

## Math was my arch enemy

by *Brianne Ayala*

I often comment that my husband and his family have the “math brain;” they tend to see the world in numbers. My son is seven and is on his third year at Diablo Valley School. Although he has never taken any formal classes in math, he has already learned how to apply addition, subtraction and even some multiplication to everyday problems in life. Perhaps he will follow in his father’s footsteps for the love of math.

In school, math was my arch enemy. I remember crying in third grade because I could not get the multiplication table. I stressed about going to math class every day where the teacher might call on me. By eighth grade I flat out gave up in math. This set me on a downward spiral. I had to enter a very remedial course in math in ninth grade. That determined that I could not go straight to a State College or University because I would not graduate from high school with a high enough math course.

This pattern followed me throughout life. I finished all my classes in general education to transfer to a CSU, all except math. Not wanting to finish math, I took on a different career choice. Years later I decided I would not let it defeat me and finished my courses in advanced algebra to transfer to CSU East Bay where I am presently attending. I even received A’s.

The other night I went out to dinner with a very close friend. Her daughter, the same age as mine and her best friend, will be starting kindergarten next fall, as will my daughter. My friend cannot conceive how I can send my daughter to Diablo Valley School where she will not be formally taught

subjects, specifically mathematics. I let my friend know that I do see importance in knowing basic math skills. She went on to state that she uses algebra every day, many times a day, and therefore it is very important.

What my friend neglected to see is that it is *okay* to not go through the day applying math to various situations. More to the point, she was making an assumption that if you are formally taught math you will use math in everyday endeavors. I am an example that this is simply not true. One does not equal the other. However, if a person strives to understand math because of the career they wish to pursue or simply out of the joy of learning, then more power to them for seeking out the knowledge. Unfortunately our school systems are not set up for individuals to seek out their desired knowledge. This knowledge is forced upon them.

The hardest part about being a parent in a Sudbury style school is trusting that our children will receive the education that they need, that their individual needs will be met. At the same time this is the best part about sending your child there, because everyone has needs and everyone’s needs are different. At eight years old I was not ready to be sat down and taught the multiplication table. When forced to do so I put up a block against anything mathematical. My children will never be forced to learn something that their mind is not ready to engulf. When they are ready for it the environment, the staff and their peers at DVS are there to help enrich them.

## *Happy birthday, DVS*

*Back in 1998 when our son enrolled, Diablo Valley School had six students and occupied only three rooms of the current school site. It was the school’s second year of operation. This year DVS celebrates its fifteenth birthday, and – typical teenager – is growing like a weed and full of promise. It seems time to send a birthday card, but what I really want to do is write a thank-you note.*

*Thank you to the small group of visionaries who had the dream to start a different kind of school here in Concord. Thank you to all the staff members who came for short or long times, from diverse walks of life, because they believed that children have rights and deserve respect. Thank you to the parents who took a leap of faith and trusted their children to follow their own paths. Thank you to the students I’ve met while volunteering at the school, for sharing your ideas with me.*

*Thank you, DVS, for your part in the education of my son, now a 24-year-old man of whom we are extremely proud.*

*And thank you for surviving, thriving, and giving me hope that Margaret Mead was right: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.”*

*May you celebrate many more birthdays.*

*Sincerely,  
Lea Mason*

# Do we have to cure childhood?

a viewpoint by assembly president Joseph Moore

Let's talk about one of the more subtle aspects of Sudbury schooling, one that can go unnoticed for years even by people deeply involved in the model. It's the irreconcilable conflict between a democratic and a therapeutic model of the world. Bluntly put, either we are free actors with rights and duties, or we are sets of problems to be diagnosed and solved. I contend that we can't be both at the same time, and that a school must take one or the other view – factory schools see us as problems to be solved, while Sudbury schools see us as free.

We live in the twilight of the Therapeutic Age. Starting about 150 years ago and peaking during the second half of the last century, people came to take it for granted that a two part solution could be found, at least in theory, to all problems: diagnosis and therapy. You correctly identify and name the problem – smallpox, appendicitis, poverty, racism – then find the silver bullet that cures it – vaccines, surgery, the Great Society, Affirmative Action – and the problem gets solved.

Like the proverbial man with a hammer, for someone married to the therapeutic view of the world's problems, everything starts to look like a nail that just needs a little treatment. If the problem does not get solved, it can only mean that either the diagnosis, therapy or both were wrong – we just need to keep trying. The spectacular success of vaccinations and medicine in general makes it seem obvious and inevitable that all problems are diseases of some variety, awaiting a cure. Behaviors that in ages past were



viewed as bad habits or vices or just boys being boys are now classified as something science or society can fix, if only we give it the right name and apply the right salve. In the worst-case scenario, we risk becoming so attached to our diagnosis and course of treatment that we run roughshod over the legitimate rights and interests of others. I think a lot of the unhappy political history of the last 150 years can be best understood in this way.

The Sudbury philosophy is not therapeutic. This fact is one of many that make this philosophy so unpalatable to much of the world. Instead of looking at a child as a set of problems – can't read, not socialized, throws like a girl<sup>1</sup>, can't sit still – that need diagnosis and treatment, we instead take the radically different tack of viewing them as people, owners of their own lives, with intellects, wills, rights and responsibilities all their own. Their personhood is sacred, not to be compromised by our compulsion to fix them.

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better for children, it should be clear how easily this desire can morph into a simple override of the child's own rights and interests. Under the guise of diagnosing and solving their problems for them, we stunt their growth by protecting them from consequences or 'getting them up to grade level' or helping them to socialize or any number of phrases that mask parental/adult *control*. It can be painful to see a child fail or suffer the logical consequences for their actions, but if we truly hope they will come to believe that they are free people who can act from their freedom, we must step aside for them.

While it is much to be hoped that the *effect* of Sudbury schooling would be to ameliorate our problems, to help us grow more healthy and heal our hurts, the *philosophy* is one of individual responsibility and rights.

<sup>1</sup> Everybody throws 'like a girl' until they learn how. Then boys and girls both throw – like somebody who knows how to throw.

# Seen and heard around the school



Making it happen.



We wear many hats.



If the mountain won't come to the school...



Do you knead help with that?

*Open House*  
*Saturday, April 21*  
*11:00 am – 2:00 pm*  
*Tour the school.*  
*Meet families and staff.*  
*Children welcome.*

## Wish List

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

- Scooters
- Guitars
- Microphone
- Pottery wheel
- Puzzle rack
- Bowl mixer
- Dress form
- Piano bench
- Small, portable amp
- Headphones
- Sturdy outdoor furniture
- Computers: current models
- High hat & bass drum pedal for our drum set
- Drummer's stool
- Flat screen monitors

**Diablo Valley School**

A Sudbury School

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*Thank you*

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

Alston Family  
Dee Peterson  
Don and Joy Aguilar  
Gerald Grewats  
Irene Moreno  
Patti Berrow  
Nicole Hammer  
Smith-Donohoe Family

Ayala Family  
Dee and Brad Covey  
Donze Family  
Heather Pierini  
Jurcenoks Family  
Miller Family  
Rogers Family

Campbell-O'Brien Family  
Delores McKee  
Gaily Ezer  
Hanson Family  
Lea Mason  
Moore Family  
Sarah Yeargin

**Pssst... past and present DVS assembly members!**

This year the school celebrates its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Do you have memories to share about your time at DVS, or want to send greetings in recognition of this milestone? Send them to the school, and we'll share selections in our next newsletter or on the website.

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