

Celebrating 20 Years at Diablo Valley School



Going Strong Since January 6, 1997



Then (circa 1999 – makeshift kitchen)



... and now, we're cooking!

A Phenomenal Place

***Alicia Richard**, one of Diablo Valley School's founding staff members, wrote to us about the early days of the school on our 20th anniversary. Here are excerpts from her account.*

When I graduated college in 1993, my strong intention was to start an alternative school. I had been trained as a traditional teacher, but after spending three months physically ill from doing my student teaching at a high school in urban Connecticut, I knew that traditional school was not the place for me. I wanted a place where I could have an authentic relationship with the students, and where they could learn and grow in freedom.

In 1996, after living in San Francisco for a couple of years, I did a search on the internet and found that there were Sudbury school start-ups happening in Santa Clara and Walnut Creek. Since the Santa Clara group had already hired staff, and I desperately wanted to be on staff, I joined the Walnut Creek group with people who many of you still know – Joseph and Anne-Martine, Amy and Ofer, and a bit later Patti, Mike and Angela.

I remember when we all went out to see the Marsh Creek Road site. It seemed like a perfect place for kids to run around and do cool stuff all day, and we decided to start the school even though we only had three students – Gareth, Steve and Morgan! After we unexpectedly lost that site after only a couple of weeks, the school soon moved into Patti's house, then Angela's, as we gained a few more students and searched for a permanent site.

I was the only full-time staff member that first year of school, and I spent countless hours writing copy for the website, facilitating and participating in meetings, making up forms, interviewing potential families, and hanging out with the very cool teenagers who were the students that year.

The first year of DVS was incredible, as all of us, students and staff, seriously considered the type of school culture we were creating, and what it meant to be free as well as responsible.

There was tennis, and making chain mail, and tai chi in Angela's yard, walking around downtown Concord, taking field trips to the beach, learning Japanese and eating Teppanyaki, awkward and difficult Judicial meetings, and so much more.

Soon after I left Diablo Valley at the end of 1997, I became pregnant with twins. In 1999, when they were six months old, we moved to Seattle. I knew that my children would attend a Sudbury school as well, and they did. Maddy and Aidan Linder graduated from The Clearwater School in Bothell, Washington.

Even though I was only there at the beginning, I've always been so proud that I had a small part in creating Diablo Valley School. All of you have kept it going all these many years... I have such deep, deep gratitude to all the parents, staff and students who have loved DVS, and given their hearts and souls to continually creating it and growing it and moving it forward. You have nurtured a phenomenal place for young people, unique in the world, and I am so thankful that you have done so. Thank you for all of your hard work, dedication, passion and love.

The Five Stages of Sudbury

Or, How I learned to stop worrying and love Diablo Valley School

By Jesper Jurcenoks

You go through five stages when first learning about Diablo Valley School.

1. Denial

Initially learning about Sudbury and DVS triggers these reactions: That is impossible. There can be no school run by students as young as five years old. It can never work.

I, myself, was only 11 years old in 1979 when I met a peer in my building who went to a self-directed school. Even today, a lifetime later, I still remember my reaction: That is impossible! At the time I had just gotten into a "progressive school" after being on the waiting list for four years. And I didn't even dare complete the thought that I could go to such a wonderful sounding school. I basically suppressed the idea. When my father asked me if I wanted to go to such a school, I said, "No." The evil you know is sometimes more comfortable than the unknown.

This is denial, and as I have heard from more than one DVS student, there is only one answer: "De'Nile is a river in Egypt."

2. Anger

"That's not fair." Why did I have to go to compulsory school when Sudbury students can go to a school without tests, homework, or having to sit still all day? Why do my children have to do homework?

Then it turns into spite: That's not a real school; you will never get a job.

The anger is also seen among friends and family. My daughter's playmates, on our street, could not integrate the fact that my daughter didn't have to do homework and loved school, when compared to their own experiences. And they quickly drifted apart.

DVS students are maturing at a faster rate than their peers who are forced into submission.

