

## SCHOOL PROFILE

**Lily Elementary School  
N7526 School Road  
Lily, Wisconsin 54491**



**Type of School:** \*Rural Elementary (K-6)  
**Location:** \*Lily: Located in rural northern Wisconsin  
\*Town population of approximately 100  
**Size:** \*Two-room schoolhouse  
\*Approximately 37 students across K-6 grades  
\*Teacher-pupil ratios are 1-18  
**Student Population:** \*Majority of students are Caucasian  
\*Some students have emotional or learning disabilities  
\*No separate special education classrooms exist  
\*62% qualify for free or reduced lunch  
**Principal:** \*Mrs. Sandi Gallagher, Teaching principal  
**Teachers:** \*Two, experienced multi-age teachers, both live in the Lily area

**Summary of Classrooms, Teachers, and Students Involved in the Research Study  
Lily Elementary – Lily, Wisconsin**

**Spring Semester, 1999:**

**Grade:** Multi-aged, First through Third grade classroom  
**Teachers:** Mrs. Elizabeth Thuestad  
**Target Students:** Timmy, male who is Oppositional/Defiant

**Grade:** Multi-aged classroom, Fourth through Sixth grade  
**Teachers:** Mrs. Sandi Gallagher  
**Target Students:** John- male with a learning disability  
Gerry – male with ADHD  
Jim – male with low motivation

**1999-2000 Academic Year:**

**Grade:** Multi-aged, First through Third grade classroom  
**Teachers:** Mrs. Elizabeth Thuestad  
**Target Students:** Timmy, male who is Oppositional/Defiant

**Grade:** Multi-aged classroom, Fourth through Sixth grade  
**Teachers:** Mrs. Sandi Gallagher  
**Target Students:** John- male with a learning disability  
Gerry – male with ADHD  
Jim – male with low motivation

**Fall, 2000:**

**Grade:** Multi-aged, First through Third grade classroom  
**Teachers:** Mrs. Elizabeth Thuestad  
**Target Students:** Timmy, male who is Oppositional/Defiant

**Grade:** Multi-aged classroom, Fourth through Sixth grade  
**Teachers:** Mrs. H. Gallagher  
**Target Students:** John- male with a learning disability  
Gerry – male with ADHD  
Jim – male with low motivation

**Researchers who observed and recorded data**

Paula DeHart	Spring, 1999 – Fall, 2000
Kim Beloin	Spring 1999
JoAnne Suomi	Spring, 1999

## **People Interviewed**

02-03-00	Axel Drabek	Second Grade Student	Interview by: DeHart
02-03-00	Elizabeth Thuestad	1 <sup>st</sup> – 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade teacher	Interview by: DeHart
04-06-00	Rose Hoffman	School secretary	Interview by: DeHart
05-12-00	Darcie Fermanich	Student teacher	Interview by: DeHart
05-12-00	Audra Gruenewald	Parent	Interview by: DeHart
05-12-00	Jay Sloan	Parent	Interview by: DeHart

## **Curriculum:**

Reading and Writing Workshop for all grade levels  
Hands-on science curriculum  
Thematic social studies curriculum  
Math-Their-Way for math

### **EMPOWER CITIZENS IN A DEMOCRACY:**

- Students created and operated a greeting card business.
- Students have many choices about what and how they want to learn.
- Older students take a great deal of responsibility in working with and helping the younger students.
- School Effectiveness Teams are utilized.
- Peer mediation is used to solve problems.

### **INCLUDE ALL:**

- All students with disabilities are included full-time in one of the two multi-age classrooms.
- Students are grouped by younger children (Grades 1-3) and older children (Grades 4-6) with one teacher assigned to each group.
- Whole-school (1-6) programs and lessons are collaboratively planned and conducted by both teachers.
- Students with cognitive, learning, emotional and hearing impairments are included full-time.

### **TEACH & ADAPT FOR DIVERSITY:**

- Appropriate accommodations for students with and without disabilities are made by classroom teachers.
- No specialized or different curricula are used for students with disabilities. All students participate in the general education curriculum with adaptations and modifications.
- All students receive their literacy instruction through the format of readers and writers workshop.
- Science and social studies content is authentically taught and learned through highly interactive thematic units in the classroom and community.
- Emphasis on place-based education.
- Math-Their-Way is taught.

### **BUILD COMMUNITY & SUPPORT LEARNING:**

- Community members and grandparents volunteer their time to teach and support the children.
- School support staff and community volunteers support and work with children in a variety of ways.
- Cooperative groups, peer partners, and cross-age tutoring are all used as peer support strategies.

### **PARTNERING:**

- Community members commonly donate their time and money to Lily School.
- Community donated land to the school for a public park which is maintained by the students and their families.
- Students decide on community and school service projects that they coordinate and implement.

- A volunteer preschool program, staffed by volunteer parents and community members, was started at the school.

## **Introduction**

Lily Elementary School is a small, two-room schoolhouse in northeastern Wisconsin. The students are divided between two multi-age classrooms with grades 1 – 3 called the “Little Roomers” and grades 4 –6 called the “Big Roomers.” There is also a morning early childhood/kindergarten program run by a part-time preschool teacher and parent volunteers. It has a homogeneous population of students with and without disabilities. Lily Elementary School was chosen as a research site because the school community exemplifies the five principles of Whole Schooling in its own unique, yet effective way. This school profile will provide specific examples illustrating how the Whole Schooling Principles are implemented across age, grade and ability levels.

## **Principle 1: EMPOWER CITIZENS IN A DEMOCRACY**

The first principle of Whole Schooling is to help students to function as effective citizens in a democracy. Because of the important role schools play in teaching essential participatory skills and in perpetuating democratic ideals, Lily Elementary School was examined for its nurturance of democratic decision-making. The examples below are taken mainly from interviews and observations over a two-year period of time. When looking at the many examples, several main themes or findings emerged.

## **Finding 1: Committed respected school leaders support the school community in democratic decision-making.**

Sandi Gallagher is the teaching principal at Lily Elementary School and teaches the upper level (Grades 4 – 6) students in addition to serving as the building principal. She has lived in the Lily area for most of her life and has been a teacher/principal at the school for eighteen years. Mrs. Gallagher is a well-respected member of the community and has widespread support as principal of Lily School. The respect and support comes from parents, colleagues and other staff in the school. During a parent interview, the following statement was made about Mrs. Gallagher’s leadership:

Someone has to be in charge. She’s very well organized, it appears to me. She has lots of help and I think she does a great job of delegating. Some leaders don’t know how to do that. She’s up on everything too. Whatever reports she has to get, she is punctual. She really likes her job.

This same respect for Mrs. Gallagher’s skills as a leader was echoed by teachers and other staff in the school. One of the other teachers in school described Mrs. Gallagher as having a leadership role “to parents, to the district, and to the community.” This same colleague attributed the success of the school to Mrs. Gallagher by stating, “Her personality has gotten us to where we are. She has a vision, she is a pusher; she finds a way to make things happen.”

In addition to being viewed as a strong leader in the school, Mrs. Gallagher is also respected for her approach to decision-making. This is what was said about her decision-

making style, “Decisions are made through consensus. There is never a decision made without at least some of the staff sitting down and bouncing ideas off.” It is interesting to note that this statement was made by the school secretary, who had an important and varied role at Lily School. Not only did she carry out the normal duties of a school secretary, she also acted as a tutor, suggested teaching ideas, disciplined students, taught keyboarding skills and was involved in much of the day to day decision-making. The confidence Mrs. Gallagher had in the school secretary’s abilities suggests the comfort Mrs. Gallagher felt in sharing power and treating everyone as an equal. A final comment made about Mrs. Gallagher’s leadership style indicates that she treats other staff in the school with a high degree of trust and respect and that she invites everyone to be a part of the decision-making in the school:

Mrs. Gallagher makes you feel like an equal and that your opinion counts. She is always very complimentary. When you do a project, it is always appreciated. She is not only my boss, she is my friend.

