

Christine R. Traxler
July 31, 2014
NEH: Philosophers of Education
Dr. Peter Gibbon

The Most Democratic School of Them All:

Why the Sudbury Model of Education Should be Taken Seriously

Introduction

On most days, I finish teaching English literature and cultural studies with my high school students in a wealthy suburb of Seattle around 2:30pm, hit the trail for a run, then pick up my daughter at very small, obscure private school called The Clearwater School in a nearby town. Her school is modeled after Sudbury Valley School in Framingham, Massachusetts, a democratic free school founded in 1968, a whole year before Woodstock and a year after The Summer of Love. You could say that the school is a hippie sandwich, and I jokingly call Clearwater the hippie school to all my friends, for its lack of classes, grades and grade levels. My friends do wonder at the seeming paradox. I am a National Board Certified public school English teacher with 13 years of experience who teaches challenging courses like Pre-AP English 10. But I allow my own daughter to run around and play all day at a glorified day care facility. That's not freedom they think to themselves, that's neglect. At least at their high ticket Montessori schools there is order, harmony and a curriculum.

I sympathize with these reactions. Most people have never heard of Clearwater or the Sudbury model before they meet me, and because it is so strange and different from anything they have heard of, their initial reactions bely a deep fear of trusting kids, a serious underestimation of what kids can and want to accomplish, and a misunderstanding of what it means to hold kids responsible for their own education. Teaching Colleges and Sudbury schools alike are to blame for this lack of knowledge and awareness. The latter

could care less if anyone else wants to emulate them, and to be fair are suspicious of overt attempts to study them for fear of being misrepresented. The former tend to focus on how to teach in the traditional model without giving teachers any sense of comparative systems and/or comparative philosophies. Even History of Education classes tend to not only leave out Montessori and Sudbury Valley School, but A. S. Neill's Summerhill as well. These are glaring omissions.

If there is any reason why Sudbury is not studied, it may have to do with the confluence of political rhetoric which tends to play down the extremes of progressive thinking, like Dewey-esque learning labs with which Sudbury is associated, and the extremes of anti-intellectual critics who demand a common national curriculum (like E.D. Hirsch). Unfortunately the current middle ground answer, the Common Core Standards, is causing all kinds of extreme reactions, mostly targeted at teachers. Teachers are not the problem. Common Core Standards aren't even the problem. The problem is the system itself. Throughout this paper I will use such interchangeable terms as model and/or system to discuss how schools are set up, the roles of adults and students, student motivation and school governance.

With the academic pendulum in American education commentary swinging wildly off its axis these days, I can't help but think this is as good of time as any to argue that not only is the Sudbury model not a glorified day-care, it is in essence the most democratic, intellectually challenging and rewarding school a child can attend today.

Current Reform: No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and The Common Core Standards (CCS)

This spring my sophomores will take the NCLB, CCS test called Smarter Balance. One does have to wonder how much money they paid a marketing firm to come up with the name of a tub of margarine for this test. However unfortunate the amateur rhetoric, the reality is that we will all fall into step with the mandates and do our best. My job will be to make sure, despite my students' real motivation for learning (to get good grades and pass this test, duh) that my subversive techniques of introducing them to good literature, and instilling expert reading, writing and communication skills, still work.

While education reform is an on-going never-ending money-making machine for those who can repackage old ideas with new catch phrases, the particular trend of ramping up text complexity via the CCS, seems to be a reaction to what William James once noted at the turn of the last century, as the "namby-pamby attempts of the softer pedagogy to lubricate" learning for students (83). It is a reaction against progressives like Dewey who focused on flowing, child-centered education with inclusion of the vocational arts. It is also a reaction to an international test of math, science and reading skills created and administered by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). According to their 2009 report ("By the Numbers"), the U.S. seriously lags behind the likes of such economic and political powerhouses as Shanghai, China, and such namby-pamby countries as Liechtenstein and Estonia (really?). While we're not sure what the rest of Chinese children are learning, it doesn't matter: the ones in Shanghai and Hong Kong are killing us on tests ("By the Numbers").

