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Wellness and the Mind-Body Connection

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CESPublications 



What Does Healthy Really Mean?

by Leroy Silva, Arlyn John,
and Emily Beenen

Wellness is written into the very bones of The Native American Community Academy (NACA). The school's triumvirate mission includes integrated curriculum, cultural/language context, and a wellness philosophy. This philosophy encompasses a holistic approach to each student and considers his or her intellectual, physical, social, emotional, and community relationship wellness.

In the beginning stages of the development of NACA, principal and founder Kara Bobroff researched possible causes of the lack of educational success with urban Native youth. She noticed that the reasons were health-related, involving factors such as alcoholism, nutrition, and high rates of suicide, and to deal with this, she formed an advisory committee comprised of educators, mental health professionals, healthcare providers, and Native American traditional practitioners. This team of professionals sought answers to this question: what is impacting Native youth? "What I thought was going to happen was we were going to come up with a scope and sequence prevention curriculum," principal Bobroff remarked. "What really happened was a two-day discussion about identity and how it impacted overall wellness. At that point, it wasn't really about a curriculum to prevent diabetes or alcoholism; it was more about looking at the overall person and aspects of who they are." From there, a wellness philosophy was conceived. It was less about specific content and more about getting at what it means to be healthy, and that had to be present in every part of what was to be done at the school.

The wellness philosophy was developed using the medicine wheel, the values of which are present in many indigenous communities. Though the medicine wheel has different significance to different tribes, the common idea is the wellness of the individual considers the intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and social health of individuals and their relationship to all of life. From this medicine wheel, NACA developed a



wellness wheel with similar values, and an approach to the development of wellness. There is a baseline holistic understanding that all components of the wellness wheel are connected and interreliant. For example, if the community the students live in does not have access to healthy food, this not only affects their physical health, but is connected to academic performance as well. The goal is to have each student understand not just who they are, but why they behave as they do. Therefore, there is not necessarily a prescriptive "intellectual wellness" program, because there is a constant flux and regaining balance for each individual student. Depending on what each student is experiencing, a holistic approach might at one point focus

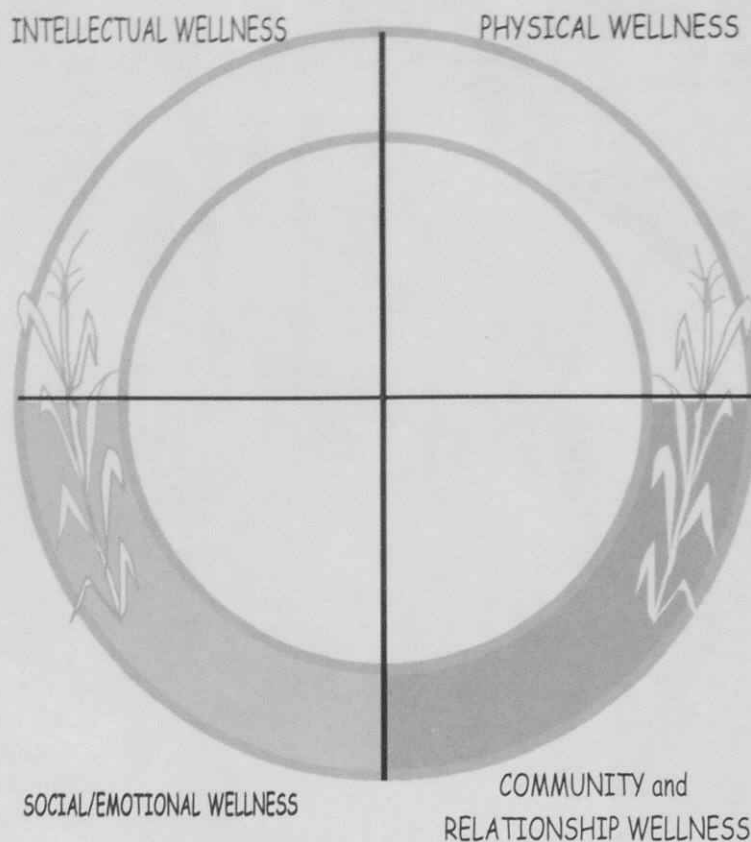
NACA is a charter school that began in August 2006 with sixth and seventh grades, adding a class each year through twelfth grade. About 95 percent of NACA's students have Native American heritage. NACA is the first urban Native school in Albuquerque, a much-needed addition; 75 percent of Natives in New Mexico now live in the city rather than on the reservation. In order to maintain classes of 12 to 18 students, each grade has no more than 60 students, taught by 17 faculty members.

on intellectual guidance, and at others on physical recommendations, teachers might choose to have students run sprints to calm them down, or to get more blood and oxygen to the brain.

What does this wellness wheel and philosophy look like at NACA? It begins on Monday morning when all students gather for morning circle. The purpose of the morning circle is to bring in the new week with good thoughts, good words, and a good song. One of the challenges is that our urban Native students have a fragmented and undeveloped understanding of the wellness wheel. So some mornings, the circle is fragmented and students disrespect the purpose of the circle. This is indicative of a larger challenge that the whole school faces: to create common behavioral expectations that are framed from an indigenous perspective. Because we are people from various cultural backgrounds, even within a homogeneous Native community, indigenous means different things to different people. Food is one example of how this indigenous perspective can be interpreted differently. Philosophically, we all agree that government commodity foods such as sugar, white flour, and lard have been detrimental to the physical health of Native people. However, frybread and pop can be found at almost every Native Feast Day, Pow-wow, and community gathering here in the Southwest. If our goal is to support holistic wellness here at NACA, then why do we allow pop on campus? Or frybread at community events? Some teachers are adamant about not allowing any unhealthy foods or drinks in their classroom because this is their interpretation of how the indigenous perspective gets translated, while others make different choices based on their own interpretations.

The students move from the morning circle to their classes. Some go to Mr. Silva's Personal Wellness class, a combination of physical education and health, where the focus today is on diabetes prevention. Mr. Silva believes healthy bodies create a healthy community and environment. Through good nutrition and adequate physical activity, students can be more productive in their academic and outside communities. In Mr. Silva's class, the personal wellness curriculum poses questions to problems prevalent to Native communities. For example the question asked is not "Does diabetes affect anyone in your family," but

Native American Community Academy Wellness Wheel



NACA students use this Wellness Wheel to create their annual Personal Learning Plans. Within this format, they record their personal mission, responding to the question, "What motivates me to come to school and learn?" Students record their goals for intellectual, physical, social/emotional, and community and relationship wellness, and use those goals to guide their learning each year and throughout their time at NACA.

"Who in your family is affected by diabetes," with the underlying assumption that everyone is somehow affected by this disease. "I want the students to recognize the problems in their community, and how those problems affect them," Silva explains. "In return, they will develop the tools to find solutions." Fifty years ago, diabetes was virtually nonexistent in Indian populations. Now, students are being told that they are at a much higher risk and are genetically predisposed to the disease. It is imperative, then, for this generation of students to begin to think of solutions because of the drastic health impacts of generations of systemic racism.

Across campus, in Mr. John's Personal Wellness class, some students are doing yoga, also as part of a diabetes prevention curriculum. Mr. John's approach is from the inside out. Studies have shown that stresses exacerbated by institutionalized racism are correlated to the increasing rates of diabetes. Yoga is proven

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to lower serotonin levels, which are responsible for telling the body to store fat. Any time serotonin levels increase, people are more inclined to eat and store fat. Most Indian families in the urban community have little or no access to healthy foods, so not only are they highly stressed, but they are eating high-sugar, high-fat foods and increasing their chances of becoming diabetic. In addition to teaching them to control their own serotonin levels, yoga also reduces stress. It's also a basic form of strength training. In Mr. John's personal wellness class, curriculum focuses on the development of critical thinking skills, group skills, physical strength training, outdoor education skills, and yoga.

Native American Community Academy Mission

NACA students will grow from adolescence to adulthood while successfully completing a college preparatory curriculum, learning the importance of overall wellness and healthy life practices. NACA students will learn through diverse cultures and engage in community projects. NACA students will have access to community mentors involved in a variety of careers and cultures found in New Mexico.

In the pink portable classroom marked "Wild Mind," Ms. Emily's eighth grade students are finishing reading the last scene of *Romeo and Juliet*. The tragedy culminates in Romeo's suicide over the supposed loss of his young wife, Juliet. "We have to spend an extensive amount of time talking about why this is a REALLY BAD IDEA, because statistics indicate the highest rates of suicide occur in Native youth, particularly young men, and specifically because of failed relationships," says Ms. Emily. Discussion includes how Romeo came to this decision, how this "fatal flaw" of the protagonist could have been avoided, how his family and friends tried to support and dissuade him. We talk about friends they know who emotionally overact like Romeo, and ways in which to support them. This is one way in which social/emotional wellness is written into the curriculum outside of a traditional classroom. Additionally, NACA's primary focus is to ensure that all of its students are college ready. Developed in collaboration with a freshman composition professor at the University of New Mexico, the focus of the eighth grade language arts curriculum is developing critical thinking skills and writing workshops in groups. Students also use individual writing time as a tool to process difficult life situations and feel through

intense emotions. Students run and exercise during this language arts class as another way to sharpening critical thinking, decision making, and great writing skills.

In the afternoon, seventh grade science and language arts are co-taught by Mr. John, Ms. Emily, and Ms. Salazar. It is spring, and at NACA, that means the garden project is in full swing. The seventh graders have just finished digging seven 4-by-16 foot garden beds in the tenacious, clay-based New Mexico soil. Gardening is intricately woven into the everyday culture of many Native communities, and this project provides a wonderful opportunity for students to reconnect with that aspect of their culture. They will plant a three sisters garden (corn, beans, and squash) in Hopi waffle garden style. The three sisters has been a sustainable way of gardening in indigenous communities for hundreds of years. The nitrogen-needing corn provides a stalk for the nitrogen-providing beans to twine around and the broad-leafed squash provides shade, and therefore minimal water evaporation, in the high desert climate. Though a few initially joke about child labor laws, most love the hard work and most importantly, getting to be outside.

NACA challenges teachers to develop curriculum that is consistent with the wellness wheel. There is a specific urgency that is felt in the rising statistics about diabetes and obesity, alcoholism and suicide, as well as the decrease in Native languages being spoken. Creating appropriate curriculum to address these issues and work with the strengths of the community is more than a nod to the status quo or standards and benchmarks, it is a factor upon which the quality of students' lives depends.

Arlyn John is currently the Experiential Educator at the Native American Community Academy. Arlyn is responsible for coordinating and planning outdoor educational trips for the students at NACA. Arlyn is also co-teaching a science and language arts class. Arlyn John has been in the field of outdoor education for four years.

Emily Beenen has taught Language Arts (and co-taught Science) at The Native American Community Academy for two years. She's also been a freelance writer in Albuquerque for the past five years and helped to facilitate CES' first Wellness Workshops at the Fall Forum in Denver.

Leroy "Buster" Silva is the Personal Wellness Teacher at the Native American Community Academy. Silva also reaches out to Native communities in New Mexico, spreading the message of health and fitness to youth, adults, and elders.

Health and Environmental Justice Influence New School Design

Horace Interviews the Founders of Bayview Essential School of Music, Art, and Social Justice

In August 2008, the Bayview Essential School for Music, Art and Social Justice (BES) will open in San Francisco as a public high school. BES will be the first high school to open in the city's Bayview Hunters Point (BVHP) neighborhood in nearly 30 years. BVHP, a traditionally African-American Neighborhood located in an industrialized area adjacent to San Francisco Bay in the southeastern part of the city, is a community with few material resources; it is struggling with the toxic results of now-defunct manufacturing, shipyards, and public utilities. Historically underserved by San Francisco's municipal services, BVHP residents are also now coping with recent interest and investment in its real estate from the city, developers, institutions, and other outside forces.

