

Connections



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Abundance

By Phillip Moore

We are now well into the forty-first year of Upland Hills School. As the Director of our school for these forty years, I know what it takes to make our school work and what the characteristics of a great year are. A great year is a year where the children are flourishing, the teachers are inspired, the parents are in alignment with our mission and the funds for paying all the bills are taken care of, there is money left over at the end of the year. That extra money is a gift that keeps on giving. When our financial goals are not only met but exceeded, the abundance allows us to do things that directly impact our future.

The wonderful thing about this end-of-the-year abundance is the feeling of creativity and gratitude that pervades each economic decision. Something new can be born out of this feeling, in part because this abundance gives our board the ability to respond to unexpected events and make wise decisions that impact our future. The most recent example of this was our purchase and installation of a \$90,000 photovoltaic array. It cost our school only \$18,000, will last more than thirty years and has cut our energy bill by seventy percent.

Annual Giving is a vehicle that allows Independent schools to raise funds that can be used for our current year. It is traditionally used to fill the gap between tuition and expenses. This year, if we meet our auction goals and raise more than \$8000 in Annual Giving, we will have those extra funds.

If you are a parent of a current student attending our school, or a grandparent or a friend, I encourage you to make a contribution. If you are a member of our sweat lodge community or someone who has toured the EAC, or attended one of the many workshops held at the EAC, I invite you to consider a tax deductible donation to our Annual Fund drive. All of your contributions help support a community that is dedicated to living in closer harmony with our earth and to growing children who are equipped with the drive, desire and determination to improve and redesign existing systems that will enhance and

support all life aboard spaceship earth.

Under the guidance of our Board and Staff and using our 'more with less' philosophy, these funds will be used to seed, support and create ways to help us achieve our potential as a learning community. Jean Houston, one of the founders of the Human Potential Movement, will be the keynote speaker at a workshop here in 2013, at just the kind of event that these extra funds enable. Last year's Annual Giving and successful auction helped us realize a new kitchen for our students and staff. This year we are hoping to raise funds to assist in the transition of the school's leadership.

I want to thank each of you in advance for considering your gift. All contributions can be done online by going to the school's website, or you could send it to us at: *Upland Hills School, 2575 Indian Lake Road, Oxford, MI 48370.*



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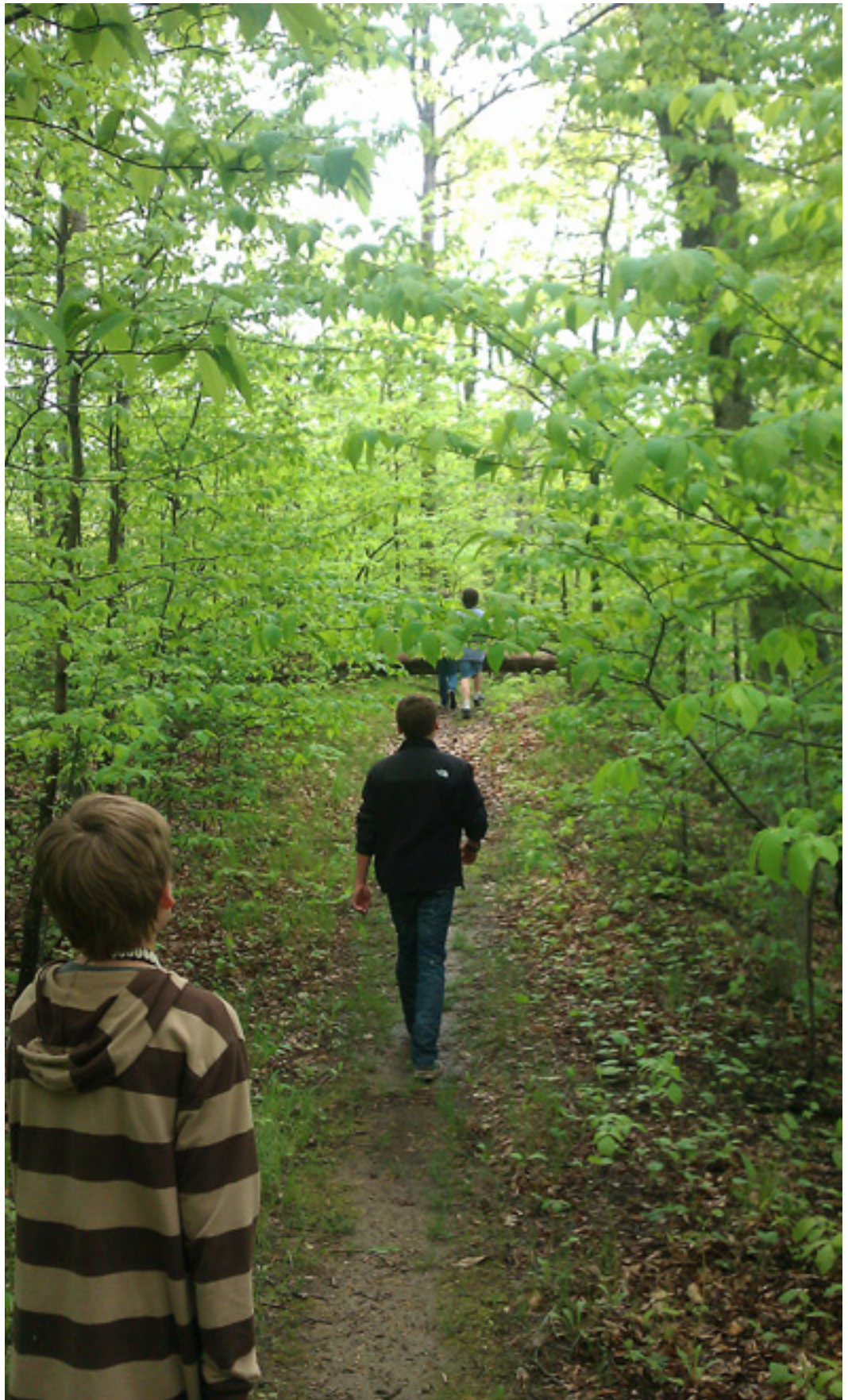
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MISSION STATEMENT

Upland Hills School, founded in 1971, is an independent school community whose purpose is to educate pre-high school children. Our aim is to discover and respect the uniqueness of every child.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Upland Hills School holds the following principles as our core values and seeks to create an environment that:

- + Protects, nurtures and defends the innocence of childhood
- + Encourages a relationship between children and the natural world
- + Empowers teachers and staff
- + Fosters cooperation and consensus in decision-making
- + Promotes mutual respect and trust that encourages our community to form authentic relationships
- + Teaches us to think comprehensively
- + Builds friendships that connect us with others around the world

VISION STATEMENT

Upland Hills School encourages children to know themselves and to connect with their environment as responsible world citizens. We provide a full academic program that emphasizes mastery of skills and creative growth. Our vision is that through the alignment and commitment of parents and teachers, children will come to see themselves as having extraordinary learning potential and access to the greatest miracle or tool in human experience, love.