These alarming PISA results highlighting Asian intellectual superiority raise the hoary hackles of dormant social Darwinist niggings. Not the Asians! But no one is saying that. Out loud. Meanwhile, our mother tongue countries are tumbling wildly into obscurity. If it weren't for Canada and/or New Zealand maintaining top 10 rankings in all three subjects ("By the Numbers"), we might feel that the English Empire had indeed imploded. I jest, of course, but even the noted educational historian and intellectual giant Diane Ravitch has come out critiquing PISA results and American knee-jerk reactionism.

The CCS movement hasn't ditched progressivism altogether, and it isn't necessarily satisfying the critics of progressives either. Richard Hofstadter in his Pulitzer prize winning critique of progressive education, *Anti-Intellectualism in America* with his argument that there are "specified bodies of knowledge" (368) students should learn, is the precursor to E.D. Hirsch in all of his books on cultural literacy that there should be a set, shared curriculum all across the country. The CCS does not set curriculum so much as it sets guidelines for determining curriculum. The guidelines are stringent enough, it seems to assume, that individual districts, schools and teachers will have to choose the types of reading material Hirsch might approve.

Yet no one is happy. Even though CCS emphasizes on every piece of media the new "shifts" in the way we teach, it's not new for many of us, and it's not really shifting anything. Traditional schooling meanders on in the same factory model that pits kid against kid, shortens his attention span throughout the six or seven period day, and compels him to engage in teacher directed work. And he's not necessarily reading all those culturally relevant texts he should be to gain background knowledge necessary for literacy. Oh, and the typical student still hates math.

It's the Model, Silly!

What's interesting about all of these debates, is that critiquing the hidden curriculum, the way the model delivers content to children and what that teaches children, has been dropped in favor of pedagogical and curricular debates all rhetorically bound up in which is more "rigorous" and "robust." Are there any two words in edu-speak more cliché than these?

Here are some underlying issues with the traditional model. A kid in your typical public or private school has to:

- Figure out the game of school, the rules, what each teacher wants him to be;
- How to get straight A's or at least pass with the least amount of work;
- How to be okay with subpar work (because there is never enough time to do a really good job);
- How to cheat when necessary (because it will be necessary to cheat at some point to survive);
- How not to get caught buying weed at lunch;
- How to get enough sleep; and
- How to navigate the social hierarchy of kids trained to see each other as competition in the cutthroat game of school.

If they figure out how to play that game, and some do it better than others, they still need to figure out how to manage stress (the weed they bought at lunch) and family politics, and find time to do the real learning (typically done outside of school) that happens when they are deeply engaged in their own inquiry.

A student I had for two years who is now at a state university is a classic example of a kid who mindlessly jumped through hoop after hoop and managed to do his real learning outside of class. Oh, he loved his teachers, including me, but our classes weren't what turned his crank. Kyle is a musician, adept at many instruments, and he's a brilliant coder. He also loves words and became the self-appointed editor of my magnetic poetry white board during his senior year, the year I didn't have him in class. He banned words to make it more difficult for kids to create dirty poetry, he assigned poetic categories, awarded "poem of the week," and added analysis on occasion. Of course all the kids who were coming in to my room to write poetry and check up on the latest poems, who were not even in my classes, was extensive. This was their thing, not a top-down teacher directed activity. It was organic, stemming from the enthusiasm of one kid. And all I had to do was step back and let them in my room.

In a brainstorming session one day after school, Kyle and I came up with this idea to put the magnetic poetry board on-line. Within a week of fast and furious coding (which he entirely taught himself), he had a working site with which to interact. I'm pretty sure he wasn't doing his homework in some of his classes during that week, and I kind of feel bad that I contributed to this delinquency, but I was as excited as he to see this very cool idea come to fruition. And this is only one kid – when I talk to all of my students, they tell me over and over again that the real learning is happening outside of class (usually in the wee hours when they should be sleeping).