As part of the Small Schools Project, the Coalition of Essential Schools has been working with BVHP community members for more than two years to get this school opened. BES will start with 80 ninth and tenth grade students and will add a grade each year until it reaches its capacity as a high school serving grades nine through 12. The school was granted approval to be a small, community public school operating under the new Small Schools by Design policy, which grants small schools more autonomy over their instructional program, the hiring of staff, and use of resources. The school's mission is to engage, educate, and empower Bayview youth to transform their lives while positively contributing to the improvement of their community.

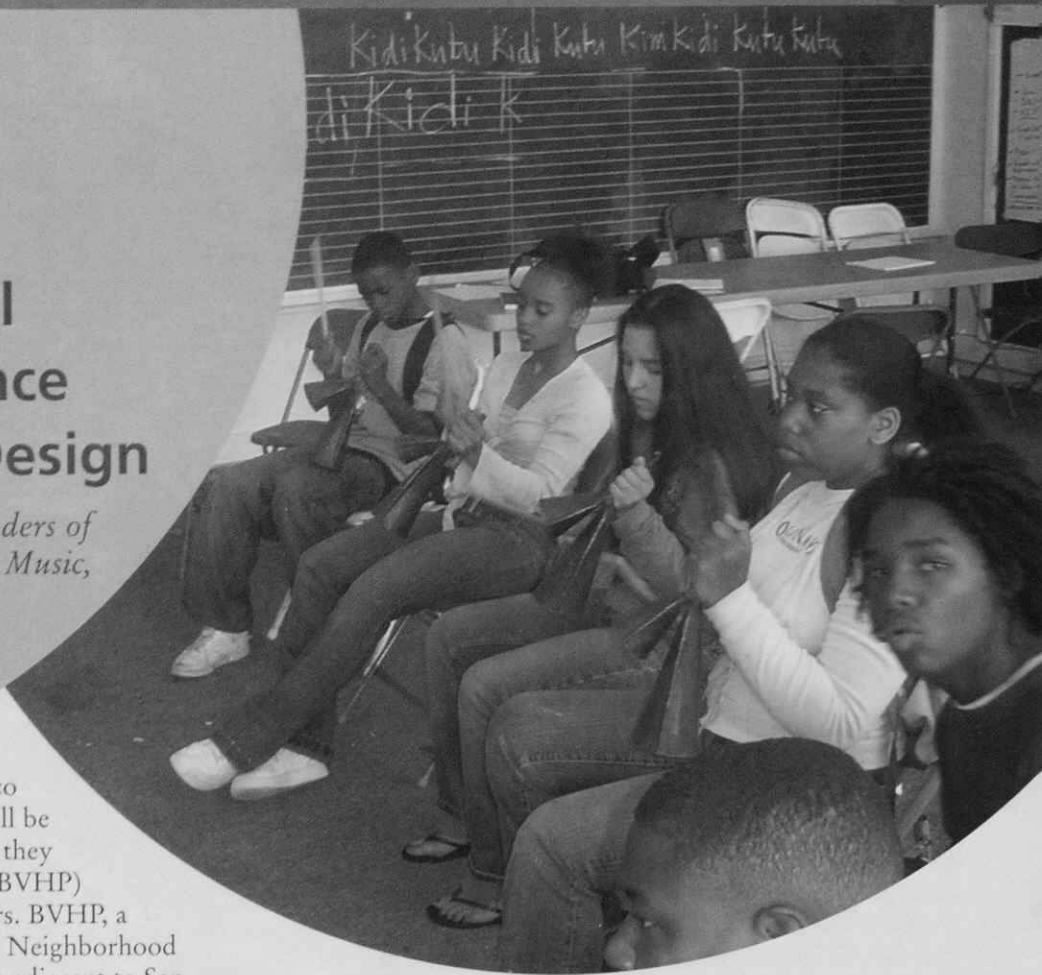
The school will focus on the digital arts—recording arts, digital filmmaking and graphic arts—scholarship, and social justice to engage students and get them excited about learning, leadership and civic engagement. BES aims to empower youth to use their knowledge,

creativity, and skills to become the next generation of BVHP scholars, artists, and community leaders. BES founders and CES staffers Mara Benitez and David Siegfried talked with Horace about the ways that environmental justice is being incorporated into BES's mission and curriculum. Siegfried is the 2008 Teacher in Residence at CES; much of his time is spent facilitating the work of the BES design team. Benitez is one of the founders of BES and CES's Senior Director of School Development. Francisco Gutierrez, not present for this interview, is the BES Design Team Leader and CES Lab School Coordinator.

Horace: Where in Bayview-Hunters Point is BES located?

David Siegfried: We're on the Gloria R. Davis school site, with a 360-degree view of power plants and the rest of the city. It's exciting—the building is new, and the interior of the classrooms are nice. Our main focus right now is enrollment, because BES didn't get approved until when high school students had made their first selection of where they want to go to school. School enrollment is a chaotic process in San Francisco; we know that we are going to have kids who didn't choose any other school. Until we have a reputation, that's who we will get, and that is fine—we welcome all kids. But there's an inherent challenge

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More about the Bayview Essential School for Music, Art and Social Justice

"Our mission is to engage, educate, and empower Bayview youth to transform their lives while positively contributing to the betterment of their community. Our students will become independent thinkers, problem-solvers, and self-directed learners. Our school community will model the values of dedication, care, creativity, and interdependence that will help to shape our students into successful lifelong learners."

For more about BES, visit www.myspace.com/bayviewschool, where you can hear music produced during the Sound of Truth summer program, read BES's blog, and follow its progress.

to finding kids. Because San Francisco's school policies encourage students to choose where they want to go anywhere in the city, there's a stigma attached to staying in your neighborhood; it's as if you had no other choices, and since it's been so long since there were any choices in Bayview-Hunters Point, many kids are already placed elsewhere. Yet we want, and really expect that over time we will get, students from this neighborhood, since the neighborhood is going to generate so much of what they study.

Horace: Describe the origins of BES.

Mara Benitez: We were approached by representatives from the neighborhood with the idea of CES collaborating in the creation of a school in Bayview-Hunters Point. So we didn't select the school as a design team—it's more like the school came to us. And the issue of dealing with the neighborhood's legacy of environmental degradation and racist environmental policies was built into the school by neighborhood activists who went into the community and talked with lots of people about what was on their minds, and how a new school could help a new generation remake their world.

Siegfried: The issues of environmental justice and health loom large for everyone who is committed to Bayview-Hunters Point. There's more asthma and diabetes there than in any other zip code in the state of California. The murder rate, compared both within San Francisco and statewide, is outrageous. The community is dealing with the closed PG & E [Pacific Gas and Electric] plant, abandoned shipyards and industry sites that have created huge areas of waste and toxicity, and two-thirds of the community lives in poverty.

Benitez: When this proposal was put on the table,

we believed that Bayview-Hunters Point was a place we should be investing in, and we knew that the school should address health, wellness, and environmental justice. We took our first steps to get the school started in 2006. We interviewed youth and other community members and, based on their ideas and concerns, designed the Sound of Truth summer program. We taught 25 kids to use action research: they interviewed 20 leaders in the community that were working on social change issues, environmental justice, mediation circles with women, and related issues of health and wellness, such as the role of an organic garden and farmers' market in this neighborhood that lacked even basic services such as accessible grocery stores. Within the Sound of Truth program, young people decided on four strands of curriculum that the school should address: health and wellness, environmental justice, violence prevention, and economic and community development.

Siegfried: You have to know that Bayview-Hunters Point's young people and families were facing these issues in the context of a huge city-driven plan to create a new community essentially on top of their neighborhood. Folks felt pressed by urban removal and a quick gentrification that was creating a Black exodus out of Bayview. There have been so few resources in the neighborhood: no restaurants, grocery stores—nothing in the neighborhood that helps sustain healthy community. Most of the low-income housing has never been cleaned up. People are living with mold and fungi, which are leading causes of asthma. The asthma rate is double that of any neighborhood in San Francisco, and it's the same with diabetes. In 1989, the Hunters Point shipyard was named one of the nation's worst toxic sites, and parts are still unusable due to toxic and radioactive waste and neglect. Twenty-one percent of Bayview's 33,000 people live under the poverty line, and many more are coping with barely livable or unlivable poverty. There is lots of discussion and organization in the community around working together to take on problems. We're supporting the neighborhood as it creates BES as an institution that will address health issues and prepare young people to be advocates, agents for change, and residents with roots and a stake in the neighborhood's renewal.

Horace: How does founding a new small high school help address this really terrible legacy of environmental and economic inequity?

Benitez: Schools have a great effect on the lives of young people and their communities—that is, they can, but they don't always. Part of what we needed to do—part of what any new school founders need to do—was to learn about the community where we planned to build the school. The need for a school

More about Bayview-Hunters Point

If you would like to learn more about the Bayview-Hunters Point neighborhood, please visit "Profile: Bayview-Hunters Point," an extensive web-based multimedia profile assembled by the University of California, Berkeley School of Journalism that includes "An Industry's Legacy of Pollution," an audio and pictorial slideshow detailing various industries' environmental destruction, neighborhood cleanup efforts, and health effects. The profile is available online at <http://journalism.berkeley.edu/ngno/reports/bayview/>.

in Bayview-Hunters Point was related to us via the CES Small Schools Project application process, and we responded by doing more research about where the school would go, connecting with more people, and creating a process for them to shape the curriculum and intention of the school. And, of course, we learned that there are a lot of layers: major unemployment, a gang injunction in the form of a curfew, and all of the environmental disaster. And through this, there was the threat that what happened to the Fillmore district—a flight of the Black working class—could happen to Bayview. Our job is to figure out who the school can join in conversation and in the process of engaging in renewal to help young people and their families to deal with the issue. Through the Sound of Truth summer program, we met with community groups and policymakers, and we could say, "Here is what young people have learned through their research." A year of town halls and focus groups in the community shaped what the curriculum should look like and what the graduation requirements should be. Having this level of autonomy through the Small Schools by Design policy helped us infuse health and wellness in every aspect of the school.

Siegfried: It's one thing to talk to students about diabetes abstractly, and it's another to find ways to understand how diabetes and hypertension might affect their own behavior and ability to participate in certain ways. Health and wellness is another lens to look at racism and history, and wellness is immediately interconnected with the learning that will take place. Our approach is that it's not an added course—it's infused in science, social studies, and community projects.

Benitez: We want to contribute to this conversation and to the effort by growing this new school that is positioned to teach relevant skills and knowledge to students so that they see themselves as social scientists, testing water and air, asking questions about

how poverty affects family situations and looking at choices that young people are making. And they will need to work together and work across differences. The demographics have changed in this community; it is no longer all African American, and we want to equip young people with the tools they need to befriend people who are outside their immediate circle, and train young people to implement their skills within their community. Bayview-Hunters Point is a lab for the school, an extension of the school.

Horace: How will BES become a part of the ongoing activism within the Bayview-Hunters Point community?

Benitez: We are partnering with Literacy for Environmental Justice, an organization that is helping the community to envision what it could look like now that the PG&E plant is gone and renovation is taking place. That's just one example of the kind of organization the school is and will be partnering with. We are not trying to solve problems by ourselves; instead, we're using an assets-based community model to build on existing strengths, especially those that include or would benefit from young people's perspectives. Young people will raise real-life issues that the community is struggling with in real time. By learning to be critical thinkers and problem solvers, they will be able to play roles in the community's development. This creates a strong context to develop curriculum; it frees you from what you think should be in the canon of the high school curriculum and lets you focus on skills required by students who see themselves as capable of taking on the challenges of their neighborhood.

Siegfried: By asking students, "What are you going to do about it?" our hope and intention is to give them a clearer understanding of how to be a scientist and a critical thinker. There hasn't been a school in the community for kids to go to for years, so they have been traveling far, and can't get involved. Thirty-three thousand people and no school? While it may make it difficult to attract kids at first, it's a great opportunity to create a school that's an asset that the community will be proud of.

