

Whole Schooling Consortium

International Journal of Whole Schooling



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The six principles of Whole Schooling are...

- (1) empowering citizens for democracy;
- (2) including all;
- (3) providing authentic, multi-level instruction;
- (4) building community;
- (5) supporting learning; and
- (6) partnering with parents and the community.

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Mission Statement

The International Journal of Whole Schooling is a fully refereed on-line journal published twice a year and governed by the management team and an independent Editorial Review Board. The International Journal of Whole Schooling is a non-profit venture run by volunteer staff. Subscription is free.

The Journal seeks to discuss issues relevant to Whole Schooling, with contributions from a variety of stakeholders including students, parents, academics, educators, and administrators.

Contributions and feedback are welcome. Please contact Tim Loreman at tim.loreman@concordia.ab.ca or Billie Jo Clausen at bclausen@mesd.k12.or.us

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The International Journal of Whole Schooling welcomes articles from a wide variety of perspectives - educators, parents, academics, students, advocates, and concerned citizens. Those wishing to submit articles for consideration should consult the guidelines for submitting articles at http://www.wholeschooling.net/Journal_of_Whole_Schooling/IJWSindex.html. There are no page charges in the International Journal of Whole Schooling.

Towards Whole Schools: Building a movement for dialogue and action in the 21st century

Michael Peterson

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the International Journal of Whole Schooling! It is my pleasure to initiate this Journal with a discussion of what has led us here, the idea of creating schools that are more effective, engaging, joyful places of growth and development for our children. This Journal is, we believe, a tool for dialogue, thinking, reflection, learning, and, ultimately and most importantly, change. In this short article, I would like to introduce the focus of this Journal and its role within: to work towards positive change in schooling.

When we talk about education, we have some very fundamental questions to ask, questions that affect any and everything else we do. Such questions include:

- Why do people go to school? What is the real purpose?
- Who is school for? Who goes to school together? Who gets separated and why?
- How do we do schooling (a broader term and concept than 'teaching')? What does it look like?

It is clear that schools will look very different depending upon their *social purpose*. Schools have served many, often conflicting purposes – the national acculturation of immigrants, preparation of the elite for their 'proper role' in society, teaching technical skills to the working class, sorting who belongs in what role. We have often also expected that schools will help solve great social problems -- poverty, violence, and social unrest. At their idealist best, many hope that schools may be tools of a new, strong democratic culture, a view best known in the works of John Dewey.

The purpose of schooling, of course, depends upon our image of the type of society for which we expect schools to prepare young people. At the beginning of the 21st Century, we are in the midst of fundamental social decisions – whether we move towards democracy, inclusion, and equality or more towards autocracy, segregation, and inequality. Virtually every political conflict can be framed in these terms. Schools are conflicted territory in this struggle, for it is in schools that children will learn to either be obedient to the existing social order or thoughtful, creative participants who help analyze and shape the world in which we live.

At the present time, major shifts are underway leading us towards inequality and autocracy. Consequently, it is not surprising to see policy initiatives all over the world which move schools away from democracy, away from teaching children skills to analyze and change their social situations through political advocacy, away from engagement in real thought. We see increases in:

“At the beginning of the 21st Century, we are in the midst of fundamental social decisions – whether we move towards democracy, inclusion, and equality or more towards autocracy, segregation, and inequality.”

1. Rigid, narrow teaching – phonics only (follow the rules and you can read all you need to know), textbooks, the ‘bunch of facts’ curriculum (rather than real thinking and questioning).
2. Standardization of the curriculum and assessment -- focus on ‘knowing the facts’, thinking technically but not critically, sorting kids, schools, and communities by test scores, most often functional measures of wealth.
3. Segregation – by race, class, culture, language, ability, behavior. We have an amazing array of mechanisms to sort children so we can easily see who is the ‘best and brightest’ and who is to be avoided. Special education classes and special schools, alternative schools, classes for ‘gifted’ students assure that we don’t build a diverse community where people support one another and critically question interests that divide people.
4. Autocratic rule. We say we live in a democracy and most schools say their purpose is to create democratic citizens. However, most schools operate with a top-down, autocratic rule that makes a mockery of these claims.