I'm not saying anything new here. Maria Montessori created an entirely new model through some of these exact critiques. Angeline Lillard in her book *Montessori: The Science Behind the Genius* notes that, "the models that form the backbone of our traditional

educational system are not well adapted to children” (325). She explains that children all learn at different rates, and to shuffle them all through the system at the same pace causes some kids to not learn. It also causes kids to lose intellectual interest and self-esteem. Case in point: in a Valerie Strauss piece in the *Washington Post*, Strauss asks a recently resigned kindergarten teacher, Susan Sluyter, to explain exactly why she resigned. Sluyter poignantly writes, “When adults muck about too much in the process of learning to read and write, adding additional challenge and pressure too soon, many children begin to feel incompetent and frustrated. They don’t understand. They feel stupid. Joy disappears” (as qtd. in Strauss). These little joyless people are only five years old.

Lillard gets at the heart of the problem with education reform, which is that “the emphasis...[is] on teacher and family factors, or relatively minor program issues instead of on the foundations of schooling” (326). She accurately describes ed reforms’ misplaced focus on teacher efficacy, teacher Unions, teacher tenure, and the cyclical minor tweaking of curriculum and pedagogy, à la the Common Core. If there’s anyone saving kids from the traditional model, it’s teachers. Scapegoating the only people in the system ameliorating the effects of the system is beyond disturbing. Meanwhile, the city school district is allowed to get bigger and more bureaucratic, creating rules that only perpetuate itself ad nauseam.

While the Montessori model takes on some of the most problematic aspects of the traditional model, like the stilted, interrupted classroom, it nonetheless maintains much of the same philosophical underpinnings of traditional schooling. Tim Selden, President of The Montessori Foundation, an international accrediting organization, says that through a highly structured curriculum, students learn “how to do things correctly” and that there are

“non-negotiable things you must learn.” In Seattle, the Montessori method is not seen as radical, but a common sense approach to teaching an in-depth academic curriculum. It operates much like a traditional school in that administrators and teachers make the rules and the important operational decisions of the school.

The Sudbury model is truly different from both traditional and Montessori schools. Adults do not drive the curriculum, but allow students to engage their interests without any coercion, influence or judgment. Students are also responsible for running the school as means of affording them full membership into the community. The Sudbury model is perhaps the only working educational model in the United States that holistically addresses the problems of the traditional model.

The Sudbury Model – Governance

While I will be jumping back and forth between Sudbury Valley School (SVS) and The Clearwater School (TCS), mostly I will describe what I directly see at TCS. The school is managed by all of the students and staff (together they are the “members”) who attend regular weekly meetings run democratically, including equal votes for each member. Even four year olds get a vote. “Students use their voices to directly influence school governance,” (“Why it Works”) including student behavior, staff hires and fires, school budget and cleaning teams comprised of students. There is a one-week waiting period between proposed changes and voting to allow thorough investigation, dialogue, debate and lobbying to occur. Meetings are handled via an adapted form of Robert’s Rules of Order, and though I’ve never seen better parliamentarians than TCS kids, great tolerance in learning the rules is extended to the younger set. TCS students take turns chairing School Meeting.

One of the more difficult School Meeting decisions at TCS happened a few years back in the laying off of a staff member. School meeting decided they needed to either make two staff positions half time or lay off one staff person due to budget constraints. A very emotional week ensued wherein parents attempted to get involved. Emails were flying over the parent group list, and frustrations ensued as they realized that they could not influence this decision. When I expressed my own sadness at a potential outcome, my eight-year-old daughter reassured me that sometimes hard decisions have to be made. School meeting is handled by students and staff exclusively, and thank goodness. They chose to lay off one of the staff, a beloved person in the community, and it was not easy. But they handled it maturely, empathetically, and the staffer in question felt she was treated fairly and with respect throughout the process. Two years later, her son still attends TCS and she is very active in the community.