The Call

By Jan Butcher

The Board of Directors of Upland Hills School has been anticipating the need to hire a new Director for several years. That time is near, as Phil will leave the Director's position within the next couple of years. The 3-D campaign was conceived, in large part, for the purpose of easing the transition of retiring staff. Five of our current staff have been or are now being mentored by working closely with senior teachers--this has been made possible through funds given to the "Dignity" portion of the 3-D campaign.

For the Director's position, the Board has outlined a similar mentoring scenario. Five people have been appointed to a "Search Committee." Three of them currently serve on the Board and two are past Board members (alumni parents) who have maintained ties to UHS. This committee has been reading a National Association of Independent Schools handbook about hiring a new headmaster and establishing a time line to post the job opening for Director. By the spring of 2013, the Board hopes to have at least five candidates for the position of Associate Director for one school year, and before the fall, the Board will make a final selection. Over

the following school year, (2013-2014) the Associate Director will serve in a mentored capacity--working closely with Phil, teaching staff, parents and students, learning about the Upland Hills community, and discovering that sometimes settling a conflict, enrolling a new student, garnering a large donation and taking out the garbage are all in a day's work.

The Board hopes that after our careful vetting and interview process and after a year of mentoring, the Associate Director will become the full Director the following school year. These are challenging and exciting times for our community, but the Board of Directors is being led by the school's mission statement as we embark on our search for a new Director.

Jan Butcher-Morning Meeting teacher and Staff Representative to the Board and Member of the Search Committee

*For more information please go our website - **uplandhills.org** and click on the **Director's Search tab**.*



What I've Learned at Upland Hills School, So Far

By Tim Thomas

When I first pulled into the Apple Tree Parking Lot at Upland Hills School seven years ago, I felt a bit like a refugee fleeing an education system that had only succeeded in making my seven-year-old son, Jack – and by extension, my wife and I – utterly miserable. Somehow, the smart, curious and creative kid I knew at home was inexplicably not thriving at our neighborhood elementary school.

So, here we were. Dropping him off for a visiting day in David's class with our fingers crossed. A funny thing happened. An immediate transformation, really. In the environment at Upland Hills, his curiosity was rekindled, his anxiety waned and school became the fun and enriching experience every parent hopes it will be.

Among Upland Hills families, my story is not so unusual. In fact, I hear similar tales from many of the students, parents and alumni. The question is, how does the school do it?

First of all, the curriculum at Upland Hills treats students as unique individuals capable of making their own choices. As the proud father of four strong-willed, unique and often raucous children myself, there's one thing I've learned to be absolutely true: every child is a unique individual from the day they're born. Each sees the world in their own way, has unique areas of strength and weakness and tends to develop skills at their own pace.

While I understand the urge in public education to standardize education for all, I'm just not sure it's realistic. From firsthand experience, I've seen how the goal of standardized education ends up making a lot of smart, creative and capable students feel like they're somehow deficient just because they fall outside of some artificially imposed norm.

It's different at Upland Hills. Every morning, kids report to a morning meeting group, where they learn a variety of subjects including reading, writing, math and science. The afternoon is broken into two hours where students choose from a wide variety of classes. The school day created by my daughter Clare -- whose interests include things like pioneer life, the natural world and physical play -- might be very different from someone who likes other things. Students are encouraged to explore their interests in a way that reinforces personal responsibility and instills a love of learning. The effect is liberating.

A unique part of an Upland Hills education has to do with the pristine natural environment that surrounds the school. The teachers here have an approach to education that you might call "no child left inside." Far from merely providing a staging area for a fifteen-minute recess, the outdoors at Upland Hills is embraced as a giant, hands-on and, dare I say, fun

laboratory for learning. From my experience, it's pretty incredible what being out in nature can inspire.

Take my youngest son, Simon, for example. Simon is an engaging, funny, kinetic personality who, when much younger, wasn't all that interesting in reading. I don't think he had anything against books. He just didn't bother them and they didn't bother him. While some schools might have unleashed a horde of tutors on Simon, something else happened to kick-start his reading. Namely, birds.

'Birding' was one of the afternoon classes offered by Anissa Howard, Simon's morning meeting teacher. To this day, it's hard to overstate how bird watching captured his imagination and fed his curiosity to learn more. As a result, he went from being not all that interested in books into suddenly spending long periods of time poring over bird books. His interest in bird books has since inspired a voracious appetite for reading books on all kinds of subjects.

Somewhere in the literature we initially received from the school, there was a reference to the natural world as "the greatest teacher of all." In the right learning environment, I've come to believe that's absolutely true.

Finally – and most impor-

tantly – I believe a school is as good as its teachers. Over the past seven years, my respect for the work of the dedicated, inventive and courageous teachers here at Upland Hills has only grown deeper. They're awe-inspiring, really.

Phil Moore often speaks of Upland Hills School as a wild school. Well, a wild school couldn't exist without a community of wild teachers whose commitment to education goes much deeper than handouts on reading, writing and math. Personally, I believe every student deserves empowered, gifted teachers who offer lessons in tree climbing, paper making, ice skating, singing, playing music, native plants, building with power tools, painting, wood working, animal tracking, creative problem solving, calligraphy, bird identification, meditation, knitting, dancing, sculpting, acting, cooking, finding salamanders, igloo construction, the life of swamps, nature journaling, movie making, gardening, community service and -- most importantly -- how to love yourself and others.

Of course, many of those subjects won't fit neatly on a standardized test, but at Upland Hills School, that's kind of the point.



Simon, Nora, Jack and Clare Thomas

Realizing Dreams

By Joe Wegrzyn

3D

DIGNITY

DEVELOPMENT

DIVERSITY

My name is Joe Wegrzyn and I am proud to serve as a board member at Upland Hills School (UHS). My wife Jennifer and I have two boys enrolled at UHS, Pierre (Jan's group) and Luke (Anissa's group). For four years we have enjoyed being part of the Upland Hills community and have truly benefited from the holistic experience that is Upland Hills School. I've been asked to share with you an update summarizing the status of the 3-D Campaign.

