



March 19, 2009

THE CHILDREN'S DAY SCHOOL Weekly

Words from Rick

Constructivism

Humans are meaning-making machines; that's why CDS is constructivist. When a teacher has everyone read a passage, her students are not receiving the same input, because as soon as the data goes in through the eyes or ears each brain does something different with it. So, it is important to teach students as if they are making sense of what they are reading, and that each one is making their own unique sense of it. Expecting the same information to come back out again unprocessed—undistorted—is not only ignorant, but a manifestation of not understanding what education is all about. Education is about challenging existing mental structures to change rather than acting as if a person's mental structure doesn't matter.

We DO want them to know what "protein" is. We also want them to know Apollo, biomass, chivalry, dialectic, ellipse, Falstaff, genocide, hierarchy, infinitive, jingoism, kilowatt-hour, Luddite, Mecca, narcissism, Oak Ridge, palindrome, quantum, referendum, Sacco and Vanzetti, Soloman, Tolstoy, utopia, vanishing point, Walden, xenophobia, Y-chromosome, and zero-sum. E.D. Hirsch has selected over 3,000 such items for the appendix to his book *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (1987). I actually think he is right: we need to know this stuff.

But what does it mean to "know" Dachau, Daedalus or Mayor Daley? Our target as educators must be understanding rather than knowledge, because knowledge must be embedded in understanding. The mental models into which knowledge is wired make all the difference in the world; so our focus must be to make these mental models ever more open and inclusive. The result of a lesson must be both increased knowledge and increased mental agility. An educator should use Degas to challenge the way the child organizes the world rather than hoping that Degas will occupy some simple spot in a child's cerebral cortex so that there will be some recognition when she reads it in a book. This is the problem that many of Hirsch's disciples ignore. It is important that we give them this knowledge, but it is vital that we teach them how to fish for more, and the former is never very effective without the latter.

One of the most important things that being a Head of School has taught me is that humans live out of these mental models. True, I knew it way back in 1974 when I began running schools, but since then I have learned that it is REALLY true. Each of us does not react to what is really there, to the reality that is before us, to the entirety of what we are experiencing, but rather to the 3% of the experience our wiring allows us to grasp. The more limited and simple the wiring, the thinner—and more inaccurate—the experience. I know of at least three conflicts in the school yesterday resulting from

Hot Dates

Tuesday, March 10 –
Wednesday, March 25 (8 p.m.)
Fiesta online silent auction is live at
www.cdsfiesta2009.cmarket.com

Friday, March 20
8:30 a.m.
Friday assembly
Third grade presenting

Monday, March 23
7 p.m.
SPEAK event: Michael Gurian,
author of *Nurture the Nature*
The Greek Orthodox Cathedral
245 Valencia Street

Tuesday, March 24
3:45-5 p.m.
Student – teacher basketball game
Boys & Girls Club

Dates also posted on CDS website
www.cds-sf.org/news/calendar.html



Thank You!

- To Susan Carp and Joe Sutton for their contributions to Friday morning coffee and snacks.

misunderstandings that resulted from minds distorting data destructively.

As I read Hirsh's list of things we should all know, I feel, "Yes I should know that, I want to know that." I feel good about myself when I do know that. But what teachers and parents must understand is that HOW our children come to know this stuff must be our focus. To give a dictionary definition of depreciation is not the same as being able to use it correctly in a sentence, and both are a far cry from understanding it.

Constructivism is teaching as if we know that our job is to change people's minds, to keep them growing, to keep them on their toes, to keep them off balance and wondering. Constructivist teachers feel successful when their students are asking lots of good questions, and are not satisfied when 85% of their students do better than 85% correct on some test of knowledge. This is why fun is fundamental, why creation is critical, why discussion drives discovery, why projects are important, why imagination breeds insight, and why play is so very, very, very important.

Remember, it's fine to know what alliteration is, but what's really important is to know when and how to use it—and when not to.

From the Classrooms

From the Green Task Force Compost Monitors and Friday Raffle

"Green" greetings from the Green Task Force! Each month, third and fourth grade students, faculty, parents and trustees meet to talk about environmental challenges, to assign and take on tasks and to find new ways to go green. The Green Task Force has been doing so much lately to reduce CDS' carbon footprint.

At the assembly last Friday, the fourth grade presented a skit on how to compost at school. The fourth grade has been working on becoming Compost Monitors. So what *is* a Compost Monitor? A Compost Monitor is a member of the fourth grade, who, at lunchtime, helps students put their lunch scraps in the right bin. You'll see their bright

orange aprons right away. If you have a question, feel free to ask any fourth grader. Remember, putting your lunch in the right bin helps reduce global warming.

A new part of the assembly will be a raffle. Parents, if you bring your own coffee mug to Friday assembly, you can enter a raffle to win CDS merchandise. The lucky (and green) winner will be announced at the end of each assembly.

Don't forget - we can all help!

—Olivia Starr and Anjali Rangaswami, fourth grade

Green Resources

As you can see, the fourth grade has been working with the Green Task Force to help CDS become a "greener" school and have a few websites to share to help with their efforts:

- Sunset Scavenger: www.sunsetscavenger.com
- SF Environment: www.sfenvironment.org

They hope the websites are helpful and encourage everyone to consider joining the Green Task Force.

From the Office

Two Events for Parents

We're pleased to present two great opportunities for parent education in the coming weeks: Michael Gurian, author of *Nurture the Nature* on March 23, and NAIS (National Association of Independent Schools) President Pat Bassett on March 31.