Literacy for Environmental Justice

BES partner Literacy for Environmental Justice (LEJ) is an urban environmental education and youth empowerment organization created specifically to address the unique ecological and social concerns of Bayview-Hunters Point and surrounding neighborhoods. LEJ's website features extensive information about health threats in the community as well as educationally-driven solutions. Visit www.lejyouth.org.

Infusing Curriculum And School Structure With Mind-Body Wellness

by Jennifer Morine

Eagle Rock School's fundamental philosophy is "eight plus five equals 10," our school value system that we use to inform all community and school decisions. The equation represents our eight themes, five expectations, and 10 commitments. One of the eight themes is physical fitness, and one of the 10 commitments is "Develop Mind, Body, and Spirit." While we incorporate opportunities for our students to do this outside of class time through exercise, recreation, and healthy eating, we have been working to diversify our perspectives on wellness and to incorporate wellness into our academic curriculum more effectively.

We use Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe's *Understanding by Design* approach to work on our class designs. We value integrated curriculum, and work to create classes that are centralized on concepts that are transferable across time, space, and subject area. This concept-based curriculum allows us to integrate different academic subjects in areas where there is commonality and/or the ability to look at the same topic through different perspectives. Using a backwards-planning design allows us to isolate the enduring understandings with which we want students to walk away from the class, and develop essential questions that capture our students' attention and interests in a variety of ways. Bringing the concept of wellness into a variety of classes has helped our students gain a better understanding of how their wellness affects their own health and the world around them. A major learning experience for many of our students has revolved around the realization that their physical well-being greatly affects their academic learning, both in the moment and in the long term.

In our societies, we often fall into the mindset that we exercise to keep our bodies healthy, and we study to keep our minds strong. At Eagle Rock, we are trying to challenge that idea and get our students to



think about how their mind and body are related. For example, in Eagle Rock's "Exercise Around the World" class, students examine approaches to health and wellness around the world, while simultaneously learning about the science of their brains. Students work to uncover how their activity levels and the food they put into their bodies affect their brains, their energy levels, the neurotransmitters released at various times, and how their bodies individually react to different stimuli. By keeping a food and activity journal over 10 weeks, students begin to look for connections between what they eat and do, and how

CES Mentor School Eagle Rock is a year-round, residential, and full-scholarship school that enrolls 96 young people from 15 to 17 years of age from around the United States in an innovative learning program with national recognition. Located in Estes Park, Colorado, Eagle Rock is also a professional development center focused on national school renewal and reform initiatives, and a CES Affiliate Center.

they feel throughout a day and week. Patterns in emotions and health begin to correspond with their scientific research on how and why their brain and body are reacting. Creating time for students to experiment with yoga, meditation, belly dancing, fencing, and tai chi allows them to reflect on the similarities and differences in the ways activities from around the world affect them in contrast to their normal weight lifting routine or basketball game. Studying nutritional concepts and then comparing food pyramids from various areas of the world allows them to comprehend our North American eating habits, and really question how what they eat affects their mood, energy, learning, and daily life. This class is a very explicit way that Eagle Rock attempts to help students develop their mind, body and spirit, and look at the mind-body connection in their learning.

There are also many other approaches we use to incorporate the mind-body connection for our students outside of health and science classes. Teachers across the curriculum have been very open to experimenting with more active classes. We have worked with our math and science teachers to offer a class called "The Physics of Mountain Biking," in which students explore the physics of motion and the conservation of energy through biking. While we do not explicitly teach about the mind-body connection in their learning, it is incredible to see their increased engagement in a subject area that previously intimidated them. Saul Flores, a senior student who has taken the class and is now planning to help teach the class this summer, states that he likes the way he "gets to see the content in a different way, and really get to see how gears and ratios really work in real life, not like in a book." Chase Orton, a math instructor who initially created the course at Eagle Rock, wanted to get students excited about physics in a way that applied to their daily lives and interests, and felt that when he could get them up and moving physically, their minds were much more engaged. Saul likes that he gets up in the morning and is moving; when he's active, he feels like he's able to think more clearly and be more engaged in class. Robert Miranda, another student who has taken the class, likes to take what he has learned and "put it to the test" when he gets out on his bike.

In education, if we truly value different learning styles and want to embrace our kinesthetic learners, it's incredibly important for us to create learning opportunities where students can touch, feel, and experience the learning that is being discussed. In Wiggins and McTighe's work, we are reminded that helping students truly understand includes increasing their ability to use and demonstrate the new knowledge in context. "To understand a topic or subject is to use knowledge and skill in sophisticated, flexible ways,"

they write. I believe that as educators, it is our responsibility to create a variety of learning experiences in which our students have the opportunity to learn through both their mind and body the concepts we are seeking to understand.

H. Lynn Erickson is an independent consultant with extensive experience in curriculum design and implementation. Her focus on concept-based curriculum helps schools take a deeper look at what is really important for students to be learning and how teachers can help prepare them to solve problems in today's complex world.

Recommended by H. Lynn Erickson:
Concept-Based Curriculum and Instruction, 2002,
Corwin Press

Stirring the Head, Heart, and Soul, 3rd edition, 2007,
Corwin Press

A major lesson for our instructional staff has been the necessity to look deeply at the connections we create in our mind-body learning experiences. Even though we value kinesthetic experiences, it is important that there are intentionality and real connections in what we do, and we want to push this deeper than we have before. Guided by the work of H. Lynn Erickson, we have been striving to take our curriculum beyond the traditional idea of experiential education and really dive deeper into integrating our curriculum through core concepts. An example of this curricular progress can be seen in an Eagle Rock class called "Colorado Rocks," which integrates geology and the study of landscapes with rock climbing and personal growth for students. Seven years ago, there was a similar place-based education class here called "Rock'n'Road," which used the desert climbing setting as a central environment to study the geology of the rock, the ecology of the rivers, related math topics, and literature about the environment. These topics all related to the climbing environment, and used rock climbing as a physical activity that gave a central draw to why students were there, and got them actively involved in that environment. For reasons already mentioned, this class still had great student engagement and success. When a new instructional team took on the curriculum around the time Eagle Rock was beginning to work with Erickson's ideas, the team really wanted to push the integration of mind and body learning to a deeper level. Rather

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than simply having a central topic to look at, the new curriculum now uses the lens of “change over time” as the core concept that ties together everything the students are doing.

Through this conceptual lens, students are truly engaging their minds and their bodies as they study both the change in the external landscapes (geology, environmental issues) as well as their internal landscapes (personal growth and self-awareness). Director of Curriculum Jeff Liddle believes that students are seeing a more direct connection in that the better they understand the geology of the landscape around them, the more they are able to compare that landscape to reflections on their own personal growth in their climbing challenges and throughout their daily lives. The increased focus on a central concept that ties together students’ learning really allows students to see the universal connections in their own experiences and the academic curriculum. The Colorado Rocks curriculum takes the mind-body connection to a deeper level than we’ve been able to achieve in other classes so far.

While being active can increase learning strictly through a physical experience that stimulates the brain in new ways, it is also powerful to see the connections that can be made in mind-body learning when an academic class moves outside to physically experience the content being studied. One great example of this at Eagle Rock is a class called “Riverwatch,” developed by our outdoor education teacher Jon Anderson, and our science teacher, Janet Johnson. Riverwatch creates a learning opportunity in which students explore river ecology and the environmental impacts of change on our water ecosystems. While most students have been around water and rivers and can imagine what is being discussed in class, Jon believes that the physical involvement—getting to the river, collecting water samples for the Colorado Division of Wildlife, learning how to fly fish, and seeing the river in action—really helps students put all the pieces together and experience the interconnectedness of it all. Jon states that “using a project-based reality and having students engage in citizen science really helps students feel a responsibility that is bigger than themselves.” Being in the river really helps the students touch, feel, and see things they have been talking about in the classroom, and create their own learning reality. Cynthia Alonzo, a student from the class, says that she got a lot out of the class because, “I learn more when I do things with my hands, and I really saw a result.” All of a sudden the fish and the food web of the river were much more real for her when she was tying flies and studying the health of the river. The tactile experience of being in and on the river helped ingrain learnings for Cynthia that will last much longer than sitting in a classroom. An additional

Mel Levine is a pediatrician and founder of All Kinds of Minds, a non-profit institute designed to help educators, parents, and students better understand and manage learning issues. Levine’s work helps teachers learn how the mind’s eight different neurodevelopmental functions work together to help each student achieve success. Specific processes help teachers identify recurring themes for different students in their learning and performance, and then support teachers in creating individual success plans with students. More information on Mel Levine and the All Kinds of Minds Institute can be found at: www.allkindsofminds.org

Recommended books by Mel Levine:
A Mind at a Time, 2002, Simon & Schuster

Ready or Not, Here Life Comes, 2006, Simon & Schuster

benefit is the increased awareness and attentiveness that comes with increased fresh air, improved circulation and relaxation, and the ways that the physical movements associated with fishing, hiking, and being outside increase learning experiences in the brain.

Mind-body awareness at Eagle Rock also comes with the deeper lesson that what we do with and to our bodies not only affects ourselves, but also the world around us. In reflecting on the state of our wellness curriculum two years ago, Jon and I realized that perhaps our health curriculum wasn’t really diving deeply enough into wellness topics that really mattered to teenagers. After studying health curriculum from around the country, engaging in critical conversations with teens in various settings, and reflecting on the reality of our society right now, we created a course curriculum called “Body Politics.” This class gives students the opportunity to learn about the science of five major body systems (cardiac, respiratory, muscular, neurological, and reproductive), examine the anatomy and physiology of those systems in a healthy state, and then dive into what often catches teen attention: sex, drugs, and alcohol. By engaging in critical research, discussions, and reflection on these actions and substances, the students have the opportunity to uncover what happens to their bodies if different drugs are taken, the impacts of various sexually transmitted infections, and what alcohol does to their brains and their bodies. The curriculum then transitions into the impact of these actions on the world around them, and specifically the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Their explorations help them uncover how countries around the world are reacting to these health issues, and what effect differ-

ent opinions and actions around mind and body have on world issues. Helping students step out of their individualistic reality and examine how their personal decisions can affect their own bodies and the world around them broadens perspectives for many of them.

Founder of All Kinds of Minds Mel Levine's work helps us remember that all students have different areas of strengths around their neurodevelopmental functions. Sitting in the same classroom day after day may engage parts of the minds of our students, but ongoing work at Eagle Rock has helped us realize that the more we can engage our students minds and bodies in a learning experience, the more deeply the learning experience may resonate with different learners. Not only do the physiological effects of activity improve brain functioning and awareness, but our kinesthetic learners can benefit so much more from touching, feeling, and trying out new ideas and experiences. If we can focus more on including the body in the work of our minds, I strongly believe our students will be much more engaged on many levels in their learning.

Incorporating mind-body awareness for our students is an ongoing quest for us at Eagle Rock School. We have found ways to do this across our curriculum and in the daily lives of our students. It helps us to realize that there are many ways to do it both explicitly and implicitly through our community values and our daily classes. One of the CES common principles looks at students learning to use one's mind well, and we have found that by increasing physical interaction in academic learning, our students are having greater success in classes and their learning experiences seem to be having a deeper, lasting impression. As we work to create opportunities that engage our students in meaningful learning, we continue to look for better ways to engage the mind and the body in each experience.

Jennifer Morine is an Instructional Specialist and houseparent at Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center. She has her M.S. in Educational Leadership and has been teaching for eight years.

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The Coalition of Essential Schools: Common Principles

Demonstration
of mastery



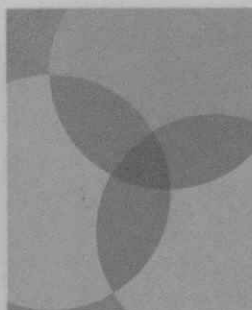
Commitment
to the entire
school

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 personalize, 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

Being Present: Mindfulness and Yoga at Westminster Center School

by Laura Thomas, *The Antioch Center for School Renewal, Antioch University New England*

Classroom management. Two words that can make or break a teacher, a student, or a school. The management of behavior and logistics in a classroom is, for many, the cornerstone of instruction. Veteran teachers can recall classroom management strategies that drew on rewards, punishments, combinations of the two, and a good healthy dose of fear from time to time. It is necessary to maintain order if we're going to get any teaching done, right? And maintaining order means getting the kids to do what we need them to do, when we need them to do it. Right?