UHS has existed and flourished for over forty years. The 3-D campaign, Development, Dignity & Diversity, originated almost nine years ago with the hope to fortify and sustain the institution that is Upland Hills School. Through the concentrated fundraising efforts of the 3-D Campaign, UHS's future looks as bright and promising as each of the 82 students currently enrolled, as well as the more than 700 students who have walked the hallways and footpaths here at Upland Hills School.

As working professionals, Jennifer and I work within the restaurant industry. The current buzz word in our industry is sustainability. Unfortunately, the notion of sustainability is sometimes overused as a descriptive marketing tool and then becomes more of a passing fad rather than a lasting principle. In our short

time at UHS, nothing is more clear to us than the fact that UHS was built upon the principle and practice of sustainability. By blending traditional education in the classroom with life's lessons available by way of our natural environment, the school and its educators have acted as stewards for our leaders of tomorrow. Our children thrive at Upland Hills School because they have been gifted a nurturing environment that allows for creative thought, self-confidence, teamwork and a respect for life and land.

Upland Hills School itself has been gifted a promising future by way of generous contributions these past nine years. At its inception in 2003, the 3-D

Campaign set a Three Phase goal to raise \$2,000,000. To date, we have met the goal of Phase I of this campaign by raising its total to \$400,000. Phase II has a target of an additional \$600,000 and to date; we have raised \$350,000 toward that goal. Collectively, our grand total for Phase I & II now stands at an impressive \$750,000. Thank you all who have contributed. These monies have been earmarked into three specific



Alex & Mia in cooking class.

categories. Development, Dignity & Diversity.

Development funds have been used to renovate the dome (our original school house) and improve our energy independence with state-of-the-art solar voltaic electric panels. These same funds also made possible the acquisition and renovation of the EAC (Ecological Awareness Center), and physical improvements within the school, including renewing the school library and building the newly redesigned kitchen and staff lounge. In all, more than \$350,000 has been raised and utilized specifically to allow this expansion and development to occur. In order to promote Diversity at UHS, the \$35,000 Nancy's Fund endowment continues to offer many students the opportunity to learn and grow by assisting with tuition expenses.

Additional Diversity funds will be used for guest speakers, learning workshops and other exciting programs designed to enhance both student and faculty education. Finally, approximately \$250,000 has been raised for our Dignity category. These funds are focused towards a retirement income disbursement for eight of our most tenured educators. Monies already given have allowed us to contribute to four of our previous teachers, including Jean Ruff and Holly MacMahon. And after we have raised the final \$50,000 toward our Dignity funding goal, we will be able to provide funds to each of the other four teachers when they retire. As part of our final stage of the Phase II campaign, additional fund raising will be targeted to provide for leadership mentoring and perpetuation, staff retention, recruitment and enhancement.

To date, the 3-D Campaign has

been an unbelievable success and has set a course for continued sustainability for Upland Hills School as a center for learning. As we move closer to our Phase II completion and begin Phase III of an additional \$1,000,000, the school community has set its sights on adding an additional 20 acres of Upland Hills Farm land, clearing up some of the overgrowth around the campus, rejuvenating the wind generating system, and building an endowment fund. Phase III will help to ensure that an Upland Hills tuition is within reach for future families and that the campus continues to grow in a healthy and sustained manner. By doing more with less and having the financial discipline to manage funds carefully, Upland Hills School will continue to be a place for both children and teachers to learn and to dream together.

I would like to personally thank our longtime friend, John LoVasco, for his collaboration on this update. His continued support, direction and advise are a constant reminder of all the good that can flourish here at Upland Hills School when we all stay informed and involved.

It is the hope of this Board of Directors that each of you considers the opportunity to assist in a fund raising project by volunteering your time and efforts or simply make a tax deductible contribution to the UHS 3-D campaign. Your assistance will have a direct impact towards the continued health of our school. To find out more on how you can help, simply visit us at www.uplandhills.org. As a board, we value and thank you all for your past, present and future contributions within this great community.
Sincerely,
Joe

To make a donation to the 3D Campaigngo to our website www.uplandhills.org and click on 3D.



A Journey to the Heart

By Robert Crowe

Picture a rural village in the middle of England in the 1970s. Picture a child, around ten years old, sitting at the bottom of a large garden, amongst fruit trees. It is approaching the end of Autumn and the sun appears impossibly large and red as it is slowly obscured by the garden hedge. A heap of sticks and red leaves provides an imaginary fire, the garden shed is a log cabin and a large Old English sheepdog conveniently stands in for a horse. The child sings the song that has become an end-of-playtime ritual since learning it in school a few weeks earlier: 'Land of the Silver Birch'. Dusk deepens and the child runs towards the warmth and light of home.

Now picture the same child over 30 years later, grown into adulthood and sitting with colleagues in a room at Upland Hills School. Young children crowd together on the floor, the teachers settling them gently into places. Everyone looks up expectantly as the door opens and Ted walks in, playing guitar and humming 'Land of the Silver Birch'. He sits, begins to sing, and 40 voices enthusiastically join in the familiar words.

These two renditions of 'Land of the Silver Birch' make good beginning and end points of a story; the story of how I, that child from England, became a teacher at Upland Hills School. As with all good stories, there are plenty of challenges along the way. It's also a

complex, multilayered story, so in this piece of writing I intend to unpack only one strand; the teaching strand. How did I come to teaching, why did I leave, and what brought me back to the profession I love?

I learned 'Land of the Silver Birch' in school from a BBC radio broadcast called "Singing Together". At that time, my childhood outside of school was full of imaginative play in the woods, meadows and brooks surrounding my home. School itself was a small primary school of 70 pupils aged four to eleven, run on traditional lines with very little 'sky time' and far too much 'seat time' for my liking. I would have loved Upland Hills; my teacher when I was eight described me rather poetically as being 'like a caged butterfly, constantly fluttering at the windows and longing to be outside'.

It was perhaps a strange choice to enter Teacher Training College at the age of 18, as my secondary school education from age 11 onward was, for a variety of reasons, an utterly miserable experience. However, I had enjoyed my work experience, spending every Wednesday afternoon for two years as an aide in an infant school with four to seven year olds), and had no other ideas, so I began teacher training. Although some parts of the course interested me, in less than a year I decided to leave college. On my second teaching practice, I remember entering the staff lounge during lesson time. Two children, apparently sent there on an errand, had dared to sit down on the couch. They leapt to their feet and scurried from the room, heads down, looking terrified. I felt deeply saddened to be viewed as a frightening authority figure, and instinctively felt there was something wrong with a system that used fear as a basis for discipline.