## **Finding 2: Students are involved in leadership roles and decision-making.**

Since the teaching of democratic skills and principles is such an important function of schools, all of the schools in this study were examined for the ways in which they encourage students to take on leadership roles and make decisions in the school and classroom. In Lily School, student involvement in leadership and decision-making took three forms. The first area of leadership and decision-making was the role students played in issues of conflict and discipline. In Lily School, students served as peer mediators for solving student discipline problems. One specific example of this was an incident involving students talking in a school stairwell, which was against school rules. The four students involved got “Think About It” slips and then had a chance to explain their side of the story to a peer mediator. The peer mediator interviewed each student to try to find out exactly what happened. After the meeting, the peer mediator explained to the classroom teacher that the talking that had occurred was part of the hall monitor’s duties, so was not a breach of classroom rules. In this particular situation, the peer mediator’s decision was respected by the classroom teacher and no further action was taken by her. Conflicts between students and infractions of school rules were frequently handled by peer mediators at Lily School.

A second form of leadership and decision-making in which Lily students participated is acting in the role of teacher. Students were often given assignments in which they conducted in-depth research and then taught what they learned to their peers and the teacher. An illustration of this was an immigration unit that students in the Big Roomers’ classroom completed. At the beginning of the unit, the teacher explained that the unit was set up under a contract system and students would complete activities to earn points. Some of the activities from which students could choose included interviewing family and/or community members about their immigrant roots, researching a famous immigrant, investigating an immigrant language and designing a menu for an ethnic restaurant that would cater to a particular immigrant group. As the teacher explained the

different activities in which students would be engaged she said, “I am going to be learning a lot from you on this. You are going to be the teachers of what you learn.”

The multi-age structure of Lily School facilitated students serving as peer teachers. During one observation, students were working in cross-grade groups (3<sup>rd</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> graders) and reading a Weekly Reader together. The group that was observed had seven students in it and one of the older girls took on a leadership role. Acting as teacher, she called on students in the group to read. After one student read, she said, “All right who has not read?” At one point in the observation, one of the younger students was reading and really struggling, the student leader said, “This is too hard for him,” and proceeded to take over the reading. Just as a teacher would, the student leader also complemented students on their reading saying, “Good job of reading,” and helped to keep students on track saying things like, “Pay attention, Danny!” When this group finished reading all of the articles in the Weekly Reader, the student leader said, “Okay, let’s see, what kind of questions might be asked by Mrs. H.,” and proceeded to ask comprehension questions about what had been read. Being able to serve in leadership roles like this example illustrates enables Lily students to learn how manage and get along with others.

In addition to being involved in discipline decisions and serving as teacher/leaders, the third area of decision-making and leadership in which students at Lily School are involved includes a variety of activities. These include activities like writing and typing the school newsletter, running a school-based greeting card business, and planning special programs, like the Earth Day and Veteran’s Day programs students planned for their parents and other community members. Lily students were also observed making day-to-day decision on how to spend their time. The following kind of comment by the teacher in the Little Roomers’ classroom was heard frequently at Lily School:

Mrs. U. said, “Today, since it is kind of a special day, you will have the choice of reading or writing workshop. When you come back to meet with me, you can bring your reading or writing. You can do either one, but right now you need to make a plan.

As illustrated in this last example, having power over their time offers Lily students the opportunity to learn how to set goals, choose priorities and allocate limited time, all of which are skills children need to be successful as students and also later to lead productive lives as adults. Due to the importance of students learning how to participate in democratic settings by the time they are adults, decision-making and leadership are areas that Lily staff should continue to support and nurture in their students.

### **Finding 3: Schools grow and change quickly, but schools reform slowly.**

This finding emerged out of the data from all of the research schools combined, but did not emerge from the interview and observational data collected at Lily School. Mrs. Gallagher and other school staff seemed to have a clear vision of what they felt was best for educating Lily students and stayed true to this vision. The factor that most threatened the ongoing efforts of Lily staff was the ever-present concern that the school district might close the school. Budget constraints within the district made the closing of Lily

School an attractive option for saving money. The thinking by district administrators was that Lily students could be bussed to other schools in the district and that there would then be one less facility to operate. Whenever the issue of closing Lily School arose, Mrs. Gallagher, along with Lily staff and community members lobbied hard to keep it open. At the time the research study ended, Lily School staff had again heard that administrators were considering closing the school.

**Finding 4: School leaders promote and believe that continual staff development, research, and collaboration improves the quality of education for all.**

Mrs. Gallagher, the teaching principal at Lily School demonstrated a strong belief in ongoing staff development. One way this was evidenced in the school was the way Schoolwide Project money was used to provide a substitute teacher in the school every Thursday. The substitute took over the teaching duties in one classroom in the morning and the other classroom in the afternoon. This released the two teachers to develop curriculum, attend workshops, prepare materials and work with individual and small groups of students. During one Thursday observation the teacher of the younger students was in a small workroom in the basement assessing individual students on their math knowledge. The teacher said that without the release time, it would be much more difficult to monitor student progress as closely as she was able to with the time. While the release time was highly valued by the teachers at Lily, there was some question as to how long it would continue. The school district to which Lily belonged was having a difficult time finding substitute teachers to take over teaching duties for absent or released teachers, so teacher release at Lily may come to an end.

Another form of staff development and research that was very evident at Lily School was the implementation of educational best practices that the two teachers learned through attending workshops, taking college classes and reading professional literature. The teachers were frequently observed putting new instructional ideas into practice. Some of these included Readers and Writers workshop, hands-on science and the integration of educational technology. During one observation, the teacher of the older students and a student teacher were writing out certificates of congratulations for the multiplication unit they had just completed. The certificates said, "You are a Mighty Multiplier." The teacher had attended a workshop on teaching multiplication in a week and she had just finished the unit with her students. She said the students had done really well. Although Lily School was in a small, rural and fairly isolated area, Lily students were receiving cutting edge instruction because of the commitment of Lily teachers to professional growth and improvement.

A third form of staff development and research that was evident at Lily School was the teachers' pursuit of charter school status. For much of the time that Lily School was involved in the Whole Schooling research project, the teachers were completing the research, planning and paperwork necessary to become a charter school. Areas of instructional focus for the charter school were science and technology. Just after the Whole Schooling observations were completed in the school, Lily School was granted charter school status.



One last indicator of the willingness of Mrs. Gallagher to support professional development, research and collaboration at Lily School is their participation in the Whole Schooling Research study. Mrs. Gallagher and the staff at the school opened all aspects of the school's operation to close scrutiny. The attitude of the school community was that they were proud of the good things happening at Lily School and they wanted to share this with others who could benefit from their example. School personnel also expressed a desire to receive feedback that might help them be even more effective.

**Finding 5: Diversity across ethnicity, SES, culture, ability, etc. is accepted and valued.**

Diversity in the traditional sense of the word, which usually means race, was not very evident at Lily Elementary School. Lily is a very small, rural Wisconsin community and the majority of the residents are Caucasian. The homogeneous nature of the Lily community is reflected in the student population. While there was little racial or cultural diversity in Lily School a form of diversity that was embraced was that of age. As was mentioned previously, Lily School is a two-room schoolhouse and both classrooms are multi-age, encompassing three grade levels. Rather than assuming all students should be at a similar stage of development, Lily teachers assumed their students would be at various levels and planned instruction accordingly. One teacher describes it this way: "Just having the multi-age makes it so much easier to adapt to differences among the ages. It happens naturally and without stigma. It isn't an added imposition, it is just part of the planning. We give the kids a lot of choices and we try to encourage the kids to make the right choices. We talk about work that is challenging, just right and too easy and the kids get used to those terms and choosing work that is right for them." While the Lily teachers talked about the challenges of planning instruction for such a wide range of abilities, they clearly embraced the diversity that came with having multi-age students in their classrooms.