At Westminster Center School (WCS) in Westminster, Vermont, they know this to be untrue. Classroom management is about building a tone of decency and respect in order to create collaborative communities in which students feel safe and supported. But what about students who don't feel safe anywhere, who don't believe that support is possible, or who are used to punitive punishment? Where do we begin for them? At WCS, teachers face the universal challenges of teaching in the twenty-first century—increasing poverty, intense family dynamics, and an increasingly isolated social culture all of which can lead students to act out in the classroom. For them, the solution lies in the idea of presence. “Being present is simply to have awareness in the moment of what is unfolding both within you and around you so that you can connect with it,” according to WCS guidance counselor Jon Schotland. Others say that “being present” is about focusing your attention on one thing at a time, and focusing fully on the person or task before you rather than multitasking, doing many things with partial, fractured attention and intention. For WCS teachers and students, being present is the cornerstone of their learning experience, and there are several routes to that presence.



When Jon, a longtime practitioner of mindfulness meditation, arrived at WCS ten years ago, he found students who were struggling to manage their emotions as well as their behaviors. “What I could see, for a lot of students, was that their inner lives were not settled,” he says. “They were emotionally reactive, often in an upset state of mind. It made it very hard for them to function in a group, and it certainly interfered with their learning. I wanted to help them to get calm in their bodies and to understand their emotions so they could participate more fully in the classroom.”

Judy Coven, retired WCS teacher and core faculty member in Antioch University New England's (ANE)

The first elementary school in Vermont to join the Coalition of Essential Schools, Westminster Center School (WCS) serves 420 students in grades kindergarten through six. One of two public elementary schools in this rural community, the population is largely white. Thirty-nine percent of students receive free and reduced lunch, 13 percent above the state average. In spite of increasingly levels of need, students in this school have made Adequate Yearly Progress in all areas as of 2007.

Education Department, saw a similar pattern. She says "My education students were telling me that they were seeing more and more kids coming to school with challenging behaviors and issues that made teaching and learning more difficult. Teachers were dealing with increasingly tough kids and groups of kids." Judy had been engaged in mindfulness and yoga practices herself for many years, and says that it became apparent to her that the benefits she had seen in her own life—an ability to feel centered, calm, and present in the moment—could benefit her graduate students (not to mention their students) as well. "It became clear—kids should be doing yoga," she says. She decided to include yoga in her graduate courses, for pre-service educators as well as veterans, in order to "walk the talk" of yoga as an instructional technique. "There are poses that can help kids slow down, focus, calm themselves, while others that can empower them and help them build their self esteem," adds Judy. "For example, postures that focus on strengthening can be good for kids who are less interested in the playful poses but are drawn in by 'warrior,' poses that lead them to think 'I'm strong. I can do this.'" She now integrates yoga and mindfulness practices into her graduate courses, preparing elementary teachers as part of ANE's Integrated Learning Program. "I'd like teachers to see that yoga can be integrated into their day, for example a sequence to transition from lunch to a work time or a two-minute break in the middle of the day to calm or energize a group. It can be another tool in their toolbox, another part of their pedagogy. And kids can begin to use these tools for themselves, to choose to use a yoga breath when they feel frustrated or angry."

Vicky Peters, WCS kindergarten teacher, agrees. "Children's natural tendency is to crave movement." Vicky, a long time dance and movement student and teacher, found that yoga provided a way for her students to be more present during the school day. "Yoga is a structure for kids to move within a calm body, but in a safe structure for the classroom environment. It gives children the confidence to express themselves in a safely confident way. One goal is to help kids say 'I can regulate my behavior myself. I can calm myself down.' Yoga brings structured, deliberate techniques for helping kids to calm down, and to make it okay to do it. It's a part of the classroom culture."

For each of these teachers, the specifics vary. Adult-oriented practices have been modified to make sense for the age, grade, and developmental level of the students. For Jon, this means focusing on activities rather than the subtle (and more traditional) concept of breath as the means of centering. He may ask a student to take a walk with him, with the task of counting steps until the student reaches 40. When the student stops walking, Jon typically discovers that the

child has regained a sense of calm and control, and is ready to discuss the issue that was troubling. In a different situation, students may help put away game pieces, putting away one piece per breath. The task helps the students to connect with their own breath, to put away the game at the same time that they "put

Continued on next page

Definitions of Mindfulness

"Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally."

- Jon Kabat-Zinn, teacher of mindfulness meditation and the founder of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center.

being present is being exactly where you are
being at your center
so purely
that you allow yourself to be removed from yourself
so you can see
the whole of your inner landscape
as a hawk
circles the land to see what lies within each nook
gently let yourself be taken away enough
to be able to peer into each nook
to see your center
for all it is
often when we are in the thick of it - it can be tricky to
seek the very it we seek
being centered or sitting, meditating
is not about emptiness or lack of thought
being present in you
in one's day
you may encounter an hysterical joke
a lavish joy
a deep sadness
a sudden confusion
being present is simply being aware
no more, and happily so, no less
being present is consciously removing yourself
ever so slightly
and in doing so
there you are
found
being present is actually extremely practical
often people think of it in theory -
when its just life,
as
it
is
whole

- Vicky Peters, Westminster Center School teacher

Children and Mindfulness: Why does it matter?

Centering with children, through play-based yoga, or calm, awareness- developing “team meetings,” opens up a wealth of opportunities. Through developmentally appropriate, accessible, and engaging mindfulness practices, children:

- integrate material they are learning into parts of themselves
- make use of their own experiences and observations as a foundation for knowledge
- pursue and complete projects
- develop their sense of self-esteem and self affirmation, because their own natural resources—their own bodies and minds—are authentically feeling the discovery and making meaning of it
- explore new modes of self-expression
- learn to take risks
- learn how to interact with others in group projects
- learn to reflect upon new information
- practice academic skills
- analyze subjects
- apply knowledge to new situations
- synthesize ideas and information
- explore feelings and ideas without being “right” or “wrong”
- learn to trust their ability to succeed
- learn to trust themselves
- learn to trust others and realize that they are a part of the “other”
- explore private space that can be shared
- experience parts of themselves that may be hard to reach, such as gentleness or strength

away the distraction. Mindfulness practices help students to calm down, get centered, so that they can then reconnect, either with other students, or with their learning.”

Another typical activity would be a “cookie ceremony” in which students are given a cookie and charged with eating it as slowly as possible. The goal is to be as aware as possible of the taste, texture, and experience of eating—to be fully present in the experience of eating the cookie. In this way, students begin to have the experience of focusing on only one thing, but focusing on it fully. Jon finds that, by building skill in focusing, he sees a benefit in not only the students’ ability to concentrate academically, but also in their ability to sort out complex social problems. “They have the ideas of how to solve problems, but their emotional reactions were getting in the way.” Through mindfulness practice, students learn to sort out their emotions, to regain control of their actions, and to resolve the problem.

In Vicky’s kindergarten classroom, yoga is a tool for

play as well as for relaxation. She might include a series of yoga poses as the activity during morning meeting, for example. “I’ll be in down dog [a pose in which only the hands and feet are placed on the ground, making a bridge] and they’ll go under.” On one side, the children do a pose they have learned, and on the other side, they do their own pose, either their favorite pose, or one they invent. This gives the students a chance to be creative, to play and take physical risks in safe ways, demonstrating their unique ways of “doing” yoga, thereby building community and acceptance of differences. She also uses yoga during that seminal kindergarten activity, nap time. “Some kindergarten friends don’t nap,” she says. “So we have one side of the room that is reserved for napping, but on the other side of the room, we do quiet, gentle yoga. We roll and twist and turn, but it’s quiet and relaxing, as opposed to wiggling our giggles out.”

Judy reminds her education students that yoga and mindfulness practices don’t necessarily need to be separate from the curriculum they are teaching. “Yoga can be integrated into many things the class is studying; you can make connections to the content. If students are studying waterways or water animals, there are a bunch of poses the teacher can use that relate to water. He can do a series that tells a story or is built around a theme. I modeled this with my graduate students; we did one about going to warm places. We went to a river: the pose we used was forward bend, but I called it something different in order to make it fit the story, so a forward bend became the flowing river as we reached up and folded over at the hip joint. Then we got into our kayaks by doing boat pose, sitting on our bums with our arms and legs in a V, a balancing pose. We followed with a variety of other poses which represented birds, the waves of the ocean, fish, whales, and dolphins. The possibilities are endless.” Since Judy no longer works with young children, she works to help her students build these techniques into their own pedagogy. “Once you’re familiar with the poses, you can use them creatively to fit them into all kinds of different curriculum. You can rename them to make them fit the story.” Judy also uses yoga poses in her math methods course, in fact. Teacher education students learn poses and then try to determine which poses are symmetrical, what lines of symmetry exist, and what impact changes in the pose might have on the symmetry. This becomes part of the way they will teach these concepts in their own classrooms.

While all three agree that the teacher must have some training in yoga and mindfulness practices in order to use them with students, all also agree that one need not be an expert before trying to integrate some elements of the practices into their own pedagogy. Judy notes, “You can buy boxes of cards that have pictures of poses

that you can practice with your kids. It won't look the same from classroom to classroom or even from kid to kid, but that's okay." You don't have to correct their form or be certain of the pose yourself; that's not the goal. The goal is to build the ability to concentrate better, to center. The goal is to have fun, to move, to get your blood moving. All the reasons that movement is good for you, yoga is good for you. The earlier they start, the more they'll want to develop it as a way to develop strength and flexibility. Yoga is good for you, no matter your size, shape, form, physical condition, age. I've seen lots of people do poses that I can't. It reinforces and presents the idea that we're all different and we all start from wherever we are, and we do whatever we can." She suggests a simple technique, a "take five" breath, as a place to begin. When the teacher asks students to "take five," everyone breathes in for the count of five, and then out for the count of five. "This is a way of bringing students together; at the end of the count, everyone is there, quiet and ready to listen," Judy says.

"And it's not just the kids that reap the benefits," she continues. "By doing yoga with kids, teachers get the same benefit, the slowing down, breathing, centering, and the more teachers feel centered, in their bodies, in the present, the more able they are to teach and to deal with challenging situations with kids. Because the breath work is so integral to the yoga (it's really what separates yoga from other stretching/strengthening work), if teachers are breathing and focusing and concentrating as they're doing yoga, they will feel the same benefits we aim for with kids, which then makes it easier for them to do their jobs well!" Jon agrees. "I use these practices in my counseling office, but they're used throughout the building as a way of just giving the students some time to settle. We're not trying to engage with the student while they're too upset. We remind them, 'I'm right here, and I'm ready to talk as soon as you can sit down and be ready to talk about whatever is bothering you.' We try to settle ourselves—I don't think you can do mindfulness with kids without doing it yourself. You have to be calm, to be present, in order to help the kids settle. I think

Centering and Creative Moment Resources

Gardner, H. (1983). *Multiple Intelligences: Theory into Practice*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.

Griss, Susan. (1998). *Minds in Motion: A Kinesthetic Approach to Teaching Elementary Curriculum*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Slack, L., and Fontana, D. (1997). *Teaching Children Meditation*. London: Harper Collins.

Stewart, M., and Phillips, K. (1992). *Yoga for Children*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Wills, R., and Hendricks, G. (1975). *The Centering Book: Awareness Activities for Children and Adults to Relax the Body and Mind*. New York: Prentice Hall Press.

Book Corner: Stories to Inspire Characters, Yoga and Mindfulness

Carle, E. (1987). *The Tiny Seed*. New York: Scholastic.

Cherry, L. (1990). *The Great Kapok Tree*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Co.