The philosophy behind School Meeting is that it actively engages every student deeply in the responsibilities of participating fully in a democratic community. Students learn self-governance and how to make their voices heard. They are not learning the arbitrary rules of traditional school, rules often in place because they serve the adults who run the school, but are addressing authentic concerns of the community. As one kid at SVS says, "We have a lot of rules, but all the rules are there to make sure everyone can exist freely" (*About SVS: How the School*). Sudbury also believes, as Cicero once said that, "Freedom is participation in power." Kids at Sudbury schools learn that both freedom and power demand great responsibility. For TCS kids, "Over the years, responsibility and freedom become habit, the foundation of action" ("Why it Works"). William James, the great behavioral psychologist of the early 20th century, advises teachers that, "Education, in

short, cannot be better described than by calling it *the organization of acquired habits of conduct and tendencies to behavior*" (25). I can't imagine a better habit to acquire than linking power, freedom and responsibility learned by direct experience.

TCS kids have "a judicial system that enforces school policies and determines what to do when rules are broken" ("Why it Works"). Both students and staff take turns sitting on the judicial committee, and there is a system whereby students can bring grievances to the committee. Often these "write-ups" seem like minor complaints, like Johnny keeps eating in the art room and leaves crumbs all over the table even after he's been asked to clean up. But his crumbs become someone else's responsibility thus infringing on someone's freedom. Both students are heard and the committee decides how to proceed. Johnny might be banned from eating in the art room until he can prove that he can clean up his mess. Kids are not afraid to write each other up when necessary, and almost every kid has been written up at one point or another. The younger kids more so than the older spend time in judicial committee until they internalize the link between responsibility and freedom.

When students are in charge of both the rules and the consequences, they feel they have control over their environment. The system is personally empowering and demands a good deal of self-restraint and sacrifice as students learn to balance their individual needs with the needs of the school community. Because there are no classrooms, even the youngest kids are trusted and allowed to roam freely in the areas in which they have been certified. When Zoe was quite young and I would arrive to pick her up, I often couldn't immediately locate her. Almost every older kid I asked would know exactly where she was,

even if that kid wasn't with her at that moment. All kids, even the littlest, know they are secure, trusted and respected at TCS, and they easily adapt to the freedom.

The Sudbury Model – Academics

The lack of a set curriculum is probably the scariest aspect of TCS for parents and most criticized by educational experts. However, if students are to truly acquire the habit of linking responsibility and freedom, they must also be free from a coerced, top-down, adult-driven curriculum. They must be “the authors and directors of their education, drawing from school staff and resources as well as the offerings of the local community” (“Why it Works”).

Many people's fears extend directly from several misconceptions about child development and capacity for self-direction. Bertrand Russell in his book *Education and the Social Order* (1932), wrote very eloquently about how “compulsion in schools...destroys originality and intellectual interest,” (215) but advocated for limited freedom for several reasons. First, he claims that “children find it both tiring and boring to have to choose their own occupation at all odd times” (219). In a traditional school where children do not have practice directing their own activities, they might get bored given too much choice. At a Sudbury school, kids know that if they are bored, it is their responsibility. They cannot blame their boredom on teachers or classes. This lesson is particularly painful for new kids who have been trained in a compulsory environment.

Pedro Noguera, Professor of Education at NYU, in a recent TED talk, says that the “Number one complaint from children at school is that it's boring.” Now, we know that the subjects kids learn in school aren't boring. Boring is a code word for it's too hard, or I don't understand, I give up or it's just not what's interesting to me right now. But isn't it

interesting that Russell thinks kids will be bored if they are not “confined within a framework imposed by friendly adults,” (219), when Noguera’s research says that is not likely the answer. Stop into TCS at any time of day and you will see kids busy in the art room, busy in a math class they created with a staff member, busy in a massive live action role playing game set in medieval Europe, busy reading, busy coding in the computer room, busy debating a political topic, busy practicing *12th Night*, busy counting salmon in North Creek, and busy doing any number of activities that curious people do because it is deeply pleasurable and intellectually rewarding. Many of these activities are also quite difficult and involve hard work—something TCS kids do not shirk simply because no one is making them do it.