**Finding 6: Students, Teachers, and parents are encouraged and empowered to develop their true selves.**

In addition to the shared decision-making and leadership roles already mentioned, there were other ways the Lily teachers and students were empowered to develop their true selves. One very creative way this was expressed was through the annual Christmas program the two teachers co-wrote and the students performed. During the two years of the Whole Schooling research project, two Christmas programs were observed. The first had a Loony Toons Millennium theme and had students playing characters like Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck and traveling all over the world to ring in the new year and new century. The second Christmas program had a Charles Dickens theme and celebrated ghosts of Lily's past. The students had been conducting research on the history of Lily School through interviews of alumni and the play was based on the information they had learned. The Christmas programs were a huge community event in Lily with parents helping to construct sets and making costumes and community members turning out in large numbers to attend the program. The programs were so well attended, in fact that the teachers and students had to present the plays twice to accommodate everyone in the small school gym/cafeteria.

Lily students were also empowered to develop their true selves through classroom duties they are trusted to carry out every day. During one observation, a student was observed walking into the school office area and picking envelopes up out of a basket. Rather than scolding the student for going where she didn't belong, the school secretary said, "Did you forget your mail?" It was this student's responsibility to see that all school correspondence made its way out to the mailbox everyday. The level of trust exhibited toward this student to carry out an important task has the potential to have a lasting impact on her self-image and confidence. All Lily students had duties that teachers and peers depended on them to complete, which built a true community feeling in the school and provided the students with opportunities to develop skills, find hidden talents and build self-confidence.

In addition to involving students in decision-making and giving them responsibility as leaders and in classroom tasks, there were other activities and attitudes observed in Lily School that encouraged students to develop their true selves. One very interesting finding was the way in which student behavior was viewed. There were examples in Lily School where students engaged in behavior that might have been viewed by teachers in more traditional settings as "problem" behavior and might have been punished. At Lily School this behavior was viewed as an opportunity for students to learn and grow as human beings. One example of this was when one of the older students named Tad lost a set of words given to him by a substitute teacher and he asked his teacher what to do. His teacher, Mrs. H. said, "Why don't you throw yourself at her mercy." She helped Tad write the following letter:

Dear Mrs. Manny,

I'm biging (begging) you for forgiveness. I made a responsible choice today. I spent my recess time today and rote (wrote) my definitnois (definitions). I'm deeply sorry but as you know youn (young) boys loss (lose) things and I seemed to have miss placed my definitin (definition) paper. Could we ples (please) call it ever (even)?

Very and sincerely your excelnt (excellent) student  
Tad

Mrs. H. understood that Tad had worked hard to complete his definition paper and that he had misplaced it, which can happen to anyone. Rather than punish him for his behavior, she helped him to approach the situation in an honest way and appeal to the good graces of the substitute teacher. In this way, Tad learned that it was okay to make mistakes and okay to be himself.

## **Principle 2: INCLUDE ALL**

The second principle of Whole Schooling supports instructional practices where all children learn together across culture, ethnicity, language, ability, gender, and age. This principle is exemplified in many ways at Lily School. The following findings and corresponding examples will demonstrate this.

### **Finding 1: Students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum.**

Lily School is the only school in a small rural area and serves all the children who live in the community. This includes students with and without disabilities. The number of students with disabilities in Lily School is small, but reflects the make-up of the larger community. No specialized or different curricula are used for students with disabilities who attend Lily School. All students are included in one of the two multi-age classrooms and participate in the general education curriculum with adaptations and modifications. For students who need specialized services beyond what the Lily teachers can offer, resource people who service the larger school district travel to Lily School and work with the students there. For example, a speech teacher made regular visits to Lily School to work with a student who needed her services, and a guidance counselor, who worked with all students in the school, also spent extra time with the students who had emotional, social or behavioral problems. The Lily teachers also occasionally consulted with the special resource teachers about students who had not been formally identified as needing special services. Mrs. U. shared that when the speech teacher was at the school she asked her to talk to Timmy, a student she felt mumbled a lot. After talking to Timmy, the speech teacher said she was more concerned with the fact that he doesn't look a person in the eye when he talks to them. Mrs. U. said that Timmy, who is oppositional defiant, has come a long way since he started at Lily School. Timmy is an example of a student who is fully included in one of the multi-age classrooms and participates in the same general education curriculum as the other students.

### **Finding 2: Inclusion is valuable for kids with disabilities.**

As previously mentioned, students with disabilities are fully included in all aspects of the instructional day at Lily School. Students with disabilities, like those without, benefit from the small community feel of Lily School, the multi-age structure of the classrooms and the rich, motivating curriculum, which will be discussed in depth under Principle 3. A specific example that illustrates how a student with disabilities benefited from being included at Lily School was seen during a special Earth Day program. Rather than getting a traditional teacher lecture on Earth Day, the students in the "Big Roomers" classroom decided they wanted to put on a special Earth Day Program for the other students in the school, parents and community members. The students, with some assistance from the teacher, did background research on Earth Day and then planned what they would present to their audience. The program included skits and songs about the environment and recycling. While the Earth Day program was going on, Mrs. H. explained to the observer that one of the boys reading the leading role of Papa Bear in one of the skits had a severe reading problem, so severe that the boy and his parents decided that he should stay an extra year in 6<sup>th</sup> grade rather than go on to the middle school with the rest of his grade group. Mrs. H. said his reading had really improved this

year and that he hadn't hesitated to take the lead reading role in the skit. Mrs. H. said she felt confident that he would be in a much better position to succeed when he moved on to middle school. It is interesting to note in this example that the student and his parents decided that he would benefit from staying an extra year at Lily School, not the classroom teacher. Since the student had a say in the decision, there seemed to be little stigma attached to repeating sixth grade for him. As the example illustrates, this student went on to achieve success in reading and participate in activities like the Earth Day program that required him to read long sections of text in front of a community audience.

Another way that students with disabilities benefited from being included at Lily School was related to the multi-age structure of the school. Not only did each of the classrooms include students from three grade levels, students across the whole school often worked together on projects and school programs like the Earth Day program just described. Another program observed was a Veteran's Day program students presented to peers and teachers. Part of the program included a presentation by a veteran from the local community who shared his experiences in the military and stressed the importance of honoring veterans. The rest of the program featured student groups singing patriotic songs. The last group consisted of eight boys ranging in grades from 1<sup>st</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> singing "Yankee Doodle." One of the first graders in the group was Timmy, the little boy identified as oppositional defiant, who didn't always stay on track with school activities. One of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade boys stood in the row behind Timmy and lightly rested his hands on Timmy's shoulders. Timmy sang enthusiastically with the rest of the group. This kind of mentoring between older and younger students occurred naturally at Lily School and was especially beneficial to students with special needs like Timmy, who needed the guidance from a positive role model that the sixth grade student provided.

### **Finding 3: Inclusion improves the educational experience for all kids.**

This finding emerged from the data of all the research sites combined, but did not emerge from the interview and observational data collected at Lily School. This should not be taken as an indication that inclusion was not beneficial for all Lily students. Observations revealed that all students benefited from the multi-age structure, the engaging curriculum and the close relationship with peers that developed because of the small student population, but these benefits were not directly related to the inclusion of students with disabilities. A teacher's comment that was quoted previously expresses the approach to education taken at Lily. She stated, "We give the kids a lot of choices and we try to encourage the kids to make the right choices. We talk about work that is challenging, just right and too easy and the kids get used to those terms and choosing work that is right for them." Regardless of whether or not they had identified disabilities, Lily students learned to monitor their educational progress and stay on a track that wasn't so easy they were bored or so challenging they were frustrated.

