

Children learn decision-making at Sudbury schools

By Joseph Moore

Our two oldest children have reached the happy and scary point in their lives when they can begin to seriously think about leaving the nest to pursue college or some other adventure. Fortunately, their time at Diablo Valley School has helped prepare them to make these choices. We are confident in their ability to choose wisely.

Like virtually every other human activity, we tend to get better at making decisions the more practice we get. But much more is involved in developing life-long habits of good decision-making than the mere presence of a choice. Key ingredients in learning to make good decisions include Reality – choosing in areas that matter to the chooser; Support – making choices in a community that expects and supports your freedom; and Responsibility – having to live with those choices.

At a Sudbury school, kids make real decisions every day. The culture supports their right to make those decisions, and the school community holds them responsible for the consequences. It may be that decisions that seem burning and serious to a five year old

seem silly to an adult or even an eight year old, while the decisions facing a sixteen year old seem far too real. But they are real, rich choices. The five year old might decide to write a complaint against a teenager, and have to face that teenager before a jury of their

peers. In another two years, that sixteen year old may be voting, or join the military. The freedom the kids have in the school is real. The consequences are real. And so, the experience they gain will serve them well in the 'real world'.

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Traditional schools and many families will not allow kids to make rich choices. In the name of protecting them or 'nurturing' their growth in a particular direction, we deprive



children of the true growth that can only come from making real choices and experiencing failure as well as success. If every 'choice' is only granted at the whim of an authority figure, if decisions about how to spend your time are limited to the few hours a week when you're not booked with school, homework and other activities, and if the consequences of the decisions are either trivial or backstopped from having any real risk, then what will be learned bears no relationship to the real world.

Diablo Valley School provides abundant opportunity for students to make choices small and great. They can know what real success and, equally important, real failure feel like. When they pursue their own great adventure of adult life, it won't be the first time they've made a real decision.



"Education is implication. It is not the things you say which children respect; when you say things, they very commonly laugh and do the opposite. It is the things you assume that really sink into them. It is the things you forget even to teach that they learn."

G. K. Chesterton

Eliteness

by Vicente López

Sparring ideas with my new California friends/coworkers I ponder the place I hold. I like it. I like how my mind is always active, dynamic...engaged in cutting-edge thinking. I look around and we're all playing the same game. We're all constructing ourselves for the best possible outcome given the hand dealt. We swing and we duck, we dance and we re-deal. This is no different than the traditional world. I feel none the specialer because of my mental frame. Just about every human I know is on that same boat. Always grasping for that next handhold in rock climbing, or finding a better angle to that wave... we are human.

What I do observe uniquely from this environment, after my

gardening different soils, is the efficient use of resources for the particular goal of eliteness at being human. All my fellow school meeting members have access to time. They access that time to build what they believe in. What they are building, I would have to go on a one by one basis and often not fully knowing, because it's not really fully my business -- it's theirs, just like it's yours or mine. I can, however, see it in every card they play, in their words and their smiles. They grow and they communicate, assert their ideas and open their minds.

Religions and political views learned from their families get challenged and strengthened; they get fueled for growth. They get ready to enter the complicated dance of our highly intricate social network where amazing beauty and technological advancements yang the yin of

wars and environmental destruction. There is only one way to ride that snow-covered slope... with eliteness. And that's why DVS is da' bomb of educational environments, because it brings out the elite in all of us.

Vicente López is a staff member at Diablo Valley School.



Open House
Saturday, March 14
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Is Sudbury schooling
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What I learned from Joanna

by Rose Hardesty

When you go to a Sudbury school you get used to a certain range of questions—especially from your family. “What are you studying right now?” “You *are* studying, aren’t you?” “How do you get into college from a school like yours, anyway?”

But at a family gathering a few weeks ago I got a question I had never heard before that honestly dumbfounded me. I could only blink in shock while I tried to process.

It came from my aunt, who runs a preschool and understands the concept of learning through play and how humans are naturally driven to learn. She has never seemed concerned about our schooling. So, when the question came up, I was floored.

“Is Joanna academically curious?”

Joanna? My sister? No had ever asked me about Joanna before, and I was at a loss for what to say.

“Academically curious?”

I could guess why she was asking. I happen to like academics, and always have. But I started out in the public school system where they are valued entirely too much, and it warped my perspective. It was a vital part of my growing up for me to realize that it was not the skill set that made me friends, or helped me resolve conflicts—while the pursuit of knowledge is one of the things that makes us human, it was not enough make me a healthy human being.

Joanna doesn’t have a particular interest in classes. She’s taken a



few here and there. I asked her about it once, just to see how she viewed them.

“They were fun, but I don’t know...When I play a new computer game or something, there are instructions, right? I don’t read them. I just jump right in and figure it out as I play. To me classes are kind-of like instructions.”

So, when my aunt seemed concerned about Joanna, I was thinking “Don’t you realize? She’s brilliant! Figure it out as you play, amazing!” But I couldn’t say that. Not when a key concern behind the question was “she realizes that classes are this wonderful thing...right?”

All the things that had been so difficult for me—interacting with human beings that weren’t teachers, for instance—came so naturally to Joanna. She was confident, outgoing, likable.

My next series of thoughts were sort-of indignant. So, you’ve never been worried about me, because I’m “academic”, but you’re worried about *her*? Don’t

you realize how hard it was for me to start liking myself, and accept that although I tested well I wasn’t actually smarter than everyone else? You’re worried about Joanna, who had never had problems believing in herself, who was cutting my food for me when I was still afraid of knives, and cooking when I was still afraid of

the stove? Who goes up on STAGE, in front of people she doesn’t know, and *performs*. And *sings*. In front of people she doesn’t know!

When I was little, why weren’t you asking things like, “So, is Rose socially curious? Does she still hate running, and fear the monkey bars? Why doesn’t she ever go bare-foot? *Has she come out of her shell, yet?*”

To me, Joanna is the perfect example of what going to a Sudbury school produces. She was never ruined; she is *always* curious. Learning to her doesn’t have to be associated with classes, and rarely is. The things she’s most proud of learning, “academic” or otherwise, she taught herself—how to read, how to ride a bike, and so on. I know that she could learn any skill she thought was relative to her life.

I eventually stopped gaping and said something like, “I have no concerns about Joanna whatsoever. I really admire her.”

Rose Hardesty is a student at Diablo Valley School

Diablo Valley School

A Sudbury School

2924 Clayton Road
Concord, CA 94519

PHONE:
(925) 676-2982

E-MAIL:
office@diablovalleyschool.org

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