hand. (To "sorry" a hand, you shake it using both hands, making a hand sandwich.) Then the student sits back down. The chosen person raises her hand and says, "Jake, why did you shake my hand?" and Jake asks, "I wanted to thank you for sticking up for me in soccer." In the case of a sorry, the chosen one will say "Mo, why did you sorry me?" and the response might be, "I sorried you because I'm sorry that I cut in front of you in line."

Perspective, empathy, and a greater understanding of the experience of others integrate the experiences of the head and the heart. After a simulation in which fifth and sixth grade students were slaves running away in the woods with masters (parents and older students) chasing them, Peter wrote in his journal:

Most people don't know this, but rain has a smell. Not the rain you get in the spring that helps plants grow, but the rain that comes with despair; the miserable rain, the fear rain. The smell is not large and most will never know it, but it's there. We all learned that smell in the days of the storm, because in that forest, most of all, was the smell of your despair coming down on you in the rain; it was strong.

The rules and expectations of Center Circles must be talked about in advance. Students can articulate the potential pitfalls of the process and the class can problem-solve these before they get started. For example, it is specifically prohibited to make comments that will end up excluding others. Having children take note of daily acts of courage, kindness, and altruism is not only an important observational skill, but also a key modeling technique.

Center Circle allowed Anna to empathize with Sally and begin to mend their relationship. It offered a place for Anna to publicly apologize to Sally for not being a good friend. The two had been "best friends" the year before and Anna had connected strongly with a new student that year. Another Center Circle included Joshua, a fifth grade student who stood out as much younger-acting than most in the class. Joshua played games that others had left years ago. He had a challenging time sitting still and focusing on what the class was doing. He often made silly comments. At the beginning of the year, many students did not know how to respond to him or what to think about him. However, his light, funny, and kind-hearted presence was noticed at Center Circle. Many students thanked him for making them laugh. He glowed with the acknowledgement and grew to be a leader the next year.

Less Is More; Depth over Coverage

As the seventh and eighth graders approached the study to *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, they focused on this Essential Question: Where does our sense of identity come from? Their month-long study led them to assess, compare and contrast community, family, ethnicity, ancestry, gender, and class. There was constant debate about the degree to which we can shape our identity.

Students read each of Cisneros' vignettes closely, focusing not only on content but on figurative language, which they then demonstrated in creative writing pieces. Students took time to know and empathize with the characters. The culminating project was a personal memoir essay accompanying a visual identity art piece, which showed the students' own identities.

Knowing Children Well

One snowy winter morning the K-1 Primes class assembled in morning meeting. As we greeted each other around the circle, several children engaged in a side conversation. "My cat was stuck outside last night," one of them was reporting. By the time the greeting time ended, it was quite apparent that they all had opinions about how pets could keep warm on a cold winter night. Here was a shared topic that was

The "Statement of Values" evolved from work done at a gathering in October of 2006 at Greenfield Center School entitled, "Raising Our Voices." This group of 25 educators came together to advocate for Progressive Elementary Education. As a way of defining what we meant, the statement emerged. The "Statement of Values" has been clarified over the year through conversation and reflection upon the CES Principles adapted for elementary schools.

Preamble: Central to the education of the public is the preparation of all youth in the skills, knowledge, and habits of heart and mind essential to sustaining and expanding a democratic, just, and equitable society.

1. Habits of mind and heart

The school's focus is on helping young people use their minds well; the school fosters critical thinking and socially engaged intelligence.

2. Less is more; depth over coverage

Studies include essential understandings and skills and integrate arts, character, and environmental stewardship.

3. Knowing children well

Curricular and pedagogical decisions are based upon student interest, and offer many opportunities to discover and construct meaning from their own experiences. Teachers guide learning.

4. Keeping decisions local

Decisions are centered as much as possible in the community that lives with those decisions; choice of materials and pedagogy rest in the hands of the principal and staff

5. Construction of meaning; active engagement

Schooling is connected to the real world through authentic projects and audiences.