A classroom example illustrates how all Lily students learned to monitor their learning. Mrs. U. called two male students from the Little Roomers' classroom to the back table and asked them if they had enough books at home that were right for their reading level. Both students said, "No." Mrs. U. said, "I am going to make a special book box for each one of you so you have books at home to read. Mrs. U. pulled out two cardboard book

boxes. She had the two boys pull out books from the library to put in their book boxes. James pulled out a book on dinosaurs and said, “How about this one?” Mrs. U. said, “Well, sit down and read a little of it and see how hard it is.” James opened the book and read the first sentence to the observer and said, “Was that right?” The observer said it was and James said, “Do you know why I am trying to read this book? I read at kindergarten and I am a second grader.”

This example says several things about what students learn at Lily School. First, James was encouraged to decide for himself whether the book he had chosen was at an appropriate reading level by reading a little bit of it, so he was learning to monitor his own learning. His awareness of his reading level was evident through his comment about reading at a kindergarten level. A second important lesson students learn at Lily School is that there is no shame attached to being at a particular learning level because they spend every day in a classroom with students of many ages and varied learning levels. While James expressed a desire to advance in his reading, he didn't seem embarrassed about the fact that he sometimes struggled with it. This could have been a very different story had James been in a straight second grade classroom where he might have been placed in the “low” reading group and been aware every day that he was not at the reading level he was supposed to be at based on the performance of his peers.

#### **Finding 4: Inclusion provides positive, proactive supports for students.**

As has been described in previous sections, students at Lily School frequently completed class assignments and projects in groups that crossed ages and abilities. This naturally created positive and proactive supports for students as older students mentored younger students and peer groups of mixed abilities worked together and learned from each other. It was a common occurrence to see students turning to one another for help. During one observation, students were learning how to write research papers and one of the third graders was writing a report on Alexander Graham Bell. She wanted to look for information on the computer, but had never done an Internet search before. She turned to one of the sixth grade girls and asked how she might find information. The sixth grader demonstrated the steps of using Lycos, an Internet search engine. The third grader was able to successfully use Lycos to locate information on Alexander Graham Bell and was observed downloading and printing information she had found to use for her research paper.

Not only were students with and without disabilities supported by the multi-age structure of the school, they also benefited from the many ways adults in the school worked together to support students. Because the student population was small and teachers worked with the same students for three years, the school had a family feel and teachers knew the students well. There was no sense on the part of the two teachers that a particular student was the responsibility of the other teacher, both teachers monitored all students. In addition to the two teachers, there was a school secretary, a part-time teaching aide, a grandmother helper and various other parents and community members that helped at the school. All of the adults present in the school were observed tutoring students, answering questions and providing guidance for behavior and decision-making. It was not unusual to see the school secretary leading a student by the hand to where they

needed to be or giving a spelling test to a student that had been absent. The Grandparent helper was also frequently available in the classroom to help individuals and small groups of students as they completed class assignments. Mrs. S. the part-time pre-school teacher and part-time teaching aide tutored students, prepared materials, assisted students on the computers and helped teach learning centers. Mrs. S. was even observed making all of the Loony Toons masks out of colored plastic foam for the annual Christmas program.

The presence of so many committed adults not only reduced the student to teacher ratio, but also decreased the likelihood that a Lily student would fall through the cracks. If a child was in need, there was usually a peer, an older student or a caring adult available to answer the need. A quote by the school secretary summarizes the ways adults in the school support students and meet their needs: “Mrs. H. and Mrs. U. would include all of the kids despite their abilities, then their individual needs would be addressed by having someone work with them individually like Mrs. S., Grandma or me. And the kids feel very comfortable asking someone for help, not just their teacher. I’ve seen kids with different needs come through here and their needs are always met. We’ve had kids with physical problems and emotional problems and their needs are always met somehow.”

### **Finding 5: Inclusion promotes the natural distribution of students.**

As has been stated in previous sections, all students with disabilities are included full-time in one of the two multi-age classrooms at Lily School. Within the classroom, students participate in a variety of cross-age and cross-ability groupings. Reading and writing are taught through Readers and Writers Workshops where students read and write at the level that is appropriate for them and students are not ability grouped. Science and social studies are taught through hands-on, thematic units that all students complete. Due to the engaging nature of the curriculum at Lily School, few accommodations or modifications needed to be made for students with disabilities. As was described previously, Lily students learned to monitor their own learning and were encouraged to choose learning materials that were interesting and appropriate for them. When a student with or without disabilities needed help, there was usually a peer, older student or adult available to help them.

### **Principle 3: TEACH AND ADAPT FOR DIVERSITY**

The third principle of Whole Schooling promotes the philosophy and practice of designing instruction for diverse learners that engage them in active learning in meaningful, real-world activities. The following findings and examples illustrate how Lily School implements this principle.

### **Finding 1: Instructional practices are responsive to learner’s needs, interests and abilities.**

There were many examples in Lily School of instructional practices that were responsive to learner’s needs, interests and abilities. The multi-age structure of the two classrooms facilitated the development and implementation of curriculum that addressed multiple needs and abilities at the same time. It was a given at Lily School that any lesson delivered in one of the multi-age classrooms was going to have to address a wide range of ages and abilities. Students in the classrooms were rarely divided into grade level groups,

rather differentiated or multi-level curriculum was utilized to accommodate the wide range of needs. One important way that Lily teachers presented multi-level/differentiated curriculum to meet varying needs and interests was through the use of Readers and Writers Workshops. The following description from a classroom observation illustrates the structure of Readers Workshop:

Mrs. U. started Readers Workshop. She showed the students sitting on the floor in front of her some sentence strips they could use to write about their books. She said they should get their workboxes and that they should be able to find where they were. A group of four students pulled out books from their workboxes and began to read. The workboxes contained different books for each child and were chosen for their match with each student's interests and abilities. One of the students showed me her sentence strip and asked me to read it. I asked if she could read it. She read "I like this book because \_\_\_\_\_." She said, "Because it was weird." She went back to her table and wrote the sentence.

As shown in this example, Readers Workshop allows students to choose books that they are interested in reading and that are at the appropriate reading level. Because everyone in the class is reading a variety of different books at different rates, there is no such thing as a "reading group" with the accompanying stigma for students, especially those with special needs, of being in the "low group."

Through Readers Workshop, Lily students learn to choose books that are at the appropriate level and learn to monitor their own progress in reading. Also, Readers Workshop allows students to choose books that address their interests. During one observation, Jeff showed the observer a book he was reading called, "Up Went the Goat." Jeff said, "I picked this book out because I thought it was a farm book. And then I opened it and saw the pictures and that is how I picked the book." As this example illustrates, Jeff was motivated to read the book he shared with the observer because he thought it was about farming, which is an avid interest of his. Although it turned out the book was not about farming, because it had a goat in it, which is a farm animal, Jeff was motivated to read it anyway.

In another observation of Readers Workshop, older students were seen keeping a Readers Workshop log. The log was a place where each student kept track of what book he/she was reading, which pages were read each day and any new vocabulary words that were encountered in each day's reading. Mrs. H. encouraged the students to go back to the pages where the vocabulary words were located, which was recorded in their logs, and figure out the meaning of the words by how each one is used in the sentence. This helped students develop the skill of deciphering the meaning of a word through context clues provided in the reading. If students couldn't figure out the meaning of a word through context clues, then they were encouraged to look the word up in the dictionary. In this way, students developed their own personalized dictionaries of vocabulary words with definitions to go along with them.

Writers Workshop is to writing much as Readers Workshop is to reading. Rather than drilling students on grammar and parts of speech, the Writers Workshop approach encourages children to write on topics that interest them and to write at the level of which they are capable. Students are instructed in the skills and techniques of effective writing, but this instruction takes place naturally in the context of writing for a real purpose. Lily students receive the majority of their writing instruction through Writers Workshop as the following classroom scenario illustrates:

**Mrs. H.:** It is time for Writer's Workshop. What do we need for Writer's Workshop? What I want to talk a little about this morning is the lead to the story. What is the lead of a story?