Russell’s second misconception is that children are incapable of “consistency of effort...without some outside encouragement”(219). Again, in a traditional school, because the system forces students to prioritize based on where they need a good grade, he is absolutely correct. When kids are juggling assignments from a variety of classes, not able to completely focus on one thing, they need an extrinsic reward to help them prioritize. When they are learning material that would not normally interest them, they need an extrinsic motivator. At TCS, kids do not have to split their time in this arbitrary way. They may stay on one thing for as long as they want or need to gain mastery. No bells are ringing, training them to shift their focus every 53 minutes as they do at my school. They are able to achieve what David Brooks describes as a “phenomenal ability to consciously focus their attention,” a skill seen in highly successful people.

There is also a culture of emulation at TCS. Because the staff are chosen every year by School Meeting, students are very invested in the adults with whom they spend time.

They know which staff has which specialty and they use the staff adeptly for their own learning. Sometimes all they need is a little guidance, other times they ask staff for direct instruction. Younger students are always interested in what the older kids are doing and it is common to see older students teaching younger students.

Even students who have been in the traditional model all their lives learn to focus their attention by coming to TCS. One of my prior students decided that by her junior year she hated school, the social environment was depressing her and she hated to read. After hearing about TCS from me, she talked her folks into allowing her to enroll, and she spent the last year and a half at TCS before graduating. Some TCS kids were reading a popular book on science by Steven Hawking and she was curious. By the end of the first year she had created for herself a long reading list of books about science, and was working her way through her own curriculum. These were not easy books, including books on string theory and quantum mechanics, but she had discovered a passion. And she realized that she actually loves to read.

Reading is a hot topic at TCS amongst parents. Some kids learn to read at four and some don't read until they are twelve. Stephanie Sarantos, one of the founders of TCS and a current staff member, says that no kid who began schooling at TCS has failed to learn to read in the 15 years she has staffed TCS. And by 12, kids are not only all reading at the same level as their peers, but most of them love to read. In my own informal interviews with TCS students who read later, most cannot articulate how they learned to read. Some say that they learned to write first, and reading flowed from that ability. Others say that one day they picked up *The Hobbit* and they could read it. While this may sound magical,

I've spent many years watching my daughter learn how to read and attest to a long process utilizing many different strategies.

My daughter Zoe is just now reading books at age 10. She's been writing for much longer – since she was four or five—out of her urge to tell stories, to comment on her artwork and to record her feelings and observations about life. I've been finding crazy hieroglyph-like scratchings on small pieces of paper all over the house for years now, but it's only in the past few years that they have started making sense to me. Like an out of focus lens slowly coming into focus, her spelling and punctuation have become clearer as she internalizes and conforms to the rules of English. She has every desire to conform, because much of her writing is for others to read and in that way she has discovered through many a disappointing interaction that her phonetic spellings weren't communicating. Her written vocabulary is becoming sophisticated and varied and beginning to catch up to her extensive oral cache. Though the staff and I have read many children's picture books to her over the years, now that she is picking her own reading material, she is going straight for chapter books. In other words, she is choosing books other ten year olds are reading.

These observations about reading at TCS are not, however, examples of the “whole-language approach” supposedly employed by naturalistic child-centered models and criticized by Core Knowledge proponent, E.D. Hirsch (221). Zoe has employed all kinds of strategies as she learns to read, including asking for “direct instruction in letter-sound correspondences” (Hirsch 221), a technique Hirsch endorses. When you leave the choices to the child, she will employ a wide range of learning strategies to meet her goals. Recently, Zoe has been learning math and finds Hirsch's “‘drill and kill’ process of learning the

number facts of addition, subtraction, and multiplication by heart” very rewarding (Hirsch 221). In fact she’s obsessive. I’ve had to ask her to remove her math workbooks from the table while we eat dinner. When a TCS kid is learning, she does not want to be stopped.