The experience contributed to my decision to look for a different career. I tried a variety of jobs including warehouse work, bar-tending, cleaning, making deliveries and working on a boat ferrying tourists along one of the most beautiful lakes in Britain. Eventually I found my way into farming. I loved being outdoors, the physicality of the job, and the animals, and even gained a Diploma in Agriculture before the inconsistencies of being a vegetarian farmer weighed too heavily on me,

and I searched once again for a more compatible career.

Evidently, something positive from those first experiences of teaching stuck with me, and I returned to college aged 24 to give it another try. This time around, I fell in love with teaching. I loved the variety of every day; the creativity of planning exciting topics; the exuberant energy of the children; the challenges of managing a group of 30 or more children. Most of all, I loved the relationships that developed in our class over the year as we learned together, and I loved the relationships I established with colleagues, which last as friendships to this day.

But the British public system was rapidly changing, following trends similar to those here in the U.S. Increasingly, the government told teachers exactly what to teach and how to teach it. First came a National Curriculum, which dictated what topics should be taught to each age group of children. Suddenly, the freedom to plan topics based on the interests of the children, the strengths of the teacher, and current affairs disappeared, and with it a great deal of creativity. The following year, the National Literacy strategy was introduced by the Department for Education, and a year after that the National Numeracy strategy. These two documents prescribed in enormous detail exactly what was to be taught and how it was to be delivered. At the same time, strict inspection procedures and vast arrays of assessments were introduced to ensure teachers were delivering the prescribed content with the correct methodology.

As I write, I still feel anger and frustration bubbling up within me.

The effect of linking Local Education Authority, school and teacher performance to the results children obtained in language arts, math and science tests at age seven and eleven distorted the education system into a lop-sided affair where linguistic / verbal and logical intelligences (predominantly language arts and math) were raised up on high pedestals and made the be-all and end-all of schooling. Worse still, the language arts and math skills promoted by a testing culture were limited and narrow. Children didn't learn to love language and to communicate meaningfully. They didn't learn to apply math skills to real-life situations. They learned to answer test questions.

When I moved to a new job in an economically-deprived area, where children's behavior was far more challenging, I began to realize that whereas in my previous school, the education system was simply not helping many pupils, in my new school, the system was actively harming them. The real needs of the children – for love, for emotional security, for learning interpersonal and intrapersonal skills – were lost in the incessant need to prove that language arts and math targets were being pursued and met.

On the surface, I was still a very successful teacher, with excellent ratings from each Education Authority inspection, and held management responsibilities as Deputy Head-teacher. I still loved those aspects of the job that drew me into teaching in the first place. But it became untenable to continue pushing and pushing children to learn spellings and math rules, when what they needed to learn was how to play with each other outside without fighting. I constantly faced the difficulty of having to simply separate angry, tearful children and continue with the daily math



or literacy lesson with the other 20 or so children who were not actively fighting that day, accepting that several children would not be learning as they were too angry or upset to concentrate, and that many others were not learning for other emotional reasons.

Of course, I did try and address these pressing needs, but only half an hour each week was set aside for 'PSHCE' – personal, social, health and citizenship education. Cramming so many aspects of learning into one acronym speaks volumes about the lack of importance the British educational authorities attached to these areas of education! Compare this to the eight to ten hours of language arts and five hours of mathematics we were required to deliver each week. On many occasions, I did use language arts or math time to work on emotional issues, but it was never enough, and I was always aware that every missing date in their workbooks could be scrutinized and questioned by school inspectors if my children failed to meet their targets.

In 2006, after finally finishing my part-time Master's degree, I decided to take a break, travel, and review my options. Six months of travelling in New Zealand didn't bring any answers so I took on a 'small' (by public school standards) class of 17 emotionally or academically challenged seven to nine year olds for several months. Attempting to teach a seven year old who had set fire to his drug-addicted mother's house at age four, a girl who

feigned illness every day so she could go home and try and protect her mother from an abusive partner, and a nine-year-old boy who arrived each day in tears and sobbed quietly for the first half hour of each day, I realized that increasingly I needed counseling skills more than I needed teaching skills. After more travelling and soul searching, and some difficult experiences with substituting, I finally made the decision that I was not going to return to teaching until sanity returned to the British public school system.

Several other strands of my story combined at this point to bring me to the United States, where I began a Mental Health and Social Work course. Through several serendipitous encounters, I found my way to Upland Hills School to complete a counseling internship. Having firmly turned my back on teaching, it took some time for me to realize that in Upland Hills, I had found exactly what I was looking for in all the earlier school experiences throughout my life. It has taken me longer still to even begin

to understand the complex culture here, but after close to three years of connection with the school, I feel ready to articulate some of my observations in relation to my experience with education in the United Kingdom.

Upland Hills is a school where children get all the sky time they need. This is a school where children behave not through fear of authority but out of respect for the love that is evident in every interaction between children and adults. And it's a school that empowers teachers to develop a curriculum that allows for great creativity, utilizing teacher's strengths, and meeting the needs and interests of the children.

It is a school that holds every line of intelligence as equally important, so that children are enabled to demonstrate their unique genius. There are always going to be children whose brain structures make learning to read and write or do math more difficult. For a child in public school, with a constant focus on these skills, life is a challenge virtually all day every day, and they are perpetually aware of their struggle. The public school system I am familiar with used a one-size-fits-all approach to education, with children expected to meet specific targets based on nothing other than their age. Those failing to reach targets were often removed from the very subjects in which they excelled (music, art, physical education) to receive extra teaching in the subjects where they struggled.

The beauty of an Upland Hills education for these children is very apparent in Michael Leone's video on uplandhills.org. At Upland Hills, teachers recognize that

children develop differently, and where one may come to reading or math very early with little effort, others will take far longer and need much more support. All are met with equal love and encouraged to demonstrate exactly what they are capable of doing. They are given the time and space to develop their capacities naturally, and they are supported in appropriate ways instead of being forced into a 'race to nowhere', hurrying to meet artificial targets that do not enable them to communicate effectively or solve real-life problems.