We are, however, the makers of our social world. Collaboration which brings people together under a joined vision of a caring, inclusive, democratic community has power. Creativity, which will allow us to use our resources and energy, holds great promise. We hold in our hand more than we know. We have choices.

WHAT MUST BE DONE?

Whole Schooling as a Framework For People Centered Schools.

While we must fight against injustice and bad policy, we first and foremost need a vision of the type of society and schools we seek, a vision to be understood and embraced by many people, a vision to serve as a practical alternative to more controlling, segregating, disempowering images, a vision to guide both policy, practice, and political advocacy.

Towards this end, in 1997, several colleagues and I developed an alternative vision for schools based on what we have come to call the Six Principles of Whole Schooling. We drew from and built on the experiences of progressive school reform organizations, particularly Accelerated Schools, Comer’s School Development Program, Howard Gardner’s Project Zero, and Sizer’s Coalition for Essential Schools. Like the developers of these programs, we were concerned with the lack of engaged teaching, the failure of schooling for students in poverty, the need to better support families and connect schools with their communities, and the need to support teachers in being real learners and decision-makers in the school as partners with parents. However, we were also concerned about the lack of explicit attention to two major additional dimensions of schooling: (1) the ongoing segregation of students with different learning styles and abilities into special programs for students with disabilities, at risk, gifted, limited English speaking; and, (2) the lack of attention to the social and political context of schooling – the increasing inequality in schools and communities, pressures for standardized testing that separate students, families, and whole communities by race, socio-economic status, and ability.

PARALLEL PATHS: Bridges To Build, Connections To Make

Since our articulation of these principles in 1997, we’ve been amazed at the degree of response we’ve had. We struck a chord of need and provide a framework that serves many purposes, one of them being to unite people who have different beginning points in seeking to build inclusive, democratic communities and schools. Seeking to build such ‘whole schools’ challenges much. As one parent recently said to me, “You are seeking to shake up everything”.

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Initially we developed a very rough framework. As we shared these ideas with schools with whom we were connected, we were surprised to discover how quickly they were embraced by a few creative school leaders. One principal in a poor, rural school, essentially said to us, “This is the type of school I have been trying to create for 10 years but had no language to describe it”. Another principal of a low income, urban school excitedly said, “This is the type of school we want to be!” She presented these ideas to her staff who quickly adopted the initial draft of the principles of Whole Schooling. We suddenly had created the beginnings of the Whole Schooling Consortium. Since then, other schools, teachers, school leaders have found these principles and their associated practices as powerful conceptual and practical tools for moving their schools ahead.

Collectively, the Six Principles of Whole Schooling describe a school culture that seeks to be a place of care, belonging, human growth, a place where community is experienced, a place where the central thrust is the preparation of children to be active shapers of inclusive, democratic communities where people of different color, culture, ability, and wealth live together as partners.

Many people are engaged in work and struggle related to at least one important issue embodied in the Six Principles of Whole Schooling. Parents and teachers concerned about the segregation of children with disabilities have been building a movement towards inclusive education. A growing number of courageous teachers and parents are challenging the rampant growth of high stakes standardized testing that links scores on dubious examinations to the future of children, the funding of schools, teacher’s salaries, and real estate prices. People of color and other ‘minority’ groups have long fought for recognition and respect for different cultures and ethnic groups, as well as learning across languages. Progressive teachers have built an international movement dedicated to supportive freedom, choice, and empowerment in the learning process.

Yet, we often do not adequately see how intimately and inextricably connected are these issues. Engaged teaching, authentic assessment, building community, inclusion, and democracy are inextricably wedded to one another. As those pushing narrow teaching, standardized tests, control of children, segregation, and autocracy have created a multi-dimensional, integrated onslaught, so we too must understand that, at their root, the alternative is connected to a common core – a vision of more caring communities and schools that will support that vision. We must see connections if we are to build such schools. We must join together. We must act together.