Piaget’s theories about developmental stages are both relevant and irrelevant in a Sudbury School. On the one hand, the student is unlikely to be damaged by a learning opportunity that is inappropriate for his stage of development. He can only get as far as his schema allow him. When approached with adding two digit numbers for instance, Zoe realized that she needed to memorize the single digit addition tables first. Kids love repetition, as witnessed by anyone who reads to small children: “Read it again!” they often yell excitedly. They will sit and listen to a story over and over again. Kids inherently know how to achieve mastery through many of the strategies good teachers employ in their classrooms. The difference is that kids choose them when they are ready for them. Complete self-direction then seems to be the efficient response to ensuring that students grapple with appropriate material in each stage on the way to mastery. This doesn’t mean that a student won’t be drawn to something way over her head – an adult movie with violence or a Shakespeare play older kids are enacting – but she can only learn what she is ready to learn. When a kid drops something at TCS, it’s usually because he is not ready for it. It is not, as some critics think, because kids can’t sustain intellectual inquiry. In this way, Piaget’s theories are useful in understanding self-driven learning.

While TCS and other Sudbury Schools are perhaps the schools E.D. Hirsch might fear the most—some wild Rousseau-like experiment—the Sudbury model is not an example of what Hirsch pejoratively labels “deep-dyed Romanticism” (215). Hirsch’s many assumptions about child-centered schools hinge on the assumption that these failed

schools are project based. When he criticizes “integrated project-learning” (Hirsch 215) or that child-centered models believe that “adequate schooling is natural and painless and mainly a function of individual talent rather than hard work,” (Hirsch 215) I’m not sure to what models he’s referring. These ideas are antithesis to TSC and the Sudbury Model in general. The Sudbury Model is child-centered, but the cultures of self and communal governance train students to believe hard work is a prerequisite to accomplishment.

Mimsi Sadofsky, a staff at SVS and a researcher, has written a book discussing the findings of extensive interviews with former graduates of SVS. With regards to the types of misconceptions Hirsch engages, she notes in an interview that,

A frequent question we hear from people interested in our school concerns how our students will fare when life is not easy. These questioners make the mistaken assumption that children free to pursue their interests will never choose to face difficulties. We know, and think everyone should know, that a life full of challenge is the most desirable life. (*About SVS: Frequently*)

In fact, says Sadofsky, when SVS kids head to college they find classes to be quite easy. The main issue they face is that they are “used to doing their best and when you go to college you can only do your best some of the time. You can’t do your best all the time because you have to balance a lot of pressures. So they have to learn how to not always do their best” (*About SVS: Frequently*).

While this is ironic, graduates often find themselves in careers where they strive to give their best. Sadofsky says of the career fields SVS graduates have chosen:

It turns out that there is a much larger than usual proportion of entrepreneurs among this group. There is also an enormous range of careers. In our study we looked at how their jobs compared to those held in the society at large. What we discovered is that there is a great deal of difference between our alumni and the society at large in the following areas: our alumni are engaged in management careers to greater extent; a higher percentage are in computer and mathematical careers, and in educational fields; and the proportion of alumni in the helping professions -- social service, community activities, health care -- is many times higher than that of the society at large. Perhaps the most striking result of all was the spectacularly high number of our graduates pursuing careers in the arts.

(About SVS: Frequently)

I'm always impressed with how articulate, knowledgeable, well-read and confident TCS graduates are. When given a chance, kids want to emulate successful, passionate, interesting adults. And despite the lack of a set curriculum, students in the Sudbury model manage to find their way to the stuff worth learning.