Perhaps most importantly, Upland Hills has always recognized what neuroscience is increasingly proving; that a child can only learn when they are emotionally stable. From their very first days at Upland Hills, children learn the vital importance of friendships. They learn how to be good friends, and how to solve the difficulties that naturally arise with their peers. When conflicts occur, the teachers, with immense skill and great love, guide children to new understandings of how they connect with people, and how their actions affect the world. This emphasis in the early years on a social curriculum pays dividends in later years. Children facing difficulties outside school will have a strong support network in their group which can help them cope with anxiety, fear or other emotions which could easily shut down their ability to learn. Equally, conflicts between older children are often solved by the children themselves, using the skills they learned in their early years, meaning less teaching time is directed to conflict resolution.

The extra attention paid to the social curriculum - far more than is given in any public school - and the broad, deep approach to all lines of intelligence at Upland Hills means that in the early years, some children may not advance as quickly in reading, writing and math as their neighbor who attends public school. With few exceptions, this gap disappears as children progress through the school, and what all Upland students learn is of far greater long-term benefit than accelerated academic achievement in the early years. Children learn the value of genuine, meaningful communication that comes from the heart. They learn to resolve their differences through self-examination, dialogue and compromise. They learn to promote social justice, both locally and globally. They learn the value of living sustainably and in harmony with the cycles of the earth. Their sense of wonder and curiosity is nurtured. Above all, they learn to be compassionate and loving beings.

These are the values that I hold dear, and it is an extraordinary privilege to teach at Upland Hills school. I acknowledge the courage of all parents, past and present, who have given us the gift of teaching their children. I also give thanks to the many teachers, other staff and those who have supported the school over the past four decades, bringing to life the mission of Upland Hills. Most of all, I give thanks to Phil, who has dedicated himself to creating an extraordinary, love-filled place here in the Land of the Silver Birch.

LAND OF THE SILVER BIRCH

**Land of the silver birch
Home of the beaver
Where still the mighty moose
Wanders at will**

Refrain:

**Blue lake and rocky shore
I will return once more
Boom diddy-ah da, boom diddy -
ah da, boom diddy -ah da, ehaaa**

**High on a rocky ledge
I'll build my wigwam
Close to the water's edge
Silent and still**

Refrain

**My heart grows sick for thee
Here in the low lands
I will return to thee
Hills of the north**

Refrain

**Down in the forest
Deep in the lowlands
My heart cries out for thee
Hills of the North**

The Value of an UHS Education; Reflections from a Former Student

By Valerie Sowa (Sherwood)

Even though I'm well into my forties, I can remember my first day at Upland Hills School like it was yesterday. It was love at first sight. I had been in a public school for three years when my mother decided she'd had enough of my frustration with it. I was frustrated by being forced to read "Dick and Jane" at grade level instead of being encouraged to read at the level of my abilities, which were more advanced. I cried from being bullied on the way home from school, and even hid my shoes when I got home so that I could feign searching long and hard and be late to school in the morning. School held no appeal for me. There were moments in that setting where I longed to shine and be recognized for my abilities, but instead I was forced to compete for reading aloud time, for a part in a school play, for someone to take an interest in me for who I was and what I could do. I can easily recall the depressing feeling of knowing that I wanted to learn more but it was clear that I would never be offered the opportunity. The teacher simply taught to the curriculum and there was no room for choice, or time for excellence. I was labeled "shy" simply because I wasn't going to risk being criticized by asking for what I wanted. Unfortunately and to my dismay, I continue to hear stories about today's public school classrooms that mimic my own experiences.

My mother discovered Upland

Hills School in its founding year, and she enrolled my older brother first. I followed at the start of its second year – when the school was housed in two modular buildings with a covered walkway in between and an inspiring geodesic dome just beyond. Soon after I arrived on that first day, we all gathered under the largest tree in the yard where our teachers called out our names and invited us into our groups where we would remain for the year. I was astonished at how small my group was and how quickly I was able to make friends. Right away, I was introduced to choice – I was expected to pick which classes I wanted to attend, based on my own interests. I remember my mother explaining to me that this method was a lot like how it was going to be at college, and I was thrilled to take on this advanced level of responsibility. Suddenly I got to be in charge of my own learning and I was only eight years old!

In the first week, our group decided to put on a play. It was my secret wish to get the lead, but I had been so disappointed with how the parts were assigned for the play at my previous school that I was not going to risk telling my new group of friends how badly I wanted it. But to my amazement and delight and without any competition and very little discussion, I was chosen for the part. I went on to have a beloved theatrical career at UHS. I also became a published writer and poet, a seamstress, a musician, a naturalist, a women's rights activist, a linguist, an expert on Eskimo culture and an Egyptologist. At Upland Hills School, we could learn whatever we wanted to, whenever we wanted to learn it and we were encouraged to pursue the highest level of knowledge that we desired. I felt that there was no limit to what I could learn and do and be.



My education at Upland Hills was full of possibilities and opportunity. I learned to mark my own progress; I evaluated myself. The teachers were excited to teach and as far as I could tell, they taught us what we wanted to know, not what they wanted to teach. I felt respected and valued, cared for and loved. There were expectations, but I set them (and reached them) for myself. The children were in charge of their learning and the adults were our mentors. It is exciting to think about education in this way. It's a framework that is completely foreign to the current model that public education follows today – one that has been unchanged in my lifetime and continues to hold children back from reaching their potential.

This foundational experience has stayed with me. It has become a part of my soul. When I see an old friend or teacher from my years at Upland, the memories of my childhood come flooding back. I am reminded how grateful I am that I was plucked from that brick and mortar elementary school and released into the wilds of the rolling hills and forests at Upland Hills to become who I was meant to be.

Now, I find myself in my third career as a Head of School for a very small private, non-profit Montessori school in northwest Wisconsin, www.heartlandmontessori.org. We actually have a modular building and a couple of chickens, too and in the corner of my office sits my childhood guitar that my teacher, Phil Moore, taught me to play long ago. By cosmic coincidence, on the day I accepted the position as Head of



School, my UHS newsletter arrived announcing Phil's decision to move on as Director of Upland Hills School. While I read about his students and what they are now doing in the world, it struck me that Phil would be proud to know that out of the thousands of students he has influenced at least one has chosen to follow in his footsteps. Phil was my teacher and I often think about him when I am with the children, counseling my staff, and working with parents. I think of his gentleness and kind eyes, his openness, and the genuine love he shares so freely. I've come to this work in a way that is

true to my educational roots – not by degrees or accomplishments, but through my own interest and love. Like Phil when he began at Upland Hills School, I'm not sure where this latest path will lead me, but I carry within me the confidence that Upland Hills gave to me. I am reaching my potential.

