



∞ The CDS Weekly ∞

Catching Up on the Coming Weeks

(415) 861-5432
March 25, 2004

Words From Rick

Making the Lights Go On in the Brain

Yesterday I had the pleasure of interviewing a young man with ten years of teaching experience in the San Francisco public schools, seven of them in kindergarten—a wonderful man and obviously an excellent teacher. At one point in the conversation he spread his hands far apart over his head and said, “When I started teaching, this was my job. I was expected to teach the whole child and was given the latitude to do it.” As he slowly brought his hands together in front of him till they were one inch apart he said, “In the last ten years it has come to this. On the first day of school every kindergartner in my class (and for the most part in the state), is required to be on page one of the Houghton Mifflin reading textbook. The only thing I am being held accountable for is how they do on a test. I used to give a diagnostic test to see where the children were in their reading or reading readiness so I could address each set of needs. Now I am required to give a test which simply tells us who is successful and who is failing.”

My heart breaks when I hear these stories—and I have been hearing more and more of them. Unfortunately there still seem to be only two schools of thought. Should we be teaching academics or should we teach students how to think? Should we focus on standards or should we teach the whole child?

Academic standardism, now under the Bush banner, “No Child Left Behind,” has been the majority opinion for a long time. This school of thought says we should set academic standards, teach to them, then test to “hold kids and teachers accountable.” The other school of thought is progressivism or developmentalism which holds that the aim of education is to develop the whole person, engage the whole child in the love of learning, and support their social and emotional development as well as their intellectual development. Academic achievement is not the most important thing. Most parents and teachers I know believe in the latter; most schools and school systems act as if they believe in the former.

The fallacy of this dichotomy was revealed in dozens of different ways during the CAIS Learning and Brain Symposium which CDS hosted on March 12th, our professional day. In my mind the keynote address and all three workshops pointed to a synthesis. We should be clear academics is our business. We need to be clear that the real reason for everything we do is to develop the brain. We should teach academics as if our purpose is brain development. A teacher—regardless of subject—should be held accountable for engaging as much of the brain as possible. The quality of a mathematics or an art lesson is measured by how much of the organism got engaged, and the novelty of the connections that were made.

∞ This Week's Hot Dates ∞



Friday, March 26th

Lost & Found Table on Yard

Monday, March 29th

Spring Electives Begin

Monday, March 29th

5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

Knit & Spin

Faculty Lounge

Tuesday, March 30th

4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

PTTA/Strategic Planning Meeting

Faculty Lounge

***Don't Miss This Important Meeting
(Details in PTTA Update Below)***

Wednesday, March 31st

10:45 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Cesar Chavez Birthday Celebration Assembly

CDS Yard

(Families Encouraged to Come By)

Wednesday, March 31st

Last Day to Sign Up for Spring Break Camp

Thank You!

- ▶ To **everyone** who donated, sold, served, spotted, organized, auctionated and participated in the Black & White Spring Ball & Auction, **thank you!** The evening couldn't have happened without you.
- ▶ To Winnie von Ehrenberg for her tireless editing of the Preschool Newsletter!
- ▶ To Tacy Gaede for the beautiful rug donated to the 3rd floor administrative office.

In the last few weeks, several of us have watched half-a-dozen demonstration lessons on fractions. There are two kinds of lessons: those where the teacher seems to want the students to learn a procedure, and those where the purpose of the lesson is to get them to think mathematically. In the former, the level of enthusiasm is low and the teacher uses a lot of his/her energy to get the students to focus. In the latter, the students are engaged. You can see the wheels turning in their brains and the lights going on in their heads as well as other parts of their bodies.

If the purpose of teaching long division is to learn the algorithm for doing it, not very much of the brain is used, not much learning takes place, some students get it fast, some take a long time to gain proficiency in it, and many are clueless about what it's all about. If the teacher sees her purpose is to develop the brain, long division can be a mind expanding experience. Not only will students learn long division better, but they'll understand what they're doing when they should apply this skill, and will have a variety of ways to approach a problem. Ms. Paula's workshop during the CAIS symposium was one hour packed with dozens of lessons that made this same central point. Teacher candidates can see it going on in all the classrooms from preschool to 6th grade and are impressed. Not all of them can do it, however.