Similarly, students do not fear taking intellectual risks; in fact they might appear to enjoy it a little too much. Many thoroughly enjoy debate as a means of bouncing their ideas around, of testing their theories and scratching the competitive itch. They are very interested in what each other know, and they are willing to hold each other accountable for that information. Because of this they tend to spend a good deal of time learning particular things and gaining disciplinary knowledge so that they can call someone out on an idea.

Sudbury and Disadvantaged Students

TCS is located in Bothell, a small suburb of Seattle, and many students commute miles to attend. Even though it offers partial and full scholarships on a trust basis (no need to prove your income), if you can't get your kid there, your kid can't attend. Currently it attracts educated white parents, and a somewhat diverse socio-economic group. But it indeed could be criticized as a school for middle class kids. These kids are going to be fine whatever school they attend, says the common belief, because their home lives are filled with extracurriculars like soccer, violin lessons, dance lessons, and trips to the museum. If they don't get all the facts early on from school, they are most likely immersed in the culturally relevant facts at home and in their communities.

Could TCS work for economically disadvantaged kids in at-risk groups?

Hirsch would argue that the most economically and culturally disadvantaged kids need his curriculum, Core Knowledge, to become fully literate. If they don't have the keys to unlocking meaning in texts aimed at educated people, they will never be able to share in the power. It is perhaps his most compelling argument and one that the Sudbury Model may seem to lack. Howard Gardiner also thinks that it is too optimistic to hope that disadvantage kids would have the motivation to direct their own learning. I think this attitude is a reflection of traditional model thinking, and seriously underestimates what a child can do when he feels that he is free and respected.

In Pedro Noguera's book *The Trouble with Black Boys*, he argues that, "environmental and cultural forces influence the way in which Black males come to perceive schooling and...those perceptions influence their behavior and performance in school" (18). Specifically he notes how schools often interpret poverty-driven disabilities

as biological, and banish Black males to “remedial and special education programs” (22). “Rather than serving as a source of hope and opportunity,” Noguera observes, “schools are sites where Black males are marginalized and stigmatized” (22). If they are treated as “less intelligent even while they are still very young,” (22) Black males find themselves spiraling into a self-fulfilling prophesy of poor performance and defensive posturing that results in oppositional defiance.

Noguera seems to suggest that before a child can even engage in learning, he must perceive school as a place that is friendly and has his best interests in mind. The Sudbury Model’s complete shift in the power structure may be a better leveler of the playfield not only for Black males, but for women too, than a change in curriculum. Although women are doing just fine in traditional school, where obedience is valued and rewarded, they are still way behind in positions of power in the work world.

As I noted early in the Governance section, TCS students feel empowered through School Meeting and the Judicial System. Every vote counts and all voices are valued. There is no competition to get into School Meeting like there is in traditional school to sit on ASB. There is no assumption that someone is more worthy to make important decisions because he gets better grades or can play the game of school better. And the student choice curriculum sends a clear message to students that their passions, identities and ideas matter. In his book, Noguera cites Ogbu’s argument that “‘folk theories,’ ...suggest that because of the history of discrimination against Black people,” many black youth believe that “even those who work hard will never reap rewards equivalent to Whites” (23). With no grades and no pressure to learn a top down curriculum determined by whites for

whites, or so the perception goes, Black males (along with everyone in the school) are given the freedom to figure out who they are and what they are capable of doing and learning.

Why Sudbury Should Be Studied and Considered as an Alternative Public Option

Howard Gardner in book *The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach*, implores progressive schools to allow themselves to be evaluated. While I am not sure how that could be done for Sudbury schools, other than looking at SAT and ACT scores for the approximately 85% of kids who attend college, I agree that would be important to gage the efficacy of this system, to know how Sudbury kids compare to their traditionally schooled kids. A problem with evaluation would inevitably bump up against philosophy, meaning that Sudbury advocates are much more interested in producing deeply democratic, autonomous, passionate, creative people than ones who are familiar with a set of cultural facts or a particular disciplinary knowledge. Sudbury kids may choose not to engage in such an evaluation. Unlike in traditional schools where kids can be forced to take evaluative tests, Sudbury kids must decide this for themselves.