Hudson, W. (1993). *Pass It On: African-American Poetry for Children*. New York: Scholastic, Inc.

Medearis, A. S. (1991). *Dancing with the Indians*. New York: Scholastic, IMnc.

Seeger, P. (1986). *Abiyoyo*. New York: MacMillan Publishing.

Sneve, V. D. H. ed. (1989). *Dancing Teepees*. New York: Holiday House.

UNICEF, ed. (1993). *I Dream of Peace*. France: Harper Collins.

we have a lot of people in this building who do that. That's why I like working here."

Laura Thomas is the Director of the Antioch Center for School Renewal, the Service Wing of Antioch University New England's Education Department. She has been working in and with Essential Schools since 1991 and can be reached at ACSR@antiochne.edu

Addendum on Wellness

Continued from page 7

You exhibit responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others in physical activity settings.

You demonstrate competency in motor skills and movement patterns needed to perform a variety of physical activities to maintain your personal health.

A version of this document, along with other information about health and wellness at Parker Charter Essential School, can be found at www.parker.org/CurriculumAssessment/wellness_at_parker.htm

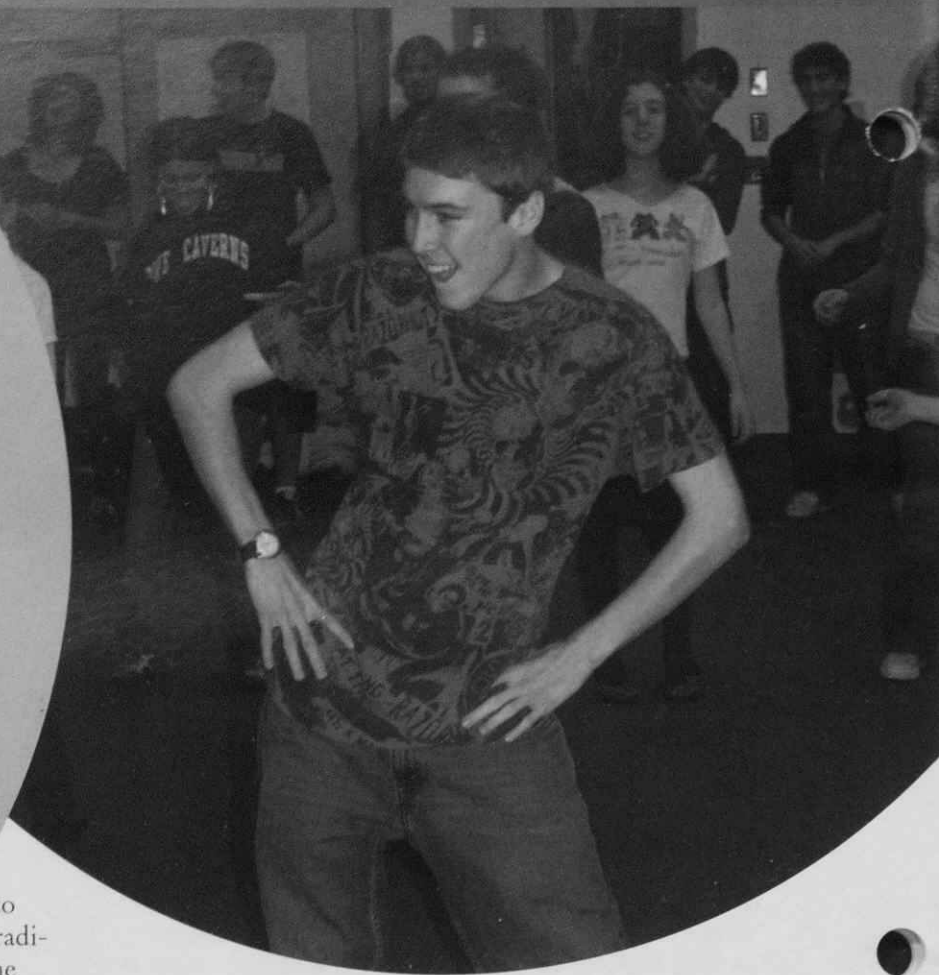
Health Week: A Wellness Immersion

by Lauren Beigel

At the end of each trimester at Compass School, classes are suspended for week-long immersions in rich, problem-based learning experiences. During Health Week, Community Service Winter Term (which we call Winterm,) and Project Week, students are involved in travel, meeting local community needs, and doing in-depth projects and explorations. One of these weeks, Health Week, is devoted entirely to wellness-related matters and has been an annual tradition for the past eight years. I am astounded by the enthusiasm students have for this symposium-like week of workshops and celebrations built around the concept of health. When I think about my experience as a teenager with health, sex education or learning about “how to take care of my teenage self,” I think of awkward class discussions and lectures which left me feeling completely overwhelmed by the dangers of the world. At Compass, this week-long immersion throws out taboos and encourages students to look honestly at the issues in front of them.

Health Week was created in response to a need to meet state standards in health education and a desire to build community in a very young school. Compass was only two years old when the first Health Week was planned. It has evolved from a few days of healthy exercise and discussions about gender identity and health to a multi-workshop conference style extravaganza. The scope has expanded to include alternative health and medical practices while also connecting to the community surrounding our school. Health Week has become a way for people in the community to know more about Compass and for our students and staff members to get to know the resources out there. The planning is wildly intensive, requiring hours of phone calls, scheduling, organizing, and grant writing. It often feels unsustainable—yet the week itself feels indispensable.

The planning of Health Week starts during August In-Service meetings, and becomes increasingly inten-



sive as the first trimester draws to a close. True to the CES principle that emphasizes teachers as generalists with a commitment to the entire school, each staff member at Compass has a few “guruships,” specific areas of responsibility outside his or her teaching duties. Health Week usually becomes the charge of two staff members, but almost everyone joins in to assist in the planning process at some point, pitching ideas, sharing resources, and offering to give workshops in areas of their own interest or expertise. Janet

The Compass School

Compass School is an independent school in Westminster, Vermont, designed around CES principles to be a model for choice in public education, working within the public school tuition rates and serving students regardless of economic need or prior academic record. In its ninth year, Compass serves a diverse population of approximately 90 students in grades seven through 12 with a staff of 15. Through the development of a strong, caring school community, an active, place-based, real-world curriculum, and meaningful community service, Compass provides a personalized educational option for students in our rural area.

Van Alstyne, Compass' special education director (and adept detail manager), has been involved in this process since its inception. With the help of many others, she has woven a web of community resource connections that allow us to branch out farther each year, so one could say that Health Week's foundation grows stronger and more stable each year. There are certainly challenges with trying to book upwards of 50 presenters in order to offer relevant choices to students, requesting donations from local food distributors in order to prepare fresh, organic meals that can be free to all, and finding grant money to pay presenters who are unable to participate without financial compensation. Since Compass is a small independent school with a relatively tight overall budget, there is no specific budget allotted to Health Week. Grant money may be available for a certain event or presenters, but there is often a chicken-and-egg situation in terms of needing to book presenters ahead of time, but not being able to book them until we know we can pay them.

Once the school year is in swing, students participate in the planning process by discussing in Advisory what they hope to learn about, things they've liked in past years and new directions they might dream up within the scope of the week's main topics. Last year, a core group of students joined the organizational process, forming a committee that met on a weekly basis (and then more frequently closer to the start of Health Week). This year, I was Janet's sidekick in organizing Health Week, and we solicited student input casually, but frequently, as we worked through the details. During the week itself, some students facilitated discussions and workshops, such as those involved in the Gay-Lesbian-Bisexual-Queer group or exchange students who may give talks about traditions in their home countries. Given a choice between several different workshops for each time slot during the day, all students are involved in framing their personal experience during Health Week.

Every other year, Health Week's topic is "reproductive health and substance abuse," a.k.a. sex, drugs, and rock and roll. The alternate year focuses on a more holistic look at health and wellness. Health Week has recently been combined with Culture Days, another Compass "tradition" that halts the "normal" flow for a shot of multiculturalism in Vermont, a state with overwhelmingly homogeneous demographics. Last year, this cultural approach allowed us to look at health as something beyond condoms and exercise. Each day had a different theme as we explored the concepts of a healthy self, healthy relationships, healthy community, and a healthy planet. Looking at health in this light helped students to see the interconnections between their own personal health and a spectrum of choices, interests, and affiliations.

Especially for teenagers, health is about having outlets for energy, anger, frustrations, joy, and excitement. In addition to sessions on sexuality or the effects of substances on the brain and development, workshops on yoga, hula-hooping, juggling, Aikido, journaling, art therapy, and Budo punctuate the morning. In the afternoons, ultimate frisbee games, contra dances, and dance-offs get people moving. Workshops focused on the health of the community, such as "Shades of Gray: Bullying and Harassment," result in shifting student perspectives, allowing them to become more conscious of actions that can degrade the health of our school community. Workshops on topics such as parent-teen relationships help students learn to understand situations they are facing and how to deal with them in healthier ways.

The conference-like structure of Health Week allows students to hear many different speakers talk about similar issues, giving them the opportunity to see the range of perspectives that exist. Our most recent Health Week had discussions led by a bisexual male who pushed students to think beyond the normal boundaries of what's expected of specific genders. In the same day, presentations given by middle-aged heterosexual women advocating celibacy as a healthy sexual choice challenged the same students to think about the stereotypes that exist about sex and gender roles and the "truths" that have created them. Students are pushed to the edge of their comfort zones in a safe setting, allowing them to question things aloud and providing the substratum for real learning to take place. Speakers are inspired by the honest culture of our school and our forthright students who ask insightful questions and don't appear to be squeamish in the presence of difficult topics. In turn, the outside presenters are upfront with students and a high level of respect ensues.

New students are astonished by Health Week's content and structure, comparing it with the uninspiring grind of health class at their previous school. A student who has been at Compass for three years says, "It's a fun, chill break from the normal, stressful school schedule." In fact, he finds it to be more than a "break," saying, "I usually take something away from each workshop. I've learned a ton: everything from diet to understanding the mind." Other students praise the week as a time when the school comes together. One eighth grader comments, "I remember how much [a workshop during Health Week] made our class start having in-depth discussions about what the presenters told us and if we agreed with it or not. It helped us bond and get to know each other better." Many students love the chance to be in workshops with students from all grades, a trademark of these special weeks. When necessary, students are separated by age if a topic is age-sensitive, but generally

Continued on next page

there is a feeling of dissolved lines between high school and middle school.

After so many years of passionate involvement in Health Week, Janet Van Alstyne feels like all the exhausting planning is worth the hours on the phone and the days and weeks of planning. Thinking back to poignant moments that inspired students, speakers, and staff alike, she wonders if a Compass alumna, who has gone on to work with HIV/AIDS patients in West Africa during her college career, had a flame lit under her during Health Week. That year, an AIDS patient came to speak during Health Week about the emotional pain of keeping her condition a secret from her mother because she was so ashamed. The student went up to her at the end of her talk, put a hand on her shoulder, and told her that she must tell her mother, tears streaming down both of their faces. One can imagine that such a moment was responsible for helping to focus that student's subsequent years of study, travel, and service.

The school is shaken up in a wonderful way during Health Week. This year Eric Rhomberg, Compass' director, gave up coffee publicly and encouraged students to kick caffeine along with him. He also gave a talk about drugs that challenges students to look at the way that they take care of themselves and how to keep drugs out of the picture. Students mingle with students in other grade levels, engaged in a workshop schedule that they have chosen. The school community is infused with new faces and people who are passionate about what they are presenting. Energy is high because there's no homework that week, and the new pace of learning hardly makes it feel like learning. The change in the normal schedule inspires spontaneity: music breaks out at lunchtime, hula hoops revolve, and local, organic food graces the lunch line while students chat with visiting speakers. This is school, but during times like these, it feels like a lot more; it's a community within a community. The connections that are made during this week inspire the students and staff to recommit not only to our own health, but the health of our community, and it shows. The sparks of Health Week set fires glowing all over the place.