Michael Gurian

On Monday, March 23, at 7 p.m. at The Greek Orthodox Cathedral (245 Valencia Street), SPEAK (Speakers for Parents Educators and Knowledge) will host Michael Gurian, author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Nurture the Nature*.

CDS Yahoo Group

Our CDS Community Yahoo group is a forum for the CDS community to share information about life outside of school. Join this Yahoo group, our in-house "craigslist," by visiting: groups.yahoo.com/group/cdscommunity.

School Wish List

- Thank you to all who have been bringing in the wonderful lemons. We can always use more for our delicious Country Fair lemonade. Don't let your extra lemons go to waste. Lemons can be left at the front desk or outside the environmental education kitchen/classroom.
- The school needs a TV/VCR/DVD player to be used in St. Joseph's Hall (TV width should be less than 27"). If you have one in good condition you'd like to donate, please contact Rebecca Kroll at rebeccak@cds-sf.org.

Michael Gurian will talk about the latest brain research in child and adolescent development and the tools parents need to discover their child's core nature. Please contact Kate Flynn Becker (parent of Clara '13 and Gus '10) with any questions about the event or interest in getting involved with SPEAK, at k8fln@aol.com or 415-305-6625.

Pat Bassett

On Tuesday, March 31, at 7 p.m. at Mission High School, CDS and Mission High School will host NAIS President, Pat Bassett, for a talk on "The Right-Brained Future: Creating Mindsets for the 21st Century." Pat Bassett is the author of numerous articles including "Why Good Schools are Countercultural" and "Testing, Accountability, and Independence." This event is open to all CDS parents, faculty and staff, as well as local Bay Area parents and educators. If you have questions about this event, please contact Kerry Parker at kerry@cds-sf.org.

Events

Fiesta 2009

Please see the attached flyer for all Fiesta 2009 details and highlights! In addition, bid online now at www.cdsfiesta2009.cmarket.com.

Extended Program News

April Vacation Camp

April vacation camp enrollment has begun and registration forms are available at the front desk. The theme for preschool camp is Spring Bloom, and Ms.

Ngoc, Ms. Gladys and Ms. Gloria will be leading campers in learning about flowers, plants, hibernation and much more. Camp will feature many art and cooking projects as well as a jumper castle. For K-8 camp, Ms. Jasmin, Ms. Vanessa, Ms. Amanda and Mr. Noah will lead an exploration of what community means to us. Camp will feature visits to local parks, visiting and helping out our partners and creating a community chalk mural. Camp dates are April 6-10 and the cost is \$60 for a full day and \$35 for a half-day. Please contact Dan at 415-861-5432 or danl@cds-sf.org with any questions.

Summer Camp

The Extended Program is very excited to offer a full camp once again for all CDS students in preschool through eighth grade. Summer camp enrollments are rolling in, but we still have space in all camp sessions in each age group. Some highlights this summer include our first ever Spanish Immersion Camp for elementary students during Session IV, July 27-Aug 7; Rock Band Camp with Mr. Terry and Mr. Ryan for middle school students during Session III, July 13-24; and Theatre Camp for elementary students with Ms. Emilie and Ms. Jasmin during Sessions I and II. Preschool camp will also include these new exciting themes: Animalia, Cultural Explorer, Environment, Living with Music and Cooperation and Community. Enrollment forms are available at the front desk and online at http://www.cds-sf.org/life_at_cds/summer.html.

- Session I: June 15-26
- Session II: June 29-July 10
- Session III: July 13-24
- Session IV: July 27-Aug 7

Go Bulldogs!

Student – Teacher Challenge

Come out and watch the middle school basketball team take on the teachers! On Tuesday, March 24 from 3:45-5 p.m. at the Boys & Girls Club, Coach Dan and Coach Jim will join fellow teachers to play the Bulldog basketball team. It's a game you won't want to miss!

PTTA Corner

Friday Morning Coffee

Come join other parents for coffee and doughnuts in the yard after Friday drop-off, 8-9 a.m. This is your chance to meet other families, have a few minutes of grown-up conversation and grab sustenance and caffeine before you start your day. (Earth friendly tip: bring your own mug!)

We're always looking for additional volunteers—if you're willing to sign up to bring morning sustenance, please contact Friday morning coffee coordinators Wendy Bokhorst-Heng at wdbheng@gmail.com, or Angie Jolie at ajolie@morillojolie.net.

PTTA Questions or Ideas?

- General e-mail, CDSPTTA@yahoo.com
- Laura Pliska, President, (415) 641-5116 or laura@sfbabyworks.com
- Robin McClarren, Faculty Appreciation Coordinator, (415) 235-0295 or robinmcc@speakeasy.net
- Sara O'Malley, Parent Involvement Coordinator, (415) 348-8841 or sara@omalleyhilton.com
- Karen Randig, Secretary, (415) 824-1784 or krandig@msn.com
- Andrea Reynolds, Preschool Representative, (415) 860-7556 or andrea-reynolds@sbcglobal.net
- Darya Soto, Diversity Coordinator, (415) 812-1715 or daryasoto@yahoo.com
- Carlos Vasquez, Classroom Liaison Coordinator, (415) 987-6501 or xcvasquez@aol.com

Upcoming Dates

Saturday, March 28

6:30-11 p.m.

Fiesta 2009

Mighty

119 Utah Street

Tuesday, March 31

7-8:30 p.m.

"The Right-Brained Future"

Pat Bassett, NAIS President

Mission High School

Friday, April 3

Cesar Chavez celebration

Monday, April 6 – Friday, April 10

Spring vacation

No school

Extended program available

Dates also posted on CDS website
www.cds-sf.org/news/calendar.html

Children's Day School

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