One way to evaluate would be to deeply study or observe kids in the Sudbury model over a long period of time. Sudbury is definitely in the long game rather than the short, and any sort of meaningful data will take patience and persistence, potentially demanding years of observation. Another way would be to look at how grads do in college and in careers, similar to Sadofsky's book. Of course, Sadofsky is a staff member at SVS, so the objectivity of her study should certainly be questioned and reviewed.

However Sudbury is researched, a public school option should be made immediately available. We need to know how this model will work with a cross section of the community over a long period of time. It will need kids ages 4 – 19 to establish a full

Membership, and staffed by seasoned professionals who are familiar with the Sudbury model. Both SVS and TCS operate on a 20:1 student to teacher ratio, so the funds necessary for this would have to be made available. The school does not need the higher priced administrators, however, so the school should be studied for its potential cost-saving attributes.

What really sets the Sudbury model apart from the traditional model is that it hasn't been tampered with in almost 50 years, unlike the yoyo reforms in the traditional school model. It challenges deeply ingrained misconceptions about childhood, and refuses to implement any particular curricular agenda. It is very simple and bypasses all kinds of debates about direct instruction v.s. project learning, rote learning vs. inquiry, and what content choices to make. Staff are very happy at Sudbury schools as they are allowed to work with each student, to really get to know each student and be a mentor for young learners. Staff also get to follow their own passions, and are really expected to bring those interests and passions to the school. But there is no tenure, no assured job.

While the Sudbury model seems to be fully aligned with the Progressive movement, we see that the reality is quite different. Given my observations of both public school and TCS, I find TCS to be a much more compelling model for all children. I find it to be much more intellectual and demanding than public school, and much more rewarding. Finally, the Sudbury model is the only model that affords opportunity for students to fully internalize self trust and autonomy.

What are we waiting for?

Works Cited

- About SVS: How the School Operates.* Sudbury Valley School, Framingham, MA. Web. 30 July 2014.
- About SVS: Frequently Asked Questions.* "A Birds Eye View of Sudbury Valley." Sudbury Valley School, Framingham, MA. Web. 30 July 2014.
- "By the Numbers: American Schools." *The Atlantic Monthly*. October, 2012.
- Brooks, David. "Lost in the Crowd." *The New York Times*. December 15, 2008.
- Gardner, Howard. *The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach.* Penguin. 2000.
- Hirsch, E.D. *The Schools We Need: And Why We Don't Have Them.* Random House. 1996.
- Hofstadter, Richard. *Anti-Intellectualism in America.* Vintage. 1966.
- James, William. *Talks to Teachers on Psychology.* Rockville, MD. Arc Manor. 2008.
- Lillard, Angeline. *Montessori: The Science Behind the Genius.* Oxford University Press;
- Noguera, Pedro. *The Trouble With Black Boys.* Jossey-Bass. 2009.
- Noguera, Pedro. "Are we Failing our Children?" *Youtube.* TEDTalentSearch. 5 July 2012. Web. 29 July 2014.
- Russell, Bertrand. *Education and the Social Order.* Routledge Classics. 2009. Updated Edition. 2008.
- Sadofsky, Mimsi. "Afterward: From the Japanese Translation of *Free at Last.*" Online *Library: Alumni.* Sudbury Valley School, Framingham, MA. Web. 30 July 2014.
- Seldin, Tim. Class Lecture on Montessori. Boston University, July 28, 2014.
- Strauss, Valerie. "Kindergarten teacher: My job is now about tests and data – not children. I quit." *The Washington Post.* March 23, 2014.

Why it Works. The Clearwater School, Seattle, WA. Web. 30 July 2014.