Lauren Beigel is a seventh and eighth grade Humanities teacher in her second year at The Compass School. She is also the faculty point person for Compass' student-led Judiciary, and is passionate about helping students to find healthy releases in their lives, especially through writing, exercise, and time outdoors.

Summer Institute 2008

Portland, Oregon
July 14-18

The Essentials of Small Schools: Principles and Practices for Equity And Achievement

In partnership with Employers for Education Excellence (E3) and the Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC) at the University of Oregon, the Coalition of Essential Schools invites you to learn about small school planning, design, and implementation at its fifth Annual Summer Institute.

The CES Small Schools Summer Institute features workshops and facilitated conversations with some of the most effective small school educators in the country, including those from CES Mentor Schools Urban Academy, Eagle Rock School, Boston Arts Academy, Quest High School, Wildwood School, and Fenway High School.

Participation is open to individuals and school teams who are starting new small schools, working in large schools converting to small autonomous schools or small learning communities, or who are looking to share best practices with a community of experienced practitioners. This institute will provide professional development for all who are interested in making schools powerful places of learning.

Key Summer Institute features include an interactive keynote speech on literacy and social justice by Linda Christensen, a presentation and workshop from Dr. David Conley on college readiness research, "Taking It Up and Taking It Back!"—a community meeting on equity, Critical Friends conversations, significant youth participation, time for team coaching and planning, "Raising Our Consciousness About Race" symposium, many opportunities for networking and relationship-building, a dinner cruise on the Columbia River, and more.

For more information:
www.essentialschools.org/events.html

Fires in The Middle School Bathroom: Advice to Teachers from Middle Schoolers by Kathleen Cushman and Laura Rogers (New Press, 240 pages, \$24.95), reviewed by Angelis Baez



“When we come to school really upset at something, just not in the mood, it does affect a lot of things. Teachers do not even ask to see what’s wrong; they just ignore it completely. Then they wonder, ‘Why are you guys not paying attention?’” This quotation from student Alma shows, in her own words, what she believes teachers should be more aware of. Teachers sometimes don’t know how students will respond. Although some students want nothing to do with teachers and prefer to be left alone, there are others who need more attention. *Fires in the Middle School Bathroom* voices middle school students’ thoughts and opinions on daily struggles that come with making the transition from being in a friendly elementary school environment to dealing with pressure involving friends, parents, and teachers. Kathleen Cushman and Laura Rogers choose to leave most of the text in students’ own words so readers can better understand and connect to the children’s thoughts without misinterpretation.

“Make Way for Parents,” one of the book’s chapters, demonstrates the ways students fight the urge to be rebellious and mischievous without parents knowing. They want to be like other students who seem to get more attention and have more friends. During my sixth grade year, many students wanted to be the class clown, to get more attention from their peers, and even though they were getting suspensions and detentions, they continued with the teasing and the jokes just to gain peer acceptance. Middle school students are at a time when doing the wrong thing is the right thing to do. Their peers ask them to ditch classes, disrespect young women and teachers, and even drink or smoke as a way to fit in. Most parents fear their children will be asked to do such things in high school, but in reality, the pressure starts in middle school. Amelia, a student from the book, speaks about how she’s drifting away from her parents because she feels misunderstood and embarrassed by situations she faces in school. I also remember when I wouldn’t speak to my parents in front of my friends because I was scared of getting teased and bullied.

For some middle school students, learning is a distraction. They think about making a good impression with their peers rather than focusing on academics. “We’re ready to do something and the teachers are giving us work, and we just want to get out,” says Gabe in the chapter “Using Our Energy to Help Us Learn.” Cushman and Rogers give ideas on how to get students

to stay on task and focused, such as playing music for the students or letting them have a snack might help them settle down before starting class.

Middle school teachers should read this book to get an idea of what most students are going through. For example, they can learn that students are at a time when wearing the wrong outfit could get them bullied for months. This is not what teachers usually think about, but to students, it’s important. At the same time, middle school teachers need to push students to get work done on time instead of extending deadlines, because in high school, we are expected to make our own decisions and be responsible for our own work. Cushman and Rogers give ideas on how to engage students with constructive ideas and writing prompts to help teachers understand each individual student’s needs. And there are questionnaires for students as well as teachers, asking questions such as “What do you recall best about your own experiences in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade?” These questions help teachers relate to some of the issues their students are dealing with.

Fires in the Middle School Bathroom gives students the courage to speak up and let the world know that middle school is no walk in the park. As a high school student, I could relate to most of the situations mentioned in this book, and I wish I could have had the opportunity to speak about my challenges during middle school. This book is perfect for any teacher, student, or parent who really wants to understand middle school students.

Angelis Baez is a freshman at The Met’s Peace Street campus in Providence, Rhode Island. She currently has an internship with Jill Davidson, editor of *Horace*. She loves to write, read and meet new people.

Small Schools: Public School Reform Meets the Ownership Society by Michael Klonsky and Susan Klonsky (Routledge, 209 pages, \$26.95), reviewed by Jill Davidson



Mike and Susan Klonsky's *Small Schools: Public School Reform Meets the Ownership Society* deserves to have sunscreen stains on its pages and sand within as an unlikely recommended summer read for CES network educators. Okay, if there's a great novel that you've been saving for the week that school's out, read that first. But before school starts up again,

read *Small Schools* to get angry and radicalized, to remind yourself of the extraordinary value of your work, to cheer for yourselves as worthy alternative underdogs, and to rekindle your fire.

A nightmare gallery of monsters menace public education, and the Klonskys invoke some of the most frightening: the gangs of politicians, foundations, think tanks, and corporations that have invaded schools during the still-current Bush administration. Documenting the ways that "the progressive grassroots educational reform movement for small schools has been hijacked by business groups, right-wing ideologues, and the ideology of the Ownership Society," the Klonskys throw readers into the deep end of the small schools movement, the threats posed by corporate and governmental encroachment on public education, and the toxic ground on which privatization forces have co-opted small schools for corporate gain, both in the authors' home turf of Chicago and elsewhere.

The breathless pace slows in the first chapter, which unpacks small schools' "traditional democratic values of Deweyan progressivism combined with Information Age notions of professional community, personalization, and safe learning environments in an unsafe society." This chapter focuses on the story of opposing school reform movements in Chicago, serving as a useful primer on that city's tension around school size, control, and ideas of whom its schools are for. This inside baseball of Chicago politics, school reform, and role of the Klonskys' Small School Workshop is contextualized within the movement that includes Deborah Meier's work in East Harlem, southern Freedom Schools, and other results of progressive efforts around the country. This chapter also captures the "politics of disaster" that have been created in response to public schooling's complex challenge, describing how a deficit model of education

has evolved to dismantle existing public systems.

The sprawling second chapter details and defines the forces and practices of the Ownership Society and its "all-out assault on teachers, public schools, and public space in general." Featured in President Bush's 2005 inaugural address, the term was intended to sell the idea that individual citizens should control health care, finances, education, and other key factors of their lives. The Klonskys vehemently oppose the political practices that exemplify the Ownership Society, and their arguments effectively encapsulate the rhetorical co-option of words and ideas—such as the very concept of small schools—that may have originated from the grassroots progressive education movement, but have come to be fully integrated into the current administration's "demagoguery." This is compelling stuff.

The third chapter deals with the privatization of our school systems. When the Klonskys write, "In many districts around the country, the best of the small and charter schools have indeed become agents of change, responding to a national sense that the traditional system of public education needs transformation," you'll think "Hey, that's us! That's CES." But such schools are anomalies whose existence emphasizes the gulf between intended purpose of charter schools—to provide stimuli to the system and grassroots-driven alternatives—and their current uses as for-profit collectives that rob the public system.

The book concludes with considerations of the role of philanthropy, with most of its attention on the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (a CES funder). "It's hard to say whether the world's richest man has been part of the problem or part of the solution," the Klonskys observe. They are far less ambivalent on the role of conservative think tanks that rose to power on a tide of private funding and the adept use of technology that allowed them to emerge from the shadows.

The conclusion, "Alternatives to Top-Down Reform," offers a welcome, and familiar, note of hope, with its faith in the power of professional learning communities. Critical Friends Groups to the rescue! Though its documentation of the forces that oppose what we know works to educate children, and preserve and improve the intellectual and other forms of health of their communities, is daunting and at times heavy-handed, you'll finish *Small Schools* with renewed faith in your work as a CES network educator, and a healthy infusion of anger and energy.

*Year-round schools: the bane of the education book reviewer. Sorry to slight those of you who are at year-round schools, but you still experience summer, yes? And you still read? Apply this as you see fit (Horace suggests liberally).

Where to Go for More

Unnatural Causes

Unnatural Causes is a seven-part documentary on health equity that aired on PBS in March 2008 and is available on DVD. The documentary's episodes provide a nuanced grounding in a wide variety of issues that affect the health of individuals, communities, and the United States. *Unnatural Causes'* accompanying website provides a wealth of supporting material: transcripts, video clips, episode descriptions, curriculum guides, action toolkits to support activism around environmental and health justice, an extensive guide to aligned organizations, and Spanish-language transcripts and other material.

Unnatural Causes
c/o California Newsreel
500 Third Street, Suite 505
San Francisco, California 94107
telephone: 415.284.7800
e-mail: contact@newsreel.org
www.unnaturalcauses.org

Healthy Schools, Healthy Youth

This site from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) covers a broad range of topics related to youth, health, and schools, including health and academics, school health program evaluation, school and community health assessment, material for building youth health programs, school nutrition information, and more. Additional CDC resources provide a huge array of health and wellness material suitable for youth and adults interested in investigating issues and planning ways to incorporate wellness into schools and other programs for young people and their communities.

Healthy Schools, Healthy Youth
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
telephone: 800.CDC.INFO (800.232.4636)
email: cdcinfo@cdc.gov
www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/index.htm

Rethinking School Lunch

Especially in schools with high percentages of students who receive universal free breakfast and free and reduced lunch, the importance of that food to children's well-being cannot be underestimated. For schools and school systems committed to transforming the essential resource of food in schools into a more vibrant, delicious, and effective support for physical health, academic achievement, and overall well-being, Rethinking School Lunch is a deeply thoughtful collection of resources based on Berkeley, California's School Lunch Initiative. The program is an integrated systems approach covering food policy, curriculum integration,

food and health, finances, facilities design, the dining experience, professional development, procurement, waste management, and marketing and communications. Don't miss the Wellness Policy Guide, which helps schools and school systems plan frameworks for wellness.

Rethinking School Lunch
Center for Ecoliteracy
2528 San Pablo Avenue
Berkeley, California 94702
email: info@ecoliteracy.org
www.ecoliteracy.org/programs/rsl.html

The National School Board Association's School Health Programs

The National School Board Association's School Health Programs provides policymakers with information, technical assistance, and professional development on a variety of school health issues. Individuals seeking to influence school health policies will find resources for learning more about and assessing strategies to deal with challenges to youth wellness. The site's "101 packets" provide useful overviews, and links to related resources which allow youth or adult researchers to go more deeply. The Health Newsfeed is a collection of articles on various health, prevention, and wellness issues.

School Health Programs
National School Boards Association
1680 Duke Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314
telephone: 703.838.6722
email: schoolhealth@nsba.org
<http://schoolhealth.nsba.org>

The Center for Health and Health Care in Schools

The Center for Health and Health Care in Schools' online resources provide information on youth health issues with guidance on organizational and financing challenges that health and education officials confront in building school health services and health promotion programs. Highlighting key issues such as the health needs of immigrant and refugee children, school drug testing, children's health insurance, school lunches, HPV vaccinations, eating disorders, and scoliosis screening, the Center's offerings include an email listserv, newsletter, journal, grant alerts, papers and presentations, and much more.