**Student:** It is how we start our stories out.

**Mrs. H.:** Yes, it is how we start our stories out. We want to have a really good lead for our stories. Is someone reading a story now that has a really good lead? Kristen?

Kristen read the beginning of her book. Mrs. H. stopped her and asked, "Would you want to read Kristen's story?"

**Student:** Yes.

**Mrs. H.:** Why?

**Student:** Because it is interesting.

**Mrs. H.:** I would want to read Kristen's story because there is so much going on in it. There is a car accident and someone's life is changed.

Ashley would you read the lead in your story?

Ashley read the beginning of her story.

**Mrs. H.:** I really like the words the author used in the lead to that story. I like the way the author has started to introduce us to the characters in the story. Now, I want you to go back to your stories and see if you have a lead that makes people want to read your stories. Take out your story plans and write out what you are going to work on today. You have only 15 minutes to work. One thing I hope everyone writes down today is that they are going to work on the lead to their stories. See if you can write a lead that really makes people want to read your story.

Notice how Mrs. H. relates the students' writing to books they are reading. In this way, she encourages students to view themselves as real authors who are using effective writing strategies to appeal to real audiences. Within this format, students can write about topics that interest them, write at their developmental level and continue to grow as authors as they try out new techniques to improve their writing.

In addition to Readers and Writers Workshop, technology was also used to present multi-level/differentiated curriculum in Lily School. There was a computer lab in the back of the younger students' classroom that individuals and pairs of students were observed using. Students used computer programs that included a variety of activities at varying levels of difficulty related to reading, writing, math, social studies and science. Mrs. H. and Mrs. U. had written mini-grants for the funds to purchase many of the computer



programs in the lab and the programs they had chosen appeared to engage and challenge students. An added bonus to having multi-leveled computer programs available for students to use in the classroom is that they could work on programs at their level independently. While groups of students worked at the computers with little teacher assistance, Mrs. H. and Mrs. U. could work with individuals or small groups to further address student needs.

One final example that clearly illustrates the willingness of Lily teachers to address individual student's needs and interests involves a student who transferred into Lily School as a sixth grader. Mrs. H. taught her social studies curriculum in a three-year rotating schedule so that she could teach her fourth through sixth graders at the same time. She taught Wisconsin history one year, U.S. history the next and Canadian history the third year. In this way, by the time students left Lily School, they received the required fourth, fifth and sixth grade social studies curriculum. Because the student population at Lily School was stable, a three-year, rotating curriculum schedule worked well. One exception concerns a student who transferred into Lily School as a sixth grader. This student had already covered U.S. history the previous year and needed Canadian history, but Mrs. H.'s class, into which he had transferred, was on their U.S. history year. To meet his needs, Mrs. H. set up an individualized social studies program for him using the Canadian history curriculum. Mrs. H. explained how she could make this work, "Fortunately, he is a good reader and can read a lot of the material on his own, then the two of us meet and talk about things."

## **Finding 2: Motivating instruction reduces the need for individual accommodations.**

There were numerous examples of motivating instruction at Lily School. Instruction was made motivating through the use of high interest curriculum materials, classroom activities and student projects. It was common to see a high degree of student involvement in most lessons observed at Lily as the following quote by a student teacher describes:

[We do] lots of hand-on. Especially like science. They younger kids are doing cooking right now, so they made a cake from scratch. We had a recipe up on big paper and the kids did all of the measuring and blending. The older kids go on field trips. They went to watch how maple syrup was made. They got ice cream with maple syrup. They went to farm safety. They saw EMT's do emergency procedures and how to use a fire extinguisher. We went trout fishing at a trout fishery. The young kids love science. They can't wait for science, they say, "Is it time for science yet?"

As the above quote illustrates, teachers at Lily School rarely relied on teacher lecture or drill and practice worksheets to instruct students. Most of the lessons engaged students in experiential learning, and frequently the students themselves determined how the curriculum would be explored and presented. One example of this is the Earth Day program that was described in a previous section. Rather than learning about Earth Day

in a traditional manner, the students decided they wanted to put on a special Earth Day Program for the other students in the school, parents and community members. The students, with some assistance from the teacher, did background research on Earth Day and then planned what they would present to a real audience. The program began with a small group of students explaining how Earth Day started and why it is celebrated. Next, two students staged a short skit where one of them threw an aluminum can on the ground and the other student explained to him that aluminum can be recycled. The recycling advocating student shared some specific facts about aluminum recycling and how much energy it saves over producing new aluminum. The remainder of the program included students putting on a second skit, giving tips on how to care for the environment, singing a recycling song and holding up signs at the end that said, "Every Day is Earth Day." The student-created Earth Day Program was motivating because it engaged the students' creativity and imagination. The students learned important factual information about Earth Day, but did it in a much more exciting way than reading about it in a textbook or hearing the teacher talk about it.

Teachers at Lily School often created learning centers to motivate students to learn. With the help of the two classroom teachers, the teacher's aide, the school secretary and the grandparent helper, students could work in small groups and rotate through a number of hands-on, engaging activities. One example of a motivating learning center that was observed was part of a larger unit on animals and animal tracking. Students were rotating through a series of activities, one of which was making an animal tracks t-shirt. Mrs. H. had fabric paints put out on tables in the cafeteria and had white t-shirts for all of the students. She had a large box filled with blocks of wood that had rubber casts of animal footprints on them. Mrs. H. explained to students that they would move to the different tables with their shirts and they could choose whichever footprints they wanted to put on their shirts. As students stamped their t-shirts with animal prints, Mrs. H. went around and wrote the name of each animal under the print with a fabric pen. Students were very excited about making an animal tracks t-shirt and could review what they had learned about animal tracking every time they wore their shirts.

One final example demonstrates how determined Lily teachers were to motivate students. As part of a unit on the Renaissance time period, Lily School put on a Renaissance Fair. The school secretary described her memories of the Renaissance Fair to an observer: "The Renaissance Fair, that was really a big thing. We put straw on the gym floor and the kids ate chicken and threw chicken bones on the floor." Based on this description, it is unlikely that students who participated in the Renaissance Fair will ever forget what they learned about this particular time in world history. While this may seem like a radical example of motivating, hands-on learning, it is illustrative of the kind of instruction Lily students frequently encountered.

**Finding 3: “Authentic” curriculum and instructional practices are implemented (Authentic: Involving the construction of knowledge; disciplined inquiry; value beyond school).**

For the purposes of this study, “authentic” curriculum and instructional practices are defined as those that involve the construction of knowledge, disciplined inquiry and value beyond school. There were numerous examples of authentic instruction and curriculum at Lily School. Already mentioned are the Readers and Writers Workshops used for reading and writing instruction. Readers Workshop, as it is implemented at Lily School, provides students with choices about the books they read, helps them learn to monitor their own progress, teaches them strategies to be self-directed, independent readers and motivates them to be lifelong readers. Like Readers Workshop, teachers at Lily School use Writers Workshop to teach writing in an authentic manner. Students are encouraged to view themselves as real authors who use writing strategies to appeal to real audiences. Within Writers Workshop, students can write about topics that interest them, write at their developmental level and continue to grow as authors as they try out new techniques to improve their writing.

In addition to Readers and Writers Workshops, Lily teachers were also observed utilizing authentic practices in science. One example is a science unit taught to the older students about plants. Students learned all about the life cycle of plants and what plants need to grow and thrive. As a part of the plan unit the students grew tomato, peanut and radish plants. During an observation of one of the plant lessons, Mrs. H. and the students discussed how the plants were doing. Mrs. H. said the tomato plants were not looking very good and asked for suggestions for what they might do. The students considered all of the factors that might be affecting the tomato plants and one student suggested that they try Miracle Grow. Mrs. H. said she would try to remember to bring some in so they could try it. Growing their own plants, allowed students to watch the entire life cycle of the plants and to encounter the same dilemmas that are encountered by farmers and gardeners everywhere as they raise and tend plants.

