

Children are ends, not means

By Joseph Moore

Joseph is the father of four Diablo Valley School graduates and one current student.

One of the reasons I love Sudbury schools is that we recognize our kids are not the raw material of somebody else's plans, but rather are good in themselves. We as parents and the school we send our kids to are blessed to be able to help our kids grow into who they really are. We are not to try to make them into what we'd like them to be, except insofar as we'd like them to be free, happy, responsible human beings.

Seeing kids as ends, rather than means, is a stark departure from our current culture and the last couple of hundreds of years of history. The founders of the country were big fans of John Locke, who in turn was a major proponent of the idea of the mind of a child as a tabula rasa or 'blank slate'. This raises the question: who gets to write on that tablet? Towards what end?

Philosophers leapt in to supply the answer. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, the founding light of modern graded classroom education, taught that the state has the right and duty to fill in the child's mind, to write on that blank slate, even to the point of taking children away from their parents for their entire childhoods. Note we're not talking about abusive parents here – just parents who are failing to raise their kids to do what the state wants them to do. In Fichte's mind, that was ALL parents.

Fichte's ideas were put into practice in early 19th century Prussia, where Horace Mann, the founder of modern



American public education, learned them. For the next 100 years, the proponents of Prussian education in America sought to snuff out all the independent, locally run schools and replace them with Prussian style schools that would raise up kids to do what they are told.

Mann's dream has succeeded so well that, today, almost all educational battles boil down to who gets to tell the kids what to do. In almost all models, it is accepted without challenge that the kids are a means to some end, and that the purpose of school is to train them so that end is achieved. Usually, these ends go by sympathetic names – improving their economic prospects, building a better society, promoting justice, enhancing our nation's ability to compete globally, and so on.

These goals may be good things, and one would hope that a free, responsible person would aspire to help make the world a better place. But – and this is a big but – if you try to get there by treating children as if it is their purpose to further whatever your pet issue happens to be, you have turned those children into things – means – whose value quickly and inevitably is determined by how useful they are in promoting some end. Even ends like justice, to which I

would hope we all aspire, can subtly turn a kid into a thing to be used.

It is much more challenging, and a far, far better thing, to try to help kids discover who they are and how they fit into the world. That is what a Sudbury school is set up to do. A Sudbury school is not about making a kid economically useful.

Responsible, resourceful kids do tend to be productive members of society, however. The practical yet imperfect justice meted out by the Judicial Committee is not meant to solve the world's problems, but to maintain a free atmosphere at school. Yet a kid who has years of experience in JC will see, on a very practical level, what justice means. The kids sustain and define the society at school for their own purposes. Yet a kid who has spent years directing his own activities among peers will have a grip on what a good society would be like.

Diablo Valley School tries to treat every child as a valuable person in himself, never as means to somebody else's ends.

*Meet real Sudbury parents,
staff, and students
and tour the school at our*

Open House
Saturday, October 17
11:00 am – 2:00 pm

Children welcome.

Pomp, circumstance, and good times wrap up a school year ...

In June we celebrated the graduations of Adriana, Anna Kate, and Drew, and then capped the school year with the traditional end-of-year party organized by students. This year's party theme was Masquerade.



How do DVS students become effective adults?

In his address to the graduates, Assembly president Jesper Jurcenoks posed an answer to this question.

To be or not to be an effective adult in the larger community, that is the question! Friends and family are sitting here hoping that their favorite graduate is prepared for effective adult life outside of this school. The graduates are wondering if they have what it takes to be an effective adult. We, the school assembly, recently got a chance to consider what it means to be or not to be an effective adult. We all know other high school graduates who are not effective adults. So what makes these graduates prepared to be effective adults? The Diablo Valley School does!

These graduates were not told what it means to be effective adults. Instead, our graduates practiced it every day

- in Judicial Committee
- in School Meeting
- in the Admissions Committee
- in the Staff Hiring Committee
- and in all the other places where traditional schools need effective adults

Like effective adults, our graduates took care of smaller students; they



taught them and they entertained them, the same way they themselves had been mentored by older students before.

Like effective adults, our graduates picked their jobs and tasks within the school, and like effective adults they managed their own meals, their own time, and their own hobbies.

Like effective adults they acquired confidence, skills and certifications in everything from sharp knives to computers and musical instruments to sewing machines.

Like effective adults they formed corporations, made budgets, and applied for funding. Like effective adults they turned a profit and they paid taxes just like we do in the larger community.

Our graduates took college classes, earned college credits, and got paying jobs just like effective adults.

Our graduates dream of career, happiness, true love and one day starting a family just like effective adults.

Our graduates have all been with the school for many years, and they have done nothing but prepare themselves to be effective adults.

Our graduates understand the importance of playing, as it is the foundation for social intelligence and creativity which they need as effective adults.

Our graduates understand that becoming an effective adult in the larger community is a journey, not a destination. Our graduates know that even effective adults sometimes stop acting like effective adults and need to get back on track. Our graduates know that no matter how effective we become as adults we can always become better, and this is what already today makes them effective adults.

What I am saying is, dear graduates, to be or not to be an effective adult is NOT the question - it is the answer!

... Volunteers spruce up the school for the next year

Over the summer a team of students, parents, staff, and alumni volunteered many hours to paint walls and install new flooring in the computer room, halls, and office ... and assemble a new storage shed. As a result, students this year are enjoying a brighter school in which to pursue their interests and follow their passions.



Halloween Challenge: Don't be scared ... Donate!

Give by October 31st to help us earn \$2000 in matching grants.

Our second Annual Campaign is off to a roaring start, with the goal to raise \$20,000 this school year.

Specify one or more of the following areas you want your donation to support:

Breaking news! Anonymous donors have offered to match up to \$2000 of donations received by October 31. Any amount counts!

Here are two easy ways to support Diablo Valley School.

Click the Donate button on our website:
www.diablovalleyschool.org/capital.shtml
to donate by credit card or PayPal.

Check sent to: Diablo Valley School, 2924 Clayton Road, Concord, CA 94519.

- Site fund: towards our future permanent dream site
- Endowment: a nest egg for the school's future
- Scholarships for students with financial need
- General fund
- Greatest need as determined by School Meeting

For more information, email office@diablovalleyschool.org or call (925) 676-2982.

Diablo Valley School is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit corporation. All donations are tax deductible as provided for by law. Talk to your tax professional about how donating will impact your taxes.

Wish List: We would be grateful for donations of any of these items.
Please call the school before donating.

Computers (current models)	PS3 controllers	Acoustic and electric guitars
Sturdy child-sized chairs	Good sewing scissors	AED (automated electronic defibrillator)
Perler beads	Double broiler	Sturdy outdoor furniture
Dress form	Child-size brooms	New Drum kit
iPod charger that plugs into the wall	Oven range hood (call school for details)	Paint for mural (call school for details)

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A Sudbury School

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Concord, CA 94519PHONE:
(925) 676-2982E-MAIL:
office@diablovalleyschool.org

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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.*

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