Problem Solvers; Where the Rubber Meets the Road

By Ted Strunck

Ron Berger has been a Middle School teacher for 25 years in a small town in Pennsylvania. He wrote a book called *The Ethics of Excellence: Building a Culture of Craftsmanship with Students*. My wife Jane had the opportunity to listen to Berger present his ideas at a recent conference. She was so impressed that she bought two of his books and shared them with me, and I passed them on to Phil and Shaun. Berger talks about building a 'culture of excellence' in a school by teaching the skills of support and collaboration. This resonated with all of us, and so this year, Shaun and I are incorporating some of Berger's practices into our teaching.

One of Berger's ideas involves having the teacher design a project based on a real need that is close at hand. Here's how it works: first, the students are charged with the challenge of solving the problem. In Berger's experience, student brainstorming and asking questions give them direction. Together, the groups can then set out to find some answers. And because there's no road map, they don't know where to go, exactly, but since they're all in the same boat of uncertainty, they need each other's help. As they share what they find, they help each other ask more questions. Berger explains that as a result of this process, the students come to expect excellent work from each other. All along, the students understand that their results



Jade, Nathan and Phil working on the water project.

will be made public and will have an effect on their daily lives and those of others, so the importance of the task requires excellence.

In Ted's Group this fall, Shaun and I have assigned the students an important project. We need to "fix" our water here at school so we can drink it. Like Berger's students, we're learning to problem solve through solving problems. We've divided my students into four Water Project subgroups: What's in the water that makes it undrinkable? What's the source of the toxin? How can we get it out? What's the most efficient way to accomplish this? We are working through the problem using Berger's model, and intend to make our findings public and make recommendations to the school board.

Berger's ideas dovetail nicely with other learn-

ing and teaching strategies that have long been an important part of my curriculum, like traditional academic skills and cooperative learning. So for instance, within the context of the Water Project, Shaun and I have incorporated skills and assignments such as writing, vocabulary, research, data representation, technology, organization and collaboration. And we are using the constructs of Cooperative Learning to solve our water problem - each member of the Project's subgroups plays a role; scribe, leader, presenter, and organizer. The students switch



Ted's Group Bridge Project

roles every week. And finally, across the curriculum, we're putting Universal Design for Learning (UDL) practices into place by providing multiple ways to learn and multiple ways to represent understanding. For instance, history notes may be done as a 'cartoon' to represent the main ideas and events of a given chapter. In all of our classwork, we're using word processing and the Internet to lower barriers and increase access to information.

Ron Berger talks about the need for trust in this 'culture of excellence'. We have to trust each other's intentions and relinquish some control. We, the teachers, have to let the students go. We need to give them opportunities to test their ideas and the freedom to try their solutions. We have to engender an attitude that mis-

takes are opportunities for learning. We have to invite all students into a collective critique routine where everyone is helping each other do better in kind and encouraging ways.

Here at Upland Hills, we have been engaged in this comprehensive, collaborative way of learning since the beginning. We've known in our hearts what we wanted to see and have been building toward these ends all along. I have always aimed my students toward enhancing the environment through both collective initiatives and in very individual ways. Everywhere around our campus you can find evidence of these creative and resourceful endeavors. The Bridge Project was the first for me. And my Senior Projects curriculum has also produced some wonderful work including the play horses in the woods and the beautiful mosaic just inside the theater. We've come a long way down the road toward this 'culture of excellence' already. Now, with Ron Berger's book in hand, we have a road map that, points out the specific landmarks that we can incorporate into our culture. Of course, like our Water Project, this effort toward creating a 'culture of excellence' is a work in progress. We'll let you know in the spring what we learned and how much farther

down the road we were able to move toward building a 'culture of excellence' at Upland Hills School. And—fingers crossed—we hope that soon, we'll also be able to invite you to take a drink of our school's water.

The Line of Intelligence Called Mathematics Logic

By Shaun Piazza

Like everything else in life, education is evolving. People are always on the lookout for what works and what doesn't, and in our age of information sharing, these observations are accessible to all. However it falls on us to embrace new information and use the tools it creates. At Upland Hills School, we are currently exploring a new approach to teaching mathematics that was inspired by a multi-year, multi-national study. In 1996, 1999, 2003, and 2007, between 38 and 63 countries (depending on the year) took part in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS). Researchers gathered data on over a half-million students in the fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades. The most recent results from 2007 showed that the United States was significantly outperformed in this wonderful world of mathematics by eight other countries. The most troubling portion of the report revealed that only ten percent of eighth-grade students in the US perform above an advanced international benchmark while thirty-two percent of Singapore's eighth-grade students surpassed that same benchmark.

In an effort to understand the root causes of these differences, the US and five of the highest achieving countries video-taped their eighth-grade math classrooms and analyzed the results. Researchers concluded that countries that do a better job teaching math tend to give students

the answers less often, and the US practice of teaching math has not changed in a significant way in 100 years. These two findings explain why we are falling behind in math instruction. Ninety-nine percent of the US math classes which were videotaped for the study followed the same general routine, which is the same routine practiced in American classrooms for the last century, even though technology and the public demand for math application have charged ahead dramatically in the past century. Here's the time-honored routine: the students come in, the teacher reviews the previous days' work and presents a new topic, the teacher demonstrates an example of how to solve the new problem, and the students are assigned similar problems to do for the rest of class and for homework. The example--the answer to the problem--is given before the students have any chance to apply their own thoughts to the problem. This answer-first approach is backwards from the way we encounter real world problems and it is backwards from the approach of other countries that are doing a better job teaching math than us.

The results of the TIMMS study suggest that math ought be taught instead through problem solving. This methodology involves high-level thinking where the students try to find a solution without their teacher's explicit instructions. In Germany and Japan, thirty to forty percent of math lessons are taught through problem solving and both countries' students significantly outperformed our own in TIMMS. In our classrooms at Upland Hills, teachers have often embraced the practice of project learning and problem solving because it empowers students to try their hands at a task and learn firsthand from their trials and triumphs. But up until now we have not applied these same tools to teaching math because we were not sure how to do it. This year, however, we have begun to explore

this problem-solving approach to math because we believe it will make us better math teachers.