In another authentic science lesson, Lily students were studying about nutrients and their impact on human health. Students studied about the ways in which nutrients give people energy, repair body cells and build cells. After a discussion about the role of nutrients in human health, the students were asked to analyze the school lunch they had just eaten for its nutritional content. The lunch consisted of spaghetti, meat sauce, tomatoes, pears, beans, apples, milk, and bread and butter. The students put each food item into one of the four food groups and then examined the kinds of nutrients each food group provides, like the protein that is gotten from meat. Learning to eat in a healthy manner and understanding what nutrients foods provide are real-life learning’s that may impact the future health of the students.

One last authentic science activity in which Lily students participated was the science fair held at the school. To participate in the science fair, students chose an area of science about which they wanted to learn, conducted research and/or an experiment, analyzed data and presented their work to an audience of peers, teachers, parents and community members. The research in which students were engaged involved the construction of

knowledge about scientific concepts, required students to practice disciplined inquiry as they moved through the investigative process and allowed students to see the value of their work beyond the classroom walls as they presented their science fair projects to the public.

Many authentic curriculum and instruction practices were also observed in social studies classes at Lily School. Rather than a traditional fact and lecture-based approach to teaching social studies, students were frequently involved in meaningful and sustained study related to history, geography, political science, current events and the behavioral sciences. One example is an immigration unit in which the older students participated. Mrs. H. explained that she had set up a contract system for the unit where the students could earn points for completing different activities related to immigration. Some of the assignments from which students could choose included doing research on what an immigrant group left behind when they immigrated to America, interviewing a family or community member about their immigrant roots, designing a menu for an ethnic restaurant that would cater to a particular immigrant group, writing a report on a famous person from an immigrant group, conducting research on the flag of a country from which immigrants came, and investigating an immigrant language. The school secretary even called the high school to get information on the foreign exchange students in the school for potential interview candidates for the elementary students.

Students at Lily School were also engaged in another particularly fascinating and authentic social studies project. The school and school building had a long, rich history and the teachers and students in the school decided to research this history. Students in the school carried on a long distance correspondence with one alum of the school who had attended in the 1940's and provided a great deal of background on what the school was like at that time. Students also conducted interviews of a wide variety of community members who had attended the school at various times. The two teachers in the school even wrote a Christmas play with a Dickens theme of the ghost of the school's past. Students engaged in this school history project clearly were learning the authentic practice of doing historical research. One of the last discussions with the teachers in the school revealed that students were faced with the very real problem of what to do with all of the data they had gathered. One of the teachers was trying to pursue the idea of turning the project into a book and was looking for an author or publisher that might be able to help.

While most of the curriculum and instruction observed at Lily School involved the construction of knowledge, disciplined inquiry and value beyond school, there is some evidence that the teachers felt pressure to teach information that would be included on the state standardized tests. During an observation of a math lesson, Mrs. H. said, "What is the best graph to show parts of a whole? You know the standardized tests you have to take in sixth grade, I have to start using the same terminology in math class so you learn to recognize the terms." For the most part, Lily teachers were observed implementing authentic instructional practices that they felt would be most effective for promoting student learning, but like teachers throughout Wisconsin and the rest of the nation, they

realized that standardized tests are a reality and that their teaching would be judged by the results.

#### **Finding 4: Instructional practices integrate curriculum.**

There were many ways teachers at Lily School integrated content and skills across discipline/subject areas. The most common form of integration observed was the weaving of literature into the teaching of other subject areas. The integration of literature into the core subject areas makes a great deal of sense because it is a way to communicate content matter to students through stories, and stories are often more meaningful and interesting to students than straight factual information. An example of the integration of literature into social studies was observed with a series of books Mrs. U. was reading to the younger students called “The Magic Treehouse” series. Mrs. U. said she really liked the series because “the books have a really good message, they really encourage reading and they include a lot of historical content.” Mrs. U. explained to the observer that one of the main characters in the stories likes to research the background of the time periods he and his sister visit and share it. In this way, Mrs. U. said, her students learn quite a bit of factual information. While the Magic Treehouse books are fictionalized, they are based on the real life experiences of people that lived in the different time periods. In this way, students are able to connect with the content in a way they couldn’t without the use of literature.

Another way literature was integrated into the other subject areas was through Readers Workshop. Students could choose the books they wanted to read and they often read non-fiction works related to science and social studies. Students were observed reading books related to a whole variety of science topics, like plants, animals, rocks, minerals, the solar system, and dinosaurs. Students were also observed reading a wide variety of historical fiction. The books they read often corresponded to the time period they were studying in their social studies curriculum. A popular format for historical fiction was one a student in the Big Roomers’ class was observed reading. It was story that was written like a diary of someone who experienced an historical event. Again, the story aspect of historical fiction helps students connect with the past in a way they might not experience if the curriculum was limited to teacher presentation and textbook reading.

The learning centers that were frequently implemented at Lily School also integrated content and skills from across subject areas. An example that illustrates this integration is a series of learning centers that students completed as part of the plant unit. The first center involved students going outside to make patterns of plants and leaves on sunprint paper; the second center was a CD Rom computer program on plants; the third center was a card game called “Juniper,” which Mrs. H. said was a tree matching game like Old Maid; and the last center was a reading table filled with books on trees. These four centers included science, art, technology and literature and exemplifies the integrated manner in which curriculum was presented to Lily students.

The integration of technology has been described in previous sections and Lily students were frequently observed using computer programs related to the different core curriculum areas. Students at Lily School were also seen using the Internet to locate

information for research reports. Having access to the Internet really opened up the world to Lily students, which was particularly important because the school is located in a remote, rural area of Northern Wisconsin and library and community resources are limited. Technology was used naturally to support learning at Lily School. Rather than a separate area of study, technology was used as a powerful tool to facilitate learning in the core subject areas.

The last form of integration observed at Lily School happened incidentally and was facilitated by the multi-age structure of the school. Because the teachers worked with students for multiple years and were familiar with the curriculum across years and grade levels, they were able to make connections to concepts that students learned in other subject areas and in previous years. One example of this occurred at the beginning of the Immigration unit in the Big Roomers' classroom. Mrs. H. was drawing names out of a bag to determine which immigrant group each student would research. As Mrs. H. drew the first name slip out of the bag, she said, "What is the probability that I will draw your name?" This was a connection to the math curriculum students were studying on probability. The students counted how many children were in the room and then decided that the probability of being chosen was 1 out of 13. Mrs. H. then told students that next week she would teach them how to figure a percentage from a probability. Through capitalizing on opportunities to integrate curriculum across subject areas, the teachers at Lily School increased the likelihood that students would learn and remember important skills and concepts.

**Finding 5: School staff implement a number of major determiners of learning including: small class size, high expectations, time on task, accountability, effective management strategies, predictability, structure and routine, high attendance and participation rates and relevant curriculum.**

There were many factors that influenced the degree to which students were encouraged and able to learn at Lily School. Many of these factors have been covered in the previous four findings, particularly those that focus on the importance of high-interest, motivating and authentic curriculum practices. While an engaging curriculum is essential to student learning, there are other instructional factors that play a role in student learning that don't fall within the realm of curriculum. An important instructional factor that supported student learning at Lily School was the way teachers modeled thinking and decision-making and encouraged students to take responsibility for their own learning. An example of the occurred during a Readers Workshop in the Big Roomers' classroom. Mrs. H. explained what students should do whenever they encounter a word they don't know. She said, "If you aren't sure what the word means after reading it in the sentence, then look the word up in a dictionary. I shouldn't see students just walking up to an adult in the school and asking them what a word means. I am going to tell all of the adult helpers in the school to ask first, 'Did you look that word up in the dictionary?'" In this example, Mrs. H. was providing students with strategies to find answers to their own questions rather than relying on others to provide them.

