

Like drops of water

By Russ Zuckerman

Russ Zuckerman and his wife Brooke enrolled their young daughter Isobel in our school. After a year they had to move because Russ was in the Coast Guard. They moved to where they could enroll in another Sudbury school, Arts and Ideas. Russ generously shared this article with us.

Our family began our Sudbury education three years ago with no small amount of trepidation. From what I understood at the time, Sudbury children did not concern themselves with learning, they simply followed their interests. What I did not know then, but fully understand now, is that by "simply" following their interests, they unceasingly pursue proficiency.

Sudbury children are in an environment that permits them the space to pursue the natural developmental stages that are organic to their needs. Cognitive and physical development occur at a pace that is theirs alone. Emotional, cognitive, motor and social development are directed by their intelligence, their interests and their instincts.

Through Sudbury, my daughter Isobel has taught herself to read. Her process went beyond learning "sight words;" she never received a teacher's praise or external accolades; she was never graded or given a diagnostic to figure out the number of words per minute she was capable of. There was no bell curve to tell her that she was mediocre, or behind, or ahead...she simply was. She didn't want to "learn" to read, she simply wanted TO read. The incredible thing about Sudbury is that Isobel isn't working to learn words for weekly spelling tests, so there is no drudgery in the process. Through her own volition she has begun the process

of self-mastery. Her proficiency is a product of her motivation and her desire.

At Arts and Ideas, son Jarrett has learned to throw a football. He is only six, but he goes out to the yard and, "plays with the big kids." He asked me recently to play catch with him. Once we were outside he threw it over and over, conscientiously changing his footwork and his arm motion, explaining to me how to set up and execute a spiral. Like all kids at Sudbury, he is free to play video games all day, but he doesn't. At the moment, his body and mind are craving the physical education that comes through the balance, hand-eye coordination and strength of playing catch and running around outside. No one is telling him he needs to run a mile or take the president's challenge; he is pursuing the physical proficiency that a young boy needs to grow up healthy.

As a parent, my hope is to raise courageous, conscientious citizens. The fabric of a Sudbury school is knitted together through the democratic process. Both my children at 6 and 7 years old can understand, through their experiences, what legislative, judicial and executive processes look and feel like. Because we are a military family, we move around every few years. Being stationed near Washington DC has given us an opportunity to walk the Washington Mall, view the Smithsonian and see the White House. My children can converse knowledgeably about how our democracy functions by extrapolating their experiences of school meeting. They understand civic responsibility and the importance of



The learning process is like a drip of water against a rock. It appears fragile and delicate, but uninterrupted over time it is an unstoppable force of nature. The challenge of the Sudbury parent is to leave the water alone and allow nature to take its course.



dialogue and compromise. Through judicial committee proceedings and school meetings my children have learned how to take responsibility for their actions, intelligently and peaceably challenge perceived wrongs against them, and courageously speak out for ideas they believe in.

Three years of Sudbury schools have shown me that the learning process is like a drip of water against a rock. At a glance, it appears fragile and delicate, but uninterrupted over time it is an unstoppable force of nature. The challenge of the Sudbury parent, then, is to leave the water alone and allow nature to take its course.

Water continues on page 2

The right to be wrong

By Joseph Moore, Diablo Valley School parent

Water from page 1

The tough part of being a Sudbury parent is to trust that our children will pursue proficiency in reading, writing and arithmetic, or rather that we are preparing them to be successful in the uncertain world that we live in. I freely admit that until Isobel, now in her third year of Sudbury, began reading on her own, I had trouble truly believing in the process and "methodology" of Sudbury.

Through the time we have been a Sudbury family, I have come to understand that curriculum does not drive intelligence; rather it is the other way around, intelligence drives curriculum. Like drops of water against the rock, children insistently pursue proficiency in all manner of disciplines. Sudbury schools, like Arts and Ideas, provide the space for that pursuit to occur. All a parent needs to do is let nature take its course.

*Meet real Sudbury parents,
staff, and students
and tour the school at our*

*Open House
Saturday, April 25
11:00 am – 2:00 pm*

Children welcome.

The democracy on which Sudbury model schooling is based is of a very particular kind: the democracy of the New England town hall meeting. What makes New England town hall meeting democracy special is familiarity – all the people involved know one another, work together, buy and sell to each other, celebrate together. They share a common life. Town Meeting democracy exists in the service of the common life the people in the town share, just as Sudbury democracy serves the common life of the school meeting members.

Among the people of the town, there can be nothing like the 'winner takes all' attitude that is characteristic of modern American politics. For democracy to work, winners must recognize two truths: they must live with the losers, and they might be the losers the next round. Enlightened self-interest says that if I scorch the earth after the victory of my side, next time, the earth I'm standing on might get scorched if my side loses. Best to treat others as I would like to be treated.

To work, this kind of democracy rooted in community must be built on trust and respect, at least to some degree. I have to trust that the other people in my town will respect my rights and my decisions, and, perhaps more difficult, I must trust them and respect their decisions. This foundation of democracy where every vote has a face can be summed up as the Right to be Wrong.