The Center for Health and Health Care in Schools
School of Public Health and Health Services
The George Washington University
2121 K Street NW, Suite 250, Washington, DC 20037
telephone: 202.466.3396
email: chhes@gwu.edu
www.healthinschools.org

24.2 SUMMER 2008

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Notes on This Issue

Though *Horace* has existed for 24 years as the cartographer of the Coalition of Essential Schools' terrain, this issue marks the first time we have explored the connection between health and Essential schools. The lessons of mapmaking and "discovery" apply, of course; unmapped and unexplored regions are often very much alive with culture and history. That we have not thought deeply enough about them cannot negate their existence—they're real places. And Essential school educators' understanding of the role that mind/body wellness plays in learning is very much a real "place." At last, *Horace* is catching up to significant, long-term work within CES schools that have determined that health in all of its forms must be at the center of a school community, that the health of individuals affects the health of the group, and that wellness transcends all disciplines and boundaries.

Generous with their time and intellect, Essential school educators shared their experiences of how their schools are organized around wellness in these pages, and we are grateful. And now that this long-overdue map is open for constant revision, we hope that *Horace* readers are inspired to share their schools' commitment to health and wellness through Fall Forum, future *Horace* issues, *In Common*, and additional opportunities both within and beyond the CES network. This issue has been a joy to work on—and now, I'm off for a run!

Jill Davidson
Editor, *Horace*

Go To The Source: More About the Schools and Other Organizations Featured in This Issue

The Antioch Center for School Renewal
Antioch University New England
40 Avon Street
Keene, New Hampshire 03431-3516
telephone: 603.283.2301
email: ACSR@antiochne.edu
www.antiochne.edu/ACSR

Bayview Essential School of Music, Art and Social Justice
c/o Coalition of Essential Schools
1330 Broadway, Suite 600
Oakland, California 94612
telephone: 510.433.1842
email: mбенитез@essentialschools.org
www.myspace.com/bayviewschool

Compass School
7892 US Route 5
PO Box 177
Westminster Station, Vermont 05159
telephone: 802.463.2525
email: info@compass-school.org
www.compass-school.org

Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center
2750 Notiaiah Road
Estes Park, Colorado 80517
telephone: 970.586.0600
email: info@eaglerockschool.org
www.eaglerockschool.org

Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School
49 Antietam Street
Devens, Massachusetts 01434
telephone: 978.772.3293
www.parker.org

Native American Community Academy
1100 Cardenas Avenue S.E.
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87108
telephone: 505.266.0992
email: naca@nacaschool.org
www.nacaschool.org

Westminster Center School
304 School Street
Westminster, Vermont 05158
telephone: 802-722-3241
<http://wnesuwc.learningnetworks.com/Pages/index>

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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

You've read the essays.
And the books.
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And taken the workshop.

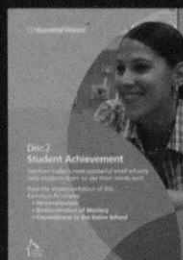
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This Year in Horace

24.1: Lifecycles of Educators: Essential School Staff Development

Horace examines the career directions of Essential school teachers and education leaders, focusing on professional learning communities to address the challenge of developing the capacity of educators and administrators to sustain success, create improvement, and start new schools.

24.2: Wellness and the Mind-Body Connection

Horace investigates the connections between mind, body, and learning, focusing on topics such as food and nutrition, the role of play in learning and schools, organized sports, wellness, personal fitness, care of the self, time spent outdoors, meditation, spiritual practices, and attention to emotional and psychological needs.

24.3: Politics and Policies: Election 2008

Horace looks at civic engagement to understand the ways that educators, students, and communities that support schools involve themselves in politics and policy creation to create and sustain personalized, equitable, and academically challenging schools for all students. And *Horace* asks, what role do Essential schools play in developing students who will participate in and shape our democracy through the 21st century?

24.4: Cycles of Inquiry and Improvement

Horace collects perspectives on schools and school systems that are committed to continuous improvement, analysis, and refinement. This focus will be on the ways that CES educators create cycles of inquiry and action. How do we know that academic challenge, relevance, and deep learning are happening in Essential schools, and how can we sustain those outcomes?

Cover photo: Native American Community Academy students Jalynn Deon and Cheyenne Benally demonstrate their soccer skills in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

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

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Annenberg Foundation, and the San Francisco Foundation

"You're It!": Thoughts on Play and Learning in Schools

by Laura Warner, Francis W. Parker
Charter Essential School

It is paradoxical that many educators and parents still differentiate between a time for learning and a time for play without seeing the vital connection between them. - Leo Buscaglia

This past fall at the Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School, after finishing the dreaded mile run, many of my middle school students took the opportunity to spend a half an hour rolling down hills. They loved it, and have since begged to go back, just to run up to the top and then come flying down on their backs and stomachs. At the time, I was wondering, "What if someone else sees this class? Is this 'worth-while' instructional time? Don't I need to be facilitating or teaching?" Responding to hearing about this at home, a parent of one of my advisees emailed, "Thank you for recognizing that sometimes the most important thing for a kid to do is to roll down a hill on his belly!"

We're very serious about education in CES schools. However, in our earnest attempts to engage students in meaningful and thought-provoking work or dialogue, is it possible that we're missing out on the crucial downtime of childhood: play?

Most people who know about children agree that play is essential to their growth and health. Play comes in a variety of forms, and can be defined as self-managed, creative, light-hearted, and spontaneous, involving rule making and breaking. Early childhood researchers have done much to forward the cause of play as a vital part of the development of young children, and have documented benefits of imaginative, social or 'free play.' A 2006 report from the American Academy of Pediatrics said free and unstructured play "is healthy and, in fact, essential for helping children reach important social, emotional, and cognitive developmental milestones as well as helping them manage stress and become resilient." This is a significant claim, so with

these associated benefits of play, why don't we place more emphasis on it in schools? Many preschools explicitly include playtime, or structured dramatic and social play with the goal of improving children's social skills as well as improving their ability to think flexibly. In "Creative Play Makes for Kids in Control," a recent National Public Radio interview, neuroscientists Deborah Leong and Adele Diamond explained that their research shows that imaginative play can also develop important executive function skills, which may also be some of the best predictors of academic success. However, this resurgence of playtime is in direct opposition to many school districts' emphasis on standardized tests scores, since as the fiscal and public pressures to perform well on tests increase, the number of gym, art, music or drama

The Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School, a CES Small Schools Project Mentor School, is a public charter school open by lottery admissions to all residents of Massachusetts in grades seven through twelve. One of the state's first charter schools, Parker was started in 1995 by area parents and teachers.



classes tends to decline, as does time for recess.

Not only are kids playing less at school, but they are playing differently at home and in their neighborhoods. With the advent of television and toy commercials in the 1950s, play changed from being activity-based to being more object-based, says Howard Chudacoff in *Children at Play: An American History*. For young kids, instead of improvising games based on multi-use, neutral toys like blocks or chalk, many children now have toys that make noise, "do something," or that are intended for a single purpose.

Older children, from middle school on, are often shuttled from one organized activity to another, where adults constantly tell them the rules and the structure of their "play." Because of safety concerns, some aren't allowed the freedoms that many of us had in our own neighborhoods growing up, and still others sit inside staring at the television or playing video games for hours. When I asked one high school student what he and his friends did together for "play," he responded with, "Well, we play a lot of Wii, I guess." Kids who leave the house with the old cry of "I'll be back for dinner!"—and families who let them—are on the endangered species list here in the United States. In today's plugged-in climate of iPods, cell phones, video games, and reality television, the amount of time that kids actually play outdoors, or even inside together, has continued to decrease. I grew up in a neighborhood with kids of all ages, and it was quiet enough that we could play in our yards, in our streets, and generally roam the neighborhood without adult supervision. In the *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*, Richard Louv observes that these experiences play a unique role in child development. Spending time in nature, he says, helps restore an inner sense of connectedness with the environment, and research has shown that it may also help reduce symptoms of attention deficit disorders, and mediate stress levels in children.

At the 2007 CES Fall Forum, Deborah Meier and Jane Andrias held a workshop called "Stories of Play." There, teachers, students, and parents each shared memories of how we used to play as younger children. Mine were recollections of Red Rover at the bus stop, kickball in the streets, and a made-up game the kids in my neighborhood called "Mission Impossible." My small group talked about creating "detective agencies," having game night with their families, and exploring nearby forests. The common themes were of independence, creativity and, mostly, a lack of supervision by adults. No one's stories were about organized sports teams or team-building games in schools, we noted. They were all spontaneous, most involved siblings or family members, and all involved creating something from our imaginations. After, Deborah Meier asked us, "So what is the point of sharing these stories?"

Why have this workshop?" Well, "Why play?" is the real question, I'd argue. Many of us grew up playing, and maybe even recognize its inherent value, but we are not always sure of *exactly* how we benefited from things such as climbing trees or pretending to be knights, horses, and monsters in our backyards.

Why Play?

What are the actual benefits of playing? Do kids learn skills so necessary from making up elaborate games about dinosaurs, bunnies, and space aliens that we would even consider including play in schools when our schedules are already jam-packed in response to high-stakes testing?

Many childhood development theorists, including Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, and D.W. Winnicott, have written extensively about play as an integral part of the world of children, in which they learn to reconcile their inner world with outer reality, work to attain mastery over their environment, and learn social rules or norms. Newer research in the field of neuroscience has also argued that imaginative play in early childhood may help to develop the critical cognitive skill of executive function, specifically what we call, "self-regulation." Young children are relatively unable to control their impulses, but their behavior is in part controlled by external forces—a "no" from a parent, a reward, or a punishment. As we grow older, our sense of self-control shifts to being largely managed by internal impulses—part of the system of regulating our own behavior. We learn to inhibit inappropriate impulses, to shift from one task or environment to another, to manage our time, and to initiate activities by ourselves. These are all crucial pieces of executive functioning, a construct used to describe a set of cognitive abilities that helps to manage our behavior, a so-called "control center" of the frontal lobe. Deborah Leong and Adele Diamond, neuroscientists researching the development of executive functions in children, spent time evaluating "Tools of the Mind," a program for preschools designed around Vygotsky's theories of play. They found that participants in this curriculum scored higher on tests of executive functioning, after they had spent one year working explicitly to improve skills involving memory and organization. Leong and Diamond explain that these self-regulation behaviors develop during play as kids make up rules, engage in self-talk, and learn to direct and inhibit their own behavior during games. Some researchers argue that these executive functions are also the critical malfunctioning systems in disorders of attention. Dr. Russell Barkley, a prominent researcher in the field of attention disorders, believes that self-control is actually the primary deficit in kids with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and that

Continued on next page

problems with attention are a secondary characteristic of the disorder.

Most of today's video games are the antithesis of executive function "developers," requiring kids to respond to visual and auditory stimuli that encourage immediate reactions instead of critical thinking. There is no time to stop, process information, or consider the implications or relevance to our own lives. The intrusion of technology isn't only a problem at home. At the beginning of advisory, and classes, I have to quickly remind one or two kids, "Please stow all electronic devices in your backpacks for the duration of the ride." Even with a daily reminder, they still seem surprised at this, "My iPod isn't turned on," one says. "I can still hear you."

When play involves physical activity, as much of it does, there may be other benefits. In his newest book, *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Education and the Brain*, Dr. John Ratey explains the positive effects of exercise on our brain, describing research that correlates increased physical activity with decreasing levels of stress and depression, and increased ability to concentrate or focus for longer periods of time. When asked about exercise, one junior at my school declared, "If I don't get at least an hour of physical activity a day, I'd be completely grumpy! It lets me relieve stress and not worry. I guess other kids like to read or draw, but for me, that's how I deal with it." This year, Parker is installing a major building addition. As a result of the construction, our outdoor space has been severely limited, and the loss of even a few minutes of outdoor break time has had noticeable effects on the students. Judy Gibson, a middle school science teacher, said, "I hadn't realized until this year how important our ten minute breaks were to the kids. Last year, we would go outside for some fresh air and movement, even in the winter! This year, they can only use the hallway for break and occasionally we play basketball in the gym. I have really felt the pent up energy; there is more restlessness in the classroom and our kids have a harder time maintaining focus for extended periods.