Our guide on this journey to better math at Upland Hills School has been a book, *Elementary and Middle School Mathematics, Teaching Developmentally*, 8th ed., written by John Van De Walle. Van De Walle uses the TIMMS studies, current math textbooks, writings of Jean Piaget on developmental learning, and straightforward examples to illuminate how to become a better math educator. This is not to say that each of our students needs to be ahead of other ninth-grade students in the math curriculum when they go on to high school. In fact, we want our students to slow down and explore topics more thoroughly. TIMMS researchers describe the US math curriculum as being a mile wide and an inch deep. Most American educators try to teach everything, and as a result, they often have to re-teach material that the student

didn't learn well enough the first time. This is time-consuming for teachers and disheartening for students. We want Upland Hills' students to be excited about math, not discouraged! And we want to teach them the best process for approaching problem solving so that if they choose to work with heavy mathematics later on, they are capable of it.

A master of math, or of any discipline, does not just know all of the facts contained in that discipline. They also know how each fact is related to the world and can skillfully maneuver their thoughts and words between topics with grace and even playfulness. Mastery elicits pride and joy for the student and does not require a large breadth of knowledge. It only requires that the person thoroughly understand the topics they have covered so that they do not feel frustrated by the inability to confidently apply what they have learned. To become a master, a student must not only learn the facts, they must become familiar with the myriad connections within their subject as well as the connections to other disciplines. These connections can only be established by the individual; they are formed when a student uses previous understanding to make a guess and explore an unknown problem.

When we explore the relationship between what we know and what we are trying to find, we establish bridges of knowledge. When a teacher or parent gives a student the answer straight away, the opportunity to construct that bridge is taken away, leaving the student with a singular point of fact that has a weak relation--or



Lily and Marianna in rocket class

no relation at all--to anything else they know. It is useless for doing anything except the exact task for which it was taught (and possibly a Jeopardy question). Having a network of established connections or bridges, however, allows the student to think comprehensively and become a more powerful problem solver.

As we teach our math students problem-solving and encourage bridge-building, we are mindful of our school mission; to discover and respect the uniqueness of every child. There is no golden method which will work well for everyone. To effectively differentiate our instruction, we need to empower our teachers to apply this new information the best way that they see fit. We have provided the essential tool—a new approach to mathematical problem-solving—and we are practicing with it, but in the end it is up to the individual teacher to decide where it fits best into her or his curriculum.

Lori has combined this new tool with her knowledge of older math classes and their struggles. She teaches

the younger level now and she omits topics that are naturally taught through other math subjects and focuses instead on what her older students had struggled with; number sense. She is working with grouping numbers, which is the basis of multiplication, division, and the rest of math. Her students manipulate beads in an exploratory way; they are practicing problem-solving while keeping their engagement high.

Ted has embraced this tool by giving up his role as the “keeper of the answer” and instead joining the ranks of his sixth grade students. His math class starts with

the presentation of a problem which the entire class works on (Ted included) in groups trying to figure out how they might find a solution. Once each group has come to a solution, they present it to the class. By having the students put their solutions into words, Ted is encouraging clarity of thought in the students. In order to present their solution in a coherent way, they learn to analyze their own logic and they are forced to critique their own work by retelling the story of their solution. A highlight of Ted's year was hearing a student comment "I used to think I was stupid in math but now I feel brilliant."

Robert has rebuilt his teaching approach in math from the ground up. He uses example problems from Van De Walle's book and studies it frequently. He tells less and asks more, and he says he sometimes sits on his hands to stop himself from picking up student's pencils to help illustrate the problem. He approaches his first/second grade math class with problems designed to pique student interest and allow them to play with math. He's teaching them that you aren't supposed to know the answer right away and there is no need to be frustrated about it. And he's helping them see that the fun of math is in the puzzle!

I have integrated some of Robert's approach as well. I'm focusing on getting students excited about math and now I teach an afternoon program called "High Five For Math!!!" which is full of smiling students eager to spend an additional hour on their math. In all of my math interactions I

try to get students to question how they arrived at their answer and figure out for themselves if their answer is correct. I encourage group work and start math lessons by having students analyze each other's homework to figure out what discrepancies there are between their problem-solving methods, and figure out what caused them. I emphasize that every problem has multiple ways to get to the solution, and each one is equally correct.

A number of us at Upland Hills are experimenting with this new approach this year, and we are working on increasing our comfort and familiarity with it as teachers. As we do, we expect that our skill and effectiveness in teaching math through problem solving will grow. We'll continue our efforts to change the students' perception about what math is supposed to be and to cultivate their joy in working to solve a problem. Mathematics is a world of wonder.



Shaun and his Math Group.

The Free Hour

By Anissa Howard

Google it and it can't be found, but ask an Upland Hills student what a Free Hour is, and they know. In my third year of teaching a Morning Meeting Group, one eight-year-old child defined the Free Hour as, 'an hour of uninterrupted time - outside - for fun and exploration for the benefit of just being me.'

The subject of Free Hour sometimes carries mystique for parents perhaps because its benefits for the child are beyond that child's ability to explain. Some parents wonder why a Free Hour exists as part of the Afternoon Program for children at Upland Hills School-- are they really learning anything if they take a Free Hour? In a word, Yes. In her book *The Absorbant Mind*, Dr. Maria Montessori writes, "Free choice is one of the highest of all the mental processes... You can't keep the child's brain from learning because it's all in the world it's designed to do. You can't keep spontaneous learning from happening." Free Hour provides our children the opportunity to learn what cannot be taught in any class. Free Hour allows them the opportunity to access the natural world and the inner parts of themselves.

The Free Hour has its roots in the earliest days of Upland Hills School when children chose Free Hour to work on or finish a project,

complete homework, help another teacher or group, or use as time alone or with a friend. Now, forty years later, children from each age Morning Meeting Group can still end up sharing a Free Hour during a school day at Upland Hills, and using it much as children did thirty or forty years ago. There can be anywhere from zero to 20+ children outside, depending on the hour. Children are not required to take a Free Hour, with the exception of the youngest groups where Free Hours form an important part of the day and support the foundation for the intelligence and preservation of Play. (Play deserves a whole article on its own).

For the children, building their afternoon schedules is about making arrangements. When planning their afternoon schedules, students choose the placement and frequency of their Free Hour times, weighing that option against the other classes being offered. Once the children create their schedules, Free Hours fill a space in their week for the remainder of Trimester, just like any other afternoon class.

Making choices about their classes helps children learn about sequencing and through choice, time, and direct experience, they practice refining their choices. Children whose awareness has been allowed to grow through this kind of practice learn to make wise and practical choices about the positioning of not just their Free Hour, but also the rest of their classes. I have been surprised to see that as a result of this choice-based model, children as young as six and seven years old are already gaining the ability to scan ahead across more than just the present Trimester, in order to arrange classes and Free Hours in suitable ways for a whole school year experience of their own design. Sequencing is about learning to have it all - but not all at once.