6. Assessment using multiple formats

Assessments from many perspectives include performance of real tasks, projects, portfolios, and self and peer critique.

7. Tone of decency and trust

Families are vital members of the school community.

8. Generalists with a commitment to the community

Educators are generalists first who expect multiple obligations and a sense of commitment to the entire school.

9. Resources dedicated to teaching and learning

Budgets reflect the values of the school and the voice of the people affected by the decisions.

10. Schools practice/model democracy and equity

The school is a small, caring community in which all members are known, respected, and valued, and in which differences based on class, race, language and disabilities are honored. Forms of inequity are challenged.

Postscript: There is an understanding that strong progressive education will look very different in varied settings, in viewpoint and in specific school and classroom structures; the progressive approach is seen as continuous reflection and reassessment of practice rather than adherence to orthodoxy.

Continued on next page

engaging, personal, and real to our children. Over the next few days, teachers provided time to share stories about pets. This led to students' concerns about the fate of wild animals in the woods.

After reading aloud *The Night Tree* by Eve Bunting, the class realized they could create their own special place out in the forest to help provide food for animals. This project soon opened out in multiple directions. Children were studying animals in literature group, making trips out to the woods to make and revisit our own night tree to see what animals would eat. They recorded results in nature journals.

Our students represented their observations from field walks, readings and group discussions by building "habitat" boxes. Based on their research they wrote and drew plans for what these boxes would look like. They also made lists of materials they would need. They assessed their work for accuracy and reflected each day.

Based at Greenfield Center School, New England Coalition of Progressive Elementary Educators, PreK-K-8 (NECPPE) is a newly founded CES affiliate focused on the development of elementary schools within the CES network. For more on NECPPE, visit www.center-school.net/necpe/raisingourvoiceshome.html.

Construction of Meaning: Active Engagement

In the fall of 2006, the fifth and sixth grade "Upper Middles" engaged in a thematic unit of ecology. Included in this unit of study were projects and opportunities for students to engage in "real world" learning. Working in collaboration with two local organizations, Northeast Sustainable Energy Association (NESEA) and the Greenfield Energy Committee, our class set out to survey the residents of Greenfield about local energy issues. Clipboards, surveys, and pencils in hand, all 20 students and five parents hit the streets of downtown Greenfield to ask passersby their opinions about issues such as recycling and composting, insulation, renewable energy, and alternative fuels. After collecting data from 350 people of varying ages and economic classes, students organized, tallied, analyzed, and graphed the data. Finally, they reported their findings to the Greenfield Energy Committee at its monthly meeting, provided information to NESEA, and met with the mayor to discuss their discoveries and ask questions about town initiatives and plans for meeting the town of Greenfield's energy needs. This process assisted students in discov-

ering the importance of various ecological issues, introduced them to a wide variety of opinions, and taught them the power of democratic inquiry in affecting local politics.

Assessment Using Multiple Formats

Deb, a sixth grade student, spent time this year learning fractions, measurement, and geometry in math. When it came time to select a project for math fair that showed her understanding of these topics, she chose to build a bird house. Since Deb had shown her competency on paper, and had used manipulatives to demonstrate her knowledge, she thought this was simply going to be a fun thing to do, an opportunity to use tools, and a way to help the birds in her neighborhood.

The project, guided by her teacher and supported by her parents, offered much more - in particular, a venue for using math strategies and skills. Deb planned the project, defended her plan, and then had to translate the plan into three-dimensional thinking. The final project included the birdhouse, a painted background of the future location of the house illustrating her understanding of the environment, and an explanation of this project as stewardship. She had a step-by-step explanation of the construction of the birdhouse, and the ways in which she had to revise the task. Finally, she was required to explain this work to an audience in a way that showed her knowledge of fractions, measurement, and geometry. She used mathematical vocabulary, such as circumference, when talking about the need for exact measurements for particular birds. Deb chose this piece of work to place in the school museum.