So what happens if kids get to middle or high school having had little to no playtime? What are the repercussions? Psychologist Harry Harlow, famous for his experiments using monkeys to learn about attachment and isolation behaviors, replaced real monkey mothers with homemade cloth-surrogates to test what factors were needed for "normal development." Interested in the role of play in socialization of young monkeys, Harlow took away their natural playtime, keeping them in social isolation for up to six months. When he reunited these monkeys with their normally raised peers, they exhibited aggressive social behavior like biting and hitting, as well as autistic-like qualities of rocking and avoidance. However, with the addition

of a half an hour of playtime, Harlow found that the socially awkward monkeys could be re-socialized to be comparable to their peers. So, that leads me to wonder, "Is it possible that our kids are like these monkeys?" As they miss these experiences in their childhood, will they become less flexible, less able to agree upon and make rules with their peers, and more aggressive? I do have kids in class who seem like they missed out on these important social experiences. Most of us learn over time that even though we'd like to win, we still wait for the "Ready, Set, Go," before we leave the start line. We understand that to play with others means to compromise, to inhibit our basic impulses, and to adjust our level of competition accordingly.

Physical Activity as Play

One of the ways that I suggest we can include more playtime in middle and high schools is by re-envisioning traditional gym class. At Parker, all seventh through tenth graders have "Wellness" classes four days a week, three of which are designated for an hour of physical activity. In our classes, we offer a mix of the conventional, with games like floor hockey and soccer, along with activities like rock climbing, walks, problem-solving activities, and large group tag games. This three hours a week of physical activity is significantly more time than students get in many other larger public schools, but it almost never seems enough for some kids. Just recently, I listened to my students discuss how having daily Wellness classes affects their school day:

Kevin, 14 years old: "I can't sit still for too long. I need to run. At my old school, we had [physical activity] once a week for a half hour and I was always hyper and the teachers were always mad at me. They didn't care that I needed to move! I love going outside for classes...it's really hard to be stuck in a classroom."

Greg, 13 years old: "I use Wellness class to get rid of stress. I play it off, and I use it to have something to look forward to and keep myself motivated and going through the day."

Katie, 14 years old: "It helps me focus better because if I have a lot of energy it's hard to focus or it gives me new energy to pay attention. It's something to look forward to, if I am bored at school, I think about what we will do in Wellness."

Adam, 12 years old: "It's basically all I love about school."

Their spirited discussions revolved around needing a physical break in their day, a respite from sitting in a classroom, helping them focus their energy, and allow-

ing them social "down-time" when they are able to talk and play with friends.

But are they engaging in real play? I am supervising and structuring it after all, and as Leong and Diamond explain, too much of kids' play time is overly programmed for them, not allowing them the time to learn to monitor themselves, and build those critical cognitive skills. However, the social aspects of our physical activity classes can replicate some features of traditional play. They still need to negotiate rules, even in frequently played games, and since most of the games are interactive, they are constantly developing the way they act towards one another. I watch them, like an anthropologist observing this strange and complex social dance that they do in adolescence. In fleeting moments in class, if I'm paying attention, I start to learn a bit more about their personalities—the split second decisions they make about who to pass to, what to say to encourage others, whether or not to be mad and argue a call, and how or if to address dishonesty when they see it. I see the kid who lies about being "out" during dodgeball, and the ones that volunteer to be goalie when no one else wants to. It seems to me that the kids who are experienced at making "neighborhood rules," negotiating minutia such as "how close can you be to throw at the goal?" or "how many steps can you take with the ball?" have a distinct social advantage. Most of us who grew up playing on our own learned how to deal with kids who didn't play by the rules, who played too rough, or took the game way too seriously, without an adult intervening. I try to teach these skills in classes of 25 students, but still wonder, "Can we teach kids to play?" Or can I just make room for it, and do my best to give feedback at critical moments?

Our Wellness team has worked to include games that ask kids to create strategy, to think, to be creative and spontaneous. In a game called "Manhunt," students use a large open field bordered by woods and small outbuildings first to hide and evade the tagger, and then to join the manhunt and find and tag the final remaining students. Kids have all sorts of strategies: many just enjoy the hiding, covering themselves with leaves, concealing themselves under bushes, or trying to stand innocuously behind trees. Others might pretend to be "it," jumping out and chasing people around in an attempt to keep the taggers away from them. I usually play this with the kids, and have enjoyed many afternoons in these trees, peering out from behind branches in search of my prey, then springing out like a lion chasing the gazelles. Sounds fun, doesn't it? Kids laugh, I laugh, we're all out of breath. Isn't this play?

This variation on hide-and-go-seek, along with other games like Capture the Flag, Four Square, and various tag and ball games can all include elements that we

used to define play earlier: lighthearted, improvised, and imaginative. Just listen to this litany of rules negotiated in a game of Four Square outside on the pavement! *My turn. Okay, old-school, double taps, no penguins, no cherry bombs, no outs on first serve, body language and play nice.* A new student makes her way into the four square, where you get to change the rules and announces: *Alright. Single taps. You have to say the name of a country when you hit the ball, no spikes, firewall, no chicken feet.* Whew!

In many schools, physical activity happens in a variety of settings—classrooms, advisories, recess, and after-school programs. Here are a few suggestions for ways to make it more like play.

- Let kids make some of the rules, but provide structure so they can improvise. Suggest, and then help enforce that all voices be heard.
- Don't keep score.
- Play games that encourage strategy making and creativity. Laugh. Have fun!
- Be open to changing the game. Some of the most interesting games I've played have happened when a student has suggested, "What if we tried this?"
- Set the example. Play as a faculty—not just competitive games, but those that require imagination and strategy. Take risks.
- Physical activity can definitely be one place for teenagers to engage in playtime, but only when it is structured in such a way that the competition is not central to the enjoyment of the game, and kids are able to play together naturally in ways they invent.

What Can We Do?

Most of the research advocating for increased playtime is directed towards preschool and elementary school students, but we need to recognize that this need doesn't end in the upper grades. Teens are in desperate need of creative play, and although they may participate in numerous activities, the attitude towards what they are doing together is what makes the biggest difference. We can't treat them like smaller adults; the transition between childhood and adulthood means that they waver back and forth from feeling independent and wanting to break away, and then needing to be able to relax, be silly and act like kids. Teenagers need breaks from the seriousness of school. We need to give them the room for this though, and trust that they will use it well.

A few years ago, I attended a Project Adventure workshop, at which my two colleagues and I prepared for the school year by learning and playing warm-up tag games and team-building events. After being a part of a "Wolfpack," a tag game where when we were

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hit by the ball we joined the "pack" and had to howl loudly, I found myself thinking that my 14 year olds might not go for this. "Would they really howl?" I questioned, and what would happen if they didn't? In our reflections at the end of the workshop, my goal for the year became to trust that my classes could have fun, relax, and howl like wolves when given the space. Trust, along with my own willingness to be silly and make a fool of myself, were the important components for success here. I have to constantly try to remind myself to allow students to help make the rules, to make changes, to be funny, and have fun, but this requires that I give up part of my well-earned classroom control, and trust that it will be okay. Sometimes it doesn't work, but sometimes it does, and even moments of this can make a big difference in classroom culture. Between classes, I lock the gym closet door, and put away my equipment. I've learned that this is the easiest way to keep the one or two kids for which the balls are totally irresistible from throwing them at each other and making class a bit harder to start. However, I recently walked in and a small group of eighth grade boys were flinging around a pinnie that had been left on the ground. They had devised a whole game around this small piece of cloth, kind of a cross between tag, keep-away and dodgeball. Watching this, I know that kids will always find ways to play, and that some will continue to seek it out while we re-learn how to provide space for it.

How can we encourage and stimulate imaginative play in students past their prime playing years? What else can we do to reverse the effects of too much screen time? One of the ways we can help change this trend is to model it ourselves. I appreciate our middle school division faculty meetings because we play together! We've made it a priority to share games and short activities in order give us each more of an advisory toolbox. One of our more productive meetings consisted of sitting under a parachute "mushroom," throwing neon-colored foam balls at each other, laughing wildly. However, recently I heard one of my colleagues ask, "Why is it that we ask our students to always take risks, but we are so hesitant ourselves?" She was referring to the fact that many of our female teachers were less than enthusiastic about playing in the Faculty Women vs. Varsity Girls Basketball game, where we usually get thoroughly crushed by the high school girls. We don't only need to make the time for

play, but we also need to be open to it in our classrooms, our homes, our daily lives. Play happens when we allow ourselves to change things, to invent something new, to relax. Play was the start of who we are today, and it allows us the freedom to be anything we can imagine. Lenore Terr broadly defines play as "any activity aimed at having fun," in her book *Beyond Love and Work: Why Adults Need to Play*, and she argues that play is also a necessary part of our adult lives. Play "gives us pleasure, a sense of accomplishment, of belonging...it is an opportunity for learning," Terr writes.

Let's all break out the rainbow parachute, hide under piles of leaves, and howl like wolves more often.

Laura Warner is a middle school Wellness teacher at the F.W. Parker Charter School, and holds an Ed.M. in Risk and Prevention from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She still enjoys playing outside in the mud with her daughter, and swings high in the sky on the flying trapeze in her spare time. Laura wants to thank her Wellness colleagues, Deborah Chamberlain and Alan Laubenstein, for their contributions to this article!

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Addendum: Parker Charter Essential School's Wellness Program

Wellness is an integrated curriculum combining aspects of traditional health classes with physical education, games, fitness skills and other mind-body connection skills. The goals of the Wellness program developed by members of the Parker community are: to develop and nurture resilience; to foster and promote healthy decision-making and action; and to enhance personal and social responsibility among all community members. The Wellness program provides an experiential curriculum for all Parker students that engages, challenges, and supports students across all divisions (grades 7-12).

Parker's Criteria for Excellence in Wellness

Self-Management

You identify responsible health behaviors.

You identify your personal health needs.

You compare your behaviors that are safe to those that are risky or harmful.

You demonstrate strategies to improve or maintain your personal health.

You develop injury prevention and management strategies for your personal health.

You demonstrate ways to avoid and reduce threatening situations.

You apply skills to manage stress.

Interpersonal Communication

You demonstrate effective verbal and non-verbal communication skills to enhance health.

You demonstrate healthy ways to express needs, wants, and feelings.

You demonstrate ways to communicate care, consideration, and respect of self and others.

You demonstrate communication skills to build and maintain healthy relationships.

You demonstrate refusal, negotiation, and collaboration skills to manage conflict in healthy ways.

Accessing Information

You evaluate the validity of health information, products and services.

You demonstrate the ability to utilize resources from

home, school, and community that provide valid health information.

You analyze how media influences the selection of health information and products.

You demonstrate the ability to access school and community health services for self and others.

Decision-Making and Goal Setting

You demonstrate the ability to utilize various strategies when making decisions related to health needs.

You analyze how health-related decisions are influenced by individuals, family, and community values.

You predict how decisions regarding health behaviors have consequences for self and others.

You implement strategies and skills needed to attain personal health goals.

You evaluate progress toward achieving personal health goals.

Health Advocacy

You evaluate the effectiveness of communication methods for accurately expressing health information and ideas.

You express information and opinions about health issues.

You utilize strategies to overcome barriers when communicating information, ideas, feelings, and opinions about health issues.

You demonstrate the ability to influence and support others in making positive health choices.

You demonstrate the ability to work cooperatively when advocating for healthy communities.

You demonstrate the ability to adapt health messages and communication techniques to your audience.

Internal and External Influences

You describe the influence of cultural beliefs on health behaviors and the use of health services.

You analyze how messages from media and other sources influence health behaviors.

You analyze the influence of technology on personal and family health.

You analyze how information from your peers and your community influences health.

Physical Fitness and Movement

You participate regularly in physical activity and movement.

You achieve and maintain a personal health-enhancing level of physical fitness.

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