

Everything but Squidzilla

How to describe a day at Diablo Valley School? Here is a viewpoint from staff member Vicente López.

Every day I could write a blog entry, fix something, draw, dance, think about how to help fix the world, or a combination of any of the above as I see fit. Today I played an epic game of Munchkin for around three hours. Munchkin is Zen in defining a tip of the poly-dimensional iceberg that is my job. Human day-to-day is an elaborate dance of figuring stuff out. That's our daily curriculum. We figure stuff out.

I go to the thesaurus to look for *complex/dynamic* to describe the game, and it takes me to a wiki page that gives me a window into something mathematical that could have been my life. It's like a browser window with 42 open tabs. I lose track of why I went to look for the word, but the concept is clear in my mind. I play with thoughts and brainstorm how to get the idea across. Peter Gray's words are strong in my mind; he too is part of this game. The students go through this same process. They learn to prioritize which tabs are important to their needs. In the process they forge their own intelligence that connects and builds on the parallel constructions of their peers. And the game goes on.

I return to the table from a 15 minute walk-around where I



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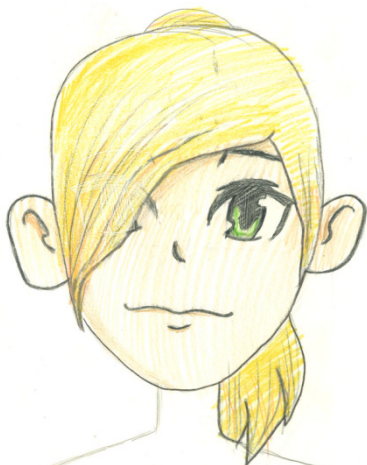
finger wagged (no time to write up) a messy plate on the floor, restarted the wireless, and crossed some three different worlds in creation; all moments worthy of an essay and/or deep thought and appreciation. The game is moving like molasses with no rhyme or reason but to have fun. That fun we're having is a result of our brains learning and self-constructing. The tinfoil hat gets traded for the sandals of protection, and I again refuse to trade my coat of arms. I pull no punches.

I do another walk around school. I'm not there for half of the conflicts but it's not held against me. I'm one more of the party with my own needs to be met.

When I return, a fierce battle is taking place. Five-, fifteen-, and forty-five- year olds are melding worlds, emotions, and knowledge in the name of play. Level down cards and potions are flying across the table, ducks are getting picked up in the dungeon, and the numbers are fluctuating like the stock market.

A parent waits patiently at the door for their offspring, gets a five-minute glimpse of the awesomeness that is our day, and smiles at the decision to have enrolled all those years ago when they still struggled to let go of the idea that homework, grades and other forms of indoctrination were the right path in the construction of an intelligent, efficient, healthy and happy mind. And the dice roll...

Drawings and haiku



Vibrant eyes of green
Golden locks flow in the wind
An artistic muse

haiku by Drew
drawing by: Chris



Spirits rise in cold nights
Stars sparkling under crescent moon
A haunted graveyard

haiku by Drew
drawing by: Duncan

Lingering Effects

by Joseph Moore

Joseph is the father of three graduates and two current students of Diablo Valley School.

All of us who have been around Sudbury kids much have run into the 'decompression' effect: kids who have spent a few years in the graded classroom almost always go through a disoriented phase upon embarking on the new educational adventure at our schools. While a kid may be thrilled with the new freedom, he may also feel guilty about 'wasting' time, and keep waiting for somebody to tell him what to do. Some kids come to school and sleep; some misbehave; some mope. They push the boundaries. All are learning to cope with a different set of expectations.

Now, everybody has their ups and downs, so not every moody or bored day is a sign of something deeper. But, all in all, there seems to be an identifiable pattern in the way kids adjust to the difference between being micromanaged to the point of no personal responsibility and being freed and having their great responsibility recognized. It's stressful, and, while the majority of kids soon learn to love the school and the respect it gives them, sadly, not everybody makes it through.