And speaking of problem solving... that is how we should view art class, and it's how Karen and Elizabeth teach it. The point of their workshop (which about 45 visiting teachers attended) was that to teach art properly one has to teach as if one's purpose is to develop the entire human organism, and to do it in community. Teaching kids to be creative is a multi-faceted and many-splendored thing. It's about problem solving, social interaction, learning to trust yourself, the materials and the people you're working with. It's about learning concepts like line, shape, color, but it's also about mysterious things like imagination, the muse and the soul. CDS students learn the academic skills of art by being artists. Making art requires mobilizing the entire human organism. That's the way it is with all subjects.

Our goal is to graduate fourteen-year-olds who will do well in high school and college. Our aim is to develop the whole brain. It is appropriate for academic achievement to be an ultimate measure of success—along with love of learning, self-possession, and caring for others. However, perhaps paradoxically, the things we should be monitoring in the short term are:

Inspiration

Wonder

Industriousness

Taking responsibility

Wanting to come to school the next day

CDS kids are proving school can provide it all, but the only way for a school to provide it all is for everyone to keep their eye on the right ball: making the lights go on in the brain.

The Dirt

Best in Show

Last week, four classes submitted entries in Dirt Mama's Children's Garden Show as a part of the San Francisco Flower and Garden Show. Each preschool class created miniature gardens integrating topics they were investigating in their garden projects. The 2nd grade class created a miniature city for their entry. Having lately been engaged in an investigation of cities and urban ecology and the plants and animals living right here in San Francisco, the students created a wonderful cityscape complete with homes, stores, and restaurants, including "Joe's Hot Dog Stand." They constructed a sidewalk from linoleum squares and planted grasses that grew up in between the cracks

in the pavement. The class also created urban animals out of clay. Raccoons, pigeons, salamanders, snails and worms were "crawling in the soil" and "hiding in the trees." One student attached a hummingbird to a wire so it could "hover" over the tree and its nest of eggs. It was an incredible creative effort by everyone in the class and the garden reflected all they had been learning about in their urban ecology project. After they added all the finishing touches, Ava said to me, "It looks so good, I think we might win."

Wednesday morning came and we all piled into cars and headed to the Cow Palace to see the show. We started at the mini-gardens and the class got to see their garden as well as entries from other schools. They found their garden and were disappointed they didn't win a ribbon in any of the categories. Then the children began to take a look at the other entries. I was walking around with Noah who made a few observations echoed by other kids in the class. Looking at a garden with ceramic figures and sculptures, he whispered, "They didn't make any of their stuff like we did. They bought all of their materials at the store." After walking through the exhibit, almost all of the students in the class took great pride in the fact they had created a garden all by themselves and made everything in it. The importance of winning a blue ribbon had faded into the background.

—Morgan Taggart, Environmental Education Resource Teacher

Extended Program News

Spring Break Camp

Spring Break Camp will be held from April 12th– 16th, and the theme is Urban Wildlife. **Remember to sign up in advance**; drop-ins are difficult to accommodate with our reduced camp staff.

Spring Enrichment Classes

The deadline for signing up for Spring Enrichment Classes is this Friday, March 26th at noon! Classes begin Monday, March 29th.

Movie Screening

Everyone is welcome to a screening of short, student films created during the TV News Show and Cartooning elective, on Friday, March 26th, at 3:30 p.m. in the Teddy Bear room.

PM Program Spring Community Service Project
Each Tuesday in April will be devoted to projects and activities related to urban wildlife and community service. The PM program's work will culminate in May when we'll be working with the organization Literacy for Environmental Justice doing wetlands and habitat restoration work at the beautiful Heron's Head Wildlife Area on the bay. We will need volunteer drivers and helpers. If you're interested, please call Jenna at extension 15.

—Jenna Stephens, Extended Program Coordinator

Ewww! What's that Smell?

Thought you'd heard every possible angle on the parking issue at CDS? In recent weeks, visitors have regularly parked beside the gate-enclosed garbage cans at the front of the school. This is bad on a number of levels, not only because parents have been repeatedly asked **not to park in the CDS lot**, but because when cars block our garbage cans, our garbage doesn't get picked up. Naturally, this stinks! Please, please, if you're visiting the school, give yourself time to park on the street, or call Martha at the front desk to find out if any spaces are open in the lot. And never, never park in front of the garbage cans! Thank you.