Tone of Decency and Trust

Homework is often a stress on family life. Since we know this to be true, we think aloud with parents about the purpose of homework, and the ways in which the teachers support the students and their families' in this endeavor. At the parent-student-teacher conferences we hold before the year begins, we set the amount of time that students should not exceed for homework, and also empower parents to tell students to stop doing work that is stressing them. Parents or students are asked to call teachers at home or at school the next day to figure out what needs to be done. In many cases, a conversation with parents and students and teachers is arranged to negotiate a plan with the student.

This year Alice was having trouble writing her journal. She was melting down at home. Mom called for help. Mom, teachers, and Alice sat down and brainstormed options to help Alice complete more of the assignment and to get "unstuck." It was important to ask for ideas from Mom in front of Alice and

also in conversations previous to this meeting. Some ideas included Alice calling the teacher for help, talking through the ideas before beginning to write, taking breaks to exercise, and setting time limits. Additionally, we got an Upper (a seventh/eighth grader) to have “working lunches” with her several times a week to help Alice flesh out her ideas and get them written down. There were continual check-ins with Mom and Alice about progress.

Generalists with a Commitment to the Community
Teaching the whole child means that teachers take on many roles. In the Middles classroom, third and fourth graders recognized the transitions that happen when students leave the school. “Magic Penny” ceremonies help students say good-bye. Students gather in a circle prepared to share a memory or appreciation of the student who is leaving. This student is seated on a stool so that he/she is higher than the others.

Students experience this circle sharing differently. John was so moved by the process that he chose to repeat the process by interacting individually with each person in the circle. Another student, Jenny, sat through the entire circle and simply said, “Thank you.” It always concludes with the song, “Magic Penny.” The structure acknowledges the difficulties of leaving and the possibility of losing friends.

Resources Dedicated to Teaching and Learning

As in many schools, the GCS budget is sparse. Ninety percent of the budget goes to salaries. There are two teachers in each classroom and a Special Abilities teacher for every two classes. The teachers receive an allocation for spending in their classrooms that is approximately one hundred dollars per student. There are few other things in the budget. Since the Board of Directors has six staff members on it, there is good communication, support, and advocacy for teaching and learning.

Schools Practice and Model Democracy and Equity

Soccer is taught throughout the school with “social” goals in mind. Regardless of the experience they bring, all students set soccer goals and all work on something. Each person learns the different positions in the game, and, regardless of skill, gets a turn at each position. The use of a soccer wheel ensures this equitable distribution of roles. The soccer wheel has all positions on the outside and the names of students on the inside. Turning the inner wheel changes the positions played by the students. The teacher uses the wheel to assign the positions, turning it one place each day. At times, more skilled players are asked to coach novice players. The number of passes and number of people the ball must be passed to are often set before a game is played. Sometimes students have constructed the

rule that no one can score until every team member has touched the ball. It is explicit at GCS that soccer is about teamwork and should be fun, and respectful of experience, age, and skill diversity.

After the practice or game, we leave ample time to

Related Resource

For more on the values and practice of Greenfield Center School, please see “Representing: Elementary to the Exhibitions of Learning” by Laura Baker in *Horace* Volume 23, Number 1, Winter, 2007. This issue, along with the complete *Horace* archive, is online at www.essentialschools.org/horace.

debrief with the players. This is a time for players to notice what went well, who has improved, to thank people who helped them, and to notice any other positive events. It can also be a time to note what we need to work on. There is a lot of time and practice allowed to help students learn how to speak in constructive ways during this time. In addition, we teach and practice the “soccer talk” during the game and from the bench. We brainstorm ways to talk while a game is in play, how to be encouraging, how to coach, and how to control both our excitement over wins and good plays and our disappointments. Role playing these occurrences is very important.

Building the Portfolio

Offered as insight into CES values in practice in one elementary school, these snapshots provide a beginning for the documentation of this practice for Greenfield Center School. As we continue to define what the principles look like and sound like in our school, artifacts and stories from all our schools across the CES network will add meaning, clarity, inspiration, and dimension.

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