The right to be wrong has as its base a realistic humility: I, of course, like pretty much everyone, think I'm right about everything – otherwise, I'd change my mind! Yet I also know both from logic and experience how wrong I can be. Therefore, I'm more than willing to accept losing as long as we all agree to keep the democracy alive, to respect one another, and be up-front about what we want and how we

aim to change things. Nothing kills a democracy faster than end-arounds where people try to get what they want outside the normal voting process. Nothing except apathy, that is.

Everyone in a functioning democracy has a right to be wrong – to have others respect our opinions and votes even when we lose. The only exceptions are things that destroy the democracy itself: in their own small way, the New England town meeting and the School Meeting are the sovereigns of their own little nation, and, as such, cannot vote away that sovereignty. So no voting for a dictator-for-life, no trying to use elections to create or destroy a culture, no secret agendas to get what you want under false pretenses.

An interesting side note: off and on over the years, people will propose that a Sudbury school would be better founded on Consensus rather than Democracy. Can't we all just talk it over until we all agree? Under consensus, however, there is no meaningful right to be wrong – if everybody but you think you're wrong, enormous peer pressure is brought to bear on you to conform whether intended or not. In a democracy, on the other hand, one can be the 'loyal opposition' – one can say: I think you all are wrong about this, but I value your friendship and the peaceful operations of the School more than I love getting my way.

The School Meeting and, to a lesser extent, the Assembly, are models of democracy, and both a cause and a result of our school being what it is. It will never be perfect – nothing ever is – but it can be good. It may even motivate us and our children to seek better government in our town, state and nation.

Our donors make a difference



Diablo Valley School parents and students installed new flooring in our kitchen, a vital part of the school. Purchase of the flooring was funded by generous donations to this year's annual campaign. You, too, can make a difference in building a stronger foundation for Diablo Valley School, where young people decide what they want to learn and what kind of person they want to be.

Donate any amount by April 30 to help us earn \$2000 in matching grants.

Thanks to the generous and committed Diablo Valley School community, our annual campaign this year has surpassed its original goal and is well on the road to raising \$20,000 to help strengthen Diablo Valley School for today and the future.

Anonymous donors have offered to match up to \$2000 of donations received by April 30. Any amount counts! Here are two easy ways to show your support.

Click the Donate button on our website: www.diablovalleyschool.org/capital.shtml to donate by credit card or PayPal.

Check sent to: Diablo Valley School, 2924 Clayton Road, Concord, CA 94519.

Specify one or more of the following areas you want your donation to support:

- Site fund
- Endowment: Creating a nest egg to guarantee continuous delivery of Sudbury education at Diablo Valley School into the future
- Scholarships: Based on financial need
- General Fund
- Greatest need as determined by School Meeting

For more information, email office@diablovalleyschool.org or call (925) 676-2982.

Diablo Valley School is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit corporation. All donations are tax deductible as provided for by law. Talk to your tax professional about how donating will impact your taxes.

Thank you

We are grateful to these wonderful supporters who have made gifts of funds or materials to help our school.

Phil & Breda Alston
Mike & Patti Berrow
Joe & Amy Fox
Katharina Kurwig
Jesse Maeda
Leah Norling
SAP Software Solutions
Ric Zegri & Heidi Wohlwend

Arcadia Vacation Planner
Black Bear Diner
Rose Hardesty
Kurwig Consulting
Lea Mason
John & Linda O'Brien
Veronica Sepe

Tony & Brianne Ayala
Scott Campbell & Doreen O'Brien
Stephan Jaetzold & Eva Ebenhoeh
Ben Levy
Joseph & Anne-Martine Moore
Andrea Payne
Sarah Stier

Michael Baum & Lori Miller
Hal Childs
Jesper & Lillian Jurcenoks
Jared & Jessica Mackey
Irene Moreno
Summer Reese
Camille Vernick

Diablo Valley School

A Sudbury School

2924 Clayton Road
Concord, CA 94519PHONE:
(925) 676-2982E-MAIL:
office@diablovalleyschool.org

Do you want to save paper by switching to the electronic version of our newsletter? Send us an email.

Wish List:

We would be grateful for donations of any of these items.

Computers (current models)

Puzzle rack

Stuffed animal filling

Dress form

Dry Erase board (3'x4')

Sturdy outdoor furniture

Acoustic and electric guitars

iPod charger that plugs into the wall

Flooring for cubby room and hallway
(call school for details)

PS3 controllers

New piano bench

Sewing elastic

Child-size brooms

New Drum kit

AED (automated electronic defibrillator)

Oven range hood (call school for details)

Spatulas (off-set and rubber, bowl-scraping)

Diablo Valley School

A Sudbury School

2924 Clayton Road
Concord, CA 94519*Open House**Saturday, April 25**11:00 am – 2:00 pm*