BUILDING A GLOBAL MOVEMENT: Schooling For An Inclusive Democracy

To move in the direction we want, we don’t have much choice but to build a community for change with people whose position, role and starting interests are different from our own. Parker Palmer, in *‘The Courage to Teach’*, describes our coming together as a major decision, a decision to no longer be alone, a decision to make a difference. Coming together to build a community for change, where people care for and support one another and commit to engaging in change efforts is difficult. Building a community goes against the many trends in our culture that separate and segment. Building a community for change, by definition, means that we struggle with power structures, seeking to build a new power base among people in a growing movement. Can this be done? We believe it can.

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In the summer of 2000, a momentous event occurred in Detroit, Michigan. For the first time, some 250 leaders in progressive education came together from all over the United States and two additional countries. What was unique about this event was that it drew together people who represent the many starting places embodied in the principles of Whole Schooling, parents, teachers, professors, consultants, and administrators engaged in dialogue about inclusive education, whole language practice and politics, the movement against standardized testing, community service, critical pedagogy, and more. People had the opportunity to begin to understand connections, develop relationships, and talk and strategize about building a movement for change.

The Whole Schooling Consortium has grown organically, not bureaucratically, since its inception in 1997, providing various methods of involvement. Members of the Consortium are organizing *Local Whole Schooling Consortia* to form action and learning networks composed of educators, parents, students, and university faculty who meet together to share, learn, support one another, and take action. Some schools have adopted the Six Principles of Whole Schooling as a framework for their *school renewal efforts* and have joined in partnership with other schools and university faculty who serve as critical friends to provide support to school personnel. Several international *research and development projects* are underway. Between 1998 and 2002, the *Whole Schooling Research Project* involved an intensive qualitative study of 15 inclusive schools in Michigan and Wisconsin. A report is available online. We expect this information to be available in a book in the coming months. The *International Whole Schooling Video Study* involves the collection and editing of videotape of exemplary schooling practices in four countries throughout the world. Edited video clips will be made available on the Whole Schooling website. An international study is underway regarding attitudes of pre-service teacher education students regarding inclusive education and working with students of ability differences in general education classrooms. Last, but hardly least, is the launching of the *International Journal of Whole Schooling*, the first such journal that provides a forum for the many interacting issues represented by the Six Principles of Whole Schooling. If you are interested in being involved in any of these ways, or have a project you would like to propose, contact us at wholeschooling@comcast.net.

The work of the present and the future is to think, learn, and build networks of communities for change and action. We have ideas, knowledge, and tools. We have but to harness our inventiveness and capacity for group effort to build a better world and hold back the terrors of the one that threatens to overtake us. We expect that this Journal will be a place to stimulate learning, debate, dialogue, and deep thinking – all leading to action to create better places of learning that will lead to a more whole society and healthy, democratic, and inclusive communities. May we all gather from the wisdom of the authors of this Journal to begin the journey, gathering fellow travelers for the road.

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Michael Peterson is coordinator of the Whole Schooling Consortium and Professor of Education at Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.



WE INVITE YOU to join us! You can make a difference! We are growing the Consortium through the grassroots efforts of teachers, parents, faculty, administrators, and community members. If you are interested in being involved, contact us at:

Wholeschooling@comcast.net

<http://www.wholeschooling.net>

The **Whole Schooling Consortium** is an international network of schools and individual teachers, parents, administrators, university faculty and community members. We are concerned with the following central problems that deepen our social and individual problems: segregation of children based on ability, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status and other characteristics; standardization and narrowing of curricula, stifling creativity, critical thinking, and democratic engagement; narrowly focused standardized assessment that centers schooling around the taking of a test rather than learning and creates competition and rivalry across schools; punishment of schools and educators rather than providing help, support and assistance; consequent creation of school cultures of tension, anger, and pressure preventing what should be a place of joy, fun, community, and care; and lack of attention to economic and social needs of children. Schools, we believe, are central if we are to have a democratic society and inclusive communities where people of difference are valued and celebrated. Schools must be places that encourage the development of the whole child – linking talent development and social, emotional, cognitive, and physical learning. We believe this is necessary and possible.

Education for a Democratic Society

Excellence and Equity Together