Lost & Found

Our lost and found is bursting at the seams. Come reclaim your child's missing coats, sweaters, shirts, pants and toys this Friday afternoon on the yard. In the event of rain, look for a table on the first floor. All unclaimed items will be donated to Community Thrift.

Hola Familias!

As I mentioned last week, the Union Espanola de California building will host a reception with the purpose of raising funds for the victims of the terrorist attacks in Madrid on March 11th. There will be tapas, wine, raffles and a live performance by my dance company, Grupo Andanza. All CDS families are welcome to attend: Sunday, March 28th, at 2:00 p.m. at 2850 Alemany Boulevard in San Francisco. The cost is \$10.00 per person. I hope to see you.

Here are *la frase de la semana*:

Viva Cesar Chavez. Long live Cesar Chavez.

Dijiste: Si se puede! What do we say: Yes we can!

Gracias a todos.

—Consuelo Aparicio-Cercos, Spanish Department

Knit and Spin, Monday Evenings

The Knitters and Spinners continue to meet every Monday evening from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. in the faculty lounge to share our projects, offer one another help and learn new skills. You're invited! Hope to see you there!

CDS Parent-Teacher-Trustee-Administrator Association: PTTA Update

We Did It!

While we await the final auction numbers, let us take a moment to revel in the undeniable success that was our Black & White Spring Ball & Auction. Delicious food, blue cocktails, gorgeous flowers and decorations, spirited bidding and boogie fever all combined to make the evening one to remember. We hope everyone took a moment to pause on the last page of the auction catalogue to acknowledge the tireless efforts of so many caring volunteers. There are too many names to mention here and so to *everyone*, thank you so much! Special mention must be made, however, of the incredible work of Ball & Auction co-chairs Tina Corse, Emma Donovan, Lisa Eltinge, and of course our beloved 'auctionator' Steve

Donovan. We couldn't have done it without you!

Strategic Planning at CDS -- Please Join in at the March 30th PTTA Meeting!

The next PTTA meeting has been moved forward one week to Tuesday, March 30th, and will start earlier than usual, at 4:00 p.m. in the faculty lounge. Rick and other members of the CDS Board of Trustees' Strategic Planning Steering Committee will lead parents in a town-hall meeting to brainstorm big picture strategic planning topics including parents' dreams for CDS in the future, areas in which parents would like to see CDS become stronger, what is already excellent about CDS and what key components of the CDS mission statement mean to parents. Please refer to the attached letter for more information. We hope to see you there!

The Country Fair Needs Your Talent!

The Country Fair Committee is seeking talent for our Country Fair celebration on May 1st. Are you a musician? A juggler? A balloon sculptor? Do you have a magnificent talent you'd like to share with the CDS community? Don't hide your talent from your potentially adoring fans! Contact Sally Nielson at sn@hausrath.com to get involved.

Friday Morning Coffee

Schedule a few minutes in your Friday morning to join other parents for hot coffee and grown-up conversation in the yard after drop off, 8:30 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.

PTTA Questions or Ideas?

Contact Marion Quinones at (415) 701-1957 or MQuinones@fbm.com.

Do You Prefer *The Weekly* by Email?

Help us reduce our paper usage by receiving the *Weekly* via email. Please email us at cdsweekly@cds-sf.org and give us your email address. Let us know the name and class of the child your hard copy usually goes home with so we can remove him or her from the classroom distribution list. Thanks!

Upcoming on the CDS Calendar



Sunday, April 4th

Daylight Savings Begins

Monday, April 12th – Friday, April 16th

Spring Break

Spring Break Camp Available

Monday, April 19th – Friday, April 23rd

Week of the Young Child

Thursday, April 22nd

Earth Day

Saturday, April 24th

Spring Work Day

Saturday, May 1st

11:00 am – 3:00 pm

Country Fair

How to Submit to *The CDS Weekly*.

Submissions are to be received **no later than 8:00 am Wednesday**. Please email them to cdsweekly@cds-sf.org