Another example of modeling a thinking strategy was observed during a math lesson on graphing. Students were using graphing strategies to locate squares on a grid and then coloring the squares specified colors to create a Christmas picture. Tad, one of the older students, was a little hesitant at first, so Mrs. H. sat down by him and showed him a strategy to use. She told him to start with the very first color, which was blue, to locate it on the grid, mark it, to color it in, and then to X it out on the paper so he knows he has done it. Then Mrs. H. said to Tad and another boy sitting at his table, "Okay, you guys know what you are doing, you don't need me here." After she left, Tad was observed talking himself through the steps Mrs. H. had given him and successfully completing the graphing picture.

A final example that illustrates Lily teachers modeling thinking and encouraging students to take ownership for their learning occurred during a dinosaur lesson in the Little Roomers' classroom. The students in Mrs. U.'s class were studying dinosaur models, drawing them on paper and then writing down words to describe them. After students had been working on their pictures for about fifteen minutes, Mrs. U. asked them to put their pencils down and to share what they had written about their dinosaurs. Jeff, a second grader, showed his dinosaur and said, "He has plates and spikes on his back." Another student asked what the plates were for and Mrs. U. said, "I don't know, what do you think they might be for?" Jeff answered, "It means he has been around for millions of years and he hasn't gotten eaten." Then Mrs. U. said, "So you think those would be a good defense?" Jeff said, "Yes." Rather than giving the first student an immediate answer to her dinosaur question, Mrs. U. turned the question back to the class and Jeff came through with an answer that he had deduced from thinking about his model and drawing. The kinds of strategies modeled by Lily teachers in situations like this can help students be successful independent learners in school and beyond.

#### **Principle 4: BUILD COMMUNITY & SUPPORT LEARNING**

Principle four focuses on the school's practices for building an effective and supportive learning community. This often requires the use of specialized school and community resources (e.g., special education, Title 1, gifted education) to build support for students, parents and teachers. This principle also focuses on building community and mutual support within the classroom. Finally, providing proactive supports for students with behavioral challenges is a necessary ingredient. The following findings and examples illustrate Lily School's commitment to Principle 4.

#### **Finding 1: The creative use of available time, staff, parents, and peers benefits and supports ALL students.**

Many of the ways that staff, parents, peers and community members were used creatively to benefit all students at Lily School have already been discussed. This includes the important role that support staff in the school like the school secretary and teaching aide (who was the parent of two of the students in the school) played in collaborating with the school's teachers and supporting student learning. During one particular afternoon, the school secretary was observed answering the phone, filing materials and books in the classrooms and learning how to use a computerized grade book. The computerized grade book was going to enable the teachers to send home weekly grade reports to parents. On

the same afternoon, Mrs. S. the part-time teaching aide, was observed helping with the plant learning centers. While Mrs. H. and Mrs. U. were facilitating learning centers inside the school, Mrs. S. was working outside with small groups of students as they used leaves and sunprint paper to create interesting patterns. The involvement of the secretary and the teaching aide in supporting and teaching students decreased the student to teacher ratio and made it possible for the teachers to implement lessons that would be very difficult to do otherwise, like the simultaneous learning centers. One additional note about the role of support staff in supporting teachers and students at Lily School involves the school cook. During the Earth Day program, the school cook was observed taping the students' presentation with a video camera. Clearly, support staff were used in unique and creative ways at Lily School.

Parents and community members were also used creatively in the school. Previously described was the role of the grandparent helper in the school, who assisted students and decreased the ratio of students to adults even further. Community members visited Lily School often, reading books to the children and making special presentations. During one observation a senior citizen from White Bear Lake, a neighboring community, was reading "The Little Engine that Could" to students. Mrs. H. said that this same man had read to her daughter's class in White Bear Lake and her daughter went up to him afterwards and said "My mom is a teacher and you have to go to her school and read to them, too." Mrs. H. said that the first visit from this gentleman had been six or seven years ago and he had continued visiting a couple of times every fall and every spring to read to the students. In another observation, a Korean and Vietnam War veteran from Lily visited the school to make a special Veteran's Day presentation. This veteran shared his experience of serving in the military with students and showed them how to fold the American flag properly. Mrs. H. had the sixth graders learn how to fold the flag from the veteran so they could do it properly each day when they brought the flag in from outside. Clearly the veteran's presentation had a strong impact on students because when it was over one of the students asked if they could remember the ceremony for veterans at the local cemetery. Mrs. H. said that when Memorial Day gets close, the students could put a reminder in the school newsletter.

Students' parents also worked in the school in creative ways. Already mentioned was the support parents provided in the form of prop construction and costume making for the annual Christmas plays presented at Lily School. Parents also dropped in to share stories, talk with teachers, drink coffee and eat the homemade treats that were often provided at Lily. One parent had this to say about the ways he participated in some of the daily activities at the school, "They call me and I bring things to share. I come and do reading with them. They respect me. I bring baby chicks. We had three different colors of chicks, we brought four colors of each so every child had one." As this statement illustrates, Lily school provided a place where parents could engage in social interactions with others, share their time and expertise and participate in their children's learning.



## **Finding 2: Peers serve as natural supports for their classmates.**

There were numerous examples of peers serving as natural supports for their classmates in Lily School and many have been described in previous findings. Students frequently worked in cross-age and same-age groups to complete classroom activities and assignments. The Lily teachers encouraged students to support one another and look to each other for assistance. An observation of a lesson in the Big Roomers' classroom demonstrates how teachers encouraged students to work together and support one another. The lesson involved students in working in cross-age groups to read a "Time for Kids" magazine (similar to a Weekly Reader) and then participate in a jeopardy-like game afterwards. Mrs. H. explained that she was going to set the game up a little differently. She said rather than calling on the student on their team who had their hand raised, she was going to call on anyone in the group, so they needed to make sure everyone in their group understood the articles. The students were then observed reading the magazine in the cross-age groups and preparing for the game. In one group, a sixth grade girl took over a leadership role, calling on students to read, complimenting students on their reading and quizzing students about the articles that were read.

As the above example illustrates, Lily students worked together, looked out for one another and sometimes squabbled. The older students became like older brothers and sisters to the younger students, creating a family-like atmosphere. While an observer was sitting in the Little Roomers' classroom, Annie, one of the sixth grade girls came in carrying a bag of crayons and some papers. She said to Mrs. U., "Some of the younger students left these in the other room." The older students looked after and sometimes scolded younger students. Because the younger students looked up to the older students, they often changed their behavior around the older students. An example was given in a previous finding of Timmy, a younger student who is oppositional defiant, singing in the Veteran's Day program. One of the sixth grade boys stood behind Timmy with his hands resting on Timmy's shoulders. Timmy sang enthusiastically with the rest of the group, rather than getting off track, which he might have, had he not been under the watchful eye of the older student.

Lily students worked together in pairs and small groups even when they were not required to do so. This often happened while students were working at the computers. An example of this occurred during writing time on the computers. Two younger students were sitting at a computer working together and Mrs. S. asked them if they were writing a journal together. The two students answered in total unison, "Yes." Lily students also supported one another without prompting. In an observation of a small group math lesson, Sally struggled with one of the problems. The other students in the group spontaneously cheered her on until she got the correct answer. A parent expressed appreciation for the cross-grade interactions created by the multi-age structure when he was asked what is good about Lily School. He responded, "In multi-grades, the smaller kids learn from the older kids. The teacher may be talking to kids two grades above and the younger kids get to learn from that."