In the end, resentment exists towards those who have freedom by those who do not.

Sometimes parents at this stage project their anger towards their children: "I know what is best for my child" and "Look at me, I turned out alright." I certainly hoped that my child would turn out a lot better than just "alright" when I sent her to DVS.

To those parents there is only one thing to say. "Did your child give consent to being forced into homework, sitting still five hours a day, and standardized testing?"

3. Bargaining

A friend of mine who has a daughter who goes to a traditional private school once told me, "Your daughter must be really responsible to manage her own time. My daughter could never do that." I thought, "When did you stop believing in your own daughter?"

At this stage, new parents start to bargain with their kids: We will let you go to Diablo Valley School if you promise to manage your time responsibly. We expect you to choose to study math on your own, despite all the other kids playing all day. Family members start to meddle, offering to pay for afterschool programs.

At this stage, parents at the school start offering to "help" by teaching the parent's favorite subject, whatever it might be.

The answer is as always: "Thank you, but no thanks. It would not be a student-directed school if we try to influence their education."

4. Depression

It starts with boredom. "I am bored. I have been here for four months now and I am bored." Then the depression sets in. Without an adult to tell me what to do, I will never be successful. I will live with my parents for the rest of my life.

That family member was right when they said I would never go to college.

As parents, this feeling starts to creep in too: "What have I done? Did I rob my child of a future?"

During this phase, Sudbury schools lose students.

The answer is: "It is darkest and coldest just before sunrise."

5. Acceptance

You have fully embraced Sudbury life. As a parent you realize that if your child is

- competent enough to decide when to eat lunch,
- competent enough to mediate conflicts between peers,
- competent enough to pick the staff, and
- competent enough make major school decisions,

then she is also

- competent enough to decide what to eat,
- competent enough to decide what to wear to school,
- competent enough to decide when to go to bed,
- competent enough to go off-campus during school hours.

At this point as a parent, serene calm settles in. You know that everything will be fine.

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Five Stages of Sudbury *(from page 2)*

You know that your child will be more than just "alright," that in fact your child will be great.

There will be no wild goofing off in college; that childish behavior was exercised during childhood where it belongs. There will be no expensive student loan on an unfinished college education.

DVS students will go out to be whole people who know what they want and how to achieve it.

These are students who can follow their heart and not be fearful of where that will take them.

As parents we embrace the fact that our children, like us adults, are in charge of their own lives.

And then the magic happens, as we parents accept that the student is a full human individual with her own desires, needs, and competencies to act on those desires and needs. Then we as parents stop projecting our own ambitions onto others and we become better at seeing people for who they are, not who we want them to be.

That means we become better parents, and then we become better spouses as well.

For those of you who are still on stages 1 to 4, I say this: Come join us at stage 5. This is where the fun is.

This is where the fun is

We celebrated Diablo Valley School's 20th Anniversary with a disco tea party. In addition to delicious food and speeches by school founders, there was...

Music...



Gala attire...

... and cake made by a DVS graduate!



Diablo Valley School

A Sudbury School

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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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Wish List

We would be grateful for donations of any of these items. Please contact us by phone or email before donating items to make sure we haven't already received them.

Art Supplies: Canvases, assorted sizes ★ Safety pins ★ Pipe cleaners ★ Velcro
 Glitter glue ★ Pinking shears ★ Make-up sponges ★ Paint brushes (call school for details)
 Embroidery hoops, assorted sizes ★ Sewing machine parts & tune-up funds

Electronics: Video editing software ★ Lightning cables ★ PlayStation 3

Kitchen: Double boiler ★ Oven range hood (call school for details)

Outdoors: Soccer balls ★ Footballs ★ Basketballs
 Sturdy outdoor furniture - tables, chairs ★ Gymnastics mat (call school for details)

Diablo Valley School

A Sudbury School

2924 Clayton Road
Concord, CA 94519*Open House**January 20**March 3**11:00 am – 2:00 pm*