

Learning for success and happiness

by Joseph Moore

I recently ran across a couple of essays on education that illustrate why our cultural obsession with academics is misguided. The first was a sad story in the *New York Times* about three ‘underprivileged’ young women from an ‘underperforming’ high school who nonetheless tried college. All three were good, enthusiastic students, but all three lacked the family and social support most successful college students have. A gung-ho counselor had helped them get into college, but once there, they were largely on their own. Not having family or friends to show them the way and provide emotional support, each made, in her own way, decisions that torpedoed their college careers.

The conclusion of the article was that college, far from helping the less fortunate get ahead, instead reinforced existing economic and social stratification. The conclusion I reached was that, in college as in so much of life, having good social connections and skills is far more important than academic achievement. I’d also add that financial success more often than not appears to be an effect of having the same solid social skills that can get you through college, rather than college itself being the cause of future success. Not to mention that success measured in happiness flows to those with strong connections to other people – to those with family and friends.

So, why do we focus so much energy on academics – eight or ten or more hours a day for many high school students – and leave social skills to be developed ad hoc in our kids’ spare time? Why demand that kids sacrifice family and social times to hit the books?

At Diablo Valley School, students have every opportunity to develop their academic skills, and we have in fact graduated a number of students who have done very well in academic pursuits. But we also value the social skills that can only be developed by freely interacting with other people, in formal settings such as School Meeting and Judicial Meetings, and in the less formal but equally important casual encounters. Over



and over again, family, friends and visitors have commented on the outstanding social skills our students have. In the long run, their success and happiness will depend more on their relationships with people than on mastery of academics.

Next, I read an essay – one in a long stream of such writing in these tough economic times – pointing out that an MBA isn’t worth the time and money, unless you get it from a top tier school. Why is that? You will certainly take many of the same classes – accounting, marketing, finance – at Local U that you’d take at Harvard. Nope, it’s not the classes – it’s the contacts you make. What you’re paying for at Harvard is to become a cog in the huge, well-oiled machine that links its graduates to all the major companies around the globe. The academic studies are gravy, and all those MBAs know it.

Here’s an idea: instead of burning the midnight oil to get into Harvard’s business school, why not cut to the chase and work on developing contacts? This isn’t some wild theory – there are more successful people who have skipped business school but pursued many friendships than there are who connected all the Master’s Degree dots but failed to make friends. This is true in virtually every field, and has been well known among successful people from time immemorial.

Does this mean academics are not important? Well, as someone who loves reading and writing, and who did my share of college, I’m not about to say that. But focusing on academics to the detriment of social skills is always short-sighted. At Diablo Valley School, we make room for both.

Staff Insights

Diligence

by Vicente López

It's not unknown for a child who is still working on understanding their body to have an 'accident' because they are engrossed in a game.

There's no more powerful feedback for the correction of that incident than the child's own discomfort and peer comments. (I smile at the deep intelligence of the community; that type of incident has never been written up.)

We as adults may point it out to them, out of our own self process, and the diffusing of the potential shame involved, rather than for result achievement.

The intensity of diligence in those situations is at its peak. Balance will undoubtedly be mastered, like game levels, like reading the information on how to beat the level, like understanding the math that will bring forth the results desired, like driving, college, work, like me stopping here because I've written it before.



Family Corner

Finding a passion

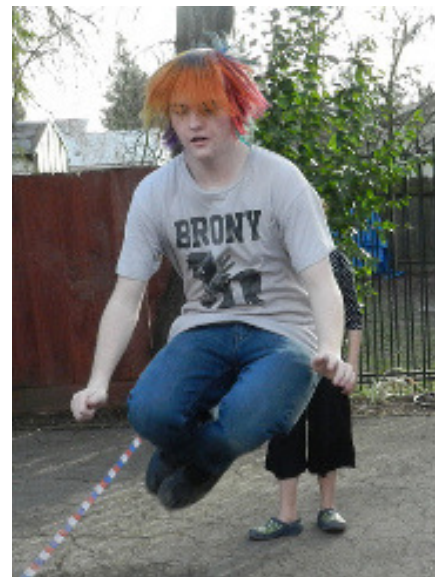
by Evelyn Hardesty with Rose Hardesty

My daughter Joanna is sixteen, and DVS is the only school she has ever known. Instead of sitting in a classroom, Joanna spent her childhood playing and talking. Over the years her play and involvement in the school community has developed into a passion for theater and community service.

She is currently a performer and volunteer in a foundation that raises money for the Oakland Children's Hospital. As part of her volunteer work, she assisted the make-up crew in the spring production and became fascinated by stage make-up. This interest led her to sign up for a Stage Make-up class at Diablo Valley College last fall.

Over the semester, Joanna's dedication and patience with the medium never wavered, through long hours of self-transformation into a whole host of characters, as well as assignments where she recruited her friends as guinea pigs. Her make-up box followed her around at DVS all day on Halloween, and students stood in line to be made-up with frighteningly realistic scars, bruises and vampire bites.

The fact that Joanna was asked to be a teaching assistant for her stage make-up class is a reminder that trusting our children to follow their own interests and choose how they spend their school time pays off.



Occasions and Observations



Everyone looked fabulous at the school's gala 15th-anniversary celebration

Congratulations to our 2012 graduates



We are evolving



We are who we are



We are finding our way



We are exuberant

Diablo Valley School

A Sudbury School

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2924 Clayton Road
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We are grateful to these wonderful supporters who have made gifts of funds or materials to help our school.

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Camille Vernick
Daniel Kennedy
Donzé Family
Jurcenoks Family

Moore Family
Evelyn Hardesty
Lea Mason
Ayala Family
Irene Moreno

Wish List We would be grateful for the donation of any of these items. Scooters, acoustic and electric guitars, AED (automated electronic defibrillator) puzzle rack, bowl mixer, dress form, sturdy outdoor furniture, computers (current models), flat screen monitors, quality drum set, iPod charger that plugs into the wall.

Open House

*Saturday
January 26th 2013
11:00 am – 2:00 pm*

*Tour the school.
Meet families and staff.
Children welcome.*