### **Finding 3: Whole Schools provide positive, proactive supports for behavior management.**

Several positive, proactive supports for behavior management were observed at Lily School. One of the most powerful approaches Lily teachers utilized for managing behavior was the motivating and engaging curriculum and instruction that was implemented. Lily students were kept too busy with authentic learning activities to get into trouble. In addition to the motivating curriculum, Lily teachers also developed other creative ways to manage behavior. An observer walked into the Little Roomers' classroom and noticed that Mrs. U. was wearing a wizard's hat as she worked with a small group of students. Mrs. S. who was in the same room, assisting students on the computers explained, "When she has that hat on it means that nobody can talk to her except the students sitting at the table." The hat strategy gave a clear signal to students when it was appropriate to talk to the teacher, which allowed her to focus solely on the individuals and small groups of students she was teaching.

Another proactive support for behavior management observed at Lily School was peer mediation, which was used consistently and effectively to solve disputes between students. Students were observed coming in from the playground to meet with a peer mediator to settle conflicts that had arisen as children played together during recess. Peer mediators were trained in the skills of active listening and conflict resolution. The peer mediators learned to be leaders and all students learned that they could rely on themselves and one another to solve problems. Lily teachers rarely intervened in peer mediation or challenged the solutions the peer mediators and other students came to for resolving conflicts. The use of peer mediation not only taught the students valuable lessons, but also freed teachers to spend their time developing curriculum, preparing materials and tutoring students rather than settling student disputes.

Peers and school staff also assisted with behavior management. As has been discussed in previous sections, older students frequently looked out for younger ones in the multi-age structure and school staff like the secretary, the teacher's aide and the grandparent volunteer helped to monitor student behavior. One example that illustrates this dynamic was an observation in the Big Roomers' classroom. While the lesson was in progress, Timmy one of the younger students wandered into the room. One of the older girls said to Timmy, "Get back in the other room." At this point, the school secretary walked into the room and escorted Timmy back to his classroom. Lily students had many caring peers and adults helping them to be on their best behavior.

## **Principle 5: PARTNERING**

The last principle of Whole Schooling is Partnering. This principle requires that school staff build genuine collaborative relationships within the school and with families and the community. It further promotes that schools take an active role in strengthening the community as well as providing guidance to engage students, parents, teachers and others in decision-making and the direction of learning and school activities. Lily School exemplifies this principle in several ways that will be described below.

### **Finding 1: Joining together with families, community members and university faculty mutually benefits all.**

Lily School staff had a close connection to the local community and this was expressed in many ways. One very unique and beneficial collaboration with the community was the local park owned by the school and maintained by the students. Mrs. H. said there used to be an old house near the school and she had asked someone in the community if the school could have the old house and the land it was on. Mrs. H. said they ended up paying one dollar for the land and the house, the fire department burned the house down and another community member bulldozed the remains. Mrs. H. said they turned the land into a park for the children to play in and care for. She added that families take turns weeding the park's garden over the summer when school is not in session.

During another visit to Lily School, Mrs. H. told the observer not to be surprised if a gerbil ran over her feet because there was one loose in the classroom. She explained that one of the community members that worked on a road crew found a box with two gerbils in it and brought them to school. Mrs. H. said a mom brought in a hamster cage for the gerbils and they became classroom pets. As is demonstrated in these examples, the connection between Lily School and the community is mutually beneficial. In the first, the community got a new park that was maintained by students and in the second, the school received an unexpected gift of gerbils.

Lily staff reached out to families and community members in other ways. An annual beginning of the year picnic was held for students and their families. The picnic was a way to re-establish connections with continuing students, meet new students and their families and communicate important information. The last year that the Whole Schooling researchers conducted observations at Lily, Mrs. H. said that people in the district were talking again about closing Lily School and she was going to use the annual picnic as a way to keep parents informed.

Parents and community members were also involved in the Lily history project. Mrs. H. and her students were researching the history of the school and developed a questionnaire to garner information about the school. Community members, who were alumni of the school, were then invited to the school and interviewed using the questionnaire. Mrs. H. said she and the students hoped to publish the Lily School history and make it available to anyone who had attended the school and/or lived in the community who might be interested in it. It is quite clear that the close connection between the school and the community benefited all residents of Lily.

## **Finding 2: Collaboration and Co-Teaching strengthens the overall school community and learning experiences.**

As has been discussed in previous sections, Lily School staff worked closely together. Decisions in the school were made through discussion and consensus. The school secretary and the teacher's aide in the school were a part of the decision-making team, along with the two classroom teachers. In the following quote, the school secretary describes how everyone works together:

If there is something that has gone on during the day, we are always discussing that. Even if the guidance counselor has concerns, depending on what it is, we are all involved because we all know what is going on. There is a trust here where we know that nothing is going to any further like out into the community. There is a genuine concern here for the kids. If anyone of us could, we would do whatever we could to help the kids. If that is collaboration, then we do it all of the time.

There were important benefits to this close collaboration discussed by Lily teachers and staff. One of these is the benefit of having everyone in the school share their ideas. Like the school secretary said, "Everyone has a perspective." Another benefit was the knowledge this close connection gave the two teachers of each other's curriculum. Mrs. H. highlighted this benefit when she said that one of the nice things about she and Mrs. U. working so closely together was that each was aware of what the other person was teaching and could look for materials. This close collaboration improved the educational experience for teachers and students.

## **Finding 3: Parents and students feel supported by school staff.**

As prior findings and examples have illustrated, Lily School staff cultivate close relationships with parents. Parents felt comfortable just dropping into the school to talk with teachers and teachers sent new home through a weekly newsletter. The teachers also communicated with parents through a weekly grade report. All student grades are recorded on a computer program and then printouts of the reports are sent home with the children every week. Mrs. H. said a benefit to sending the grade reports home is that it shows parents what work is missing or not completed. The grade reports served to inform both parents and students how they are doing in each of the subject areas. Mrs. H. said there was even a place on the grade reports for parents to sign and then send the report back. This facilitated regular two-way communication about students' progress.

Lily teachers communicated to parents in other ways. During an observation, Mrs. U. was seen working with individual students during her weekly release time and assessing their letter recognition and word formation skills. She was asked how she would use the information she was getting from the assessments. Mrs. U. said, "Well as far as affecting my day to day teaching it doesn't do that much, its more to find out where they are at and also to be able to share with the parents. I can sometimes give gentle suggestions to parents about what they can work on." As this statement illustrates, Mrs. U. valued the role parents' play in educating their children and invited them to take an active role in supporting their children's learning.

Parent interviews revealed positive feelings about the school staff. One particular complementary comment was made by the mother of a child with cystic fibrosis. She said, “[My daughter] has cystic fibrosis and they really keep a close eye on her. They watch her diet and tell me if she is coughing more. She’s been a little more sick this year and has missed more school than she’s ever missed before. They’ve been really good about getting her work to her and helping me keep her caught up.”

The only concerns expressed by parents about Lily School were related to Mrs. H.’s role as teaching principal and playground supervision. A parent felt that being both the principal and a teacher at the school was too much. He said, “She [Mrs. H.] has to have a sub every week to take her place and sometimes I feel that takes away from the kids. Don’t get me wrong, I think she is doing a good job, I just think it is an awful lot.” This same parent said that he would like to see more playground supervision. Of this he said, “This is an area that could be improved. I would like to see more structured play on the playground. I think you can teach as much on the playground as you can in school. Like fair play and sharing.” These are areas that Lily School staff might want to examine and explore further.

## **Conclusions**

There are several issues to watch concerning the future of Lily School. The first of these is its future as a charter school, which was granted just after the Whole Schooling research project ended at Lily School. While Charter status brings in special funding and the freedom to develop instructional programs that fall outside district guidelines, it doesn’t guarantee Lily’s future. Dropping enrollments and budget cuts remain constant threats to the continued operation of the school.

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