



2012

Nurturing the Brilliance in Every Child

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Recommended Citation

Donnelly, Susan (2012) "Nurturing the Brilliance in Every Child," *Journal of Educational Controversy*: Vol. 6 : No. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://cedar.wvu.edu/jec/vol6/iss1/3>

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EDITORIAL

Fifth Anniversary Issue of the Journal of Educational Controversy

Nurturing the Brilliance in Every Child

Susan Donnelly, Guest Co-editor
Head, Whatcom Day Academy

When Lorraine asked me to co-edit this issue with her, I thought *she* was crazy; and when I agreed, I knew *I* was crazy. However, that is the kind of person she is; she gets things done, and she is always thinking of more interesting ways to get them done. It is no wonder that the *Journal* has grown as it has under her direction. It has been inspiring to work with her and to help select the thoughtful responses by these authors to the central controversy of this issue; they address different facets of the problem from a range of perspectives that are enriching and provocative.

When Lorraine first conceived of the idea for this issue at the talk that Alfie Kohn gave in Bellingham in October 2010, she wanted it to include a feature that would take readers inside a school using the multi-media possibilities of an online journal. It is characteristic of her vision to understand the importance of showing how theory is realized in practice and to gather the resources necessary to make it happen. I am honored to share the results with you in "Creating a School Meant for Children", a portrait of Whatcom Day Academy in text and video in Section 3 of this issue.

It was a considerable challenge to prioritize and select what to include in the portrait from among the many facets that make up an ever-evolving school, which, when you think about it, is probably one of the most complex organizations in our society. Using the flexibility of a multi-media website, I try to give you a sense of the school as an ongoing process rather than a finished product, in keeping with John Goodlad's (Goodlad, Mantle-Bromley, & Goodlad, 2004) assertion that schools should always be in a process of *renewal*, as opposed to *reform*. We have been supported in this ongoing process through our work with Lorraine, *The Journal of Educational Controversy*, and our joint membership in the National League of Democratic Schools, which was founded by Goodlad and the Institute for Educational Inquiry in Seattle. The League's membership includes schools from across the country that are intentional about the role of education in sustaining a democratic society and that all hold similar core values about education, but each school enacts those values and shapes their practice in a unique way. Whatcom Day Academy is one among many models of schools that our children deserve.

A former colleague and gifted teacher, Jessica Howard, once described teaching as weaving a tapestry while all the figures in the tapestry are busy weaving themselves, so that the teacher, as the master weaver, is constantly modifying the tapestry to accommodate the changing figures within it. This metaphor, so rich with meaning, has stuck with me for more than twenty years. The teacher, as weaver, is craftsman, technician, and artist; the ever-changing artwork is the result of ongoing collaboration among the teacher and the students as they all learn and grow together. A school is a complex system of many such collaborations on the classroom level, as well as teachers working together as learners and weavers of their own professional identities, and, in our school, parents are very much part of the collaborative process as well.

There is a lot of talk these days about research-based curriculum, evidence-based teaching strategies, and data-driven decision-making. There is nothing wrong with using scientific methods to examine what we are doing in education and to inform our decisions about what works. However, I am worried that the pendulum is swinging too far in that direction and that we are in danger of losing sight of the fact that, at its heart, teaching is an art form enmeshed in personal relationships. The schools our children deserve must do a constant balancing act between accountability and autonomy, support and challenge, individual rights and group responsibilities. This is the fulcrum upon which teachers perform their dance and weave their magic every day. To help illustrate this, I would like to share a poem written by Ian Carroll, a 19-year-old graduate of our school; it says as much about the artistry of teaching as it does about that of painting, writing, or sculpting.

THE ART UNDERNEATH

Subtle art forms are what win in life.

The art of the perfect compliment
Or the art of truthfulness
Or of entering scrambled social scenes

The art of performance
And the art of literature.

There are the acknowledged arts and the ones that creep about beneath the folds in each day.

There is an art to dissuading a cop from writing a ticket
And also an art to getting him to reduce the amount of the ticket
There is an art to even deciding which is called for

It is a magnificent world
Filled with magic and ability
But we've got to acknowledge a skill
Before we can practice it.

We are all artists of behavior and action.
Each moment, movement and gesture is original.
We are always trying to match the social scene and act right
And maybe with a little confidence we even try to act exceptional-
Which is all a very delicate process
Of balance, judgment, reaction and immersion.

Improvise in artforms you didn't know that you possessed.

Art can be coercive or confrontational
Emotional or motivating
Deceptive or daft
Art is so varied and full of specific types of power.

The proper piece of art at the right place at the right time can create just about any change, reaction or situation that you could imagine. So much is made possible when you acknowledge the small arts that move silently through our society every day. When they happen upon opportunity - there is nothing that a skilled artist cannot achieve. When opportunity matches the talent, at the right time and place-

It is like a door into another world drawn on an adjacent reel of film.
And the artist reaches out with his style and form
and jumps
-the leap of faith-
When he lands on that other place
He has brought the whole world along behind him.
Every day artists in a thousand places and ways

Change the order of films that roll across the big-screen tv in the living room
Where the world is on the couch with tv dinners- watching breathlessly.

Reference

Goodlad, J. I., Mantle-Bromley, C., & Goodlad, J. S. (2004). *Education for everyone*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.