This class selection process functions differently in the older end of the school than it does in the younger end. For the older children, the Renaissance Program

begins to factor into their decisions. And from the third group on up, Free Hours are capped at 2 per week, and must be taken on separate days of the week, (not back-to-back). For the youngest two groups (the four to seven year olds), Free Hours are taken each day as a component of their afternoons and can happen either 1st or 2nd hour, by the child's or teacher's choice. Care is taken to help the youngest children have a school day that provides guided instructional group experiences balanced with undirected time outside together with others - building the foundations for social intelligence.

Free Hours give the children the benefits of social interactions not controlled by adults and the opportunity to fall in love with the natural world. These hours are also valuable because engaging in non-structured creative play leads inevitably to conflict, which gives the children the opportunity to learn about justice and communication, and their interpersonal and intrapersonal understandings become richer because of it. Free Hour serves the introverted children in the sense that it gives them chances to be alone / still / quiet by providing an oasis of quiet in the busyness and noise of the day. Much of J. Krishnamurti's life's work inspired the formative philosophy of Upland Hills School. In *Freedom From The Known*, he writes, "It seems to me that one of the greatest stumbling blocks in life is this constant struggle to reach, to achieve, to acquire... Space and silence are necessary to go beyond the limitations of consciousness. To have inward solitude and space is very important because it implies freedom to be, to go, to function, to fly."

Several years of witnessing



Grace on Free hour.

this undirected time has shown me how it lends itself to allowing experiences to deepen and naturalize. Yes, conflicts arise, and also relationships gel, and spontaneous partnerships arise across different age groups. A twelve-year-old can be seen pushing a four-year-old on the swings; in wet weather perhaps they move inside to read a book, and nearly always, multi-age games arise. There is always a teacher on Overview, as well as other staff members on hand, all watching and available to handle any situations that may arise for the children.

One time, there was an hour where just one child was on Free Hour alone. At first I wondered how she would like her choice, but soon her joy during that hour was almost palpable. Coming from a big busy family with several siblings, she would stand – a solitary figure out in the middle of the empty field – arms outstretched – face to the sky – for a long time. Once a week, every week, in all kinds of weather that Trimester she did this. I never interrupted her. I just watched. At times she would find me and tell me little secrets she was learning about the wind. What birds she was guessing might be signaling certain kinds of approaching weather, hunches she has about her own observations, and other things that just never could have emerged in structured time. She was positively radiant. It made me think of the validity of a lecture I had attended where Joseph Chilton Pearce spoke of a happiness indicator scale that was done with young children. Across many variables, the single variable that the ‘happiest and most well-adjusted children’ (the top 3% of the study pool) scored highest in was something called Blank Staring. In the act of Blank Staring, children stared off for a number of seconds or moments in an unfocused way, and appeared to be at a distance from their immediate surroundings, after which they would

re-enter play willingly and energetically. When given the opportunity, children will naturally pause and reflect more often than a directed schedule permits. A Free Hour offers all of our children this opportunity.

Also quite naturally, children just don’t extrapolate – they can’t see themselves within the framework of an evolving world in which they, too, are evolving. This is why I wanted to write this article, because the children don’t come home and say things like:

“My Free Hour is placed strategically in my week and is offering my brain and body and spirit, the chance to assimilate and conjugate our school setting, and all that I have just listened to but do not yet understand and that integration is happening in the time I spend in some undirected time with my friends here at school.”

Oh! And on the Free Hour we worked parts of our morning into our play, resolved some conflicts, and our unique understandings were animated and for an hour we were out under the sky, where things were our choice. In our game we decided who was going to be the golden dragon and whether or not it was fair for that dragon to spit golden fire when the other dragons in our game aren’t powerful enough. We discussed it, argued, cried out of the injustice of each of our differing understandings of how to communicate in a group of peers and who is in control of the rules of our game and how we make rules.

A teacher came and talked with us about how to make those group decisions, and we realized we weren’t really listening to each other because after all we had the exact same ideas anyway, so then we all agreed and when we did there was the magic of possibility, and we became energized by our new-found cohesion. We pretended we flew off to other lands where there were towers (the monkey bars) and mountains (grasshopper hill). We played this way for 45 minutes straight. “Teachers were watching us but we weren’t aware of that so we felt alone and safe and free in that hour of time.”

In contrast, parents are more likely to hear responses from their children much more like, ‘Yeah I had a Free Hour. It was fun. We played outside.’ While an older child might answer with a shrug of the shoulders, older children are working with Free Hours as well, within the scope of their unique social development as pre-teens and teens. This time is very important time for them as well, as they spend their Free Hours together or alone, walking and talking or sitting together outside.



Alex and Owen playing.

Jean Piaget was a Swiss Psychologist who was internationally renowned for his studies of the development of children’s thinking processes. He said we quickly forget what it was like to be a child, and that as adults our assumptions and expectations can get in the way of understanding what children are really telling us and how. One of the elements of Piaget’s work is called Equilibration, which he stated “orchestrates the companion processes of physical experiences, social interaction, and maturation in advancing the child to higher levels of understanding.” This cycle, he explained, “of repeated and expanding interactions between the child and his environment spotlights the child as the mainspring to his own intellectual development.”

The Free Hour is just one aspect of the intelligent design put into practice at Upland Hills School. As with many components of the curriculum, parents are welcome to bring specific questions about how your child’s Morning Meeting Group teacher works with Free Hours directly to those staff members.

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Upland Hills School is part of a larger, interconnected learning community which includes the Karen Joy Theatre, the Ecological Awareness Center (EAC), the Upland Hills Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and Upland Hills Farm. If you are looking forward to the spring musical performance, or looking for new ways to connect responsibly with the natural world, support local, wholesome food production or are interested in learning more about the great programs and camps at Upland Hills farm, see below for more details.



Spring performance of Heroes, an original play by Karen Moore and Ted Strunck, at the Karen Joy Theatre on **Saturday, April 27 at 7 pm** www.karenjoytheatre.org / 248-693-2878



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Celebrate Birth 2012 at the EAC and connect with people across the planet in welcoming the birth of the new enlightened humanity on **Saturday, December 22**; Sweat Lodge on **January 1 2013**; Jim McDonald Herb Workshop, January 13th 2013 www.uheac.org / 248-693-2878



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