Similarly, we parents go through a phase of adapting to the new expectations. Even we, the small percentage of parents willing to let go enough to send their kids to our school, find our expectations need adjusting. All in all, it seems the kids have an easier time than the parents. Most cases of kids not adjusting are easily traced to parents not adjusting.

Say we've been here for a while, our kids are happy, and we're as in love with the idea of the school as our kids are. Done, right? We know all about it, and have freed our minds from all that educational baggage and peer pressure that insisted we do things just like everybody else.

Not so fast. Do we really think the years of schooling we went through, and the years of peer pressure, and all the approval we got for being good students, all the shame we felt for failing, all those years and years of control, can be healed in a year or two, just by embracing the Sudbury model?

It's tempting to view Sudbury schooling as a sort of miracle cure. After all, sometimes after as little as a few weeks, we see children go from sullen troublemakers or withdrawn whiners to fully engaged and confident students. Parents

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Lingering Effects

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often report that they have gotten their child back, that evenings at home, without the homework fights, have become tolerable, even pleasant.

Just as common is the feeling among parents of having awakened from a bad dream. Now that they can see with their own eyes that their kids are doing just fine without the endless micro-management and pressure of the classroom model, the scales have fallen from their eyes. Like Neo after taking the red pill, the world now makes sense. We will never be fooled again; we will never allow our children to be treated as standardized products again.

But as Tank said to Morpheus, looking over the newly-freed Neo: "He still needs a lot of work." We, too, need a lot of work to reclaim ourselves. We can't expect the effects of the 8 or 12 or more years of schooling to be healed away in a miraculous moment of enlightenment. We spent those years being prepared to be interchangeable parts, not free adults.

Contemplate this quotation from Johann Gottlieb Fichte, the father of modern education, whose basic methods and goals are still in place today in every graded classroom in this country:

"Education should aim at destroying free will so that after pupils are thus schooled they will be incapable throughout the rest of their lives of thinking or acting otherwise than as their school masters would have wished."

Do you think such an effort would not lead to lingering effects, even in

those of us who have embraced the Sudbury model for a decade or more? Our children are being spared, we fervently hope, the brunt of this effort – that's what Diablo Valley School is for. But what about us?

Let me give you one example of a thing our masters would not wish us to think: Across many cultures and thousands of years, the wise have agreed on a couple things as essential to a good life. A Buddhist, a Confucian, a Jew, an Ancient Greek, an Imperial Roman, a Christian, a Native American wise man would all recognize the wisdom in these ideas: Know Thyself. And: There is no freedom unless one is freed from one's passions. To the modern well-schooled mind, however, the first seems a truism – how could I not know myself? – and the second simple nonsense – what am I if I am not my passions?

I contend that these reactions are a lingering effect of classroom schooling. We trivialize or

otherwise dismiss these two ideas without which – here's the tricky part – we can't think free thoughts. The human being who knows himself and controls his passions is a very difficult creature to herd.

The idea shared by many cultures is that, to live a good life, one must always evaluate one's own self, who one is, what one has done, and what are one's goals. As Socrates put it: the unexamined life is not worth living. Second, the idea that what we want is not who we are, and that our desires must be judged by the self-knowing person frees us from easy manipulation, both the carrot of political and advertising pandering, and the stick of being defined out of social groups.

Sudbury schooling, while a very good thing, cannot miraculously cure us parents and our children from all the ills the masters of the classroom model have inflicted on us.



Diablo Valley School

A Sudbury School

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Give to our annual campaign. Any amount counts! Help us raise funds to build the future of Diablo Valley School: site, scholarships, School Meeting needs, and an endowment so our school can thrive for generations to come.



Halloween Challenge: Donate by **October 31** to help us earn up to \$1000 from a generous donor who has pledged to match donations received by Halloween.

Donate online: <http://www.diablovalleyschool.org/capital.shtml> or mail checks to the school.

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2924 Clayton Road
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*Open House
October 18
11:00 am – 2:00 pm*

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

